

Covid-19 Pandemic a New Threat to Global Education: The case of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study appraises the cost implication of the online learning system on the educational system in Nigeria with a view of evaluating if the new learning system is worthy of emulation. Being a quantitative survey, this study looked at the views of academic staff of private universities in Nigeria where Frequency Distribution and the Chi-Square test were employed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0. The study concludes that there is a significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria. It was further observed that the cost implication of the online platform does worth the academic exercise in Nigeria. The study recommends that adequate preparation by both government and the private sector educational institutions to collaborate in effort to contain the spread of the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, educational sector, private universities, cost implication, on line platform, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

Corona virus disease (Covid-19) is today the latest threat to global economic activities which also coincided with the largest global annual human gathering, i.e., the Spring Festival travel season (Sahin, Erdogan, Agaoglu, Dineri, Cakirci, Senel, Okyay, and Asdogan, 2020). This annual migration resulted in a rapid national and global spread of the infectious disease. First declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the 11 March 2020, Covid-19 was officially recognized in Wuhan a city from Hubei province in China on 29th December 2019 (Hussein, 2020, WHO, 2010). Covid-19 is today the ongoing global outbreak of the respiratory disease that was rapidly shown to be caused by a novel corona virus that is structurally related to the virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) (Lin, Zhao, Gao, Lou, Yang, Musa, Wang, Cai, Wang, Yang & He, 2020). Covid-19 has today spread to all the 196 continents of the world except Antarctica (Rahman & Bahar, 2020). It was also stated in an editorial of the new England journal of medicine that other two

preceding instances of emergence of corona virus disease in the past 18 years include Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) of 2002 and 2003 and the Middle East Respiratory syndrome (MERS) of 2012 to the present (Fauci, Lane & Redfield, 2020). These Covid-19 outbreaks has posed serious challenges to the economies of nation states and have now forced a rethink on alternative ways forward especially in the area of children's educational attainment.

Consequent upon this new threat, governments around the world including Nigeria have temporarily closed down their educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Burgess & Sieverstsen, 2020; Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020; O'Malley, 2020). Studies in this respect show over 91% negative impact on the world's student population affecting millions of learners. According to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1,575,270,054 learners i.e. 91.3% of total enrolled learners in 191 countries are affected by the closures world-wide (UNESCO, 2020b). Burgess and Sieverstsen (2020) argue that the global lockdown of the educational institutions is going to cause major interruptions in students' learning outcome because of disruptions in their internal assessments and possible cancellations of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative.

As a health crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has left many countries with a decision between two extremes: closing schools (reducing contact and saving lives) and keeping them open (allowing workers to work and maintain the economy). In another dimension, the severe short-term disruption is felt by many families around the world because home schooling is not only a massive shock to parents' productivity, but also to children's social life and learning. Teaching is moving online, on an untested and unprecedented scale (Wu, Chen & Chan, 2020). Student assessments are also moving online, with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty with many assessments below standard or being cancelled altogether (Rahman & Bahar, 2020). The foremost fear in all this is that, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue, but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohort that is most likely to increase inequality in learning and research. This study is focused on the cost implication of global online education during the COVID-19 outbreak and the assistance received by the Nigerian private universities from the government if any. Based on the above, this study proposes the following research questions backed with research objectives as follows:

- a. Is there any significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria?
- b. Does the cost implication of the online platform worth the academic exercise in Nigeria?

To ensure that these stated research questions were addressed, the following objectives were put in place:

1. To appraise the impact of the cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria.
2. To examine if the cost implication of the online platform is worth the academic exercise in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO) reported that, governments all over the world including Nigeria have temporarily closed down their educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020a). Studies so far on the pandemic show over 91% negative impact on the world's student population and their learning outcome affecting millions of learners. Although efforts are being intensified to teach using webinars and other remote learning, students learning in the classroom are known to be the best public policy tool designed by government for skills acquisition. Going to school raises a child's ability in social skills and social awareness. Research has shown that even a relatively short period of missed school will have negative impact on student's skill acquisition and growth (UNESCO, 2006).

With higher institutions and individual researchers joining forces to share knowledge and expertise for new education policy formulation and addressing social issues in the classroom, it is expected that indeed very soon, higher education across the globe can play a tremendous role (Oboh & Oboh, 2020). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) observed that, COVID-19 pandemic have now forced down the world of work with institutions to closing down with some delivering all educational activities such as project proposals, proposal defence and Viva Voce online (ILO, 2020). Every international conference in higher education has been cancelled or conducted via series of webinars. Moreover, even if governments consider reopening Universities and other institutions of learning, new modes of social distancing will continue to apply in and out of the classroom for some time to come. This will no doubt affect on-

campus learning in physical space from the classroom to libraries. It will further disrupt the much needed on-campus student network interactions (Sahin, Erdogan, Agaoglu, Dineri, Cakirci, Senel, Okyay and Asdogan, 2020).

While some institutions were already working on new approaches for online or blended education delivery, others simply have no time to change the pedagogy. They hardly deem it fit to work with professional instructional designers on purpose-built teaching material for online delivery and to train lecturers to effectively deliver online. For instance, an online survey pertaining to online teaching by MBA prospective students in the United Kingdom (UK) say that missing out on the full on-campus experience, such as face-to-face discussion with lecturers, participating in co-curricular activities and building a network with peers and verbal interactions with faculty, was a major concern. Online teaching though a worthwhile alternative is clearly less attractive to students (Burquel and Busch, 2020).

2.1 Covid-19 Pandemic around the World

As fear and anxiety mounted about the COVID-19 pandemic spreads around the world, many people are starting to ask difficult questions about how the pandemic will impact on educational attainment. Globally, the wide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic saw most of the world's universities closing their campuses and sending their students back to their parents. Large majority of the students have shifted to distance learning in its various ramifications to allow classes to continue and students to complete their current cohort with considerable adjustments by both teachers and students. The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt brought about a new online revolution to higher education by forcibly pushing IT specialist at universities to do remarkable job of migrating modules and programmes online (Raham & Pasi, 2020). Individually, countries around the globe have different experiences in their educational settings. For instance, while the pandemic lasted, South Korea universities in Seoul are considering increase in their regular admissions while university mergers are being considered in the United Kingdom. Financially hit universities in Ireland consider recruitment freezes and university authorities in Kenya ask staff in their payroll to take voluntary pay cuts. Moreover, in South Africa lockdown is easing slightly as against universities in Romania and those of Nigeria that still consider it safer to remain on lockdown until further notice. The experiences of selected countries around the world which is further analyzed in some details below reveal insights into the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on educational development in major countries.

2.1.1 The United States of America

In the United States of America, O'Malley (2020) reports that more than 180 members of Congress have signed a memorandum urging leaders of the House of Representatives to include in the next COVID-19 relief legislation a palliative of US\$26 billion to cover research costs, citing the important role played by the 560,000-strong research workforce from Universities, medical centres of excellence, independent research institutes and national labs throughout the 50 states. The aim according to this initiative is to preserve American current scientific workforce and ensure that the US is prepared to continue their effort of global scientific leadership after the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.1.2 Australian Experience on Education

The educational sector in Australia is the third top three export economy with up to AU\$3 billion (US\$1.9 billion) of revenue on the line (Burquel and Busch, 2020). According to Maslen (2020), with COVID-19 reaching its boiling point in late January, Australian higher institutions of learning were faced with very serious problem. Maslen (2020) further noted that universities were right in the middle of their main academic year intake as thousands of students were preparing to enter the country and classes were scheduled to commence at the end of February. To Burquel and Busch (2020), the immediate remedial measure put in place to contain the situation in Australia include introducing online student counseling, webinars and live-streaming campus tours. Further, staff needed the ability to pivot quickly and deal with an ever-changing environment. They are involved in the retention of students moving from one term into the next rather than just focusing on new student's enrolment as in the past.

2.1.3 Europe and Europe-Africa Educational Collaboration

A Study from Europe on the Covid-19 pandemic by Murphy (2020) observed a devastating challenge to universities in many new ways. First as places that gather many individuals, they cannot open their doors to students and it does not mean that they are closed. What they did is to swiftly move their learning and teaching online. For an education sector serving more than 20 million students, Europe, is no doubt going to face lots of problems. Moreover, as universities remain active in the research in the search for new vaccines and possible treatments of the Corona Virus by responding to the challenge through expertise in virology, epidemiology or sociology. By supporting society in so many ways, universities in Europe have no doubt demonstrated the dynamism and flexibility of the education sector. But even with their advanced educational setting, Europe are

still facing the challenge of regulating study times, type of examinations and grants needed to adapt in a short time for students to stay and study at home because of their deepened social inequality. There is further the need for teachers in many institutions to fine-tune their skills in tandem with the new learning environment. As it is however, Europe's universities need to brace for difficult times especially as it affect the level of public funding, revenues from both international and national tuition fees and cooperation with business and industry.

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic has push further the call for Africa to build on a locally developed knowledge based society particularly around Africa's public universities. In quoting the General Secretary of the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (the Guild), Kokutse (2020) notes that even though every country's first response to the pandemic has been to close its borders, the European Union (EU) contribution to Africa on education is not likely to be affected by Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the Guild has already enabled over €120 million in supporting research and innovation on the corona virus, and it is also providing platforms to bring together innovators and researchers in African universities.

2.1.4 Russian Federation Education

In Russia university students are being expelled and evicted from campus dormitories during the corona virus pandemic lockdown (Holdsworth, 2020). For example, the Moscow's Russian State Social University expelled and evicted at least 200 of its 1,568 students in mid-April, according to a report in the student newspaper *Doxa*. Another report published in Moscow by "Meduza" a respected Russian-language independent online news service based in Riga, Latvia gave several reasons for locking students out of their dormitories during the pandemic lockdown. Mullen in DOXA (2020) reported that even against the university authority's threats for speaking talking the press, students at some Russian universities says that before their expulsions they had initially been asked to all move into one dormitory for the duration of the lockdown. However, those who resisted were threatened with expulsion.

2.1.5 Singaporean Education Palliatives

In Singapore, Sharma (2020) reports that the Covid-19 pandemic is having a devastating effect on students employability consequent upon which government through the National University of Singapore (NUS) now have to step in with a plan of hundreds of jobs including 200 full-time paid positions within the university and paid traineeships with US\$34 billion bailout package. The

Singaporean government further introduced tuition fee deferrals interest-free for up to three years from the date of enrolment for those going on to a master's degree at the same university. There is no gain saying that these generous Singapore universities scheme by the government is "an innovative approach" in this period of Covid-19 pandemic which every government should emulate.

2.1.6 Indian Covid-19 Experience

Niazi (2020) reports India's higher education regulator, the University Grants Commission (UGC), rolling out the final semester time table for the 36 million bachelor and masters degree students to start in July 2020. The UGC further advice universities to examine students depending on the infrastructures of individual universities and the corona virus outlook in their area. Moreover, education authorities have indicated that schools, colleges of higher education such as universities and public transport may remain shut even after 3 May because of the increase in COVID-19 cases in the country. The UGC have cancelled winter holidays in December and have increase the period of lectures to a six-day working week to make up for the lockdown lost time. For MPhil and PhD students studying in India, a six-month extension will be granted and about 25% of all education curriculums including viva voce will be done online. However, the greatest challenge to online learning in India according to vice-chancellor of the University of Madras is lack of internet access by all students.

2.1.7 Africa Education during Covid-19

The challenge pose by the Covid-19 pandemic in the African continent is a "far greater" contribution from the hitherto traditional role played by universities into a more rigorous research and development which feeds directly into private sector activity. With the Covid-19 pandemic experiences thus far there is little doubt that new thinking and practical implementation is required from universities. However, this is only possible with support from the government and other international multilateral donor agencies. Sawahel (2020) rightly observed that the future of African countries is heavily dependent on the quality of its research and higher education institutions. Universities in Africa must seat up to innovate and become more proactive in responding to the immediate needs of the marketplace in their research and in the calibre and skill set of their graduates if Africa are to weather the turbulence caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. African universities must therefore adopt a "top-down frugal innovation business model by trying to do more with less by adopting home-grown solutions to solve future problems.

It is a well-known fact that African universities may not obviously solve the profound socio-economic impacts of the corona virus pandemic on their own. However, they can collaborate with governments and private organisations to help address the crisis through evidence-informed policy and practice and to help retrain and rehabilitate people as the world recover from the pandemic. Obviously, the power of universities lies in their ability to play a role in “leveling up opportunities” among different social groups. This can only be possible through collaboration in research and innovation which is badly needed around the world as evidence by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nigeria’s efforts in the fight against the impact of the corona virus pandemic provide a somewhat different scenario on the impact of the pandemic to what obtains in other climes. First, as the most densely populated black country in the world.

2.2 Covid-19 Experiences in Nigeria

One known palliative put in place that is documented by Federal Government of Nigeria was the sum of NGN5 billion (US\$12.8 million) spent in 2019. Even with this effort put in place by the government not much improvement was recorded in tackling the menace. However, Aikulola (2020) reported on further effort by Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TET Fund) to support same course on the Covid-19 pandemic by professionals in the nation’s universities. Education is a process of teaching and learning whose primary purpose is to develop individuals’ knowledge, skills and behaviour (Burke, Lawrence, El-Sayed, & Apple, 2009). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO, 2006) defines education as to what people can consequently achieve in terms of production at individual, national and international levels. This further means that it is a task that is related to achievement. Consequently, the need for all tiers of governments (Federal, States and Local) to come to the rescue of education through the provision of infrastructural facilities in both urban and rural areas to enable internet based knowledge delivery becomes very much imperative (Oboh & Oboh, 2020).

3.0 Methodology

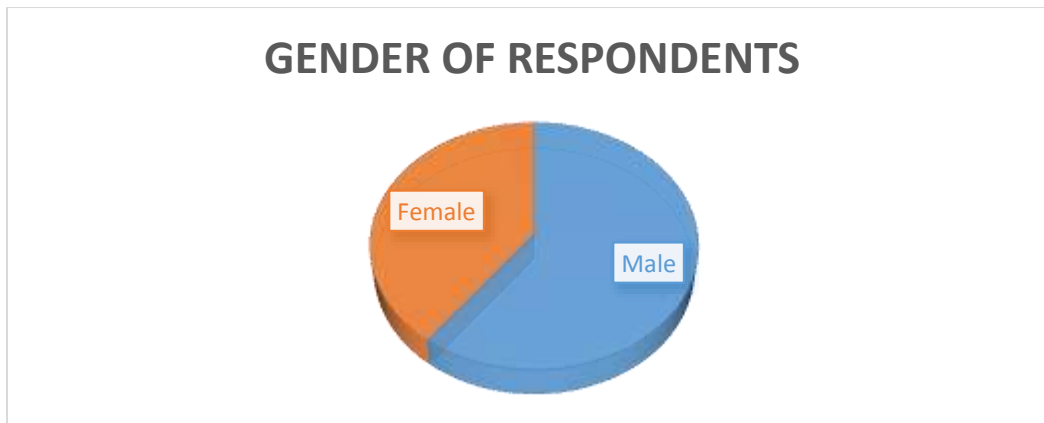
To ensure that the employed research questions were properly addressed, this study adopts quantitative survey approach as it helps in providing responses to several research questions that were connected to the itemized research problems. To achieve this study’s objectives, an online survey was sent out to academic staff of the 66 private universities in Nigeria (NUC, 2017). For a good coverage and in a bid to have a substantial generalization of the chosen population however, the

researcher saw the need to confine the study within a sample size. Consequently, sample sizes of 383 respondents were generated from the population of 8,986 academic staff with the aid of Taro Yamane's 1967 sample size formula. This study further employ Frequency Distribution and the Chi-Square test of goodness fit for the analysis. The hypotheses were finally tested with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

4.0 Discussion of Results and Test of Hypotheses

Table 4.1 (see appendix) shows the frequency distribution of the 383 respondents that were employed in this study. The study found that out of the 383 respondents engaged, all of them responded to the online survey. This shows that 383 respondents were taken and adjudged suitably, thereby forming the foundation of the analysis in this study. From the first two rows of the above table (i.e. the demographic information of the respondents), the study shows that more of the male gender participated more than their female counterparts as the statistics above indicates 231:152 ratio in favour of the male gender (See Figure 1 below for further illustration).

Figure 4.1: Analysis by Gender



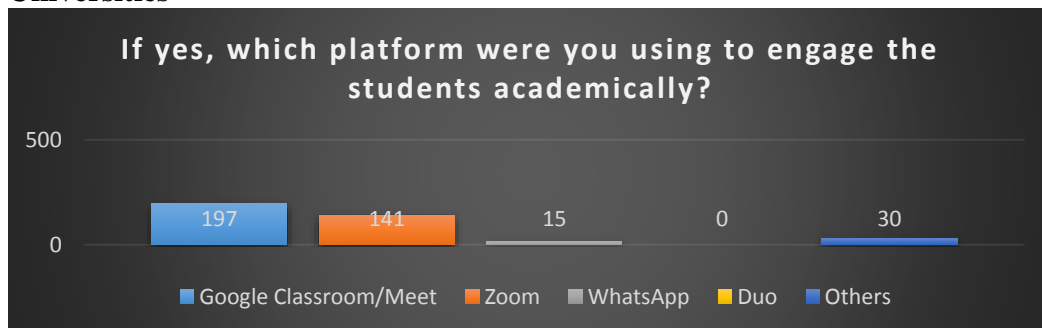
Source: Extracted from the Statistical Output

On the nationality of the respondents, it was found that 347 people out of the 383 respondents indicated that they were Nigerians with the remaining 36 respondents as foreigners within the Nigerian private universities. On the period spent with private universities in Nigeria however, the study found that over 76% of the respondents had spent over 10 years in academics with the private universities.

On further steps to know whether the academic programmes were running during the COVID-19 pandemic period, it was observed that all the respondents indicates that there were no loss of academic period as a result of the Corona Virus outbreak.

On platform used for engaging the students academically however, it was noted that 51.4% of the respondents employed the Google Classroom/Meet, 36.9% of the respondents made use of Zoom network, 3.9% of the respondents employed the WhatsApp platform while 7.8% of the respondents informed that they employed other platforms not mentioned on the list. This was further illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 4.2: Various Online Learning Platforms employed by Nigeria Private Universities



Source: Extracted from the Statistical Output

On the cost management of the online platforms, this study found that 262 of the respondents informed that the cost was self-sponsored while 121 respondents indicated that the online classes were funded by management of their universities. A further step was taken to find out if the online platform was worth the exercise. Fortunately, all the respondents informed that the online platform was worth the exercise. Last but not the least, this study found that all the respondents informed that there was no form of palliative from the Federal/State Government to private universities in Nigeria during the pandemic period.

4.1 Test of Hypotheses

To ensure a better assessment of this study, the following hypotheses were postulated in their null forms:

H₀₁: There is no significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria.

H₀₂: The cost implication of the online platform does not worth the academic exercise in Nigeria.

4.1.1 First Hypothesis Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria.

H₁₁: There is a significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria.

Table 4.2: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.333 ^a	2	.001
Likelihood Ratio	16.912	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.528	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	383		

a. 5 cells (83.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .80.

From the above Chi-square Table 4.2, the calculated Pearson Chi-Square value of 13.333 was found to be greater than the tabulated of 10.597 at a Degree of Freedom of 2. More so, the Chi-square probability value of 0.001 was found to be less than the 5% level of significance, and as such, the alternative hypothesis (H₁) was accepted that the analysis is statistically significant. Thus, the study concludes that there is a significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria.

4.1.2 Second Hypothesis Testing

H₀₂: The cost implication of the online platform does not worth the academic exercise in Nigeria.

H₁₂: The cost implication of the online platform does worth the academic exercise in Nigeria.

Table 4.3: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.613 ^a	3	.002
Likelihood Ratio	19.887	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.835	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	383		

a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .90.

From the above Chi-square Table 4.3, the calculated Pearson Chi-Square value of 14.613 was found to be greater than the tabulated of 12.838 at a Degree of Freedom of 3. More so, the Chi-square probability value of 0.002 was found to be less than the 5% level of significance, and as such, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted that the analysis is statistically significant. Thus, the study concludes the cost implication of the online platform does worth the academic exercise in Nigeria.

5.0 Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic has created panic worldwide with the press and electronic media not helping issues. There is considerable uncertainty about the likely overall economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic especially in developing economies such as Nigeria. The duration and severity of the virus will depend on the success of measures to stop the virus spread and how quickly economic activities can bounce back, trade and investment can recover, and when financial markets and commodity prices can be stabilized. However, what is not in doubt remains the pandemics immediate effect via slowdown or reversal of educational growth and poverty reduction with the long-term outlook is uncertain. This calls for more research so as to evaluate the significant cost implication of the exercise on the private universities that adopted the new learning system.

5.1 Recommendations

Having thoroughly appraised the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian private universities, this study concludes that that there is a significant impact of cost implication of the online platform on education system in Nigeria. It was further observed that the cost implication of the online platform was worth the academic exercise as depicted by private universities in Nigeria. In order to assist

the education sector in Nigeria therefore, this study see the need for adequate preparation by both government and the private sector educational institutions to collaborate in effort to contain the spread of the pandemic.

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Appendix

Table 4.1: Result Presentation and Interpretation

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Demographic Information of the 383 Respondents		
Gender	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Male	231	60.3%
Female	152	39.7%
Nationality	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Nigerian	347	90.6%
Non-Nigerian	36	9.4%
Respondents' View on Topic under Study		
How long have you worked in the Private University?	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Less than 5 years	45	11.7%
5-10 years	45	11.7%
Above 10 years	293	76.6%
Were your academic programmes running during the COVID-19 pandemic?	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Yes	383	100%
No	-	0%
If yes, which platform were you using to engage the students academically?	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Google Classroom/Meet	197	51.4%
Zoom	141	36.9%
WhatsApp	15	3.9%
Duo	-	-
Others	30	7.8%
How was the cost for the online platform managed?	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Self-Funding	262	68.4%
Funded by Management	121	31.6%
Does the cost for the online platform worth the exercise?	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Yes	383	100%
No	-	0%
Was there any form of palliative from the Federal/State Government to your university during this pandemic period?	(Total 383)	(Total 100%)
Yes	Nil	0%
No	383	100%