

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A VIEWPOINT

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has done great harm to various sectors of the global economy, including education. This paper critically reflects on the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on university education in Nigeria. From the authors' views, the pandemic has immensely impacted students, lecturers, and university management. Suggestions on mitigating the impacts of the pandemic with respect to university education, especially in Nigeria were proffered. It concludes that the university management sensitises members of the university community on the COVID-19 pandemic and its psychological impacts while providing a platform for curbing these impacts.

Keywords: COVID-19; Psychological impact; Students; Lecturers; University education; Nigeria.

Introduction

Pandemics have been part and parcel of the history of man and emerged in many forms and with various names: Aids, smallpox, plague, influenza, dengue, cholera, tuberculosis, West Nile disease, severe acute respiratory syndrome, monkey pox disease, and the Covid-19. The worst of these pandemics is the Coronavirus 2019 [7], which was first diagnosed in the lower respiratory tract of patients with pneumonia in Wuhan, China; on 29th December 2019, and was reported to have originated in Hubei Province, China [19], [29]. It is a human transmittable infectious disease through droplets, aerosol, and direct contact [43]. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the pandemic broke out around March 2020. In Nigeria for instance, the pandemic was affirmed on the 11th of March, 2020, and has progressively risen to 258,874 confirmed cases, 250,456 recoveries, 357 new cases, and 3,144 deaths [23].

[24] assert that dry cough, sore throat, vomiting, malaise, diarrhea, fever, respiratory distress, and death are the symptoms suffered by infected patients. The Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, is working to prevent the spread of the disease in Nigeria by introducing several approaches such as social distancing, regular hand washing with soap and water, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, cancellation of mass gatherings, closure of educational institutions and the stay-at-home order, to prevent the spread of the pandemic [29]; [32]. Quarantine and isolation were also put in place for infected patients [2]. The use of emergency remote teaching (ERT) on online platforms by numerous universities across the world has increased student anxiety [39].

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the welfare of humans globally with several psychological consequences [20]. It has caused emotional and financial stress, worries, anxiety, depression, suicide, and death. These were prompted by people's fears of getting sick and dying, avoiding medical care out of fear of contracting an infection, losing their jobs, being socially excluded, being quarantined after contracting an infection, feeling helpless in protecting family and loved ones, fear of being parted from loved ones, refusing to care for

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vulnerable people out of fear of infections, and feelings of helplessness, boredom, loneliness, and depression as a result of these fears [16]. The disease is a stressor that can lead to mental disorders such as anxiety and depression [9]. The pandemic has disrupted the teaching-learning processes while exposing the many inadequacies in the education sector of developing nations such as Nigeria [29]; [7], and the world in general [42]. As such, educational researchers and scholars have concentrated their efforts on mitigating the various impact of the pandemic on education, and other fields [29].

[39] conducted a study that assessed the psychological impact of COVID-19 and lockdown among university students in Malaysia. Results showed that COVID-19 caused high levels of anxiety among students, and these were necessitated by remote online teaching, financial constraints, and uncertainty about their future expectations. [4] examined the influence of COVID-19 on tertiary students' well-being. The study revealed that the pandemic caused loneliness, stress, and depression among students. [12] examined the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on university

students in China. The study found that the pandemic caused increased levels of anxiety among students. This finding was similar to those of [25], among others.

Studies on the impact of the pandemic on several sectors of the nation's economy abound in education [32]; [29] air quality [33], manufacturing and industrial operations [5], recreation and sports [17], healthcare workers [36], transportation [13]; [30], and business [38]. However, literature on the psychological impact of COVID-19 on university education with respect to students, lecturers, and the university management in Nigeria; to the best knowledge of the authors seems unavailable. There is, therefore, a need to reflect on the psychological impact of the COVID-19 on university education in Nigeria-students, lecturers, and the university system; this is the basis of our critical reflection for this study. With this viewpoint, we aim to fill the gap in extant literature regarding the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on university education with special attention to the Nigerian context. We also believe that these views would become a foundation for empirical studies on the subject.

Conceptual Framework

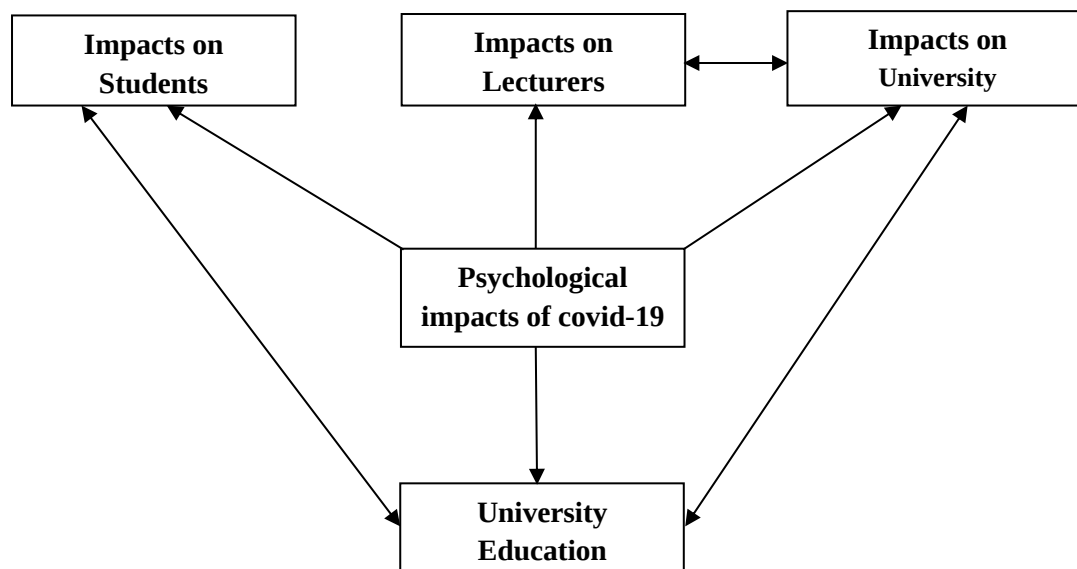


Figure 1: Developed by The Authors

Psychological Impacts of COVID-19 on Students

The disruption occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching implications for students. The closure of the universities negatively affected students' learning and social relationship [7]. The lives and academic endeavours of Nigerian students irrespective of their background were interrupted for about eight months, from which they will not be able to recover. Many of these students, as a result of the pandemic outbreak, missed or were deprived of admission into higher education institutions; some

missed their graduation, while others could not achieve their aspirations with regard to employment prospects. In all, the psychological impacts of COVID-19 on students in Nigeria can be summarized thus:

- i. Late completion of academic programmes: Many students had challenges completing their programmes against their initial propositions. Many had to spend an extra semester and (or) session before they could graduate. [3] opined that

the COVID-19 pandemic affected academic programmes, led to major disruptions in academic programmes, and thus resulted in late completion of programmes.

- ii. Decreased rate of retention: According to [11], the academic momentum of students is an indicator of the eventual completion of their academic programmes. The retention rates of the students reduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was because many of these students lost the motivation and interest to read as well as study habits. Reading at the time was a herculean task. Also, many of these students could not come home with their texts and books to read, due to the abrupt closure of schools nationwide.
- iii. Quest for knowledge: The quests for knowledge by many students deteriorated due to the obnoxious involvement in a bid for survival during the pandemic. COVID-19 has exposed students to increased barriers to successfully engaging in educational activities. Most students were lured into different forms of illegal online activities (especially internet fraud), with little or no passion for knowledge quests. Even after the re-opening of schools, many students seldom come for lectures, hoping to pay their way through to success from the illegal money obtained through questionable means at the time of the pandemic.
- iv. Online education: COVID-19 brought about alternative teaching and learning modes which is different from the usual face-to-face classroom interaction [6]. Students perceive this to be strange and unwelcoming. Many of these students lacked the necessary tools and gadgets for online learning, amidst the epileptic power supply and internet services in various university campuses in the country. More so, the response rate and success of online education depend on students', teachers', schools', and governments' level of preparedness [18]. Predisposing factors to this online education are the high speed of internet connections, high-quality learning software, and the cost and availability of technology [27]. Students could not afford the cost of buying the necessary technology for learning (such as data for internet access) during the pandemic [26].
- v. Mental health: There are increasing concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of students [14]. Students in universities are exposed to a range of psychosocial stressors that can increase their vulnerability to depression, anxiety, and suicidal attempts, and these were heightened by the reduction and ban of social interactions in lieu of the pandemic. These may have caused students' poor feeding, isolation from family members, irregular sleep patterns, pressures, financial stress, and drug and alcohol intake [28].
- vi. Academic performance: At the re-opening of schools after the major COVID-19 outbreak,

students' attitudes and motivation to academic concerns were drastically reduced. [8] did restate that the pandemic affected students' learning outcomes. This led to a sharp decline in their academic performance. This may have been necessitated by the decrease in the quality of teaching and learning at the time because students were so used to physical interactions and attention [21].

- vii. Withdrawal from academic programmes: The pandemic led to students' withdrawal from their various programmes. This may have been due to the poor academic performance of these students, and/or their inability to pay up the school and tuition fees within the stipulated time frame.
- viii. The strain on relationships: COVID-19 was premised on social distancing, self-isolation, use of face masks, no shaking of hands, and other body contacts. Even after schools were re-opened, this behaviour kept on. Socialising and interactions among students were not as usual [44].
- ix. Accommodation anxieties: During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, students struggled with accommodation difficulties [13]. This was as a result of schools requesting that students vacate the university's halls of residence for fear of the spread of the virus. Many off-campus hostel owners also did the same. Students had to scamper for where to put their belongings and live in; many had to abruptly return to their parents. As at the time the pandemic subsided, the cost of accommodation in university environs was exorbitant [31]. Many students were highly stressed as a result of these.
- x. Decreased reading/study habit: Among students, there was a decline in general reading habits. This was because students were more interested in watching Television, YouTube, playing video games, and fascinated by social media; all necessitated by their staying at home.
- xi. Travelling Anxiety: The COVID-19 pandemic led to the imposition of travel bans which affected the movement of students, especially those who had wanted to travel home. There were bans of intra and interstate travel, for fear of the spread of the disease [40].
- xii. Disordered eating: At the time of the pandemic, and since students were confined that their homes against their wishes, many of them had eating disorderliness [41]. Many of them were binge-eating which led to weight gain amongst many of them.
- xiii. Substance abuse: As a means of handling the vulnerability to depression and other stressors associated with COVID-19, some students have resulted in excessive use of substances particularly alcohol and drug. This has had negative consequences not only on the mental health but also on the social and psychological well-being of these students [10].

Psychological Impacts of COVID-19 on Lecturers

The COVID-19 pandemic caused lecturers a lot of stress, anxiety, and imbalance [4]; [37]. The psychological impacts of COVID-19 on lecturers may include:

- i. Anxiety: Lecturers feared that they can be infected by students and colleagues alike. Many academic staff members become more irritable, restless, anxious, palpitating, and quivering as a result of this [4]. These anxieties interrupted the sleep time of lecturers, thereby decreasing their immunity and making them vulnerable to infections. Memory [22], visual motor skills [35], and focus and concentration are all negatively impacted by anxiety [15].
- ii. Depression: This is a mental disorder brought on by emotions of helplessness, melancholy, poor concentration, lack of interest, disrupted sleep, immobility, suicidal thoughts, and significant impairment of everyday functioning that are all linked to Covid-19 [37]. Some professors lose trust in visiting hospitals or clinics for medical examinations due to their pathological exaggeration of the disease's hazards.
- iii. Fear: The lecturer-student relationship that existed before the outbreak of COVID-19 was replaced by fear [4]. This was also worsened by the number of COVID-19 infections and deaths that were recorded in many higher institutions in the country at the time.
- iv. ICT Compliance/online teaching: The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the need for online education which requires the availability of ICT infrastructure for implementation; these are limited or unavailable to many lecturers in Nigeria. More so, where these ICT facilities are available, lecturers are not compliant especially with the use of educational online teaching tools, as they have not been professionally trained on it [34]. The challenges with electricity supply impeded lecturers' compliance and adoption of ICT facilities for online teaching.
- v. Impact on research: COVID-19 outbreak affected the execution and output of research. The pandemic discouraged research symposiums, workshops, and conferences, where researchers meet to discuss their research and finding. Also, the emotional and psychological challenges caused by the pandemic, reduced lecturers' penchant for research, with little or no access to research grants.

Psychological Impacts of COVID-19 on University Management

COVID-19 affected the stability and efficiency of university management in Nigeria. In some universities, for instance, students were asked to vacate the university halls of residence which led to infrastructural decay and loss of funds. At the time of the dreaded pandemic, offices, halls of residence and similar infrastructure were at the mercy of

burglars, as many universities recounted their losses at the re-opening of schools. There was distortion in the academic calendar as the university was forced to combine two academic sessions into one. Outreach and affiliate programmes on which universities depended for funds were closed down. Many students under these outreach programmes abandoned the programme, for more reasons than one. The attitudes of university staff as well as their work ethics were dampened during and after the pandemic.

Policy failures and poor institutional management of the post-COVID-19 era have continued to give poorer outcomes for universities at large. This is noticeable in the area of health services rendered in the universities (with the offering of intermittent services), the number of students to be admitted, academic programme and sessions to be maintained/canceled and the delivery of other social services within the universities.

Mitigating the Psychological Impacts of the COVID-19 in Nigeria

For continued mitigation of the psychological impacts of COVID-19, the study suggests the following:

- i. There is a need to strengthen health education and eliminate excessive fear, social prejudice, and discrimination.
- ii. Appropriate and scientific information on the COVID-19 pandemic should be provided to alleviate anxiety, pessimism, and other negative emotions within the universities.
- iii. Health centres within the university should communicate frequently with and encourage members of staff and students to present themselves for psychological check-ups and treatment where necessary.
- iv. Psychotherapist and counseling units should be deployed and established in units, departments and faculties in universities, to urgently curb and address psychological breakdown among lecturers and students, or other members of staff.
- v. Professional development of staff in universities on strategies for overcoming psychological issues, should they arise among themselves and students, even in the post-COVID-19 era.
- vi. Universities should provide an enabling environment for learning, teaching, and work. This may be through the provision of ICT facilities in the universities for ease of online teaching and learning endeavours [1].

Conclusion

The psychological impacts of Covid-19 on university education in Nigeria are immense, as it affected all players in the university space-students, lecturers, and the university management. The long-term psychological impacts of the pandemic are still in their initial stage. The university management

sensitises members of the university community on the COVID-19 pandemic and its psychological impacts while providing a platform for curbing these impacts. It is believed that our viewpoints with regards to the discourse of this study would be useful to researchers, policymakers, educationists, psychologists, university counselors, university health services, and management.

Contributions of the Study

This study has the following major contributions:

- i. It surveyed studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the university education system, especially in Nigeria.
- ii. It provides enlightenment on how students, lecturers, and university management have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- iii. It assists educational administrators and policymakers by identifying ways the university community has been impacted by the pandemic.
- iv. It provides suggestions for overcoming the impacts of the pandemic on students, lecturers, and the university management during the post-COVID-19 era.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest between the authors in this manuscript.

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