



Impact of COVID-19 on the Academic Achievement of Tertiary Students

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered profound disruptions across various sectors worldwide, including the education system. This paper investigates the impact of COVID-19 on the academic achievement of tertiary students. By analyzing existing literature and empirical data, this study explores the challenges faced by tertiary students due to the pandemic-induced shifts in learning modalities and examines the resultant implications on their academic performance. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the challenges encountered by tertiary students during the pandemic and propose strategies to mitigate adverse effects on academic achievement.

Keywords: COVID-19, Academic Achievement, Tertiary Students, Remote Learning, Educational Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 unleashed unprecedented disruptions across global socioeconomic systems. One of the sectors significantly affected is education, with tertiary institutions worldwide compelled to adapt swiftly to remote learning modalities to ensure continuity in academic activities while safeguarding the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff [1, 2]. However, the sudden transition to online and hybrid learning formats has presented unique challenges for tertiary students, impacting their academic achievement in myriad ways [3]. This paper aims to examine the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on the academic achievement of tertiary students, shedding light on the various challenges encountered and proposing strategies to mitigate adverse effects. The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed profound challenges on tertiary education systems globally, disrupting traditional modes of teaching and learning and necessitating the adoption of remote and hybrid learning approaches. While these measures were crucial for maintaining educational continuity amid the crisis, they have presented significant obstacles for tertiary students, affecting their academic achievement. Challenges such as limited access to resources, technological disparities, lack of conducive learning environments, increased stress and mental health issues, and disruptions to academic schedules have all contributed to the complexities faced by tertiary students during the pandemic [4, 5]. Understanding the scope and nature of these challenges is imperative for devising effective interventions to support tertiary students and mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on their academic success [6, 7]. This paper also assesses the various challenges faced by tertiary students as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to examine the impact of COVID-19-induced disruptions on the academic achievement of tertiary students. It will further identify factors contributing to the differential impact of the pandemic on academic achievement among tertiary students, and explore strategies and interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of COVID-19 on tertiary students' academic success. Lastly, there will be recommendations for policymakers, educators, and institutions to support tertiary students and enhance their academic resilience in the face of future crises.

Concept of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic refers to a global outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), characterized by its rapid transmission and widespread impact on public health, social dynamics, and economic systems worldwide [8]. It represents an unprecedented global health crisis, marked by significant morbidity, mortality, and societal disruptions, necessitating coordinated international responses to mitigate its spread and mitigate its adverse effects [9, 10].

Impact of Covid-19-Induced Disruptions on the Academic Achievement of Tertiary Students in Nigeria

The impact of COVID-19-induced disruptions on the academic achievement of tertiary students in Nigeria has been profound, affecting various aspects of their educational experience. These disruptions have stemmed from measures such as nationwide lockdowns, the closure of educational institutions, and the transition to remote learning modalities [11]. Here's a breakdown of some key impacts:

- a. **Limited Access to Resources:** Many tertiary students in Nigeria faced challenges accessing essential resources for remote learning, such as stable internet connectivity, electronic devices, and relevant learning materials. This lack of access hindered their ability to fully engage in online classes and complete assignments effectively [12].
- b. **Technological Disparities:** Disparities in access to technology have exacerbated existing inequalities among tertiary students. Students from lower-income backgrounds or rural areas often lack the necessary devices and internet connectivity for remote learning, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their more privileged counterparts [13].
- c. **Quality of Learning Environments:** The shift to remote learning has exposed disparities in the quality of learning environments among tertiary students. Many students face distractions and challenges studying from home, such as inadequate space, family responsibilities, and lack of quiet study areas, impacting their concentration and academic performance [14].
- d. **Increased Stress and Mental Health Issues:** The uncertainty and disruptions caused by the pandemic have contributed to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and mental health issues among tertiary students in Nigeria. The isolation from peers concerns about academic progress, and worries about the future have taken a toll on students' well-being, further affecting their ability to focus and excel academically [15].
- e. **Disruptions to Academic Schedules:** The closure of educational institutions and the transition to remote learning disrupted academic schedules and timelines, leading to delays in course completion and graduation for many tertiary students. Uncertainties surrounding the resumption of in-person classes and examinations further compounded these challenges, adding to students' stress and anxiety [12]. Thus, COVID-19-induced disruptions have had significant and multifaceted impacts on the academic achievement of tertiary students in Nigeria, exacerbating existing inequalities and posing challenges to their learning experiences and outcomes.

Factors contributing to the Differential Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Achievement among Tertiary Students

Several factors contribute to the differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic achievement among tertiary students. These factors vary widely depending on individual circumstances, institutional responses, and socioeconomic contexts. Some key contributors include:

- a. **Socioeconomic Status:** Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often face greater challenges during the pandemic due to limited access to resources such as technology, stable internet connectivity, and conducive learning environments. Financial constraints may also force some students to prioritize employment over education, impacting their ability to focus on academic pursuits [16].
- b. **Access to Technology:** Disparities in access to technology, including devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, as well as reliable internet connectivity, significantly affect students' ability to engage in remote learning. Students without access to necessary technology may struggle to participate in online classes, complete assignments, and access educational resources, leading to disparities in academic achievement [17].
- c. **Home Environment:** The quality of students' home environments plays a crucial role in their academic success during the pandemic. Factors such as living conditions, availability of quiet study spaces, and familial responsibilities can impact students' ability to concentrate on their studies and participate in remote learning effectively. Students facing challenging home environments may experience increased stress and distractions, affecting their academic performance [14].
- d. **Level of Institutional Support:** The effectiveness of institutional responses to the pandemic also influences students' academic achievement. Institutions that provide robust support services, clear communication, and flexible learning options are better equipped to help students navigate the challenges posed by the pandemic. Conversely, institutions with limited resources or inadequate support systems may struggle to meet students' needs, leading to disparities in academic outcomes [18].
- e. **Adaptation to Remote Learning:** Students' ability to adapt to remote learning modalities varies depending on factors such as prior experience with online education, technological proficiency, and learning preferences. Some students may thrive in online learning environments, while others may struggle with the transition from traditional classroom settings. Students who face difficulties adapting to remote learning may experience lower academic achievement during the pandemic [19].
- f. **Mental Health and Well-being:** The pandemic has taken a toll on students' mental health and well-being, with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression reported among tertiary students. Mental health challenges can impact students' ability to concentrate, stay motivated, and engage in academic activities effectively, leading to lower academic achievement [20]. In summary, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic achievement among tertiary students is influenced by a complex interplay of factors

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including socioeconomic status, access to technology, home environment, institutional support, adaptation to remote learning, and mental health and well-being.

Strategies and Interventions aimed at mitigating the Adverse Effects of Covid-19 on Tertiary Students' Academic Success

In Nigeria, several strategies and interventions have been proposed to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on tertiary students' academic success. These strategies aim to address the challenges faced by students during the pandemic and provide support to help them navigate the transition to remote learning and cope with the associated disruptions. Some examples have been cited in this study.

- a. **Providing Access to Technology and Internet Connectivity:** Institutions can support students by providing access to necessary technology, such as laptops or tablets, and ensuring reliable Internet connectivity. This may involve loaning devices to students, subsidizing internet costs, or providing access to computer labs on campus [21].
- b. **Flexible Learning Options:** Institutions can implement flexible learning options to accommodate students' diverse needs and circumstances. This may include offering asynchronous learning opportunities, recorded lectures, and alternative assessment methods to accommodate students who may face challenges with synchronous online classes [17].
- c. **Enhancing Academic Support Services:** Institutions can enhance academic support services to help students succeed in remote learning environments. This may involve providing tutoring services, academic advising, and counseling support to address students' academic and mental health needs [21].
- d. **Promoting Peer Support Networks:** Establishing peer support networks can help students connect with their peers, share resources, and provide emotional support during the pandemic. Peer mentoring programs, online study groups, and virtual student clubs can foster a sense of community and belonging among students [13].
- e. **Addressing Mental Health and Well-being:** Institutions should prioritize mental health and well-being initiatives to support students' emotional resilience during the pandemic. This may involve providing access to mental health counseling services, organizing wellness workshops, and promoting self-care practices among students [19].
- f. **Communication and Transparency:** Maintaining clear and transparent communication with students is essential for building trust and managing expectations during the pandemic. Institutions should provide regular updates on changes to academic policies, health and safety protocols, and support services available to students [18].
- g. **Financial Assistance:** Institutions can offer financial assistance programs to support students who may be experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic. This may include emergency grants, tuition waivers, or assistance with housing and living expenses [16]. By implementing these strategies and interventions, institutions can help mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19 on tertiary students' academic success and promote their overall well-being during these challenging times.

Recommendations

There is a need for policymakers and institutions to support tertiary students and enhance their academic resilience to COVID-19 by exploring the following: Policymakers should prioritize investments in digital infrastructure to ensure equitable access to online learning resources for all tertiary students [13]. Similarly, institutions and policymakers should establish financial assistance programs, including grants and scholarships, to support students facing financial challenges due to the pandemic [13]. Institutions should further expand mental health support services, such as counseling and wellness programs, to address the psychological impact of the pandemic on students' well-being [15]. There is need for institutions to adopt flexible learning approaches, such as hybrid models and asynchronous learning, to accommodate students' diverse needs and preferences [13]. Institutions should also bolster academic support services, including tutoring and academic advising, to help students navigate challenges and succeed academically in remote learning environments [14]; while also encouraging the formation of peer support networks and online communities to foster a sense of belonging and provide mutual support among students [14]. Institutions and policymakers can further maintain transparent communication with students, by providing regular updates on academic policies, health guidelines, and available support services [13]. Equally, Institutions should empower students to participate in decision-making processes and provide feedback on their experiences with remote learning, ensuring their voices are heard in shaping policies and practices [14], in the same way, they should offer opportunities for students to develop essential skills such as digital literacy and adaptability, preparing them for future challenges in a rapidly changing world [13]. Finally, Institutions should collaborate with community organizations and government agencies to leverage resources and support initiatives that benefit tertiary students, promoting holistic development and well-being [15]. These recommendations can guide policymakers and institutions in effectively supporting tertiary students and enhancing their academic resilience to COVID-19.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted the academic landscape, particularly affecting tertiary students' educational experiences and achievements. This study has explored the versatile challenges faced by tertiary students, including limited access to resources, technological disparities, inadequate learning environments, increased stress, and disrupted academic schedules. These challenges have exacerbated existing inequalities and hindered students' academic performance. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, and institutions. Strategies such as providing access to technology and internet connectivity, implementing flexible learning options, enhancing academic support services, and prioritizing mental health and well-being are essential. Furthermore, transparent communication, financial assistance, and the promotion of peer support networks can significantly alleviate the adverse impacts of the pandemic on students. Policymakers must prioritize investments in digital infrastructure and financial support programs, while institutions should adopt hybrid learning models, expand academic and mental health support services, and involve students in decision-making processes. By fostering a supportive and adaptable educational environment, institutions can enhance students' resilience and ensure their academic success during crises. Ultimately, these recommendations aim to create a more equitable and resilient tertiary education system, better prepared to face future disruptions. Collaboration among community organizations, government agencies, and educational institutions will be crucial in promoting holistic development and well-being for tertiary students. Through these collective efforts, the negative impact of COVID-19 on academic achievement can be mitigated, paving the way for a more robust and inclusive education system.

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