

The Challenges Faced by University Students Amid Covid-19 Lockdowns: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

The coronavirus is an infectious disease that had ravaged the world. Since a new strand of the virus was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019, over 112 million people had been infected, out of which over 2 million had died. With the rapid global spread of the virus as well as the rising number of infections and related deaths, different public health strategies including lockdowns were instituted to combat it. The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by undergraduate students in Anambra State during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic. It adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach where in-depth interviews were used to collect data from 30 purposively selected undergraduate students in Anambra State. Findings from the study showed that the lockdown adversely affected the students' socio-economic and psychological wellbeing. Findings also showed that the students' academic life was disrupted during the lockdown due to poor network connectivity and lack of e-learning facilities in public universities. Generally, the female participants, participants who studied science courses, participants enrolled in public universities, those from low income families and those who were above 25 faced the most challenges. This study argues that the lack of alternative learning measures like e-learning was the major reason for most of the challenges faced by the students. Based on its findings, the study recommended that there should be an e-driven Educational Continuity Plan (eEECP) to ensure that students continue their learning even during situations like pandemics. It also recommended that Nigerian universities should make their guidance and counseling units/ students' affairs units more effective, to see to the academic and psychological well-being of the students.

Keywords: Coronavirus, lockdown, public health measures, student challenges

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Introduction

The coronavirus or COVID-19 is an infectious disease that has ravaged the world's health sector. It is caused by a newly discovered coronavirus (WHO, 2021). Since a new strand of the virus was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Yuan, Xiao, Dai, Huang, Zhang & Chen, 2020), over 120 million people have been infected, out of which over 2 million have died (John Hopkins University, 2021). In Nigeria, the first case of the virus was recorded on Feb 27, 2020. He was an Italian citizen who had recently arrived in Lagos from Europe and tested positive for the disease a few days later (Kalu, 2020). Since then, the number of cases had increased to over 153, 189 with 2,058 deaths (NCDC, 2021).

Due to the rapid global spread of coronavirus as well as the rising number of infections and related deaths, different strategies were instituted to combat it. The World Health Organization provided guidelines including hand washing with soap under a running tap, cough etiquette, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, wearing of nose masks, observing the 1m – 1.5m social distancing and avoiding social gatherings among others (Cowling et al., 2020; Lewnard & Lo, 2020; Liu, He, Rong, & Tang, 2020; Leung, Lam & Cheng, 2020; Zhao, Li, Liu, Zhu, Ma & Wang, 2020; Earle, Prusaczyk, Choma & Calogero, 2021). Furthermore, different countries went on to adopt measures like self-isolation, quarantine, and lockdowns to control the spread of the virus in line with prevailing country-specific situations (Xiao & Torok, 2020).

The lockdown, in particular, restricted people from stepping out of their homes. It also meant that all road, air and rail transport services were suspended, with exceptions for transportation of essential goods and emergency services. More so, educational institutions, industrial establishments and hospitality services were shut down; only food shops, banks and ATMs, petrol pumps, and other facilities that provided essential services were exempted. Furthermore, several punishments for violation of the lock down order were also stipulated (Kalu, 2020).

In Nigeria, an initial 2-week nationwide lockdown was announced by the federal government on March 30,

2020 with immediate effect in Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja and, on April 13, it was extended by another 2 weeks before it was gradually eased in phases (including at the state level where the various state governments had also adopted the lock down measure) (Ibrahim, Ajide & Julius, 2020).

This study, therefore, explored the challenges faced by undergraduate students in Anambra State during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus outbreak.

Statement of the problem

Undoubtedly, the coronavirus pandemic has profoundly altered the daily lives of the global population within a very short period. To contain the spread of the virus, many countries introduced serious social restrictions including lockdown. The lockdown meant that people were confined in their homes and were banned from public gatherings and commuting to work unless necessary. In addition, schools and all non-essential businesses were closed, to avoid person-to-person contact (Frank & Grady, 2020).

Notably, the consequences of the lockdown on different aspects of people's lives have been a focus of research. Finding from studies suggest that there is an association between the lockdown and poor social and emotional wellbeing in people with reports of sadness, depression and anxiety (Brooks et al., 2020; Jiao et al., 2020). Additionally, home confinement has been found to impact individuals' wellbeing negatively due to unprecedented changes in lifestyle including limitations in physical activity as well as increases in domestic conflict (Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang, & Jiang, 2020).

In Nigeria, available evidence shows that the lockdown mostly affected the general public economically. Those who were daily income earners were worst hit. The shutdown of markets and shops, as well as the restriction of movement meant that these daily income earners could not make ends meet. Worse still, it was reported that the palliatives provided by the government did little to help the situation (Andam, Edeh, Oboh, Pauw & Thurlow, 2020; Kalu, 2020; Ozili, 2020).

During the lockdown, educational institutions at all levels were also shutdown. Students were directed to stay at home and adopt alternative learning approaches like e-learning where available. However, there seems to be a paucity of systematic studies that explored the challenges they faced during the lockdown. This would mean that the government and other relevant bodies may lack relevant insights on how to improve the learning of students when situations like such occasioned by the coronavirus arises.

Purpose of the Study/ Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges faced by undergraduate students in Anambra State during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic. In precise terms, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore the socio-economic challenges faced by undergraduate students in Anambra State during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic.
2. To examine the health challenges faced by undergraduate students in Anambra State during the lockdown owing to the coronavirus pandemic.
3. To investigate the academic challenges faced by undergraduate students in Anambra State during the lockdown arising from the coronavirus pandemic.
4. To find out the category of students that faced the most challenges during the lockdown because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Literature review

The effect of the lockdown (which was adopted as a measure to control the spread of coronavirus) has been a focus of research. One of such was conducted by Morgül, Kallitsoglou and Essau (2020) examined the psychological impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on primary school children and their families in the UK. The study was designed as an online survey involving 927 caregivers with children aged between 5 and 11 years. The caregivers reported that the emotional state and behaviours of their children changed during the lockdown. The symptoms that were frequently reported were boredom (73.8%). This was followed by loneliness (64.5%) and frustration (61.4%) and restlessness, irritability, anxiety, anger, sadness and worry which was reported by over 30% of the caregivers. In addition, family coexistence was described as moderately difficult during the lockdown and more than half of the caregivers reported being moderately or seriously distressed during the lockdown. In addition, findings from the study showed that the caregiver's level of psychological distress was significantly related to child symptoms. The researchers concluded that the findings of their study emphasized the importance of developing prevention programmes to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the psychological wellbeing of children and their families.

On their part, Đogaš, Kalcina, Dodig, Demirović, Madirazza, Valić and Pecotić (2020) aimed to investigate the effect of the coronavirus lockdown on lifestyle behaviours and mood changes of Croatians. The study was designed as an online survey involving 3027 respondents. The female respondents reported smoking an

increased number of cigarettes and the proportion of respondents (of both sexes) who drank 7 drinks per week or more increased. In addition, the female respondents reported lower frequency and duration of physical exercise. Furthermore, a total of 30% of respondents gained weight, with the female respondents being associated with an increased likelihood of gaining weight. Additionally, both male and female respondents felt afraid, discouraged and sad more frequently.

In a similar study, Simon, Helter, White, van der and Łaszewska (2021) explored the impacts of the Covid-19 lockdown on capability well-being, mental health and social support in Austria. The study was designed as a cross-sectional online survey of 560 adult Australian residents. Thirty one percent of the respondents reported low mental well-being and only 30% of those who had a history of mental health treatment received treatment during lockdown. Findings from the study also showed that direct experience of Covid-19 and susceptibility to the virus due to age and/or physical health conditions were also associated with significant capability deprivations. In addition, findings from the study showed that significant capability reductions were associated with increased levels of depression (-1.77) and anxiety (-1.50), and significantly higher capability levels (+3.75) were associated with higher levels of social support. The researchers concluded that the negative capability well-being, mental health and social support impacts of the Covid-19 lockdown were strongest for people with a history of mental health treatment and recommended that future public health policies on lockdowns should pay special attention to improve social support levels in order to increase public resilience.

In a study that focused on students, Aristovnik, Kerži, Ravšelj, Tomaževi and Umek (2020) explored how they perceived the impacts of the first wave of COVID-19 crisis on various aspects of their lives. The study was designed as a survey of 30,383 students from 62 countries. Findings from the study showed that amid the lockdown and transition to online learning, the respondents were most satisfied with the support provided by teaching staff and their universities. However, the students reported that deficient computer skills and the perception of a higher workload prevented them from perceiving their own improved performance in the new academic environment. In addition, findings from the study also showed that the students experienced anxiety, boredom, and frustration and were concerned about issues to do with their future professional career and studies. Furthermore, the students reported that the pandemic made them adopt some particular hygienic behaviours like wearing of mask and discouraged certain daily practices like shaking hands. In addition, findings from the study showed that the male students, those who studied part-time, those in their first-level and those whose had lower living standard, and those from Africa or Asia were significantly less satisfied with their academic work/life during the pandemic, whereas the female, full-time, first-level students and students faced with financial problems were generally affected more by the pandemic in terms of their emotional life and personal circumstances.

In a similar study, Bonal and González (2020) assessed the impact of the school lockdown on the learning gap between children from different social backgrounds in Catalonia. The study was designed as an online survey of which elicited 35,419 responses from families with children aged between 3 and 18. Findings from the study showed that middle-class families were able to maintain higher standards of education quality in a critical context, while children from socially disadvantaged families had few learning opportunities both in terms of time and learning experiences. Furthermore, results from the study varied by type of school (public/ private). Students who enrolled in private schools, both independent and private subsidized ones, had more opportunities to learn compared to those enrolled in public schools.

In another study that focused on students, Sundarasan, Chinna, Kamaludin, Nurunnabi, Baloch, Khoshaim, Hossain and Sukayt (2020) examined the effect of the lockdown on the anxiety level of university students in Malaysia. The study was designed as a cross-sectional online survey involving 983 respondents. Out of the total number of respondents, 20.4%, 6.6%, and 2.8% experienced minimal to moderate, marked to severe, and most extreme levels of anxiety, respectively. Findings from the study also showed that female gender, age below 18 years, age 19 to 25, pre-university level of education, management studies, and staying alone were significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety. The main stressors were remote online teaching, financial constraints, and uncertainty about the future with regard to academics and career.

Odrozola-González, Planchuelo-Gómez, Irurtia and de Luis-García (2020) explored the effects of Covid-19 outbreak and lockdown among university students, academic staff and faculty members, of the Department of Psychology at the University of Valladolid, Spain. The study was designed as a survey and involved a total of 3,707 participants. The student participants in the showed significant higher results in both anxiety and depression in contrast to administrative staff and faculty members altogether. These scores were found among students of Arts, History and Social Sciences and Law students, followed by Architecture and Engineering students. Findings from the study also showed that the Master degree students showed lesser anxiety and depression compared to the undergraduate students. Overall, 21.34% of the participants showed mild ranging to severe anxiety symptoms; 28.14% showed mild to extremely drastic stress symptoms, and lastly, 34.19% of them suffered from mild to extreme depression symptoms. In addition, students who offered Arts and History and Social Sciences and Law studies were more affected compared with students who offered other courses,

especially Architecture and Engineering students.

In a Nigerian study, Ajibo (2020) conducted a study to explore the socioeconomic challenges faced of Nigerians, as well as the health sector's preparedness to handle the pandemic, and the role of Nigerian social workers in the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. The study employed a phenomenological and exploratory research design involving eight participants in a focus group discussion (FGD), two 'ordinary' citizens in an in-depth discussion and three medical workers and three social workers in the in-depth interviews. Findings from the study showed that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the socioeconomic well-being of Nigerians. In addition, the participants reported that the Nigerian health system is ill equipped and underprepared to handle the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a similar Nigerian study, Stanley, Nkporbu and Stanley (2020) assessed the socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic on the general population. The study involved a review of the available health service records in the hospital from December 2019 to mid-April, 2020, internet information, electronic and print media. This was followed by active search of available online data from the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other countries Centre for Disease Control, the World Health Organization as well as emerging literature from National Media. The review showed individual socio-economic loss and difficulties due to the lockdown and restrictions. Many Nigerians, especially those on small and middle cadre employments had lost their jobs, there increased dependency, hunger, sufferings and has posed a lot of restiveness and social insecurity. The researchers concluded that the coronavirus pandemic had caused huge losses.

On their part, Kapasia, Paul, Roy, Saha, Zaveri, Mallick, Barman, Das and Chouhan (2020) assessed the impact of the lockdown on undergraduate and postgraduate students at various colleges and universities in West Bengal, India. The study was designed as an online survey involving 232 students. Findings from the study showed that the students faced psychological health issues like depression and anxiety. In addition, the respondents, especially those that resided in rural areas, reported challenges like poor internet connectivity for online studies and unfavourable study environment at home. Furthermore, majority of the students reported that their economic condition was adversely affected by the lockdown and that low family income occasioned by the lockdown would have a negative impact on their education. Most of the students also thought that the current pandemic may make them discontinue with their education.

In another Nigerian study, Afolabi (2020) examined the mental health implications of lockdown during coronavirus pandemic among adult residents in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study was designed as a descriptive survey involving 132 respondents. Findings from the study showed a high level of effect of lockdown during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the anxiety level among adults resident in Ibadan. On the whole, sleeplessness was perceived as the dominant of two variables and is significantly positively correlated with depression and anxiety with the least coefficient is also significant and positively correlated with depression among the respondents. The reviewed studies show that socio-economic challenges as well as psychological issues like anxiety, depression and sadness was common across different demographic groups during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic. However, there seems to be a paucity of research that focused on the challenges faced by university students in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted an interpretative phenomenological approach. It is an approach apt for exploring the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon (lockdown in this case) through interviews. The study involved 30 participants selected purposively. They were undergraduate students from public and private tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The participants (15 males and 15 females) were gotten through the snowball technique and were all university students who had given pre-information about the challenges they faced during the lockdown and were interested to discuss more about them. Their phone numbers were collected and dates for the interview sessions were subsequently agreed upon.

Due to the Covid-19 spread, the researcher engaged 16 of the participants through phone interviews and Whatsapp, while the rest of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 29 years. An in-depth interview guide, as derived from the objectives of the study, was used to facilitate each interview session. Before the commencement of each interview session, consent forms and information sheets were presented, and the participants were allowed to ask questions about the study. All of the procedures to be adopted in the study were presented explicitly to the participants before they consented to participate in the study.

The recordings from the interview sessions were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. The researcher cross-checked the transcripts and field notes to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were then coded. Each phenomenon was labeled as it occurred and the context, frequency, specificity and elaborateness of each response were noted. Quotations that best illustrated the main themes were selected for inclusion in the report. An academic colleague independently read the transcripts and identified the themes which were similar to those identified by the researchers. This provided a validity check for the data analysis. In order to maintain

confidentiality, access to the data was restricted. Safe storage of data was also ensured during data analysis and the data was destroyed afterwards. More so, names were not attached to the transcripts.

Findings and discussion

In this section, qualitative data from the interview sessions were discussed under six broad themes. These include: socio-economic challenges, health challenges and academic challenges.

Socio-economic challenges

The participants were of the view that they faced economic challenges during the lockdown. The participants most affected were students who combined studying with small scale businesses. In one participant's words:

The lockdown really affected my finances. There is a small computer business I do in school as a student. The coronavirus really affected the business because schools were closed. Because of this, I did not have any money. I found it difficult to start the business elsewhere because most of the people that patronize me are students and students' environment is where that kind of business moves well (Participant 22, Male, 28, Mass Communication, Public University).

Another participant who had a similar view said:

As a student, I do not think there is a time I have ever been as broke as I was during the coronavirus pandemic. My money finished. I could not do some of the small small businesses I did in school to make some money. It was really a terrible experience for me. I had to rely on my parents. It was not easy for them either. We were just managing the money they had saved. I was very difficult financially (Participant 24, Male, 23, Business Administration, Public University).

Furthermore, some of the participants who were solely dependent on their parents reported that the economic challenges faced by their parents affected them. According one of the participants in this category:

During the lockdown, my parents' business was badly affected. They are traders and they lockdown meant that their shops were closed. They had no money and it meant I had no money too. It was really a difficult time for all of us. I was even afraid that the whole thing would continue for a very long time. If it did, my education would have been affected because it is my parents that pay my school fees (Participant 25, Female, 22, Mass Communication, Private University).

The participants also stated that they experienced a hike in the prices of commodities, despite the fact that they did not have enough money to make purchases:

As if the fact that I did not have enough money was not enough, the prices of things in the market continued to increase. Everything in the market was expensive. Imagine not having money and still being faced with the high cost of things in the market. It was such a terrible experience (Participant 30, Male, 27, Economics, Public University).

In addition, the participants stated that their social lives were disrupted adversely by the lockdown. For instance, they stated that they could not go to parties and other social gatherings and the ones that had been scheduled were canceled. According to one of the participants:

Our social lives were badly disrupted during the coronavirus lockdown. We could not go to functions. We could not go to social events and parties organized by students. It was a very boring time for us students. I just stayed at home waiting for the say the lockdown restrictions would be lifted so we could go back to our normal lives (Participant 4, Female, 24, Mass Communication, Public University).

It was a hard time during the coronavirus pandemic, we were all stuck at home. Gatherings of any sort were restricted. It really affected me negatively. I am an extrovert. I like to go out and meet people. But doing the lockdown, nothing of such was possible. It was not easy at all (Participant 11, Male, 24, Mass Communication, Public University).

The results above corroborate findings from other studies which have also shown that people faced economic challenges during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic (Andam, Edeh, Oboh, Pauw & Thurlow, 2020; Kalu, 2020; Ajibo, 2020). Furthermore, regarding the economic challenges faced by students in particular, findings from this study showed similarities with findings from the study conducted by Kapasia, Paul, Roy, Saha, Zaveri, Mallick, Barman, Das and Chouhan (2020) where the students reported that their economic condition was adversely affected by the lockdown and feared that the low family income occasioned by the lockdown would have a negative impact on their education. Interestingly, findings from this study showed that the socio-economic challenges were reported mostly by the male participants and then the females who were aged between 21-25 years.

Health challenges

The participants stated that they faced health challenges (mostly psychological) as a result of staying at home due to the lockdown. The major psychological issues that were mentioned by the participants were anxiety, sadness and depression.

I was really sad during this coronavirus lockdown, staying at home all through has never been my thing. How can one stay at home from morning to night without doing anything. I was worried about the delay in my academic pursuit. I was hoping that I would graduate this year, but now everything has been delayed (Participant 18, Female, 28, Medical Student).

At the beginning it of it all, it seemed fine. I thought I could enjoy a few days or a couple of weeks at days went on, it felt terrible. They continued to extent the lockdown. It really affected me negatively. I had already set targets which I could no longer reach. It really bothered me. I was depressed. But thank God school has resumed now (Participant 2, Female, 28, Physiotherapy, Public University).

In addition, some of the participants (females especially) reported that they added weight during the lockdown, as they add too much and exercised very little.

The lockdown was not a good for me. I added excess weight and it was not healthy at all. Before the lockdown, I had a lot of weight school stress and all that helped me manage the weight. At school, I also tried to diet. But with the lockdown, I just sat at home and eat. Even till now I am trying to loss all the weight I gained during the lockdown. For me, I think it is easier to gain weight than to lose it Participant 2, Female, 28, Physiotherapy, Public University).

I really added weight during the lockdown. I was eating a lot of things. I ate and watched TV and did no exercise. At school it is different. You do not have a lot of food and there is no time to just stay and do nothing Participant 3, Female, 22, English and literary studies, Public University).

I think the major challenge I experienced health wise was weight gaining extra weight. I am already plus size and I like my weight. But during the coronavirus lockdown I added so such. Look me now. I am fatter than I was then so you can image. It took me a lot of effort to get to this size. I am still trying to reduce more weight. It is not easy at all Participant 5, Female, 26, Biochemistry, Private University).

The results above substantiates results from other studies which also showed that young people, including students faced psychological issues like depression, sadness and anxiety, as well as like lifestyle challenges like poor eating and exercising habits during the lockdown occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic (Đogaš, Kalcina, Dodig, Demirović, Madirazza, Valić & Pecotić, 2020; Morgül Kallitsoglou & Essau, 2020 Aristovnik, Kerži, Ravšelj, Tomaževi & Umek, 2020; Odriozola-González, Planchuelo-Gómez, Irurtia & de Luis-García, 2020).

Furthermore, findings from this study showed that female gender, science related courses, studentship in a public University, age above 25 were significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety. The main stressors were financial constraints, and uncertainty about the future with regard to academics and career. This is similar to findings from the study conducted by Sundarasan, Chinna, Kamaludin, Nurunnabi, Baloch, Khoshaim, Hossain and Sukayt (2020) which also showed that these variables that significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety in particular and that the main stressors were also financial constraints and uncertainty about the future with regard to academics and career. In addition, it was the female participants who were associated with an increased likelihood of gaining weight due to lifestyle changes like lower frequency and duration of physical exercise unhealthy eating. This was also similar to findings from the study conducted by Đogaš, Kalcina, Dodig, Demirović, Madirazza, Valić and Pecotić (2020).

Academic challenges

The participants reported that they faced numerous academic challenges during they lockdown. Apart from the psychological issues of depression and sadness which they reported as having negative impact on their interest in studying, some of them reported that they lost interest in reading. There were also some participants (especially those who resided in the rural areas) who reported that poor network connectivity hampered their using of the internet in studying. Generally, most of the participants reported that they were not motivated to study at home as it was not an idea environment for academic work due to a plethora of distractions.

Like I said before, I was in a very sad mood during the lockdown. I am a medical student. We were preparing for our final exams before the whole thing started. During the lockdown, we were asked by out lecturers to continue studying because examinations would be written once we resumed. But I could not study. I was just not in the mood at all. I lost interest. The best place to study is in the school environment (Participant 18, Female, 28, Medical Student, Public University).

I am someone who can study whether in school or anywhere. I like to read ahead and I use the Internet to get some materials. Before the lockdown started, there were lots of areas I still had to cover. I thought I could continue my reading at home, but when I got home, I could not have access to the Internet as much as I had in school. My parents stay in the village and network access can really be poor there (Participant 8, Female, 21, Physics, Public University).

For me, home is not really a conducive place to study. There a lot of distractions there. As a female, when I was at home during the lockdown, I had to do a lot of house chores. This reduced my reading time. If it were to be in the school environment, I would have all the time in the world to read. One

thing that worsened the situation is that my school does not have the facilities for e-learning. If we had e-learning facilities, I think things would have been a bit different. We would have been motivated to learn from home (Participant 21, Female, 28, Physiotherapy, Public University).

I faced challenges in my academic life. I lost interest in studying because I was at home. But after sometime, my school started online learning. It was very interesting. You just sit at the comfort of your home and learn. All you need is strong Internet access Participant 16, Male, 28, Microbiology, Private University).

The findings presented above corroborates findings from the study conducted by Bonal and González (2020) which also showed that students' academic life was generally disrupted during the lockdown occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as also shown in Bonal and González's study, findings from the present study showed that students who enrolled in private Universities had more opportunities to learn (due to the availability of e-learning facilities) compared to those enrolled in public Universities. This study argues that the lack of alternative learning measures like e-learning is also a stressor for the psychological distress experience by the students who enrolled in public Universities. The situation can be said to be worse for the female students aged between 25-28 years who were studying science-related courses.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges faced by university students in Anambra State amid the covid-19 lockdown. Findings from the study showed that the lockdown adversely affected the students' socio-economic and psychological wellbeing. In addition, findings from the study showed that the students' academic life was disrupted during the lockdown poor network connectivity and lack of e-learning facilities in the public Universities. Generally, the female participants, participants who studied science courses, participants enrolled in public universities, those from low income families and those who were above 25 faced the most challenges. This study argues that the lack of alternative learning measures like e-learning was the major reason for most of the challenges faced by the students.

Based on its findings, this study suggests that there should be an e-driven Educational Continuity Plan (eEECP) to ensure that students continue their learning through electronic and internet-enabled platforms even during situations like pandemics. The infrastructural facilities for e-learning should be provided for education institutions which to facilitate digital learning during health emergencies or other situations which might result to closure of educational facilities. There is also need to provide capacity development training to the stakeholders of higher education institutions to enable them make use of the e-learning facilities when provided.

In addition, Nigerian universities should make their guidance and counseling units/ students' affairs units more effective. These Units can see to the academic and psychological well-being of the students and can focus on the most vulnerable which was shown in this study to be females.

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