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COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN, DISRUPTION OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AND E-LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic, which caught everyone off guard and led to mandatory social-distancing and a complete lockdown, obviously had a detrimental impact on academic activities across the board in all educational levels with public institutions appearing to be the most severely impacted. There have been several ways through which awareness of integration of technology in education have been created but unfortunately, not all involved in the delivery of instructions in tertiary institutions deem it fit to embrace this innovation that would have served as remedy during the disruptions of academic activities caused by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown leading to abrupt closure of schools. During the total lockdown, advocacy for online education emerged and while introduction of air-learning (radio and television) were introduced to keep learning experiences active in both primary and secondary schools, the vulnerable in public tertiary institutions were caught in the web of uncertainty. Covid-19 experiences demand that public tertiary instructions find the most appropriate alternatives capable of sustaining academic activities and the implementation of same in order to avoid future occurrences thereby turning the challenges into opportunities.

Keywords: *Covid-19 Pandemic, Lockdown, Academic Activities, Public Tertiary Institutions, e-Learning.*

Introduction
The outbreak of pandemic threw the whole world into chaos as the enforcement of lockdown and social distancing coupled with guidelines ranging from washing of hands to the use of sanitizers and face masks emerged. Covid-19 sometimes referred to as the novel coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan, China in December, 2019 (Munster Et. al 2020). It came as a thief in the night as it was never envisaged. Most people were caught unaware by its outbreak as the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared it as pandemic on the 11th of March, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that range from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) (https://www.uopeople.edu/blog/impact-of-coronavirus-on-education/).

Academic activities were all interrupted at all levels of education which did not exclude that of tertiary institutions in Nigeria despite being in session as all schools were forced to close down indefinitely even though some states of the federation struggled and managed to complete the then on-going session amidst fears of the unknown. Ifijeh & Yusuf (2020) noted that from inception to now, the attainment of educational objectives in the Nigerian University system has been achieved through non electronic teaching and learning methodologies. Although lockdowns are effective in enforcing social distancing measures and tracing of COVID-19 patients, they are not good for education and the economy (Tumwesige, 2020). Consequently, there was executive order that schools should embark on online teaching and those schools that had already embraced integration of technology in education took advantage of it to continue with the academic session while those who are still marking time were left stranded. At the hit of the pandemic, several online/virtual teaching and learning such as Zoom, YouTube, Udemy etc erupted. Although some radio and television stations offered air-teaching which was commendable but had no provision for feedback unlike virtual learning, digital learning platforms and learning management system that allow for feedback and also make assessment of learners and evaluation possible. In some private schools, remote teaching was done through online learning management systems such as Canvas, Zoom, Edmodo, Google Classroom and

Microsoft Teams. Course materials were also sent to the students' Emails and WhatsApp groups.

It was disheartening to observe that while the lockdown was eased off a little, majority of the affected students dabbled into apprenticeship of skilled labour while the affected educators were also perceived to have engaged in one business or the other as they had to keep themselves busy and fend for their families. There is no doubt that the lockdown affected majority of the students when they got back to school because of the long break without any academic activities. Adjusting to running academic activities was perceived to be extremely difficult which also reflected on the students' academic performance.

United Nations (2020) stated that about 1.6 billion learners in 190 countries across the world were affected by the pandemic, with 94% of the world's school population impacted by school closures. E-learning would have been a panacea needed in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria during the compulsory lockdown but lack of preparedness and technological know-how put academic activities on hold.

How Covid-19 Lockdown Affected Public Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria Abrupt Closure of institutions

Institutions were asked to shut down without prior notice and all the ongoing academic and administrative activities were abruptly discontinued. The lockdown caused by Covid-19 led to the suspension of internal and external examinations, disruption of academic programmes, suspension of admission of new students at all levels of the educational system, suspension of teaching and learning activities, research programmes, cancellation of conferences and proceeds, suspension of internal examination, loss of manpower in the educational institutions (Ogunnode et. al 2021). The inconveniences brought about by the lockdown paralyzed the smooth running of operations in institutions.

Unequal Access to Education

During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, a substitute for the didactic teaching approach was introduced through educational radio and television broadcast, thereby ignoring one of Nigeria's primary problems which is irregular power supply. The ministry of education casually announced that pupils and students should tune to public media channels such as radio and television for learning programmes (Anyika, Anikelechi and Thobejane, 2021). Although, this development appeared to be a low-cost technology, nevertheless, teachings done through audio-visual aids such as television could not be accessed by many due to power shortage. At the same time some fell back to audio broadcast which could only produce audio contents and thereby excluding learners from benefitting from subjects that involved practical procedures.

Digital Divide

Digital divide is in various forms. It is a gap between those who have technological know-how of digital devices and those who do not have. Digital device can also imply the gap between those who have access to digital devices and internet connectivity and vice versa. While most private institutions embarked on online teaching to continue with their academic activities, the reverse was the case in most of the public tertiary institutions. Students involved in online teaching were provided with learning materials and virtual classes. Ugochukwu-Ibe and Ibeke (2021) noted that the lack of the requirements needed for remote education during the worldwide lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has impeded teaching and learning. Also, Pokhrel & Chhetri (2021) stated that majority of students do not have access to smartphones or TV at home in addition to poor Internet connectivity. From another angle of digital divide, Alasoluyi (2021) revealed that teachers who are reasonably aware of the switch from classroom-based to online teaching have low competence due to a lack of technological resources and technical know-how. For Obiakor & Adeniran, (2020) in Nigeria, majority of

the population with internet access are from richer socio-economic and urban households who can afford private school education, thereby giving their children a learning advantage over their public-school counterparts.

Lack of Preparedness on the Part of Institutions

Online teaching in Nigeria was both asynchronous and synchronous (Eboho et. al, 2021). Even though, the educational sector globally is seen to be shifting towards e-learning in order to cushion the effect of this pandemic, challenges arise as a result of the varying degree of preparedness of the institutions, lack of infrastructures, paucity of funds and policy issues in the Nigeria education sector (Adeoye, et. al, 2021). Meanwhile in other countries, Takar (2020) stated that many colleges and universities have shifted their traditional classes system to the online classes as well as the examination system. This happened mostly in private tertiary institutions as they were equally able to hold matriculations and graduations virtually.

Dwindling Payment of Tertiary Staff Salary

Suspension of academic activities as a result of Covid-19 affected the revenue inflow of tertiary institutions which resulted in dwindling payment of staff salaries especially those in state tertiary institutions who are dependent on their Internal Generated Revenue (IGR). If there was continuity in academic activities, online teaching as the case maybe, would have given the institutions the leverage to demand that the students continue with the payment of school fees among others. This situation affected the welfare of tertiary institution staff and some are yet to get over it.

Way Forward

Sensitization of Tertiary Teachers about e-learning in tertiary institutions

Tertiary educators need to be sensitized about the ICT surge and also need to adjust to the innovation. Though some of them may not be digital natives, there is need for them to adjust to the pattern of learning of the digital natives which would have been advantageous to both parties during the Covid-19 lockdown. As Prensky (2001) has asserted that today's teachers have to learn to communicate in the language and styles of their students and as educators, we need to be thinking about how to teach legacy and future content in the language of Digital Natives. The ease with which digital natives interact with digital content makes it clear that e-learning is ingrained in their language.

Introduction of e-learning in Tertiary Education Curriculum

E-learning has been perceived to be beneficial to both the educators and their students in so many ways even before the eruption of novel Covid -19 pandemic. Introducing and integrating e-learning into the tertiary education curriculum is believed will stand the test of time should there be a reoccurrence of such pandemic. Atubi and Obro (2021) noted that adopting the use of educational applications like Google Classroom and Google Meet, module, learning management systems, online chat platforms, virtual learning and internet-based classroom learning received extremely high positive responses. By implication, these online learning methods were highly recommended. As Covid-19 was officially confirmed, Noah and Gbemisola (2020) opined that tertiary Institutions should effectively prepare students for the use of this platform for their learning activities during the pandemic as the platform is capable of assisting both students and teachers to connect, work together, create assignments, grade students and post learning materials. It is necessary for everyone involved to be ready to adapt to the current trends toward change.

Capacity Building of Tertiary Educators on e-Learning

There is need to organize workshops for tertiary teachers for the purpose of equipping them with the necessary technological skills needed to effectively work with e-learning gadgets and applications. Consequently, in the era of workshops, seminars and conferences which bring academics together in their various institutions and associations, it is pertinent that e-learning should be emphasized and be part of the major discourse.

Bridging the gap in Digital Divide

Equal access to and technological know-how of ICT facilities needed for e-learning for educators and students will solve the problem of digital divide. Azubuike, et. al (2021) opined that there is a need for education stakeholders and policy makers to pay attention to the issue of internet use and who gets to learn remotely both because they cannot afford to and because of the lack of the infrastructural provisions that excludes students from low-income households. Although Ogunode & Musa (2020) suggested that the government should provide adequate ICT facilities to all the higher institutions to enable them switch to online education and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on higher institutions in the country, it should be noted that availability and utilization should go together for effective implementation. This implies that as the facilities are made available, the intending users need also to be equipped with the necessary training and skills needed for their utilization.

Conclusion

Introducing and integrating e-learning in tertiary institutions curriculum will expose both the educators and their students to ICT prowess. Teaching and learning will be made easy as learning can take place anytime and anywhere. Moreover, course materials and lectures can be asynchronous and synchronous and be edited or upgraded in the future. Thus, in cases of emergency and abrupt closure of schools, academic activities can continue. These and many more are associated with e-learning. This is the time for public tertiary institutions to turn the experiences and challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown into opportunities for the stability of academic calendar among others.

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