# Post Covid-19 Crisis: Effects and Transformation of Tertiary Education System in Nigeria

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*Abstract:* **Covid-19 pandemic has caused education disruptions and prolonged school closures all around the world, which affected about 95% of the world's student population. This paper holistically looks into post COVID-19 crisis: Effects and Transformation of Tertiary Education System in Nigeria. Concept of tertiary institutions was x-rayed and some of the factors that may affect closure of schools were highlighted. They are: Student dropout, unplanned pregnancy and Academic setback. Post COVID-19 Crisis to System Transformation was discussed where the paper divides into stages. The first phase explained the institutions could adapt with post COVID-19 pandemic and set a template for academic process, second phase highlighted how to build continuity in terms of academic recovery and the third phase looked into speedy recovery of had been built in the previous stages. Combining these stages would bring about academic transformation in Nigeria education system. Conclusion was made that the stages suggested in this paper, if properly adopted would bring about academic transformation in Nigeria.**

*Keywords:* **Post-Covid-19 Crisis, Effects, Transformation, Tertiary Education System**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as a major instrument for transformation of individual and the nation. Tertiary education must engender in the individual a deposition of personal autonomy, responsibility and relevant forms of life, thought and action (Okeke & Osuala, 2016). According to Isuku & Emunemu (2009), higher education exercise a direct influence on national productivity, which to a very large extent determines the country's standard of living and help in stimulating local economy as an engine of growth.

The current health crisis is having a vast impact on educational institutions globally. Universities and other educational institutions closures are enacted in most countries including Nigeria. Nigeria had shut down its educational institutions and all boarders on 30th March, 2020 due to the fear of spread of Covid-19. As at 30th August, 2020, the number of infected person in Nigeria stood at 53,727 (National Centre for Disease Control Report, 2020) though, Nigeria government had ease the lockdown in the country and secondary school students who are finalists had resumed since 4th August, 2020 to write their examinations with the hope of adhering to COVID-19 protocol. Unfortunately, as at the time of this research, tertiary institutions have not resumed due to existing issues between federal government and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and COVID-19 related issues. This paper covers the impact of the post COVID-19 crisis responses on Educational System transformation and rethink of Tertiary Education with possible solutions that will make the system blend to the situation on ground. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, education in Nigeria has suffered much neglect manifested in the form of inadequate funding, inconsistent policy changes; lack of infrastructure and disruption of the school system. These problems in the education system have been very disturbing. In fact, budgetary allocations to education in Nigeria have been grossly inadequate leading to agitations by Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU) and students about obsolete equipment, old and outdated textbooks and journals including poor remuneration for lecturers especially at the tertiary level, which have also heightened the level of brain drain in the country as many of them moved to different parts of the world in search of greener pastures.

According to World Bank Group (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic now threatens to make education outcomes even worse. The pandemic has already had profound impacts on education by closing educational institutions almost everywhere in the world, in the largest simultaneous daze to all education systems in our lifetimes. The damage will become even more severe as the health emergency translates into a deep global recession.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

*Concept of Tertiary Institutions*

Tertiary education as emphasized by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004), in her National policy on Education , is any education given to an individual after secondary education in formal institution (university, colleges of education, polytechnic and monotechnics) including those running correspondence courses. Tertiary education is an advanced place for the training of people for the work force and other societal engagements. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) highlights the goals of tertiary education thus;

  i.  Contribute to national development through higher level relevant manpower training;
  ii.  develop and inculcate proper value for the survival of the individual land society;

iii.  Develop the intellectual capacity of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.

iv.  acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individual to be self- reliant and useful members of the society;

v.  promote and encourage scholarship and cement national unity and

vi.  promote national and international understanding and interaction

To achieve the above laudable goals, there is need for the populace to have free access to tertiary education. According to Ehiametator in Adiotomre and Ekwevugbe (2007), access to education is the opportunity to participate in the education sector, whether formal or informal. Every education opportunity worth it should search out the personality of the individual and give him or her right process to actualize it but such is beyond the reach of the poor because the cost of education in Nigeria is very high. To achieve appraisable level of equal educational opportunity, solve the seemly problems student face in acquiring tertiary education. These could not be achieved in the face COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

## III. EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN ON STUDENTS

This paper holistically conceptualizes the effect of covid-19 pandemic lockdown on students of institutions of higher learning in Nigeria.

Figure 1: Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic Lockdown on Students
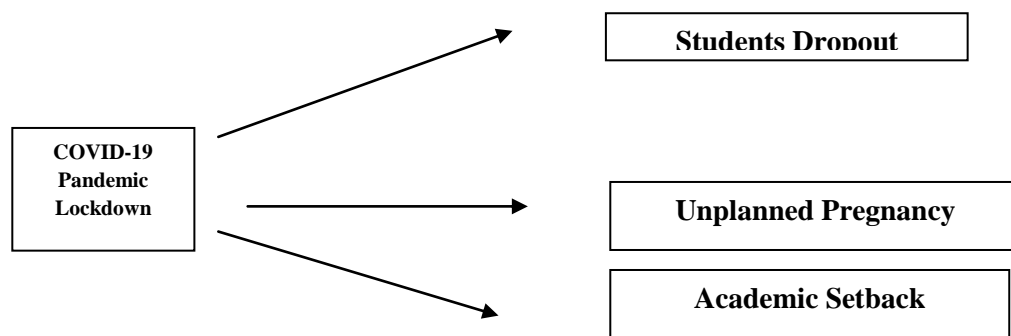


Source: Researchers

Figure 1 describes the relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on tertiary institution students. After COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, many students would not be able to return to school because of economic hardship that result from total lockdown. This scenario will greatly affect the disadvantaged among the students. In the same vein, unplanned pregnancy will be rampant among the female students thereby lead to unplanned marriage. For those that were managed to return to school will suffer academic setback due to the time wasted during the lockdown.

## IV. STUDENTS DROPOUT AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

The term "dropout" is commonly used to describe the situation whereby students enroll at a certain institution of education and leave without obtaining a certificate or passing their final examinations. According to Rumberger (2001), factors that influence dropout can be divided into personal and institutional. Most sociological theories that address the complex problem of school drop-outs begin with an analysis of these factors. Among the personal factors identified in the scientific literature, the most frequently encountered are weak educational results, socio-economic status (the representatives of the lower social classes have a higher risk of dropout than those in the middle and upper classes), children from single-parent families, and ethnic minorities (Bungau, *et al.,* 2017). Regarding institutional factor, Bungau *et al.* (2017) further affirmed that the school climate can have a decisive influence on the results students obtain and even their decision to drop out. One of the biggest problems from a methodological point of view is the identification of the factors that are specific to the educational institution and how they influence the results obtained by the students, and especially their separation from other external factors. So, this paper looks at the angle at which students drop out of institutions due to socio-economic and health related factors. Nigeria shut down all educational institutions since 30th March, 2020 due to fear of the spread of covid-19 pandemic.

As at the time of writing this paper, all higher institutions in Nigeria still remain closed except final year in secondary schools that were opened to write their West African Examination. The pandemic has caused a lot of harms to the students because most of them were unable to return to school to write their examination due to economic hardship that borne out of lockdown. Many university undergraduates were tired of staying at home as majority have ruled out education in their mind due to the fact that most of their loved one that sponsor their education were greatly affected by covid-19 pandemic. Some of the students interviewed have resulted in

leaving the schools even if the schools were opened by the government because their upper most priority now is to survive from hardship meted out of covid-19 pandemic. No wonder Edeh *et al.* (2020) stated that coronavirus school closures could increases student debt, extend the graduation time of students, and shatter the academic dreams of students, as well as programme schedules of educational institutions. They stated further that protracted school closures may result to increase rate of dropouts due to loss of interest and lack of resources to continue. If not well managed, school closures can also increase the rate of crimes, because prolonged school closures can lead to idleness which contributes to negative peer influences and youth involvement in crimes. Education jobs were also affected; many workers risks pay cuts or even disengagement from work during unscheduled school closures.

## V. UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

Unplanned pregnancies are pregnancies that are unplanned or unwanted at the time of conception. Sexual activity without the use of effective contraception through choice or coercion is the predominant cause of unplanned pregnancy. This is a pregnancy that is not desired by one or both biological parents. The prolong institutions closure in Nigeria will increase rate of illicit sex and unwanted pregnancy among higher institution students. According to the Global Partnership to End Child Marriage (2020), disruption in access to sexual and reproductive health services – including to sexually transmitted infection (STI), HIV, contraception and safe abortion services – during the acute phase of the crisis will have severe consequences for adolescent girls and women. Where services are available, girls may be unable to physically access them due to restrictions on their mobility. Lack of access to contraception and safe abortion services is likely to increase the number of unwanted and unintended pregnancies for married and unmarried school girls, which in turn could increase pressure on girls to marry early. Hence, put a stop to her education as the parents would not take the responsibility of sponsoring her education as well as taking care of the pregnancy.

## VI. ACADEMIC SETBACK AS A RESULT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

Academic setback is an event that delays students' academic progress or reverses the progress of academic activities in the institution due to COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Many students would have lost interest in education due to prolong institutions lockdown and for those who return to school would have suffered a great loss in their academic activities because of prolong school closure all over the country. According to World Bank Group (2020), Students will largely stop learning academic subjects, and the decline may be greater for newly admitted, whose families are less likely to prioritize their learning during school closures. Learning inequality will increase, because only students from wealthier and more educated families will have the support to learn at home either through online programme. Academic and research activities have basically come to a halt. As of late March 2020, universities and other tertiary education institutions are closed in 188 countries and communities, and over 220 million post-secondary students have had their studies ended or significantly disrupted due to COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank Group, 2020).

## VII. TRANSFORMATION OF ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic lockdown had disrupted academic activities in Nigeria and indeed all over the world. But if government and all stakeholders in education sector in Nigeria take a bold step in easing the lockdown, they can at least partially mitigate the damage. And with the good planning and policies, they can use the post COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for education system transformation to build more inclusive, efficient, and resilient education systems in Nigeria. This paper presents three stages at which academic activities can transformed after COVID-19 pandemic lockdown: Stage one - Adaptation, Stage two - Building Continuity, and Stage three - Speedy Recovery.

Figure 2: Stages Involved in Post COVID-19 Academic Transformation
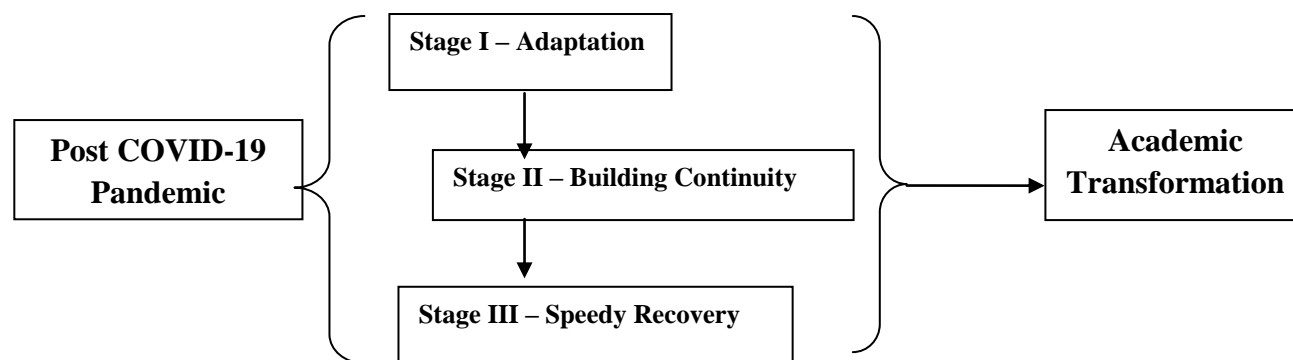


*Source: Researchers*

Figure 2 describes how tertiary education can be transformed after COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Researchers suggest three stages that could bring about academic recovery and transformation in our tertiary institutions. These three stages are arranged in such a way that the first stage leads to the second and so on. The three working together will bring about academic transformation if well managed.

*Stage I – Adaptation:* This describes how tertiary institutions could adapt and cope with post COVID-19 pandemic as it has come to stay like other diseases because as at the time of this research, there is no cure yet for COVID-19 pandemic all over the world hence, the need to adapt to the situation on ground. Students need to understand the protocols involved in coping with the pandemic. At this stage, government needs to prevent students' dropout by providing incentive, inform of scholarship, for the less privileged among the students. Also, government and other stakeholders should find see it as a point of duty to make use of media houses and online platform to broadcast academic programmes for the students to recover from academic loss. Lecturers are at the heart of academic process; as such they need digital training that will give them the opportunity to deliver lectures through social platform like zoom, watsapp and so on. World Bank Group (2020) also affirmed that tertiary institutions can also train youth for COVID related work. Systems should provide targeted online training to students in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education for high-demand roles in pandemic coping and recovery. Government can equally open the institutions in batches and allow final year students to return to school to complete their programmes. Having return to school, the students need to observe COVID-19 pandemic protocols like physical distancing, hand washing with soap or hand sanitizer and the use of face mask. COVID-19 Committee should be set up by the institution authority to maintain COVID-19 regulations among the students and also saddle the responsibility of disseminating the information in and outside the lecture rooms.

*Stage II – Building Continuity:* This stage describes how the first stage could be maintained and where continuity of the academic transformation needs to be built on solid rock. The institutions should bring about academic changes that will make the students recover quickly from long pandemic lockdown. Those from low- and middle-income families need to be encouraged and supported in order to prevent dropout and being lag behind in academic activities. This time, COVID-19 Committee set up in the institution should review the activities of the students from time to time so as to know whether they are making progress or otherwise. Health related issues discovered by the committee members in the school should be channelled to appropriate quarters for onward review. This would expose government to progress reports of the institutions regarding the pandemic. And it would give government insight on whether to sustain the easing of lockdown or not.

*Stage III - Speedy Recovery:* This is the third stage where government needs to use the COVID-19 opportunity to hit the ground running and build back stronger education system in Nigeria. At this stage, all hands must be on deck to actualize Nigeria education dream. That is all stakeholders have roles to play to bring back the lost glory of our education system. Parents of the students too should encourage their wards on the need to level up with their peers in terms of academic recovery. Health Ministry should employ the services of the media to create more awareness on guides and protocols against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic so that the resuming students would not be a centre for the spread of the disease. Lecture should be broke into batches so as to decongest large lecture room crowd in the institution. Health unit in the institution should be equipped, including training of personnel, in order to meet up with the challenges on ground. At this stage of speedy recovery, lecturers should adopt different pedagogies for lecturing so as to build foundational skills for students and government should reciprocate by supporting lecturers as they too are affected in one way or the other by this COVID-19 pandemic. Once these are achieved without recording more infected cases of COVID-19 pandemic, government can gradually re-open institutions for other levels of education.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 pandemic is a global enemy that should be fought collectively. As at the time of writing this paper, no particular drug yet has been produced for the cure of this pandemic. Meaning that it has come to stay like other diseases. As such, government needs to understand that gradual easing of lockdown will reduce hardship caused on the people and gradual re-opening of educational institutions will prevent student dropout of school, unwanted pregnancy and academic loss among the students because prolong lockdown would not do any good to our society. The stages suggested in this paper, if properly adopted would bring about academic transformation needed in our present day society.

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