

Covid-19 and Future of Tertiary Education in Nigeria

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Nigeria tertiary education today is confronted with challenges occasioned by the effect of the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. This paper examined the future of Nigerian tertiary education in the period and post covid-19 pandemic. It x-rayed the impact of Covid-19 on; teaching and learning methodologies, admission, and graduation of the students. It also looked at the economic implications of Covid-19 on tertiary education. It points out the effect of covid-19 on tertiary education in Nigeria owing to the fact that most educational activities have been stalled. This paper went further to recommend among others that the federal government should provide funds for research so as to enable tertiary institutions to come out with adequate measures to tackle the pandemic, conducive classroom environment should be built to help maintain the measures of social distancing, the necessary facilities that are required for e-learning should be made available, academic staff and students should be trained in order to be ready for online teaching and learning. Finally, ASUU demands in federal universities should be met so as to enable the resumption of school activities in no time.

Introduction

Education as we all know is a key to a nation's development and Nigeria as a country is not an exemption. At the tertiary level of education, the system consists of a university sector and a non-university sector. The latter is composed of polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education. The tertiary sector as a whole offers opportunities for undergraduate, graduate, and vocational and technical education (Ogunode, et al., 2020). The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), defines tertiary education as the post - secondary section of the national education system, which is made up of universities, polytechnics and colleges of technology including courses as are given by the Colleges of Education, Advanced Teachers Training colleges, correspondence colleges and such institutions as may be allied to them. According to Isuku and Emunemu (2009), tertiary education exercise a direct influence on national productivity, which to a very large extent determines the country's standard of living and help in stimulating local economy as an engine of growth. According to UNESCO (2020), since its foundation, the tertiary education especially university, like any other social institution, has had to confront devastating epidemics that have impacted on their daily operations, and they have survived and pursued their mission even with their doors closed. One of these epidemics that had confronted tertiary education lately is covid-19 pandemic.

The novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic which broke out in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Kandola, 2020) has turned out to be the cankerworm that has stagnated the economy, education and health sector of the world generally and Nigeria in particular. Nigeria confirmed and recorded her first case of Covid-19 on February 27, 2020 (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020). The painful experience caused by this monster is one that cannot be forgotten in ages, ranging from hunger associated with partial or total lockdown, limited freedom of movement and association, and psychological trauma caused by fear of contracting this

dreaded contagious disease. Covid-19 has affected mostly all activities carried out in Nigeria and most especially on its education sector focusing mostly on higher institutions. In a bid to curtail the spread of the Covid-19, the initial response of the Nigerian Government was the closure of all schools, including tertiary institutions beginning in March 2020. Consequently, all students ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate students had to leave their tertiary institutions, putting an abrupt end to academic activities and disrupting academic calendars across various institutions (Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020). In light of the above, most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. These nationwide closures are impacting over 91% of world's student population (UNESCO 2020).

Furthermore, education in Nigeria has been affected greatly in the course of the spread of this pandemic, owing to the fact that most activities have been stalled. As of March, 30 2020, the united nations educational scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) estimate that 87 percent of the world's students, that is 1.5 billion learners have been affected by school closures (Ogunode et al, 2020). Daniel (2020) asserted that the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of students in different ways, depending not only on their level and course of study but also on the point they have reached in their programmes. Besides schools, universities and other higher education institutions have also quickly suspended campus-based operations, such as teaching and research (Brajkovic and Zavalina, 2020). Brajkovic and Zavalina (2020) went further to argue that restrictions on research activity might affect the COVID-19 response in a direct way, as universities through their research and training of technicians are key players in developing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the rise of this deadly pandemic has forced the adjustment of some of the activities conducted in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, thereby giving rise to other methods of learning apart from the physical teaching and learning method. Students have also had to make an effort to adapt to what for many of them are new formulas for teaching and learning, when they have been fortunate enough to find a continuity offer (UNESCO, 2020). UNESCO (2020) further claimed that the traditional distance education mode, where the teacher continues to teach in a regular class setting that is broadcast live and can be retrieved at a later time, seems to be the most appreciated by students because this best reproduces the dynamics to which they are accustomed. This paper focuses on the future of Nigerian tertiary education in the period of Covid-19 by discussing the impact of Covid-19 on; teaching and learning methodologies, admission and graduation. It also looks at the economic implications of Covid-19 on tertiary education and Nigeria tertiary education in period and post Covid-19.

Impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning methodologies

Nigeria experienced couple of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic ranging from total to partial. These lockdown and social distancing affected all sector including the education sector. In fact, the government of the federation on realizing the extent of damage which this pandemic would cause and have caused in other countries, decided the lockdown of tertiary institution, which in its entirety affected teaching and learning. According to UNESCO (2020), what has had the most immediate impact has obviously been the temporary suspension of classroom activity which has left students, particularly undergraduates and those finishing high school and aspiring to begin tertiary education, in a completely new situation without a clear idea of how long the impact will last, and feeling its immediate effect on their daily life, cost of living and other

financial burdens and, naturally, on the continuation of their studies. The mode of teaching in Nigerian tertiary institution as noted by Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) has been the traditional method, which consists of lecturers or teachers having physical meetings with students in a classroom building for the purposes of lecture, examinations, seminars and project/thesis defense. Ifijeh et al. (2015) observed that very few Nigerian universities operate e-learning platforms, which merely allowed for upload and download of lecture notes, as well as giving and submission of students' assignments.

Before now, the only resemblance of out-of-campus teaching and learning program was the distance education program run by a few institutions in the country. However, no real online teaching takes place, as students are required to visit the campus periodically and are provided with materials which they take home for further studies (Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020). As a result, tertiary institutions and their students especially government owned institutions are finding it difficult to adapt to other means of teaching and learning which would come in place or improvise the normal classroom activities of face-to-face teaching and learning. In respect to the above, in a report prepared by the technical team of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education (2020) the traditional distance education mode, where the teacher continues to teach in a regular class setting that is broadcast live and can be retrieved at a later time, seems to be the most appreciated by students because this best reproduces the dynamics to which they are accustomed.

However, after understanding that the COVID-19 epidemic and quarantine measures would last for months, the learning process has continued (in developed countries) in a distance mode using online technologies (Brajkovic and Zavalina, 2020). This is basically due to the absence of face to face interaction of lecturers with students. Furthermore, students and lecturers in tertiary institution have been forced to adopt online teaching and learning methods (e-learning), which does not require the traditional face-to-face teaching and learning in a classroom. E-learning attempts to shift the focus of the educational environment away from the physical teacher-student context while disseminating information (Franklin and Nahari, 2018). The e-learning required the utilization of some tools for instructions in higher education for its effectiveness (Aina and Opeyemi, 2020). According to Pande, Wadhai, and Thakare (2016), Weblog, Social bookmarking, Wiki, RSS, Podcasting, Instant messaging, Text chat, and internet forums are essential tools for any e-learning. According to them, some of the advantages of e-learning include flexibility, efficiency in knowledge and qualification enhancement, motivation of students' interaction, cost-effective, and others. Stern (n.d.) outlined the advantages of online teaching and learning methodologies to include the following:

- Convenience: 24/7 access from any online computer; accommodates busy schedules; no commuting, no searching for parking.
- Enhanced learning: research shows increased depth of understanding and retention of course content; more meaningful discussions; emphasis on writing skills, technology skills, and life skills like time management, independence, and self-discipline.
- Leveling of the playing field: students can take more time to think and reflect before communicating; shy students tend to thrive online; anonymity is guaranteed in an online environment.

- Interaction: increased student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction and discussion; a more student-centered learning environment; less passive listening and more active learning; a greater sense of connectedness, synergy.
- Innovative teaching: student-centered approaches; increased variety and creativity of learning activities; address different learning styles; changes and improvements can translate to on-ground courses as well
- Improved administration: time to examine student work more thoroughly; ability to document and record online interactions; ability to manage grading online.
- Savings: accommodate more students; increased student satisfaction, higher retention and fewer repeats.
- Maximize physical resources: lessen demand on limited campus infrastructure; decrease congestion on campus and parking lots.
- Outreach: give students options; reach new student markets; appeal to current students, thus increasing enrollments.

For Universities in developed countries of North America, Europe and parts of Asia and Africa, the concept of online education is not novel. Some of them have embraced the concept in the form of blended learning or collaboration with external bodies that run Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020).

Another method of teaching and learning that has been adopted during this lockdown is the google classroom. According to Shaharane, Jamil and Rodzi (2016), Google Classroom is a Google Apps for Education that helps the teachers to create and organize assignments quickly, provide feedback efficiently, and communicate with their learners easily. Research studies indicate the application helps students to learn more electronically and teachers spend more time with students than with papers (Basher, 2017; Rabbi, Zakaria and Tonmoy, 2018). The three fundamental menus when anyone logs in to the Google Classroom account are streams, classwork, or student activities, and people (Henukh & Rosdianto, Oikawa, 2020). The stream is used for creating announcements, to discuss ideas, or see the flow of assignments, materials, quizzes from the topics taught. The teachers use Classwork to make test questions, pretests, quizzes, upload materials, and hold reflections (Henukh, Rosdianto and Oikawa, 2020). The teachers use the people menu to invite students by using the access code that is available in the people bar. According to Aina (2020), Google Classroom can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Students do not need to get to a designated building called classroom before receiving lectures and parents and guardians can track the progress of their wards (Mafa, 2018). It minimizes the paperwork for the teachers, helps classroom management. It enhances the student-teacher interaction as well as communication (Azhar and Iqbal, 2018).

However, despite the vital roles e-learning plays in tertiary education in many countries of the world: most developing nations including Nigeria are yet to unlock the full potentials of it (Kyari, et al, 2018). Challenges faced in implementation of distant learning in developing countries especially in Nigeria include:

- Weakness of internet connection and internet speed in many countries
- High prices for a good internet connection
- Absence of computers/laptops/tablets/smartphones that support online teaching and learning

- Many online instruments, platforms, and websites crashed when an unexpectedly high number of clients connected to them.

Finally, One the disadvantages of e-learning is finance. Some students especially in Nigeria where there is less provision of free internet connections find it difficult to purchase data and devices to surf the internet. For Mohamedbhai (2014), inequalities could be one problem of distance e-learning because of the differences existing between urban and rural students; between the rich and the poor who cannot afford the cost of internet.

Impacts of Covid-19 on admission and graduation in tertiary institutions

According to Ogunode et al (2020), many higher institutions in Nigeria had started their first semester examination before the incident of the COVID-19 pandemic that led to the national shut down of all the educational institutions in Nigeria. Simon & Hans (2020) observed that the closure of schools, colleges and universities not only interrupts the teaching of students around the world; the closure also coincides with a key assessment period and many exams have been postponed or cancelled. In light of the above, because exams did not take place and many cancelled, it would be difficult for the admission of students into a new class whereas the old students have not moved to the next class. Langella (2020) asserted that the COVID-19 emergency is likely to affect students' entrance to university. A-level exams are not going to take place this year. According Langella (2020), A-level and equivalent exams have been traditionally used to evaluate university applications. Currently, most students have submitted their application for entry in September 2020 and universities are issuing offers. In a standard year, students will then sit their A-level exams and attempt to meet the requirements of the university offers. This year, as the exams will be substituted by more elaborate forms of grade prediction, it is hard to say how accurate the process will be. But past research shows that grade predictions are not particularly accurate (Langella, 2020). If this is confirmed by the new prediction process, this could worsen the probability of mismatch between students and universities, particularly in a context where universities may have a bigger incentive this year to make offers to marginal students, due to the possibility of a fall in international student numbers (Langella, 2020).

Mismatch refers to the situation where students enter 'lower quality' universities than their prior attainment would suggest they are able to (Langella, 2020). Research shows that this affects students from low-income groups more than those from high-income groups. Any increased mismatch could therefore have long-term impacts on social mobility. Furthermore, teacher discretion in the grading of high-stakes tests can have long-term consequences (Langella, 2020).

At the moment, the offer process is ongoing, but discussing alternative selection methods that overcome the lack of information related to A-level disruptions is still relevant, in order to prevent similar problems happening in the future (Langella. 2020). According to Langella, one possibility is that universities provide their own entry tests. An alternative is to extend the weight given to previous assessed results, so as to have a more comprehensive overview of the students' school paths, which can complement the information coming from A-level coursework (Langella, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic affects administrative procedures in universities, as well. Many countries have yet to take a decision on how admission to universities will work in 2020 (Brakovic and Zavalina, 2020). It seems clear that admissions to universities will be postponed, and some countries have already articulated that expectation (for example, Russia); however, no final decision has been taken regarding how long this is going to be and what will be the procedures for applicants. Brakovic and Zavalina, (2020) further stated that other universities, however, are proceeding with online applications. Graduation is being handled with less uncertainty in ECA countries. Several approaches are used: postponing thesis defense and graduation (for example, in Turkey¹³), undertaking them online, and sometimes providing students the opportunity to choose (for example, medical students in Germany) (Brakovic and Zavalina, 2020). For universities, this is not as hard to manage either academically or administratively. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic will have a huge negative impact on entrance to the labor market of 2020 graduates. Based on the experience of previous crises, this cohort will feel the impact of the recession throughout their lives. Uncertainty is clearly dominating countries and universities across the ECA region in terms of formal procedures and changes in the academic calendar, especially with a view to admission. Decisions need to be taken and publicly articulated as soon as possible to ensure transparency and confidence in the system, especially for prospective students and their parents (Brakovic and Zavalina, 2020). Possible COVID-19 impact mitigation strategies in the areas of examinations, admission, and graduation policies as observed by Brakovic and Zavalina, (2020) include the following:

- Postponing decisions in the expectation of a quick end of the COVID-19 pandemic is not recommended. This should be a time for policy makers and institutional leaders to provide clear guidance on how to approach examinations and related procedures this year.
- Examining options for school leaving/university entrance exams: first, to move them online,¹⁴ if possible, and second, to cancel them for this year with results to be proposed by teachers and calculated on
- the grades/average progress during the last year(s). The International Bachelor Organization, for example, has announced that the related “examinations scheduled between 30 April and 22 May will no longer be held. Students will be awarded either a diploma or a course certificate which reflects their standard of work. The achievement will be based around the students’ coursework and the established assessment expertise, rigor, and quality control already built into the programs.”¹⁵
- Extending the admission period for Bachelor’s degree programs. Where university admission processes are moved online and extended this year,¹⁶ it is time to recommend on the national level that the admission period for Bachelor’s degree programs be extended, depending on the country’s situation with respect to the pandemic.
- Making decisions on international student admissions for this year as quickly as the situation permits. Prospective students need to know in advance what to prepare and what are possible scenarios from a menu of options (online admission only, extended admission, with decisions taken as quickly and clearly as possible, etc.).
- Providing support to graduates/school leavers to navigate the uncertainties of the labor market. In terms of graduation, it is critical to provide support to labor market newcomers on the national level, to avoid future negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This support can include specific online career guidance and advice, and

national short-employment programs and special labor-market transition arrangements, including those related to the fight against the epidemic.

Economic implication of Covid-19 on tertiary education

The coronavirus pandemic has upended business as usual for colleges and universities. Not only have campuses shifted to remote learning almost overnight, but institutions are also suddenly grappling with grave financial challenges as the domestic and global economies may now face what looks to be a major recession (Deloitte, 2020). In Nigeria, private tertiary institutions are being funded and owned by private individuals or organizations and are funded and developed by the fees paid by the students who attend these institutions. The pandemic has caused what is said to be economic setback for these schools as no financial transactions occur. The lockdown has stopped the activities and transactions which are supposed to help in the development of the institution and the payment of staff. According to Deloitte (2020), If students are unable to return to campus, colleges and universities could face unanticipated and historic attrition from students who are either unsatisfied with their distance-learning experience or whose ability to afford tuition in the current economic climate will be inhibited; others may simply decide to stay closer to home in uncertain times.

Furthermore, Covid-19 has burst the bubble of market-led higher education expansion funded by fee/loans. As a result, many universities are facing bankruptcy with threats to jobs both in the institutions themselves and in the areas which have come to rely upon them as large local employers and contributors to the local economy (Lethbridge and Ainley, 2020). Damtew (2020) observed that Africa's growth performance, which stood at 3.4% in 2019, was expected to climb to 3.9% in 2020. Alas, this may now remain a dream as the global economic depression is likely to devastate its economy and also its institutions, including higher education because of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Ogunode et al (2020) the effect on higher education may likely be most felt on two grounds: firstly, a precipitous decline in government subventions to higher education due to weak revenue and income; and secondly, a comparable drop in commitments from development partners, largely to research, upon which African higher education has been unduly and disproportionately dependent. Finally, Ogunode et al (2020), recommended that the government should increase the funding of higher institutions in next year budget to allow them manage all the damages caused by the COVID-19 school close down.

Future of Nigeria tertiary education in period of Covid-19

Before now, Nigeria tertiary education has been in shambles ranging from the constant loggerheads between the federal government and tertiary institution unions especially Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), decrease in the budget meant for education and poor infrastructures. Now that the pandemic has occurred, its effect would worsen the situation of tertiary education in Nigeria. According to Ogunode et al (2020), the after effect of COVID-19 to the tertiary education ranges from disruption of academic calendar, cancelation of already planned local and international conferences, teaching and learning gap, loss of workforce in educational institutions and cut in budget of higher education. Simon and Hans (2020) submitted that the global lockdown of education institutions is going to cause major (and likely unequal) interruption in students' learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative. Ogunode (2020) observed that the closure of all educational institutions from primary schools to the higher

institutions would affect the students' academic plans and programme because many of the higher institutions have started their first semester exams.

Furthermore, teaching and learning in most Nigerian tertiary institutions will never follow the normal process because at resumption, most institutions would want to run through their academic calendars thereby putting tensions and pressures on students and teachers to finish the set out course outline for the year. In the words of Aina and Opeyemi (2020), the educational system of the world was halted because of social distancing and the lockdown, the conventional paradigm of teaching fails and teaching/learning suffers a severe setback all over the world including Nigeria. In the part of budget cut due to covid-19 and its effect on the Nigerian economy, Cseaafrica (2020) submitted that the Nigerian federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations. This would affect the budget for years to come.

Finally, many conferences on different programme that are planned for the first and second quarter of 2020 have been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ogunode et al, 2020). As far as the effect of this pandemic is concerned, conferences would not take the same shape as before. For instance, international conferences planned to take place in other countries may be cancelled so as to enable good measures to curtail the spread of the virus. This would have effect on research especially on developing countries like Nigeria that have failed to embrace and adapt to the use of Information and Communication Technologies such as in teleconferencing and international seminars.

Conclusion

Covid-19 has eaten deep into the education sector particularly tertiary education in Nigeria. Its emergence has caused major issues ranging from hunger associated with partial or total lockdown, limited freedom of movement and association, and psychological trauma caused by fear of contracting this dreaded contagious disease. In the aspect of teaching and learning, Covid-19 has affected the traditional classroom activities of face-to-face teaching and learning involving lecturers and students in tertiary institutions. It has forced the adoption of online teaching and learning which is not presently practiced in Nigerian tertiary institutions especially government owned institutions at the moment because of the lack of necessary infrastructures needed to embark on online teaching and learning, and industrial action embarked by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

Furthermore, the economic implication of the pandemic is that not only has campuses shifted remote learning almost overnight, but institutions are also suddenly grappling with grave financial challenges as the domestic and global economies may now face what looks to be a major recession. Finally, in terms of admission and graduation of students from tertiary institutions, most students are yet to write their final examinations before the pandemic thereby causing the admission of new students a major issue. At the reopening of schools, lecturers and students will be forced to rush through their course work for the year thereby creating unwarranted pressures for the lecturers and students.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made which will help to maintain good and improved tertiary education in the period and post covid-19 in Nigeria:

1. On resumption of tertiary institutions, safety measures should be adhered to by students and staff of tertiary institutions to curtail the spread of the pandemic. These measures should range from maintaining social distancing, wearing of facemasks in classrooms and the school environment, and washing of hands frequently with soap and water and frequent sanitization.
2. The federal government should provide funds for research so as to enable tertiary institutions come out with adequate measures to tackle the pandemic.
3. Conducive classrooms should be built to help maintain the measures of social distancing because most of classrooms are not conducive enough for teaching and learning
4. In the aspect of admission and graduation in tertiary institutions, the national university commission should device easy means to enable the final year students write their exams as soon as possible so new students can be admitted
5. The necessary facilities that are required for e-learning should be made available, academic staff and students should be trained in order to be ready for online teaching and learning.
6. Finally, ASUU demands in federal universities should be met so as to enable the resumption of school activities in no time.

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