

APPRAISAL OF THE LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is among the sectors with overwhelming impact on the control and management of COVID-19 pandemic. With the emergence of the lockdown condition and school closure due to the pandemic, both teachers and learners are helpless on how to continue learning, hence the need to investigate the preparedness of schools to carry out academic activities. The study investigated the University of Benin's level of preparedness to teach in the post Covid-19 era. The descriptive research with survey design had a population of 9986 fresh students registered in the 15 Faculties/Schools of the University of Benin as of 2019/2020 academic session, of which 406 students were randomly selected to form the sample size of the study. A questionnaire titled "Observance of Covid-19 Protocols in the Teaching-Learning Process Questionnaire, (Covid-19QUE)" was designed, validated, and pilot tested ($r=0.84$, $N=20$) and administered for about three weeks. Mean and standard deviation statistics were used to answer the two (2) research questions raised for the study. The findings regarding research questions one and two revealed that the level of preparedness of the University of Benin to teach students in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic is low (2.25), and there is no variation in the level of preparedness among faculties. It was concluded that Nigeria, especially the universities, have not responded to the global challenge by complying with the established Covid-19 protocols to fight the pandemic. It was recommended that the University of Benin should endeavour to increase the space available, which can be done by building more classrooms and recruiting additional lecturers, among others.

Keywords

COVID-19,
Teaching-Learning,
Preparedness,
University

Introduction

The University of Benin was established on 23rd November 1970 and it is one of the 49 Federal Government Universities in Nigeria. It is the 6th oldest and the last of the first generation Universities with two campuses in highly populated

cosmopolitan city. The vision of the University is to be a model institution of higher learning which ranks among the best in the world with a mission to develop human mind to be creative, innovative, and competent in Research, Engineering, Agriculture, Entrepreneurship, Health and Social Services. The

University started with the three faculties of Medicine, Sciences and Engineering. The number of faculties increased to five in 1974/75 with the facilities of Education and Social sciences. The 52 year old university as at the year 2022 has been administered by ten (10) Vice Chancellors with academic programme increased from 11 in 1970 to 116 in the academic year proceeding the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) is a contagious virus/disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Its existence was announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) in February 2020 as being the cause of the hitherto unknown pneumonia disease discovered in Wuhan city, China on 31st December 2019. The first index case of the disease in Nigeria was recorded on the 27th of February 2020 in Lagos through an Italian national passenger who flew into the country. To curtail the spread of the disease and accompanying fatalities, the WHO 2020 published the symptoms associated with the disease and possible preventive and curative measures to be adopted by the nations of the world. According to the WHO, the most common symptoms of the virus are fever, dry cough and tiredness. Others are loss of taste or smell, aches or pains, headache, sore throat, nasal congestions, red eyes, diarrhea or a skin disease. There are also asymptomatic cases. These are persons who have been infected with the virus and have laboratory confirmed positive tests but do not exhibit any of the common or other symptoms associated with the virus.

However, the WHO similarly recommended some preventive measures which include the wearing of face/nose masks in public places, washing of hands with soap under running water, use of alcohol-based sanitizers, keeping of safe distance of at least 1 meter from the next person even when they do not appear to be sick, choosing of open and well ventilated

spaces over closed ones, opening of windows if indoors, covering of nose and mouth with bent elbow or tissue when sneezing and staying at home when unwell. Persons were advised to seek medical attention for fever, cough and difficulty in breathing. In addition, the WHO advised nations to establish of isolation centers in designated hospitals and procurement of ambulance for emergency cases.

UNICEF, 2020 stated that in the case of school, college, and university closures, support continued access to quality education. This can include the use of distance learning strategies, assigning reading and exercises for home study, radio or television teaching of academic content, assigning teachers to conduct remote follow-up with students, and develop advanced education strategies. Since schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been efforts by governments, private sector and key education stakeholders to promote continued learning and bridge potential learning gaps. These efforts range from large-scale, low-tech solutions that do not require internet-enabled devices (radio and television), to high-tech alternatives (virtual classrooms, video conferencing, animated lessons and online resources libraries) that require internet-enabled devices. Obiako and Adeniran, 2020 found that the pandemic has impacted education in three major ways, including missed learning for the majority of the pre-pandemic students, loss of access to vital school-provided services and leaving more kids behind. Francis and Pegg (2020) alluded that school closures have halted school nutritional program in some localities in Nigeria. Van Lancker and Parolin (2020) observed that COVID-19 is a social crisis which has resulted in school closures, a situation that is impacting the education of approximately 80% of

school-age children globally. The occurrence of the pandemic resulted in some critical implications for educational institutions, including the University of Benin. For instance, implementing the associated protocols requires the provision of additional physical facilities for teaching and learning, hostel accommodation for students, library use, medical facilities and associated kits, re-agents, testing and laboratory equipment, and medical personnel, oxygen cylinders, etc. The provisions of these additional facilities require a lot of financial commitment from the institution. Hence, it is expected that the pandemic would have a more adverse effect on schools that had no online learning platforms before the pandemic, (Zhong, 202; Kachra & Brown, 2019). These grave implications of the Covid-19 protocols can be illustrated using the spatial/social distancing of at least 1 meter from the next person.

The education crisis during the pandemic has also challenged the leadership style of government agencies working in education. These agencies have had to deploy crisis management skills to ensure that the number of Nigeria's out-of-school children does not increase permanently by working with stakeholders to provide distance learning opportunities for as many children as possible. They, however have not provided an enabling environment for public tertiary institutions to transition from traditional schooling to remote schooling. Nigeria requires massive training of teachers to teach at a distance and use e-learning. Teaching online seems to be much more difficult than teaching face-to-face. The global technological space has experienced positive disruption, and Nigeria is not excluded. A number of technological tools and services that can facilitate remote teaching and learning have

been tailored to meet current educational demands. More than ever before, radio platforms are being used to disseminate lesson instructions to a large number of children at the same time. According to Vegas (2020), while about 90% of high-income countries provide remote learning opportunities, less than 25% of low-income countries offer any type of remote learning. Consequently, the former majorly engage learners via online platforms, while the latter mostly use television and radio to reach learners. In fact, only about 23% of countries in sub-Saharan Africa combine online and broadcast media platforms, and only 11% rely exclusively on online platforms. The researchers, curriculum designers, education officers, and educational institutions work together to transform the education system during the closures. Educational institutions should design curriculums, prepare learning strategies and techniques for post-COVID-19, and transform the education system itself. During closures, curriculum design, collaborations, skill development, and educational institutions should focus on advancing the education system.

The University of Benin with a total full-time student enrolment of 43,776 during the 2019/2020 academic session in 15 Faculties, Institutes and Centres and a corresponding teaching staff strength of about 1,779 have lecture theatres, laboratories, seminar rooms which are dedicated or shared with other academic units. The implementation of the social distancing protocol automatically resulted in the reduction of seating capacity classrooms. For example, the popular 500LT in the university now accommodates only 250 students, a situation that will deny many students access to lectures except new classroom are urgently provided. The hostels, laboratories, clinics, studios and

workshops are similarly affected by the social distance protocol, the new normal.

Similarly, the 1779 available teaching staff of the university will have to be urgently doubled if the NCDC social distancing protocol of 50 persons per gathering or crowd will be complied with. It is imperative in the circumstance to investigate the preparedness of the university to carry out the activities of teaching and learning during the unfortunate era of the Covid-19 pandemic, thus, two research questions are therefore raised to guide investigation.

Research Questions

1. To what extent is the University of Benin prepared to teach students in the era of Covid-19 pandemic?
2. Is there a variation in the faculties' level of preparedness to teach during the Covid19 pandemic?

Method

The study being descriptive research adopted the survey research design to observe and describe the level of preparedness of Nigerian Universities amidst Covid 19 pandemic. All the 9986 fresh students that registered for the 2019/2020 academic year constituted the population of study. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed to randomly select one (1) academic programme from each of the 15 faculties in the University of Benin

that was studied as a case. Thereafter all the 417 students in the selected academic programmes across the university constituted the study sample. A research instrument titled: *Observance of Covid- 19 Protocols in Nigerian Universities Teaching-Learning Process Questionnaire*, (Covid-19QUE) was designed, validated and pilot tested (N= 20, r= 0.84) on selected final year students. A total of 417 copies of the questionnaires were administered on the students to assess the level of Universities' preparedness to carry out teaching and learning activities during the Covid-19 pandemic on a 4-point rating scale. After the administration of instrument that lasted about 3 weeks, a total of 406 copies were found useful and descriptively analyzed for the study.

Results

Research Question 1: *To what extent is the University of Benin prepared to teach students in the era of Covid-19 pandemic?*

Research question one was descriptively answered by requesting 406 students randomly selected from the faculties of Arts, Humanities and Sciences to rate the level of University of Benin preparedness to carry out teaching and learning during the Covid 19 pandemic. The data provided were descriptively analyzed and results presented in Table 1

Table 1: Level of University of Benin Preparedness to Teach Students in the Era of Covid-19 Pandemic

S/N	Indices of Preparedness	X	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
1	Provision of additional classrooms	881	2.17	1.149	Low
2	Provision of additional lecturers	905	2.23	1.036	Low
3	Reviewed admission policy to reduce intake	909	2.24	1.025	Low

4	Deployment of technologies in teaching	865	2.13	1.118	Low
5	Division of large classes into smaller ones	877	2.16	1.088	Low
6	Provision of wash hand basins with soap and water, sanitizer before entering the faculties/departments	987	2.43	1.216	Low
7	Provision of wash hand basins with soap and water, sanitizer before entering the classrooms	918	2.26	1.140	Low
8	Enforcing of the wearing of face masks in the classrooms by students	1056	2.60	1.057	High
9	Students sat at least 1 meter apart in the classroom	889	2.19	1.094	Low
10	The lecturers wear face/nose masks during lectures	1043	2.57	1.089	High
11	Public enlightenment campaigns to staff and students to observe Covid-19 protocols	1043	2.57	1.025	High
12	Monitoring teams sent to faculties/hostels to ensure compliance with Covid-19 protocols	934	2.30	.990	Low
13	Provision of additional hostel facilities	812	2.00	1.045	Low
14	Reduction of students allocated to rooms in the hostels	796	1.96	1.035	Low
15	Rotation of non-teaching staff coming to the offices to avoid congestions in their offices	905	2.23	.992	Low
16	Organization of short-term training workshops to staff on how to undertake online teaching	905	2.23	1.009	Low
17	Provision of computers to staff to facilitate online teaching	824	2.03	1.084	Low
18	Many teachers undertake online teaching	824	2.03	1.000	Low
19	The health center is equipped to handle Covid-19 cases i.e.. Testing, vaccination, and treatment	966	2.38	1.026	Low
Mean		914	2.25	.778	Low

N=406 and $\delta=2.5$

According to the data in Table 1, the level of the University of Benin's preparedness to teach students in the era of Covid-19 pandemic is low (2.25). All the indices of preparedness are low with hostel accommodation lowest (1.96) followed by use of technologies (2.13).

Research Question 2: *Is there a variation in the faculties' level of*

preparedness to teach during the Covid19 pandemic?

Research question 2 was answered by requesting students from the selected faculties to rate the level of their faculty preparedness to carry out teaching during the Covid 19 pandemic. The data collected were descriptively analyzed and results presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of the Level of University of Benin Preparedness by Faculty to Teach Students in the Era of Covid-19 Pandemic

Faculty	N	X	\bar{X}	S. D.	Remarks
Arts	40	87	2.17	0.706	Low
Agric. Science	20	44	2.22	0.651	Low
Education	45	104	2.31	0.884	Low
Engineering	31	70	2.27	0.884	Low
Management Science	43	104	2.42	0.674	Low
Pharmacy	20	44	2.22	0.866	Low
Life Science	36	83	2.31	0.861	Low
Physical	26	60	2.29	0.746	Low
Social Science	40	89	2.22	0.661	Low
BMS	18	41	2.26	0.884	Low
Law	32	67	2.08	0.768	Low
Dentistry	11	25	2.3	0.796	Low
Medicine	20	45	2.23	0.888	Low
Environmental Science	12	27	2.21	0.796	Low
Vet Med	12	27	2.29	0.812	Low
Total	406	914	2.25	0.778	Low

N=406 and $\delta=2.50$

According to Table 2, there is no variation in the level of preparedness to teach during the Covid-19 pandemic. In all the faculties, the level of preparedness is low (2.25). However, the faculty of Management Science appears to be better prepared (2.42) followed by the faculties of Education and Dentistry. The least preparation is observed in the faculty of Law (2.08).

Findings

1. University of Benin level of the preparedness to teach students during the Covid-19 is low.
2. There is no variation in the level of preparedness by faculties in University of Benin to teach during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Discussion

The findings with regards to research questions one and two revealed that the level of preparedness of University of Benin to teach students in the era of Covid-19 pandemic is low with no variation among faculties. This support the claim of Dayagbil, Palompon, Garcia and Olvido, (2021) that the sudden cancellation of classes in the middle of the semester placed both faculty and students unprepared. Questions on how to continue their classes, the learning modality, the appropriate assessment, and access to learning materials were foremost in the mind of both teachers and students. These findings support the fact that

there were no additional physical facilities for teaching and learning, hostel accommodation and library for students, which is required for the implementation of the Covid-19 protocols during the pandemic era. However, detailed analysis revealed that the level of preparedness of the University of Benin to teach students in the era of Covid-19 pandemic were high in the area of enforcement of the wearing of face/nose marks in the classrooms by students and lectures and also public enlightenment campaigns within university of Benin community. This was achievable with the setting up of Covid-19 committee both at the Management and faculty level. Special branded vans with public address systems were also seen leading Covid-19 protocols campaign within the university community. The university also setup taskforces to ensure compliance to use of face/nose marks and hand washing protocols.

Conclusion

Covid 19 pandemic is disrupting the world order, particularly the school system where physical contact is the order of the day. Unfortunately, schools in Nigeria, especially the universities, have not responded to this global challenge by complying with the established Covid 19 protocols to fight the pandemic.

Recommendations

1. The University of Benin should endeavour to increase the space available. This can be done by building more classrooms and recruiting additional lecturers. Also, ICT such as zoom, google class can be deployed to reduce physical contact.
2. The respective faculties in the University of Benin should be encouraged to think outside the box. This can be done by skillfully

designing lecture timetables to spread lectures throughout the day, including weekends

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