

Impact of COVID-19 on the Higher Institutions Development in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

On 27 February, Nigeria confirmed its first case in Lagos State, an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria had returned on 25 February from Milan, Italy through the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, fell ill on 26 February and was transferred to Lagos State Biosecurity Facilities for isolation and testing. Presently, Nigeria is having 199 COVID-19 cases, two death and twenty recovered. In order to contain the spread of the virus in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education has directed all educational institutions in Nigeria to shut down and allow students to go home as cases of reported COVID-19 increased to 13. This article is aim to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic school close down on higher institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data was used in the article. This article identified the following as the impact of COVID -19 on higher institutions; reduction of international education, disruption of academic calendar of higher institutions, cancellation of local and international conferences, creating teaching and learning gap, loss of man power in the educational institutions, and cut in budget of higher education. The article suggests that the government should take the following measure; increase the funding of higher institutions to enable the institutions manage the damages caused by the COVID-19 pandemic school close down etc.

Introduction:

Nigeria has a federal system of government with 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Within the states, there are 744 local governments in total.

Education is administered by the federal, state and local governments. The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for overall policy formation and ensuring quality control, but is primarily involved with tertiary education. School education is largely the responsibility of state (secondary) and local (elementary) governments. The country is multilingual, and home to more than 250 different ethnic groups. The languages of the three largest groups, the Yoruba, the

Ibo, and the Hausa, are the language of instruction in the earliest years of basic instruction; they are replaced by English in Grade 4.(WENR, 2017)

Nigeria's education system encompasses three different sectors: basic education (nine years), post-basic/senior secondary education (three years), and tertiary education (four to six years, depending on the program of study). According to Nigeria's latest National Policy on Education (2004), basic education covers nine years of formal (compulsory) schooling consisting of six years of elementary and three years of junior secondary education. Post-basic education includes three years of senior secondary education.(WENR, 2017)

At the tertiary level, 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. The academic year typically runs from September to July. Most universities use a semester system of 18 – 20 weeks. Others run from January to December, divided into 3 terms of 10 -12 weeks. The National University Commission (NUC), the government umbrella organization that oversees the administration of higher education in Nigeria, listed 40 federal universities, 44 state universities and 68 private universities as accredited degree-granting institutions on its website as of 2017.

Many of these institutions are relatively new. In response to demographic pressures Nigeria's higher education sector expanded over a relatively short period. In 1948, there was only one university-level institution in the country, the University College of Ibadan, which was originally an affiliate of the University of London. By 1962, the number of federal universities had increased to five: the University of Ibadan, the University of Ife, the University of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University, and the University of Lagos (WENR, 2017).

Between 1980 and 2020, the number of recognized universities has grown tenfold from 16 to 170, as reported by Nigeria's National Universities Commission. For the first few decades of growth, higher education capacity building was primarily in the public sector, driven by Federal and State governments. More dramatic growth occurred beginning in the late 1990s, when the Nigerian government began to encourage the establishment of private universities. Since then, private institutions, which constitute some 45 percent of all Nigerian universities as of 2017, have proliferated at a rapid pace, from 3 in 1999 to 68 in 2017. About two thirds of these institutions are estimated to be religiously affiliated schools. Despite the sheer number of private institutions that have opened, enrollments seem to be relatively low. Although estimates are difficult to find, the small number of United Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) applications to private universities indicates that private universities account for only a small percentage of Nigeria's total tertiary enrollment, which UIS reported as 1,513, 371 as of 2011. Covenant University, Nigeria's largest private university reportedly had a total enrollment of 6,822 students in 2010/2011 (WENR, 2017).

Nigeria's 43 federal universities as well as dozens of teaching hospitals and colleges are under the direct purview of the NUC. State governments have responsibility for the administration and financing of the 48 state universities, private individual have responsibility for the administration of 79 private universities, bringing the total number of universities in the country to 170.

In addition to granting institutional accreditation, the NUC approves and accredits all university programs. Accreditation is granted for an initial three-year period and subsequent five-year periods (For a detailed overview of the process, see the NUCs 2012 accreditation manual).

The suspension of accreditation for programs is not uncommon. In 2016, for example, the NUC publicized a list of 150 unaccredited degree programs at 37 universities.

In addition to universities, there are a large number of polytechnics and colleges under the purview of the National Board of Technical Education (NBTE), the federal government body tasked with overseeing technical and vocational education. In 2017, the NBTE recognized 107 polytechnics, 27 monotronics, and 220 colleges in various specific disciplines. These institutions were established to train students for technical and mid-level employment.

The National Commission for Colleges of Education is the federal body dedicated to overseeing non-university teacher education. As of 2017, there were 84 teacher training colleges in Nigeria (WENR, 2017).

The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004), defines Higher Education as the Post - Secondary Section of the National education system, which is given 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.

The objectives of higher education include the following:

- i. the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and societies;
- ii. the development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate environment;
- iii. the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community;
- iv. the acquisition of an overview of the local and external environments (FGN, 2004).

The National Policy on Education again stated that higher educational institutions should pursue these goals through:

- i. Teaching
- ii. Research
- iii. the dissemination of existing and new information
- iv. the pursuit of service to the community; and
- v. by being a store- house knowledge (FGN, 2004).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). These viruses were originally transmitted from animals to people. SARS, for instance, was transmitted from civet cats to humans while MERS moved to humans from a type of camel. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans. The name coronavirus comes from the Latin word corona, meaning crown or halo. Under an electron microscope, it looks like it is surrounded by a solar corona. The novel coronavirus, identified by Chinese authorities on January 7 and since named SARS-CoV-2, is a new strain that had not been previously identified in humans. Little is known about it, although human-to-human transmission has been confirmed.

As of April 4, more than 60,000 people worldwide have died of COVID-19, the highly infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. The number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 has exceeded 1 million, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Countries around the world are scrambling to halt the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. This outbreak of COVID-19 is a global health emergency, the WHO said on January 30, raising the alarm further on March 11 when it declared the crisis a pandemic.

On 27 February, Nigeria confirmed its first case in Lagos State, an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria had returned on 25 February from Milan, Italy through the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, fell ill on 26 February and was transferred to Lagos State Biosecurity Facilities for isolation and testing. Presently, Nigeria is having 199 COVID-19 cases, two death and twenty recovered. In order to contain the spread of the virus in Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Education has directed all educational institutions in Nigeria to shut down and allow students to go home as cases of reported COVID-19 increased to 13. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sonny Echono, told reporters on 19 March that the directive was part of the country's overall strategy to contain the spread of the virus. Nigeria joins the growing list of countries in Africa which have closed schools and universities. Before the official announcement by the permanent secretary, most universities had already sent their students home (Wikipedia, 2020).

This article is aim to discuss the impact COVID-19 School Close down on the higher institutions in Nigeria and to suggest some ways out.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Higher Institution Development:

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is tracking the impact of the pandemic on education. As of March 30, they estimate that 87 percent of the world's students—that is 1.5 billion learners?—have been affected by school closures. The bulk of these students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools, but there are also millions of students affected at the pre-primary and tertiary education levels. More than 180 countries have shut school doors nationwide, while others have implemented localized school closures. Specifically in Nigeria the following have been identified as the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on higher institutions: reduction of international education, disruption of academic calendar of higher institutions, cancellation of local and international conferences, teaching and learning gap, loss of workforce in the educational institutions, and cut in budget of higher education.

Reduction in International Education:

Many international students studying in Nigeria have traveled back to their countries due to the COVID-19. The Nigeria government announced the closed down educational institutions to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Many Nigerian students too schooling abroad have travelled back home due to closure of higher institutions across the world. International education have been affected negatively because of the outbreak the deadly COVID-19. Many students studying abroad will be discouraged to continue their studies and many planning to study abroad cannot go achieve their pans because many countries have placed travel banned. According to Mug (2020) conversely, the Chinese master plan to become the #1 importer of international students is in question. University deans and recruiters will be hard pressed to recommend, without

reservation, future exchange programmes on Chinese campuses. In a survey of more than 2,000 students from Africa, Asia and Australia, conducted by QS, nearly three in 10 said their plans had changed due to the virus. It is impossible to estimate what percentage of the students responding to this survey would have studied in China.

Disruption of Academic Calendar of Higher Institutions:

The Federal Ministry of Education has directed all tertiary institutions in Nigeria to shut down and allow students to go home. The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sonny Echono, told reporters on 19 March that the directive was part of the country's overall strategy to curtail the spread of the virus. Nigeria joins the growing list of countries in Africa which have closed schools and universities. Before the official announcement by the permanent secretary, most universities had already sent their students home. The Academic calendar of higher institutions in Nigeria have been disrupted due to COVID-19. 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. According to Dinesh, Shadi and Shuriah (2020) countries across South and Southeast Asia have in quick succession announced the closure of their schools and universities for a minimum of two weeks in order to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus which has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization. But authorities in many of the countries acknowledge that closures could last much longer. The closures came thick and fast this week after the number of cases began to rise several weeks after countries in North East Asia including Japan, South Korea, Singapore and China – where the virus originated – closed their universities in February and March. Universities have yet to reopen in any of the countries in the region, which includes Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Simon & 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.

Cancellation of Local and International Conferences:

Many conferences on difference programme that are planned for the first and second quarter of 2020 have been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. New discovery and new findings in the educational sectors for this period have been reduced because many higher institutions in Nigeria have not fully integrate ICT into teaching and learning programme across the country. Subhasis Chaudhuri, director of IIT Bombay, in Maharashtra state, which is the Indian state worst affected by the virus, with dozens of confirmed cases, said in an official statement this week: "All academic activities including research will remain suspended and only international students and students having medical and other emergencies will be allowed to remain in the hostel with special permission from the dean and limited messing [catering] facilitates would be provided to them." According to Wikipedia (2020) the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closures of schools and universities. As of 3 April 2020, over 421 million learners were out of school due to school closures in response to COVID-19. According to UNESCO monitoring, over 200 countries have implemented nationwide closures, impacting about 98% of the world's student population. On 23 March 2020, Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) released a

statement announcing the cancellation of Cambridge IGCSE, Cambridge O Level, Cambridge International AS & A Level, Cambridge AICE Diploma, and Cambridge Pre-U examinations for the May/June 2020 series across all countries. International Baccalaureate exams have also been cancelled.

Teaching and Learning Gap:

Teaching and learning in all Nigerian higher institutions and across the world have been put to hold because of the COVID-19 virus. Teaching and learning have been put to hold in all the Universities, Poly-techniques and colleges of education in the country as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. The implication of this is that many Nigerian students will not be in the schools for a period of one month or even more implying that they will be idle. Simon & Hans (2020) cited Carlsson et al. (2015) who considered a situation in which young men in Sweden have differing number of days to prepare for important tests. These differences are conditionally random allowing the authors to estimate a causal effect of schooling on skills. The authors show that even just ten days of extra schooling significantly raises scores on tests of the use of knowledge ('crystallized intelligence') by 1% of a standard deviation. As an extremely rough measure of the impact of the current school closures, if we were to simply extrapolate those numbers, twelve weeks less schooling (i.e. 60 school days) implies a loss of 6% of a standard deviation, which is non-trivial. They do not find a significant impact on problem-solving skills (an example of 'fluid intelligence'). A different way into this question comes from Simon & Hans (2020) cited Lavy (2015), who estimates the impact on learning of differences in instructional time across countries. Perhaps surprisingly, there are very substantial differences between countries in hours of teaching. For example, Lavy showed that total weekly hours of instruction in mathematics, language and science is 55% higher in Denmark than in Austria. These differences matter, causing significant differences in test score outcomes: one more hour per week over the school year in the main subjects increases test scores by around 6% of a standard deviation. In our case, the loss of perhaps 3-4 hours per week teaching in Maths for 12 weeks may be similar in magnitude to the loss of an hour per week for 30 weeks. So, rather bizarrely and surely coincidentally, we end up with an estimated loss of around 6% of a standard deviation again. Leaving the close similarity aside, these studies possibly suggest a likely effect no greater than 10% of a standard deviation but definitely above zero.

Loss of Workforce in the Educational institutions:

Longtime University of Washington faculty member Stephen Schwartz died on Tuesday (March 17) from COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, the Seattle Times reports. "We are deeply saddened that faculty member Professor Stephen Schwartz passed away due to a COVID-19 infection," the University of Washington Department of Pathology tweeted yesterday (March 18) afternoon.

Tributes were also being paid to world-renowned South African scientist Gita Ramjee, who has died from COVID-19-related complications. MEMPHIS, Tenn. (WMC) - A University of Memphis professor has died from the coronavirus. NBC affiliate WTMJ says criminal justice instructor Lenard Wells died Saturday from complications of COVID-19, according to the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office.

Worldometers.info (2020) also reported that COVID-19 is responsible for the death of over 74,431 persons across the world. This people are from different professions including the teaching profession. According to the Department of Education and the South African

Democratic Teachers' Union have sent their condolences to the family of a teacher who died of COVID-19 complications. The Loudoun County Health Department also reported the first death of a hospitalized patient who tested positive for COVID-19. The patient, a woman in her 70s, died of respiratory failure Wednesday night as a result of COVID-19. She was a former first grade teacher who was working as a reading tutor at two Ashburn elementary schools. In April 3, 2020, the New York City, a beloved Brooklyn elementary school teacher has died from complications of COVID-19. The higher institutions in Nigeria and across the World has lost many teachers, lecturers and great researchers to COVID-19 pandemic. This loses will affect the growth and development of the educational sectors especially the higher institutions.

Cut in Budget of higher Education:

Cseaafrica (2020) submitted that the Nigerian federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations. The approved budget had projected revenue collections at N 8.24 Trillion, an increase of about 20% from 2019 figure. The revenue assumptions are premised on increased global oil demand and stable market with oil price benchmark and oil output respectively at \$57 per barrel and 2.18 Million Barrels Per Day. The emergence of COVID-19 and its increasing incidence in Nigeria has called for drastic review and changes in the earlier revenue expectations and fiscal projections. Compared to events that led to recession in 2016, the current state of the global economy poses more difficulties ahead as the oil price is currently below US\$30 with projections that it will dip further going by the price war among key players in the industry. Unfortunately, the nation has grossly underachieved in setting aside sufficient buffers for rainy days such as it faces in the coming days. In addressing these daunting economic challenges, the current considerations to revise the budget downward is inevitable. ACADEMIC Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has faulted a proposal by the Federal Government to slash 50.76 billion from the 111.78 billion budgeted for Universal Basic Education Commission. The academic union also stated that the same proposal being planned for the healthcare would be an ill wind that would further destroy the sector.

To him, a serious and progressive government will not allocate funds for any rehabilitation of government buildings or purchase of buses at the expense of critical sectors like Health and Education. ASUU, therefore, warned President Muhammad Buhari against cutting down the budget of Health and Education sectors in the proposed 2020 revised budget. The implication of revising the budget downward will directly affects the education budget of the country which experts have described as inadequate. Many infrastructural facilities and school expansion programme planned for this year would be removed from the budget due to the budget cut down (vanguardngr.com/2020/04/).

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. 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. There is the impending danger that higher education may once again be sidelined as a luxury that African countries can least afford when it should continue to garner support on a

priority basis to help overcome challenges like COVID-19 – and many other human-made problems and natural disasters.

Suspension of Examination:

Many higher institution 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 for students around the world; the closure also coincides with a key assessment period and many exams have been postponed or cancelled. Internal assessments are perhaps thought to be less important and many have been simply cancelled. But their point is to give information about the child's progress for families and teachers. The loss of this information delays the recognition of both high potential learning difficulties and can have harmful long-term consequences for the child. Simon & Hans (2020) cited Andersen and Nielsen (2019) who looked at the consequence of a major IT crash in the testing system in Denmark. As a result of this, some children could not take the test. The authors find that participating in the test increased the score in a reading test two years later by 9% of a standard deviation, with similar effects in mathematics. These effects are largest for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Importantly, the lockdown of institutions not only affects internal assessments. In the UK, for example, all exams for the main public qualifications – GCSEs and A levels – have been cancelled for the entire cohort. Depending on the duration of the lockdown, we will likely observe similar actions around the world.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

The national lockdown of educational institutions as a result of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and across the World is going to cause major interruption in students' learning; disruptions in academic programme, suspension of examination, cancellation of internal and international conferences, creating gap in teaching and learning and probably may cause manpower shortage in the institutions as a result of death caused by COVID-19.

- i. 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.
- ii. The government should immediately embark on the integration of all higher institutions into online education.
- iii. The Nigeria government should direct all the higher institutions to extend physical teaching and research activities to the online network, conduct teaching seminars online, jointly solve new problems that may arise in the teaching process.
- iv. The schools administrators should move the remaining exams forward by three weeks to enable the students prepare well before writing the remaining exams.

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