

Disruptions of Academic Activities in Nigeria: University Lecturers' Perceptions and Responses to the COVID-19

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Abstract— The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the different layers of vulnerabilities within systems across different political, socio-economic, educational and cultural contexts, so much that even the most advanced economies are struggling to check the impact of the ravaging Corona virus. However, not much is known about the impact of the disruptions in higher educational systems in developing contexts particularly in Nigeria. This study adopted a qualitative research design using a validated semi-structured interview to provide evidence-based data on the impact of the pandemic on the university system from the university lecturers' perspectives. Using purposive and snowballing techniques, seven lecturers in five universities located in three geographical zones of Nigeria were interviewed using the Zoom and Skype platforms. The results of this study show that COVID-19 had a huge negative impact on the university system in Nigeria. Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions as a few universities within the study switched to alternative teaching medium to mitigate the disruptions thus, underscoring the potentials for a more responsive higher education system. The paper discussed the limitations, and future directions that may be drawn from the study.

Keywords—COVID-19, pandemic, education, university lecturers, developing countries, alternative teaching modes

I. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the Corona virus disease (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China on 31st December 2019 unleashed an unprecedented disruptive impact on different aspects of human endeavor across different contexts and disciplines. Reported as an entirely new form of the corona disease [1], the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a global health emergency, its ravaging impact and contagious effects broke the global social, cultural, economic, political and educational order. A development that prompted WHO to declare the disease as a "Public Health Emergency" of international proportion on 30th January 2020 [2]. Although the world have witnessed different forms of pandemic over the last two decades such that in 2002, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) broke out in China causing disruptions to the health systems and educational spheres in substantial parts of the world, schools were closed to prevent the spread and escalation of the disease. In addition, in 2009, there was the H1N1 Flu that also ravaged

substantial parts of the globe and interrupted the school systems across the affected countries [3].

Among the strategies adopted to contain the virus, such as maintaining personal hygiene, self-isolation, social and physical distancing defines the new order of interaction among communities, however, the most devastating effect of the pandemic is school closures. Huang et al., [3] highlighted the UNESCO report that 46 countries across five continents had suspended school activities across the strata to contain the spread of COVID-19 as at 12th March 2020. In particular, schools were completely closed down in 26 countries thus, breaking the flow of learning in the affected countries and denying about 400 million children and youth the opportunity to learn in school. In a recent press release the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported that over 1.57 billion students from more than 190 countries have been forced to stay at home by the COVID-19 pandemic [4].

As a measure of sustaining and maintaining school activities, governments of the world activated the UNESCO framework of action on "Education Response in Crises and Emergencies". The framework charged countries to "provide alternative modes of learning and education for children and adolescents who are not in school at both the primary and secondary levels, and put in place equivalency and bridging programmes, recognized and accredited by the state, to ensure flexible learning in both formal and non-formal settings, including in emergency situations [3]. In addition, [3] reported that China introduced the education emergency management policy entitled; "Suspending Classes without Stopping Learning" to ensure the continuity of learning during the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, countries such as China the epicenter of the pandemic, the United States of America, The United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, South Africa and many of the countries affected by the pandemic have switched over to remote teaching as a response to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on the school system and maintain uninterrupted teaching and learning process especially in the Universities. Yeskel [5] reported that 120 million students and educators are using Google G-suite for education to create, collaborate and communicate despite school closures as a result of the pandemic.

However, while most of the countries in the developed contexts have the required infrastructure, workforce, competence and the technology to seamlessly migrate to the alternate, flexible learning medium, not much can be said of countries in the low-middle income bracket of the world particularly in sub-Saharan Africa which are challenged by poor Internet connectivity, inadequate power to drive technology devices and competing budgetary issues [6]. Also, UNICEF and the Microsoft Corporation and the University of Cambridge recently launched “The Learning Passport” a platform for ensuring that students learn even while at home. The Learning Passport provides a range of audio-visual materials to help students continue learning during the COVID-19 -related school closures [7].

Regardless, these enormous challenges in the global south, the COVID-19 experience provides a window of opportunity to African countries to begin to lay the ground for alternative learning mediums using technology solutions. As [3] noted, several countries have adopted various flexible teaching and learning approaches in their education systems using the online education medium. For instance in Nigeria, some institutions and state governments are making efforts to engage the students/pupils while observing the ‘stay at home’ order, The TVC News at Ten [8] reported how some educators are engaging their pupils using virtual and mobile technologies to exchange learning resources. Furthermore, some states have directed teachers and educators to deliver their teaching through the radio and television broadcasts. Nonetheless, there is a lack of empirical evidence on the organizational, institutional and workforce preparedness for remote teaching and learning in the period of emergencies. Knowledge that may guide the instructional and curriculum design, pedagogical as well as methodological approaches in the times of crisis and educational disruptions in the context of Nigeria. Therefore, this study is pertinent. In light of the above, the present study seeks to:

- (i) Assess university lecturers’ perceptions of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university system in Nigeria and identify the challenges and opportunities offered by the disruption
- (ii) Identify university lecturers’ perception of readiness for remote, flexible or alternate teaching in response to the COVID-19 disruption.
- (iii) Identify the strategies adopted by the lecturers in response to the COVID-19 disruptions of teaching and learning in their universities

As well as respond to the following research questions:

- (1) How do university lecturers perceive the ravaging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university system?
- (2) What are university lecturers' perception of the competences and the mechanisms for switching to remote/virtual teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic?
- (3) What are the strategies and actions taken by the lecturers to mitigate the COVID-19 disruptions?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

During the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, various governments around the globe made efforts to facilitate flexible learning to minimize the effects of the academic

disruption. In China, the “Disrupted classes, Undisrupted Learning” initiative was established. This was aimed at providing flexible online learning to over 270 million students from their homes across the country [3]. Similarly, the Australian government launched an initiative titled: The Flexible Learning Toolboxes Project. The aim was to encourage implementation of flexible learning modes by making available a set of learning resources intended for web-based delivery in a manner which facilitates customisation and reuse of existing infrastructure in the country’s Vocational Education and Training System sector [9].

At the University of California in the United States of America, several models were adopted by a group of medical professionals to provide knowledge for surgical residents and mitigate the loss of in-person academics and minimize mass casualty among surgical residents. According to [10], their innovative model adopted for teaching and learning during the pandemic include flipped virtual classroom, online practice questions, academic conferences via teleconference, telehealth clinics with resident involvement, and facilitated use of surgical videos. Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the SIM Share (simulation share) platform was launched to ensure that the continuity of healthcare education in the country during the pandemic. This intervention was made to provide critical facilities (e.g. mock wards and intensive care units) needed for the training of healthcare professionals which were no longer accessible due to the crisis. As reported by [11], the initiative is a success – considering the fact that within the first two weeks of its set up over 6000 users were engaged.

A. *Transition to remote teaching in developing countries’ context*

Whilst the move from traditional classroom setting to remote teaching was relatively smooth in most developed countries, it is almost the opposite in many developing countries – to the extent that some consider it as an unplanned and unwanted approach [12]. This negative sentiment - among teachers, administrators and even learners - may be attributed to lack of access to insufficient time to prepare and lack facilities in the schools [13], [14].

In Nigeria, for example, the challenges are lack of preparedness of the institutions, lack of infrastructures, epileptic power supply, high cost of Internet data services, paucity of funds and policy issues in the education sector among others [15].

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research method using structured interviews as the primary data source. The perceptions and responses to the pandemic were obtained from seven lecturers with diverse experiences, disciplines and ranks, in five universities in Nigeria. The sample size is based on the findings and recommendations made by [16]. According to [16], there are no clearly defined universal criteria for limiting sample size in qualitative research. However, we reckoned that from the literature, average of 7 to 12 interviewees are enough to reach theoretical saturation in qualitative research. In addition, qualitative research was

considered more appropriate based on its ability to reveal the authentic facts of the phenomenon from the original voices of some of the critical stakeholders in the university education stream in Nigeria in line with the recommendation by [17]. In Nigerian university system, the duration of studies ranges from four to seven years, depending on the nature of the programme where programmes leading to a first degree (e.g. bachelor's degree) should last not less than four years. The lecturers represent various disciplines such as computer science, adult education, educational technology and architecture. The participants cover six public universities and one private university were represented.

A. University Lecturers Interviews

The lecturers' data are from rigorous interviews. All interviews were conducted through voice call and the audio captured, lasting from 35 to 45 minutes. Due to their years of experience in teaching across institutions (5 years or more), the informants produced very rich data in knowledge intensive discussion. Structured interviews based on interview guide/questions were developed from the research questions in line with the objectives of the study. To ensure the validity of the interview questions, we followed the recommendations by [18] for peer review of the questions by two educators not participating in the study, their observations and comments were noted and corrected before conducting the interviews. In establishing validity of a qualitative inquiry, the researcher may use the credibility of the account of an individual external to the study [19]. The questions touched on how COVID-19 affected the academic activities, competencies in switching to online teaching, strategies adopted despite the disruptions and guidelines to address the situation in future. In the data transcriptions, the interviewees are identified randomly by numbers 1-7 and their gender is indicated by capital letters F (female), M (male) and L denotes lecturers.

B. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted for the study and deductive coding technique. Braun & Clarke [20] defined thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes the dataset in detail. To gather the perceptions and responses to the pandemic in Nigerian universities, the emerging key points in the interview transcriptions were identified, compared and categorized. Based on the categorized key points, explanations were drawn. The case study findings are summarized further in the paper.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings, discussion and implication. The first question posed to the respondents was how they perceived the ravaging impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university system in Nigeria. The summary of responses is presented in Table I:

TABLE I. LECTURERS PERCEPTIONS REGARDING IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Categ ory	Themes	Response s	Narratives
Teachi ng and Learn ing	Teaching and learning suspended due to COVID-19	5	"Well, I think there have been negative impacts. but I would like to mention a few... the first is that it has stopped learning, I mean school is closed, and learning is not going on. [L2]
	Teaching and learning not affected by Covid-19	2	"As for educational impacts, all our students are at home and they are learning from home" [L3]
How it impact ed on the studen ts	Thesis and graduation	4	"... " Some of the students were at the verge of graduation before the pandemic, as a result of which this could not happen" [L4]
	Poor reading habit	3	"I will like to also mention that the kind of students we have.... you know our students do not normally read as they are at home now, hardly will you find a good number reading their books" [L6]
Impact on the lecture rs	Inability to attend in- person conferences	7	"Like me, I have two conferences to attend but could not for the pandemic" [L4]
	Stunted research and graduation	3	"I am also a student; my work is now on hold due to the social distancing. I needed to go to the field to obtain data, things I can't do now" [L7]

Table I indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic have far reaching effects on the different facets of the university system in Nigeria. All the respondents reported that it affected the teaching and learning process consequent upon which most universities are not engaging their students in teaching and learning. 70% of respondents stated that teaching and learning has stopped in their institutions as a result of the pandemic while 30% reported that even while they were affected by the pandemic in some other ways, that teaching and learning were been remotely delivered. A recent study by [21] reported that the closure of all educational institutions across the world to curb the spread of the deadly virus facilitated the switch to virtual delivery of a large number of courses.

In a related manner, the lecturers also confirmed that teaching was been conducted using the virtual model of learning. Conversely, most institutions halted their teaching and learning activities because they do not have the resources to deliver virtual lectures and this is prevalent in most institutions in the African context. The responses from the lecturers further reflect how it affects students in relation to other educational activities. For instance, 70% of the respondents noted that the pandemic affects undergraduate final year students and postgraduate students working on their theses and consequently will affect their graduation. This, however, is not the case in other clime, for example, [22] stated that administrative services and virtual graduation of students was done using robots and tablets. Some respondents (45%) believe that the students reading habit will be at a low level since they (the students) mostly read just-enough to pass exams - during normal academic

sessions. In addition, all the interviewees alluded to the fact that the pandemic affected the way in which they attend conferences. Although they recognized the options for virtual conferences during the period, but they emphasised the significance of the physical conference attendance. Furthermore, 45% of the respondents submitted that the pandemic affected their personal and professional development in terms of research and completion of their studies. Most especially those respondents who are conducting their PhD studies in Nigerian universities and are unable to proceed with their studies due to school closures.

Research question two posed to the respondents were related to the competences and the modalities for switching to remote/virtual teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic. The responses are summarized in Table II:

TABLE II. LECTURERS PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMPETENCES AND MECHANISMS FOR SWITCHING TO REMOTE/VIRTUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING

Category	Themes	Responses	Narratives
Competences	Remote teaching competences/ skills	5	"Based on my background, I am very familiar with the use of technology tools. I have the competency to switch to virtual models, it can only affect those that are not in the ICT field. [L3]"
	Ability to use diverse teaching methods/ models	7	"I have been teaching a distance learning course online, distance learning has been part of my specializations in Adult Education" [L6]"
Use of remote teaching & learning applications	Google Classroom and WhatsApp messenger	2	"For now, we are teaching the students from home using the Google Classroom and WhatsApp applications" [L3]"
	Moodle LMS & Telegram	2	"We use Telegram to teach students because of its peculiarity. Last session we used Moodle LMS for teaching and assessment" [L5]"
	Challenges	7	"We couldn't switch to the remote or virtual teaching. There are no technologies to drive such platforms" [L4]"

According to Table II, the analysis of the responses highlights the level of competencies the lecturers possessed for switching to virtual learning mode, familiarity with the teaching methods and relevant remote teaching assessment strategies. Results show that 70% of the lecturers rated themselves high and attested to have the requisite competency for adopting remote teaching and learning strategies. The reason for this may be attributed to the background and training of the respondents as they are from the educational technology and computer science disciplines. Respondents from other disciplines had experience with online learning because they offered one form of online course or the other. The study of [23] shows that without teachers' knowledge and expertise in ICT training, it becomes very difficult to have ICTs integrated in the teaching and learning process. Similarly, findings from

[24] suggest that teachers' well-equipped preparation with ICT tools and facilities is one the main factors in the success of technology-based teaching and learning. The modalities through which remote teaching and learning was enabled included: Google classrooms, WhatsApp platforms and emails. Moodle Learning management system and telegrams were used in some institutions before the COVID-19 disruptions. Technology challenges and other resources such as lack of access to Wi-Fi and Internet connections were reported to have the most negative effects towards the remote learning methods.

In research question three, the respondents were asked the strategies that were adopted to mitigate the COVID-19 disruptions of teaching and learning in their respective institutions. The summary of responses is presented in Table III:

TABLE III. STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY LECTURERS TO MITIGATE COVID-19 DISRUPTIONS

Category	Themes	Responses	Narratives
Student Engagement	Remote project supervision	3	"I engage most of my project students online. They send to me; I go through and respond to them online" [L6]"
	Online lecture delivery	2	"We use Google Classroom for sharing materials with the students and get feedback from them through the same medium" [L7]"
Connectivity in the department and faculties	Virtual meetings at departmental and faculty levels	5	"There is a general platform where lecturers communicate in the faculty and the department. We use Telegram and WhatsApp applications" [L6]"

The respondents highlighted different strategies adopted during the pandemic. It was indicated that they engaged their students mainly through supervision of final year projects. 45% of the respondents reported they engage their students through online project supervision.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the above results, the following conclusions are drawn:

- The perception of the university lecturers is that the COVID-19 crisis has a significant negative impact on the different facets of the Nigerian university system as a result of which teaching, and learning activities were stopped in most of the institutions
- Majority of the lecturers felt confident at switching their mode of teaching from the traditional classroom setting to remote platforms. However, most of the universities do not currently have the necessary infrastructure for remote teaching and learning.
- In order to mitigate the effects of the disruption of academic activities, most of the lecturers engage their students through online supervision of their school projects. They also held meetings with their

colleagues via platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the body of evolving knowledge on the disruptions of the Higher Education system by the COVID-19 pandemic in a developing country context. The perspectives expressed by the lecturers may be used by institutional leaderships in higher education to inform policy decisions on alternative teaching media/models in the Nigerian context. Besides, the findings illuminate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university system through the authentic voices of the lecturers. The results reported may be drawn upon to inform the design and the development of viable alternative teaching models post-pandemic period in developing countries. Based on this study's findings, authors suggest that further research and development should focus on creating possibilities for online distance learning and open educational resources models to facilitate teaching and learning at the higher education institutions in the context of the developing countries [25][26]. This approach provides an environment for continuous learning and teaching in times of educational disruption such as experienced in the COVID-19 situation [27][3]. Arising from the study, it is therefore recommended that web-based support is made available for courses offered in the university system. This will enable the seamless switch to the alternative mode especially in times of pandemic. Furthermore, the university system should develop or adopt a guideline that will ensure teaching and learning continues during pandemics.

Study Limitation and Future Study

This study collected data on university lecturer's perceptions on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian university systems to ascertain the disruptive impact of the pandemic. As pertinent as it may be, the study is not without limitations. Against this backdrop the limitation of the study is as follows: Firstly, we interviewed seven (7) lecturers across five universities. Although we have relatively small samples, smaller samples are intuitively more appealing in qualitative research as its concern is more about gathering in-depth information [25]. Secondly, the sampled respondents are mostly from federal universities while two of the respondents represent each of a state and private owned university. There exist three tiers of the higher education institutional (HEI) ownership in Nigeria which are federal, state and private ownership. In addition, only universities lecturers' opinions were sampled while other HEIs were left out. Consequent upon which the result cannot be generalized within the context of HEIs in Nigeria.

Future studies should involve more state owned or private HEIs lectures to get a more broad-based perspective. It will be interesting for future researchers to also know more about the impact of COVID-19 across HEIs including polytechnics and colleges of education in Nigeria and the approaches employed in carrying out instructions during the pandemic. One aspect that should not be overlooked in

future studies is the discussion on the alternative model and guidelines to be adopted by the HEIs in times of pandemic disruptions. Further, another potential area of future research is an analysis of how these countries perceive the adoption of open educational materials to create flexible and autonomous learning in scenarios of educational disruption

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