

Nigerian Higher Institution Scholars' Perception amid COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: As the devastating effects of COVID-19 pandemic was being felt by all nations of the world, socio-economic and political undertakings were temporarily suspended, also, academic activities in almost all countries were postponed or adjusted. However, because the gravity of the pandemic effects differs, countries' higher institutions' preparations and responses varied to some degrees. Therefore, this paper studied scholar's perceptions of the Nigerian higher institutions' preparations and responses amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The quantitative research method was employed and the questionnaire was administered via WhatsApp and WeChat to the research respondents. The data collected were analyzed using wenjuanxing software and results were presented in bar charts. The research findings showed that Nigerian higher institutions face high cost of internet data, inconsistent electricity supply, and poor network services and these can affect scholars' readiness and participation in the virtual classrooms. There was no significant difference among the research participants based on their gender, academic status and geographical location. Hence, the study recommends a need to train both the staff and the students on the online classes by the institutions, and issues of poor network, high cost of data, and inconsistent electricity should be addressed by the government to help virtual education in the Nigerian high institutions function properly.

Keywords: Perceptions; Higher Institutions; Scholars; COVID-19 Pandemic

I. INTRODUCTION

The onset of the year 2020 witnessed a horrible spread of COVID-19 infection, which started in China at the end of 2019. Till date, the disease has been disrupting many human activities across the globe. The devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is being felt by nations all over the world and in many countries, socio-economic and political undertakings have been temporarily suspended. Likewise, academic activities in almost all countries are being postponed or adjusted. In China, for instance, the resumption of the spring academic semester, as well as many economic, social and religious activities were temporarily suspended. To avert the interruption of educational activities, Chinese schools, especially the higher institutions sprang into online learning. China plunged into online learning, which became a compulsory alternative to continue education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It was believed that online-based classes presented to the universities in China the flexibility necessary to contain the virus spread and maintain an uninterrupted academic semester. In many societies, little was known about

the students' viewpoints regarding the students' narratives amid the pandemic, its effects on their socio-academic lives, and the various challenges they encountered in online learning.

Several countries (Australia, Cote d'ivoire, Senegal, South Africa, Kenya, among others) across the world that were hit by the virus embraced e-learning as an alternative means of educating the youth. According to Alvarado & Calderon (2013), & Montiel (2018), online education has progressively evolved as modern popular technology gave room for attending universities remotely without physically moving to universities. Montiel (2018) noted that more and more colleges and universities go beyond their physical frontiers to offer quality education to distant learners. On this note, Swan (2019) stated that the modern learning environments created by web-based technologies have eliminated the barriers of time and space and provided increased access to higher education. They also challenged traditional teaching and learning processes at higher education levels and all school levels. Some of these countries made provisions for basic education through websites, radios, televisions and other digital resources (Nyariki, 2020). However, the impact of such educational programs might differ. Perhaps, the differences in the gravity of the COVID-19 effect made it that higher institution preparations and responses varied to some degrees across the globe. There was almost a total shift from the physical classrooms to the virtual learning classrooms ran by learning management systems such as Canvas (Gomes & Chang, 2020). While some universities in Europe and some parts of Asia and Africa excelled in the use of online platforms for teaching and learning, there were many universities in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, that were not prepared for such academic transformation, with the simple reason being that e-learning was unaffordable, impracticable, and elitist-stylish (Mukeredzi, Kokutse, & Dell, 2020), therefore, higher institution students in Nigeria faced an abrupt interruption in their academic activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some higher institutions even deferred their academic activities until further notice. As part of the measures to contain the virus spread, the deputy executive secretary of the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) announced approval for a quick shutdown and closure of all the schools (Azezat, 2020; Adejumo, 2020).

This study examines Nigerian higher institution scholars' perception and acceptance of the online program amid the

COVID-19 pandemic, thus, the primary aim of this research was to explore the perception and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' academic activities in Nigeria. The following questions guided the study:

- What is the perception of scholars on the Nigerian higher institution preparation amid the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Is there any difference among the research respondents based on their gender, academic status and geographical location?
- What challenges do Nigerian higher institution scholars face amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

The outcomes of this research will be significantly useful to the Nigerian higher institution scholars, particularly the administrators and curriculum planners who, being stakeholders in the higher institution education, will need data and information from studies like this to make important decisions in this pandemic.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research method. The researchers' questionnaire were distributed electronically to an unlimited number of scholars (lecturer and students) of higher learning institutions in Nigeria. A total of 114 responses were obtained from the respondents. The research questionnaire contained open-ended items and for easy administration of the questionnaires, the researchers used an electronic questionnaire builder (wenjuanxing software) in designing the questions and used electronic social media of WhatsApp and WeChat in sending them to the respondents. In order to ensure accuracy in the data collected and analyzed, the researchers excluded seven responses obtained outside Nigeria, and the research analysis considered only 107 responses from the respondents who reside in Nigeria. The data are analyzed using wenjuanxing (wjsx) software (software used for building surveys and analyzing research data), and bar charts plotted from collected data aimed at achieving a visual appreciation of the results.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results obtained were presented and an attempt was made to discuss the responses given by the research participants. The data from the perception of scholars on Nigerian higher institution preparation amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the differences between the research respondents based on their gender, academic status, and geographical location, and the challenges research respondents face in the Nigerian higher institution amid the COVID-19 pandemic were analyzed and discussed. The results and discussion are as follows:

The perception of scholars on the Nigerian higher institution preparation amid the COVID-19 pandemic

The respondents reported that factors like poor electricity, high cost of internet service could be the major hindrances to a

successful preparation for virtual classrooms in the various higher institutions across the nation. About 72.9% of Nigerian higher institutions suffer from lack of basic facilities like computers and good, smart phones. A total of 52.34% referred to a stable and affordable broadband connection as an obstacle in providing this learning system to the students in higher institutions in Nigeria. About 19.63% of students were not prepared for online learning, and the reasons are reported to be both poor mental preparedness and physical preparedness. The lecturers seemed to agree with working with a new teaching and learning system as only 9.35% of the lecturer-respondents claimed to be not prepared for the online classes.

The difference in Scholars' Perceptions on Nigerian Higher Institutions Preparations and Responses amid COVID-19 Pandemic Based on their Gender

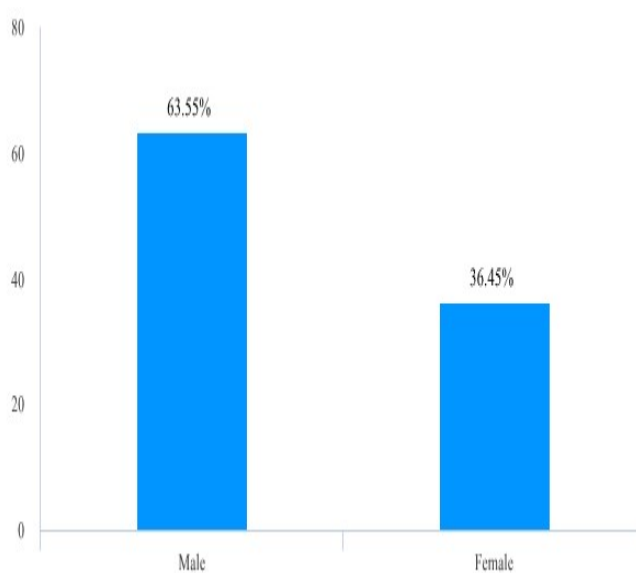


Figure 1 Difference in Scholars' Perceptions on Nigerian Higher Institutions Preparations and Responses amid COVID-19 Pandemic Based on their Gender

Figure 1 shows the respondents' gender and the difference that exists between male and female respondents. A total of 107 respondents, 68 males (63.55%) and 39 females (36.45%) participated in the study. The figure showed the inclusiveness of both genders in the Nigerian education system, however, it also signaled male dominance in having access to basic facilities that facilitate their response to this research. The research, by the male respondents being more than the female respondents, therefore, highlighted the disparity based on gender in higher institutions of Nigeria.

In response to the problems that Nigerian higher institutions faced in organizing online classes, both male and female respondents shared the same view that factors like poor electricity, high cost of data, and lack of basic facilities militate against higher institutions successfully running online classes for the students. Both male and female respondents also noted that the Nigerian higher institutions were not ready for online teaching and learning as many students do not have computers

and smartphones, high cost of data, inconsistent power supply, and poor network. These problems were reported by Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu (2005) but after more than a decade, they are still not addressed in Nigeria. The findings, furthermore, confirmed Aworanti's (2016) research findings that Nigerian schools suffered a lack of ICT facilities, highly skilled staffing to operate complex the ICT facilities, and shortage of electricity.

Due to the above, the respondents posited that physical classroom interaction was best in Nigeria's high institutions and can help build an excellent teacher-student relationship. This result is in agreement with Olasunkanmi (2020), where Nigerian university students expressed their preference to physical classroom interactions. Despite the numerous challenges encountered, several participants, including both genders, agreed that e-learning, if incorporated into Nigerian higher education system, could be a welcomed development while a few, from both genders, disagreed with the inclusion of online class in Nigeria higher education curriculum due to inconveniences that will arise from poor network and high cost of data.

The difference in Scholars' Perceptions on Nigerian Higher Institutions Preparations and Responses amid COVID-19 Pandemic Based on their academic status

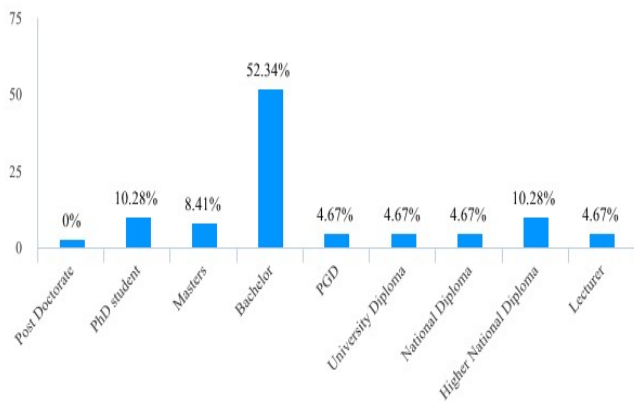


Figure 2 Difference in Scholars' perceptions on Nigerian higher institutions preparations and responses amid COVID-19 pandemic based on their academic status

In the context of this paper, the academic status of the scholars in Nigerian higher institutions included the qualifications of the respondents shown in figure 3. Bachelor students had the highest percentage of 52.34%, Ph.D and Higher National Diploma respondents stood at 10.28% each, Masters respondents made 8.41%, while PGD, University Diploma, National Diploma respondents, and lecturers stood at 4.67% each. The post-doctorate segment had a zero 0% response.

On the readiness to participate in online classes, the respondents pointed out that lack of computers and smartphones, high cost of data, inconsistent power supply, and poor network services were likely to hinder students from participating in virtual classrooms. When asked about the

acceptance of online classes, the respondents believed that a physical classroom was best in Nigeria and can help build a teacher-student relationship. However, some of the respondents in the upper academic levels (Ph.D., Masters, Post Graduate Diploma PGD) insisted that online classes were convenient and could help students master the use of ICT gadgets. This was also buttressed by Akudolu, Ugochukwu, & Olibie (2017).

Most of the respondents in the lower academic levels (Bsc. Higher National Diploma, National Diploma, and University Diploma) and upper academic levels accepted the inclusion of virtual classrooms into the academic curriculum of higher institutions in Nigeria because of the diversity it would bring into the education sector of the country but few respondents in the lower academic levels and two respondents in the upper academic level objected to this idea pointing at the lack of electricity, poor network, etc. as obvious difficulties to be faced.

The difference in Scholars' Perceptions of Nigerian Higher Institutions Preparations and Responses amid COVID-19 Pandemic Based on their geographical location

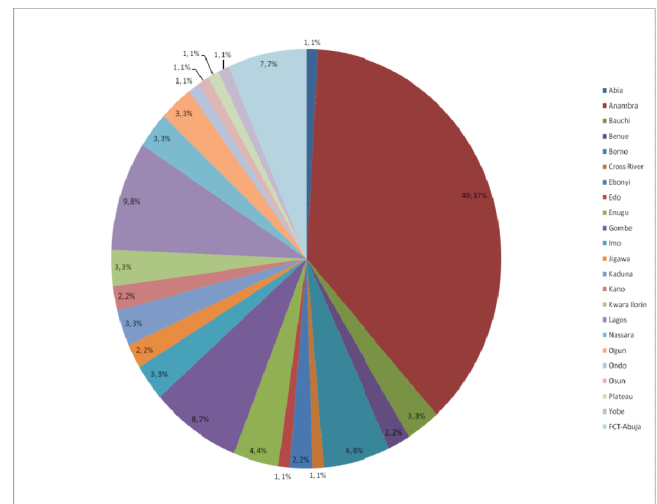


Figure 2 Difference in Scholars' Perceptions on Nigerian Higher Institutions Preparations and Responses amid COVID-19 Pandemic Based on their geographical location

The result from figure 2 above showed the geographical location of the respondents who participated in this research. The pie-chart showed that the respondents came from 22 out of 36 states of Nigeria. With the said number of respondents from different states, the researchers are of the view that the country is covered because 22 states can represent the 36 of the federation. The data collected showed Anambra State formed the greater part of the respondents with 40 respondents followed by Lagos state with 9 respondents, Gombe State - 8 respondents, FCT-Abuja 7 respondents, Borno State - 6 respondents, Enugu State - 4 respondents, Bauchi, Imo, Kaduna, Kwara, Nasarawa, and Ogun states with 3 respondents each, Benue, Ebonyi, Jigawa, and Kano states

had 2 respondents while Abia, Cross River, Edo, Ondo, Osun, Plateau and Yobe states had 1 respondent each.

From the data collected, most of the respondents in all the states were of the opinion that factors like lack of basic equipment, poor electricity, and high cost of internet data were the challenges the higher institutions would face in offering online classes to the Nigerian students. This same situation was reported in Apuke and Iyendo (2018). In Anambra State, 28 out of 40 respondents mentioned these challenges. Respondents from other participating states share the same view as the respondents from Anambra State. This implied that these factors have to be given adequate attention if the online classes will be a success in the higher institutions in Nigeria.

The respondents' answers on preparedness in participating in online classes showed that the challenges are lack of computer and smartphone, high cost of data, inconsistent power supply, and poor network. On the respondents' willingness to participate in the online class if incorporated into the higher institution curriculum, most of the respondents from the entire states saw it as a welcome development, with reasons that it would be a way of learning from their comfort zone, will encourage technological advancement, aid convenience learning and improve the scope of education.

Scholars' perceptions on Nigerian higher institutions challenges amid COVID-19 pandemic

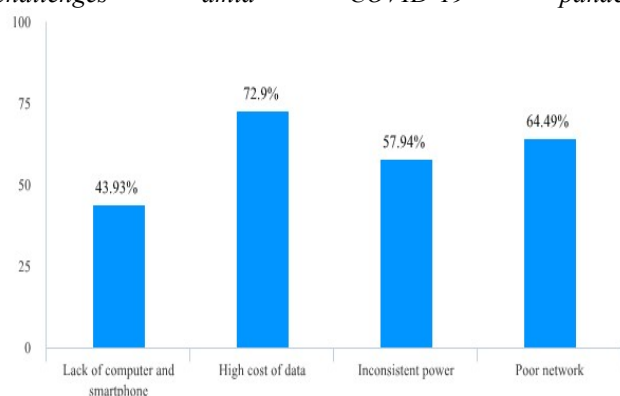


Figure 4 Scholars' perceptions on Nigerian higher institutions challenges amid COVID-19 pandemic

From the responses shown in figure 4 above, 72.9% of the respondents were of the opinion that high cost of data will pose a major threat to students that would participate in online classes. 64.49% and 57.94% reported poor network and inconsistent power supply respectively as other challenges that would hinder students and lecturers from partaking in online classes. These findings were found to similar to the findings in Olasunkanmi (2020). Figure 4 implies that lacks of computer and smartphone was not a major obstacle in running online classes in Nigeria as most scholars own or have access to them.

The responses from the respondents showed that high cost of data will affect respondents from participating in an online class as most of the respondents in the lower academic level depend on parents/sponsors for financing their programs in the higher institutions. This problem would be compounded by poor network and inconsistent power supply which would severely affect students, especially those living in the rural areas.

From the data collected from the respondents, both staff and students accept the fact that higher institutions in Nigeria will face challenges in organizing online classes. Ilokanulo (2020) concurs on this point that inadequate resources that include inconsistent power supply constitute a major challenge not only in the Nigerian higher institutions but also in Africa.

Scholars' preference on online and physical classrooms in Nigerian higher institutions amid COVID-19 pandemic

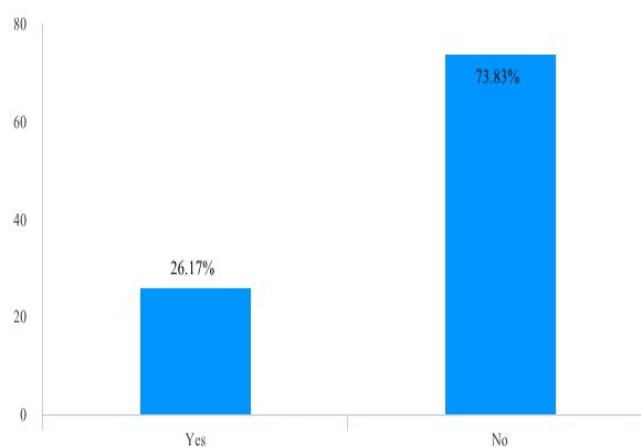


Figure 5 Scholars' preference on online and physical classrooms in Nigerian higher institutions amid COVID-19 pandemic

Figure 5 indicated that most of the respondents, 73.83%, in the higher institutions in Nigeria do not accept the idea of online classes as indicated on the bar chart. Their reasons were that the physical classroom aids a better sense of commitment, concentration, attention and sense of presence than the online classroom. The physical classroom helps students to integrate and interact more effectively with the lecturers and, thereby improve effective learning, and also things practiced in the physical classroom are concretized in the students' brain. Furthermore, high cost of data, difficulties in having access to the internet, poor network in the transmission of lectures, lack of platform for students to have face-to-face interaction, inconsistent power supply will all affect the smooth running of the online classes.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the perception of the research respondents (lecturers and students) on the Nigerian higher institution preparation and challenges amid the COVID-19 pandemic based on their gender, academic status, and geographical location were as follows:

The research respondents were of the opinion that physical classroom interaction is better than the virtual classroom in Nigerian high institutions because it helps in building up a good teacher-student relationship. Nevertheless, few male respondents argue that a virtual classroom is more convenient and can help students to master the use of ICT gadgets. There is a need for creating awareness and training sessions by the Nigerian high institutions to make both lecturers and students familiar with the online classes and understand how to go about it. And, there is even need for, as Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005:108) recommended that Nigeria should "establish a virtual learning company along the model developed and implemented at the Open University of the Netherlands". Also, tertiary institutions should give training to lecturers to make them have skills on how to deliver online teaching effectively and equally motivate the students to acquire relevant online skills for learning in the modern world (Olasunkanmi, 2020).

The participants believed that lack of computers and smartphones, a high cost of data, inconsistent power supply, and poor network services were likely to affect their readiness in participating in virtual classrooms. Therefore, both the respondents and the institutions are not fully ready for online classes. In this context, there is a need for making the lecturers and the students be prepared for online classes. The issue of poor network, high cost of data, inconsistent electricity should be addressed by the government to help the Nigerian high institutions function properly (Akudolu, Ugochukwu & Olibie, 2017).

The findings of this study show that the respondents in lower academic levels rely on their parents for sponsoring their studies at the higher institutions, so the parents should provide their children or wards with the necessary modern gadgets for learning (Olasunkanmi, 2020).

Despite the numerous challenges the online classes face, the research participants expressed the opinion that incorporation of online class into the Nigerian higher institution curriculum and the system generally is a very welcomed idea. Therefore, it is suggested that the modern curriculum content of information and communication technology be incorporated in the Nigerian high institution education system (Akudolu, Ugochukwu & Olibie, 2017).

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