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Assessment of Behaviour Policies in Higher Education: A Panacea for Sustainable Development during Post COVID-19 Era

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Abstract
This study adopted survey design to assess behaviour policies in higher education during Post COVID-19 Era. The population of the study comprised all 580 lecturers and 1,040 final year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education in 2020/2021 school session, while a sample size of 520 was used. The instrument use for data collection was a questionnaire tagged "Awareness, Attitude, Adherence, Lapses, Sustainability Questionnaire" (AALSQ) which was designed by the researchers. Four research questions were formulated and data were analyzed using frequency counts, mean and percentage. Results of data analysis revealed that students and staff have high level of awareness of COVID-19 pandemic. They also have a relaxed disposition towards the spread of the pandemic and its preventive measures. Though stakeholders' attitude to the pandemic was negative, their level of adherence to its preventive guidelines was also among the high prevalent lapses. It was recommended among others that there should be strict implementation of rules and regulations by the school authorities which will enhance sustainable development.
Keywords: awareness, attitude, adherence, lapses, sustainability, COVID-19

Introduction

The need for assessment of behaviour policy on healthcare practices and principles during and after a major health crisis in a nation for the purpose of sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. In all nations, legal provisions or policies for the conduct of the affairs of nations grow out of the belief, values and customs of the people as well as the events of the time. In all these, education is seen as a centre around which other developments revolve. As put by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014:11), "education in Nigeria is an instrument 'par excellence' for effecting national development". Federal Republic of Nigeria (2008) also states that university education shall make optimum contribution to national development; and one way to achieve this is to make professional courses to reflect the country's national development. Included in

the professional courses is Education Psychology which is a general course in Teacher Education.

Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English defines psychology as "the study of the mind and its processes, especially as the cause of behaviour". Though the wind does not have detectable quality that one can touch, smell, see, taste or feel, it has an active quality. Its activities create thoughts and thoughts create behaviours. From a person's behaviour, his body movement, facial and verbal expressions, actions and inactions, one can read a bit of his mind's activities (Isangedighi, 2007). Education psychology is a branch of education curriculum that deals with the study and understanding of behaviour. It is assumed that Education Psychology, if well positioned could produce intervention to prevent global health crisis, including the coronavirus disease popularly called COVID-19, through the observance of behavioural policy.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the learning crisis across the globe by severely limiting access to education. By early April, 2020, the crisis had left more than 20 million pre-primary, 160 million primary, 56 million secondary, and eight million tertiary level out of school across the continent of Africa (Urpilainen & Agbor, 2021). In Nigeria, due to the higher number of confirmed cases, by 8th August, 2021; a total of 182,503 were infested, 167,130 were discharged and 2,219 deaths, were reported by Nigeria Centre of Disease Control (NCDC) (Adetayo, Folarin & Tolu-Kolawole, 2021). As at this day, the pandemic has caused a massive impact in higher educational institutions and the world of education in its entirety.

Generally, the educational system supplies manpower to other facets of national development. In essence, the survival of the educational system will affect the survival of other system (Akorede, 2014). Since all systems depend upon education for survival, the government has to regulate the behaviour of the education sector at all times and in all situations including periods of national disaster such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is believed that people's attitude towards a problem could either lead to its solution or to worsening it. And attitude is a tendency to react favourably or negatively to stimuli or referent. The stimuli could be physical objects, events or activities. Attitudes are people's feelings about issues, objects, courses of activity and other referents. Thus, students and staff may have different attitudes towards many different things like social activities, school rules and regulations, including adherence to guidelines (Kerlinger & Lee, 2006). Attitude cannot be measured or observed directly but could be inferred from the overt behaviours of the person(s) possessing it. It is a term or a variable that needs operationalization before its measurement (Ukpor, 2014; Denga, 2004). Literature consulted on the subject have shown that factors like status, information, educational preparation and training, and environmental climate and other variables affect attitudes as expressed by individuals (Kerlinger & Lee, 2006; Obanya, 2011; Ukpor, 2014). From the definitions and meanings of attitude discussed so far, it is shown that attitude is explained

in people's inclinations of likes or dislikes, agreements or disagreements, opinions and references.

In a study by Roy, Tripathy, Kumar, Sharma and Kaushal (2020) on the assessment of factors affecting the spread of COVID-19 in India, they identified knowledge, attitude, anxiety and perceived mental health care needs of the adult population as important variables. A total of 662 responses were obtained for the study. The result revealed that the people showed a moderate level of knowledge about its preventive measures. Many of the people under study showed willingness to observe government guidelines on quarantine, social distancing, use of gloves and sanitizers. Their anxiety level was quite high and their mental healthcare needs were very high. The study recommended the need to intensify awareness of the people and encouragement of more positive attitude towards preventive measures among the people during the COVID-19 era.

Another suspected challenge of the pandemic in Nigeria is infodemic – the spread of misinformation and fake news that can cause harm. When information is given to an individual or group of persons without the understanding of the receiver, it is said that information dissemination has not taken place. There is a general saying that if someone is not informed, he/she is deformed. Information tends to terminate ignorance in the life of people and the society at large. According to Muanya (2020), Nigerians are faced daily with rumours of fake COVID-19 cures or preventive measures, and fraudsters taking advantage of people's vulnerability and informing them of palliatives or funds provided by NCDC. The rumours distract health workers who are working very hard to control this outbreak. They also set the populace back with the response as members of the public engage in self-medication or other dangerous acts due to these rumours. To address the situation, the NCDC boss, Chukuma Muanya noted: "we have established a very proactive communication campaign using traditional and social media, and urge Nigerians to take responsibility by only sharing verified information from NCDC, the Ministry of Health and other authorities" (Muanya, 2020:30).

The Federal Government of Nigeria has adopted some measures as intervention to mitigate the pandemic. These measures are contained in policy provisions of the Presidential Steering Committee (PSC) on COVID-19 and monitored by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Several steps or policy guidelines were taken by the implementation committee to ensure an effective control of the pandemic:

- The first step was to create awareness by giving publicity to the disease and its mode of spread. This was done through handbills, radio jingles, television programmes and the internet facilities.
- The next step was the organization of workshops for health workers, counsellors, psychologists and others to apply their professional skills in situational management of affected individuals.
- Other measures included creation of special areas called isolation centres for infected persons. Schools were ordered to close down for months. International, intra-

national, and inter-community movements were restricted to ensure reduction of spread of the virus.

- However, in order that schools and other institutions did not remain closed perpetually, a number of behaviour policy measures were instituted by the Federal Government and made available to schools. This included:
- University authorities were directed to ensure that there is physical distancing of individual students, and staff were directed to observe at least one metre apart from one another.
- All persons were to cover their nostrils and mouths with facemask before entering the school and remain with it while in school.
- It was mandatory for all departments to provide running water; example tap and sanitizers for hand washing and hand sanitization respectively.
- Coughing and sneezing into one's bent elbow was also introduced to avoid spreading of the virus.
- The usual peer interactions among students, staff and friends on campus, at eateries and drinking joints were suspended.
- All classrooms, libraries, laboratories and offices were to be fumigated regularly before continuous use of the facilities.
- School authorities and other individuals were to assist in contact tracing of and to promptly report any identified case(s) for a possible quarantine. Nobody was exempted from observing these protocols, for instance the number one citizen of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari and some of his close aides were quarantined for 10 days after their return from London in August 15, 2021 in accordance with COVID-19 Protocols for International Travellers (Adotaye, Folarin & Tolu-Kolawole, 2021).

Despite the attractive outlook of the policy content on COVID-19 issues, probing into the adherence of students and staff to the PSC's policy, points accusing fingers at the behaviour of university population. The spread of fake information and the prevalence of other shortcomings could emanate from some lapses associated with implementation of COVID-19 guidelines against its spread. A lapse, by definition, refers to a departure from what is necessary. Lapses in implementation as used in this study are those omitted but necessary facts that should have aided the implementation of the Presidential Steering Committee (PSC) on COVID-19 guidelines. These lapses may be Federal Government-related, state government related or university-related. This study focuses more on university-related lapses.

Statement of the problem

It has been observed that the response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) control measures has slowed down due to continuous disbelief and other negative attitudes of some Nigerians including university workers and students inspite of the efforts made by frontline health workers, states and federal government-led taskforces on the pandemic. Governments at federal and state levels are developing strategies to enable an effective response. These strategies include increase in case tracing, monitoring and vaccinating

of people. Despite these measures taken to address the problem of disbelief and the negative tendencies associated with the spread of the pandemic, the issue still persists. The question is: How could the services of Education Psychologists improve students' and lecturers' positive attitudes towards strict adherence to COVID-19 control measures for sustainable development?

Research questions

1) To what extent are students and lecturers aware of COVID-19 preventive guidelines?
2) How does the implementation of COVID-19 guidelines by university authorities influence school sustainable development?
3) How does the knowledge of psychology influence positive attitude of students and staff towards adhering strictly to COVID-19 control measures?
4) What are the observed lapses in the implementation of COVID-19 protocols against sustainable development?

Methodology

This is an evaluation study with a descriptive survey design. The research design was adopted to assess situations, events, attitudes and opinions occurring in the population of the University of Calabar. The focus of a survey design is to ascertain facts and not to establish or test a theory (Kothari & Gara 2014). This design was considered appropriate because the study purports to use the information obtain through questionnaire, in describing observed phenomena about the extent of students' and lecturers' awareness of and attitude towards control measures of COVID-19 and its implementation by the authorities as well as its observed lapses.

The population of the study comprised all 580 lecturers and 1,040 final year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education in 2020/2021 school session. Multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in view of the complexity of the study population. In achieving this, 20 percent of the existing population was used. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 116 lecturers whose names were written in pieces of paper, folded into a container and picked blindly at different departmental meetings in the faculty. Five departments were selected purposively to include Department of Educational Foundations, where Education Psychology is domiciled. Forty percent of final year undergraduate students per department were proportionately selected using balloting procedure of simple random sampling technique. This resulted in the selection of 416 (40% of 1040) students. The study sample was 532 persons (116 lecturers and 416 students).

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire tagged Implementation of COVID-19 Pandemic Protocols Questionnaire. The instrument was designed by the researchers and validated by expert researchers in Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Department. The instrument was pretested using Cronbach Alpha technique and the coefficient obtained was 0.78 which showed its reliability. Five hundred and twenty (520)

questionnaire leaflets were properly filled, returned and used. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, mean and standard deviation).
The weights and responses options for each items are: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD); 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree (A); 4 = Strongly Agree (SA), for all positively worded items while the negatively worded items are in the reversed. For each item, the mean of the aggregate of the weights representing the ratings on the item represents the degree to which the item is considered to have described the variables in questions. In all cases, a decision rule is fixed at mean rating score of 2.5. Any score below this point implies a failure to attract a considerable effect.

Presentation of results

Having carried out the statistical analyses, the researchers use the results obtained to draw some useful conclusion about the identified variables of COVID-19 control measures for sustainable development. The results of the analyses are shown as follows:

Research question 1: To what extent are students and lecturers aware of COVID-19 preventive guidelines?

Table 1: Frequency, mean scores and standard deviation of responses to items in awareness of COVID-19 preventive guidelines by students and lecturers

S/N	Statement (Items)	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ
	I am aware that:						
1.	COVID-19 has different mode of spread.	1280	444	80	22	3.49	0.68
2.	Proper use of facemask must involve covering both the mouth and nostrils.	1368	423	60	7	3.57	0.65
3.	Social distancing reduces fast spread of the virus.	1192	480	84	20	3.30	0.71
4.	Sanitizing one's hands prevents easy contact of the virus.	856	570	184	10	3.11	0.84
5.	COVID-19 is a mere political scam which does not really exist.	11	28	372	1604	3.86	0.61
	Overall mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ)					3.47	0.70

With overall mean score ($\bar{x}$) of 3.47 and standard deviation (σ) of 0.70, both students and lecturers are quite aware of COVID-19 preventive guidelines.

Research question 2: How does the implementation of COVID-19 guidelines by university authorities influence the school sustainable development?

Table 2: Frequency, mean scores and standard deviation of students' and lecturers' opinions on implementation of COVID-19 preventive guidelines by university authorities

S/N	Statement (Items)	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ
	A post COVID-19 era:						
1.	Education as a public enterprise needs to be managed well by firm policy implementation.	1048	324	208	46	3.13	0.91
2.	School sustainable development is a mirage without strict adherence to rules and regulations.	808	480	200	58	2.97	1.02
3.	Observing appropriate educational laws/regulations, makes for the survival and good management of the education system.	840	490	200	44	3.04	0.96
4.	Education is an instrument for effecting national development, only if rules and regulations are observed.	836	327	202	100	2.82	1.06
5.	Students and lecturers need to be controlled by specific regulations and policies especially during emergency.	804	588	222	12	3.13	0.91
	Overall mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ)					3.02	0.97

Result of analysis reveals that 3.02 mean score ($\bar{x}$) and 0.97 standard deviation (σ) suggesting that the stakeholders in the university seem to be in agreement that effective implementation of COVID-19 guidelines enhances sustainable development in the school system.

Research question 3: How does the knowledge of psychology influence positive attitude of students and staff towards adhering strictly to COVID-19 control measures?

Table 3: Frequency, mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ) of responses to items on influence of Education Psychology on students' and staff's attitude to COVID-19 control measures

S/N	Statement (Items)	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ
	My knowledge of psychology reveals that:						
1.	Prevention is better than cure, so I need to avoid contracting COVID-19.	1240	300	90	65	3.26	0.71
2.	Cost of treating COVID-19 is high, so I will do all it takes to protect myself.	1172	483	60	26	3.35	0.69
3.	COVID-19 pandemic is a scam, I have nothing to fear.	12	80	444	1280	3.49	0.59

4.	COVID-19 is not deadly, I need not bother restraining myself from free movement.	10	66	627	1072	3.41	0.65
5.	When I imagine the trauma of isolating oneself, I feel convinced to protect myself from the virus.	1224	450	108	10	3.45	0.69
6.	Once infected, my family members will be at risk, so I will strictly adhere to COVID-19 guidelines.	1464	405	20	9	3.65	0.66
7.	Health is wealth, I will therefore observe all guidelines to the best of my ability.	976	498	180	20	3.12	0.72
	Overall mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ)					3.39	0.67

The overall mean ($\bar{x}$) of 3.49 and standard deviation (σ) of 0.68 implies that knowledge of Education Psychology influence students' and staff's positive attitude towards COVID-19 pandemic.

Research question 4: What are the observed lapses in the implementation of COVID-19 protocols against sustainable development?

Table 4: Frequency, mean and standard deviation of students' and staff's opinions on lapses in the implementation of COVID-19 protocols in the university

S/N	Statement (Items)	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{x}$	σ
	In my school:						
1.	Ban on large gathering is strictly observed by staff and students.	1364	305	64	12	3.36	0.68
2.	Proper use of facemask by staff and students is strictly monitored.	176	138	200	330	1.62	2.12
3.	Fumigation of all classrooms is done regularly.	80	132	312	300	1.58	2.21
4.	Contact tracing of infected persons is effectively implemented.	120	147	280	311	1.65	2.10
5.	There is provision for sanction of erring individual(s) or department(s) on COVID-19 protocols.	16	108	180	300	1.51	1.69
6.	Vaccination against COVID-19 is optional	1152	564	68	10	3.45	0.71
	Overall mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ)					2.20	1.59

The result of Table 4 analysis shows overall mean score ($\bar{x}$) = 2.20 and standard deviation (σ) = 1.59 which is interpreted to mean that there are lapses in the implementation of COVID-19 protocols in University of Calabar.

Discussion of the findings

Presentation of discussion follows the sequence of the analyses and results and with the order in which research questions are listed.

Table 1 contains analysis of staff and students' awareness of COVID-19 preventive measures. The range of mean scores and standard deviations are 3.86 and 3.11, and 0.61 and 0.71 respectively which is interpreted to mean that the responses to the five items agreed that students and lecturers are very much aware of COVID-19 preventive measures as presented by the Presidential Steering Committee (PSC) on the pandemic. A probable explanation for the observed trend in awareness of the respondents could be that the enlightenments or publicity given by the school authorities was effective. Majority of the respondents indicated being fully aware of the guidelines, the school must have done a good job of creating awareness.

A close look on the five items in table 2 about the influence of effective implementation of COVID-19 guidelines on sustainable development in the school system, revealed that adherence to law, orders and regulations leads to progress in a system. It is apparently not possible to manage any organization without laid down rules and regulations. This is also true as in a crisis situation like the COVID-19 pandemic. This result is in line with observation by Akorede (2014) that the survival of the educational system will affect all other systems.

It can be observed from table 3 that the overall mean score ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (σ) are 3.49 and 0.68 indicating that Educational Psychology has the potential for improving students' and staff's attitudes towards a desired intent. Appealing to people's inner minds can influence their reasoning: "thoughts create behaviour", as stated in Isangedighi (2007). This result may not be surprising when viewed from the fact that most stakeholders in the study have Psychology of Education background; it is therefore easier for them to listen to their inner selves.

A close examination of the results presented in table 4 revealed that five (5) out of six (6) items under test are considered to have received the endorsement of the respondents, indicating the presence of lapses in the implementation of COVID-19 preventive measures. These findings indicate that the stakeholders agree that; proper use of facemask is not strictly monitored; all classrooms are not regularly fumigated; contact tracing is not effectively done; there is no sanction for erring person(s) or departments and COVID-19 vaccination is not made compulsory. Overall mean score of 2.57 and standard deviation of 1.43 of respondents' opinions pointing to the fact that the school authorities have some lapses in implementing COVID-19 measures as directed by PSC. This may be associated

with the general attitude of persons including some highly placed ones towards some preventive measures of the pandemic.

Conclusion

The post COVID-19 era in the university system appears to witness a generally relaxed situation in observing the PSC's preventive measures which may not be in the best interest of the development of the schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. There should be increase in students' and lecturers' awareness of COVID-19 preventive measures.
2. There should be strict implementation of rules and regulations by the school authorities which will enhance sustainable development.
3. There should be regular workshops and seminars organized by Education Psychologists on sensitization of the university population aimed at improving the positive attitude of individuals against COVID-19.
4. COVID-19 vaccination should be made compulsory for both students and staff.

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