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## The Impact of COVID-19 on Academic Research among Lecturers in Higher Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria

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### **Abstract:**

*The advent of Covid-19 pandemic has altered events and activities in almost all areas of human endeavour including conduct of academic research in higher institutions of learning. To this end, many institutions, organizations and governments are assessing the impact of this disease with a view to recovering from it and adopting survival strategies to cope with it and in the post era. The purpose of this paper therefore is to find out the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State. The study adopted the descriptive research design. Two research questions and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. The population comprised all university lecturers in the three universities in Rivers State. The Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 360. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: 'Impact of Covid-19 on Research Questionnaire (ICRQ)'. The research questions were answered with mean and standard deviation, while the hypothesis was tested with t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that restriction on conference, workshop and seminar attendance, suspension of research activities and funding, adoption of virtual learning environment for conferences and paper presentations, slow network and speed of internet, high cost of data for internet connections, difficulty switching to the e-learning platforms, etc. Impact of Covid-19 on academic research was the same for all the lecturers – male and female in the higher institutions in Rivers State. The study recommended that adoption of virtual and e-learning platforms have come to stay. Lecturers should update their knowledge in line with the recent trend in order to be relevant in the university system.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, academic research, lecturers, higher institution, impact

### **1. Introduction**

Since the discovery of the Covid-19 virus, the world has not known peace as the fear of Covid-19 is the beginning of wisdom. All aspects of human endeavour have been impacted negatively. The health, education, economic, political, social and technological sectors have come under serious threat as a result of this pandemic. Also, academic activities in institutions of learning are crippled including research writing among teachers at all levels. In response to this health challenge, many institutions, organizations, families and governments are assessing the impact of this disease with a view to recovering from it and adopt survival strategies to cope with it.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) 'is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2). The first case was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019. It has since spread worldwide, leading to an ongoing pandemic' (Wikipedia, 2020). The symptoms of this disease as reported by US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) include fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell and sometimes no symptoms at all (World Health Organization, WHO, 2020). To prevent this disease measures such as hand washing, face coverings, quarantine, physical and social distancing are the protocols to be observed in order to curtail the spread. As at now management of this disease include supportive care, isolation and experimental measures. This disease no doubt has affected the way and manner businesses, social and educational services are being done in almost all the countries of the world. Currently, researchers, experiments and studies are ongoing on the right vaccination for this disease. The production of vaccines has been reported by some countries and mass production is being accelerated.

In educational institution especially institution of higher learning, many activities have been stalled such as teaching and learning, administration, promotion and research. The importance of research especially among lecturers in higher institutions cannot be overemphasized. Research is a process of creating knowledge that is published in teaching and learning as well as community services (Ojini, Ulayi&Udosen, 2015). Research is justified in education as a scientific process of exploiting knowledge through systematic process. Nenty as cited in Ojini, Ulayi and Udosen (2015) stated that just as research in pure sciences is the process of searching for truth, and hence creating knowledge about the behaviour of physical materials. Therefore, educational research is a scientific process of searching for the truth about educational realities, and hence creating knowledge on issues of human behaviour. Also, Travers cited in Agi and Yellowe (2008) stated that educational research is an activity directed towards the development of an organized body of scientific knowledge about events with which educators are concerned.

The cardinal duties of university lecturers include research, teaching and administrative duties in a specialist subject area. Research is very important as it is the basis on which lecturers are promoted to various ranks. Inability to carry out research and publish same leads to lack of promotion. Hence, the 'publish or perish syndrome' in the universities. Effective research activities among lecturers have a lot of advantages – high caliber manpower in the academic is harvested, adequate number of staff for accreditation, external assessment, appointment into various position such as vice-chancellorship and other sensitive positions reserved for those in the system are being produced.

Teaching and administrative duties are closely related to research. Modern methods of imparting knowledge are discovered by research. Hence no academic worth his/her position depends on old methodologies to deliver effectively in this modern times. Research therefore enhances teaching, learning and administration among other things. 'Lecturer's design, develop and deliver materials using a range of methods and platforms. They create course material, lesson plans, and curricula, conduct research and field work, engage with students, assist with processing applications, and also attend interviews, conferences, and meetings. The requirement to publish research work and general commitment to the job commonly results in lecturers working long hours including evenings and weekends. Jobzilla (2021) has enumerated the duties and responsibilities of lecturers to include:

- Preparing and delivering lecturers, tutorials, workshops, and seminars;
  - Developing curricula and course materials that can be used across a number of platforms.
  - Collaborating with other academics and lecturers to improve teaching methods and expand knowledge base;
  - Participating in teaching opportunities and initiative at the institution.
  - Providing support to students and other colleagues
  - Staying current by reading widely and producing published work in the field.
  - Setting and grading assignments, tests, and exams
  - Conducting research, and writing papers, proposals journal articles and books.
  - Attending and participating in meetings, conference, and other events in an outside of the institution.).
- Added to the aforementioned are supervision of students' projects, theses dissertations, and external examination outside their own universities.

The Covid-19 pandemic may have had a negative effect on the duties and responsibilities of lecturers since its discovery in Nigeria in February 2020, especially the conduct of research and publications. The spread of this disease led to 'lockdown' of all institutions in order to curtail its spread. 'This posed serious challenges to programme delivery and assessment in higher education institutions, with foreseeable long and short-term consequences' (Oluwasola&Sekitla, 2020). Oluwasola & Sekitla (2020) further opined 'that consequently, teaching and learning became home-based as educators and students worked away from their usual places of work engagement... and in early April 2020, statistics reported that approximately 1.6 billion, or 91.3% of learners in 188 countries across all levels of education were negatively affected by compulsory school closure as a result of the lockdowns'.

Furthermore, the impact of Covid-19 gave rise to online classes. Feedbackfruits.com (2021) explained that the outbreak of Covid-19 has made online classes the cornerstone of modern higher education. The benefits of online classes in higher institutions have been identified to include providing opportunities for higher education to deliver services for people continuing their education to leverage technology to reduce burden on teachers to use improved pedagogies better suited to maintaining student engagement; online classes enhances flexibility which in turn increases the inclusiveness of higher education, and online classes give opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds – socio-economic, colour, disabilities and location, access to learning (feedbackfruits.com, 2021). Also, academic conferences, seminars and papers were presented virtually online for publication and promotion exercises. The traditional method of conducting researches is giving way to online platforms.

There are studies carried out on the impact of Covid-19 on research. Naveen and Anders (2020) investigated effects of Covid-19 on business and research. They reported that 'the current outbreak has had severe economic consequences across the globe, and it does not look like any country will be unaffected. This not only has consequences for the economy; all of society is affected, which has led to dramatic changes in how businesses act and consumers behave'. Harper et al (2020) investigated the impact of Covid-19 on research. They reported that 'the sharing of research findings and research data has never been as rapid and efficient. The crises have also brought disease, health care back to the forefront of societal issues, and will have a lasting impact on public spending'. Harper et al (2020) further revealed in their study that 'the Covid-19 crises have led to a massive influx of publications. Not only are specialty journals being flooded with submissions by authors being unwittingly granted much needed writing time, but publications on Covid-19 have literally in undated us. More than 20,000 papers have been published in many prestigious journals'.

Radecki and Schonfeld (2020) in a research report on the impacts of Covid-19 on research enterprise reported that 'the Covid-19 pandemic and associated disruptions have had a major impact on the United States (US) academic research enterprise'. The key findings of the report include:

'The federal government provided substantial flexibility to universities in utilizing research finding at the beginning of the pandemic. Many traditional research activities were largely suspended in the spring into summer, other than Covid-19 related and other essential research. With federal flexibilities ending, universities scrambled to put in place necessary protections to allow laboratories and other research groups to safely resume their activities. Many but not all research activities have successful restarted, even if not all are at full capacity... the human impacts of the disruptions are vast. These include limitations and impediments facing international students and disruptions to researchers that differ by gender, care giver status, and career level. There are substantial unanswered questions about international talent flows,

the development of early career researchers, and setbacks in achieving gender equity. The report further stated that Covid-19 had financial impacts for universities in the finding of research activities.

Weiner (2020) reported that 'the impact on research in progress prior to Covid-19 was rapid dramatic, and no doubt will be long term. The pandemic curtailed most academic, industry and government basic science and clinical research, or redirected research to Covid-19'. Weiner further noted that in the long term, it is likely that the pandemic will force reallocation of research dollars at the expense of research areas funded prior to the pandemic. Libereurope.eu (2020) revealed that the impact of Covid-19 on research libraries across Europe was that the quality of library services was affected, but only a little.

Most countries all over the world, in order to mitigate the impact of covid-19 decided to temporarily close educational institutions and most activities including research in higher institutions were also halted. 'Conservative estimates for a few European Union (EU) countries consistently indicated that, on average, students will suffer a learning loss. It also suggested that Covid-19 will not affect students equally, it will influence negatively both cognitive and non-cognitive skills acquisitions, and may have important long-term consequences in addition to the short-term ones'. Dipietro, Biagi, Costa, Karpinski and mazza (2020), Kari, Maina and Naliaka (2020), hinted that academic and research institutions find themselves 'tasked with learning how to adapt in real-time amid the Covid-19 pandemic that is significantly disrupting the global higher-education sector'. The impact of Covid-19 on academic research could be as profound as the impact on teaching and other academic activities in higher institutions (Methodspace, 2020), and where possible researchers will switch modes from face-to-face to virtual or telephone data collection., Methodspace further stated that many project, dissertation and theses supervisors are recognizing that they will need to accommodate students who are not able to collect primary data as they planned to due to Covid-19. For students engaged in quantitative analysis and unable to collect their own data because of Covid-19, an alternative method is to use secondary data.

### *1.1. Statement of the Problem*

The Covid-19 pandemic from all indications has had an impact on almost all areas of human endeavor all over the world. Educational institutions are counting their loses because of the effects of the disease. Academic research writing was impacted especially in higher institutions in Rivers State. Academic activities were brought to a standstill because of the lockdowns that lasted for several weeks. Conferences, workshops and seminars earlier scheduled were cancelled. The problem of the study therefore was to find out the impact of Covid-19 on academic research activities in higher institutions in Rivers State.

### *1.2. Research Questions*

The following research questions guided the study:

- What is the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State?
- What is the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State based on gender?

### *1.3. Hypothesis*

The following hypotheses was formulated and tested in the study:

- There is no significant difference in the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State based on gender.

## **2. Methodology**

The design for the study was descriptive. The design was employed to find out the impact of Covid-19 on academic research activities among lecturers. The population of the study comprised all the lecturers in the three universities in Rivers State. The sample of the study consisted of 360 lecturers selected using the stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: 'Impact of Covid-19 on Academic Research Questionnaire (ICARQ)'. The ICARQ was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A elicited responses on the demographic data such as gender and faculty, while section B consisted items on impact of Covid-19 on academic research. The items were responded to on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The Cronbach alpha reliability method was used to obtain the reliability of the ICARQ and it yielded reliability coefficient of 0.78. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## **3. Results**

### *3.1. Research Question One*

What is the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State?

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Restrictions on conference, workshop and seminar attendance	3.73	1.20	Accepted
2	Suspension of research activities in the universities	2.84	0.93	Accepted
3	Suspension of research funding in the universities	2.56	0.85	Accepted
4	Adoption of virtual learning environment for conferences and paper presentations	3.01	1.05	Accepted
5	Slow speed and network of internet hinder proper delivery of research and conference proceedings	2.98	1.21	Accepted
6	High cost of data for internet connections hindered participation of lecturers in virtual conferences	3.30	0.89	Accepted
7	Difficulty switching to the e-learning platforms	2.65	0.74	Accepted
8	More time to work on research papers and articles	3.21	0.88	Accepted
9	Less interaction and sharing of ideas among lecturers due to no contact	2.83	0.92	Accepted
10	Loss of interest in academic research writing	2.51	1.08	Accepted

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Impact of Covid-19 on Academic Research among Lecturers

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institution in Rivers State. A closer look reveals that all the items were accepted as impact of Covid-19 on academic research activities. The acceptance of all the items was due to the fact that all the items were above the criterion mean of 2.5.

### 3.2. Research Question Two

What is the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State based on gender?

S/N	Items	Gender							
		Male				Female			
		N	$\bar{X}$	SD	RM	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	RM
1	Restrictions on conference, workshop and seminar attendance	200	2.79	1.00	Accepted	160	2.75	0.91	Accepted
2	Suspension of research activities in the universities	200	3.15	0.81	Accepted	160	3.30	0.95	Accepted
3	Suspension of research findings in the universities	200	2.82	0.74	Accepted	160	3.01	0.73	Accepted
4	Adoption of virtual learning environment for conferences and paper presentations	200	3.06	1.03	Accepted	160	2.81	1.01	Accepted
5	Slow speed and network of internet hinder proper delivery of research and conference proceedings	200	2.90	0.88	Accepted	160	3.05	0.90	Accepted
6	High cost of data for internet connections hindered participation of lecturers in virtual conferences	200	2.57	0.98	Accepted	160	2.92	1.12	Accepted
7	Difficulty switching to the e-learning platforms	200	3.00	1.04	Accepted	160	2.60	0.96	Accepted
8	More time to work on research papers and articles	200	2.64	0.76	Accepted	160	3.03	0.84	Accepted
9	Less interaction and sharing of ideas among lecturers due to no contact	200	2.85	0.91	Accepted	160	2.63	0.96	Accepted
10	Loss of interest in academic research writing	200	2.45	0.96	Accepted	160	3.20	0.90	Accepted
	Grand Mean	200	2.92	0.91	Accepted	160	2.93	0.93	Accepted

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Impact of Covid-19 on Academic Research among Lecturer Based Gender

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of impact of Covid-19 on academic research among based on male and female lecturers. The table further indicates that all the items were accepted as impact of Covid-19 on academic research by all the male and female lecturers. All items and the grand mean were above the criterion mean of 2.5.

### 3.2.1. Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State based on gender.

Gender	N	Mean (X)	SD	Tcal	Sig Level	P-Value	Decision
Male	200	2.92	0.91	0.10	0.05	0.46	Not Rejected
Female	160	2.93	0.93				

Table 3: T-Test Analysis of Significant Difference in the Impact of Covid-19 on Academic Research Based on Gender

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value is 0.10, significance level of 0.05 and the p-value of 0.46. Since the p-value is greater than the level of significance, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference between male and female lecturers on the impact of Covid-19 on academic research in higher institution in Rivers State.

## 4. Discussion

The result of research question one revealed that all the items on impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State were accepted. This means that, restriction on conference, workshop and seminar attendance, suspension of research activities and funding, adoption of virtual learning environment for conferences and paper presentations, slow network and speed of internet, high cost of data for internet connections, difficulty switching to the e-learning platforms, more time to work on research papers and articles, less interactions and sharing of ideas among lecturers, and loss of interest in academic research, were impact of Covid-19 on academic research. Further, the result of research question two revealed that both male and female lecturers accepted the above-mentioned impact of Covid-19 on academic research. The test of hypothesis one showed that there was no significant in the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lectures based on gender. This implied that Covid-19 had the same impact on academic research on both male and female lecturers. Hence, there was restriction on conference, workshop and seminar attendance, suspension of research activities and funding, adoption of virtual learning environment for conferences and paper presentations, less interaction and sharing of ideas among others.

The finding of this study is in agreement with Naveen and Anders (2020) who investigated the effects of Covid-19 on business and research and reported that the outbreak has had severe economic consequences across the globe. Harper et al (2020) finding supports this study. They investigated the impact of Covid-19 and reported that the sharing of research findings and research data has never been as rapid and efficient. Harper et al (2020) further revealed that the Covid-19 crises have led to a massive influx of publications. This finding is also supported by Radecki and Schonfeld (2020) whose study reported that many traditional research activities were largely suspended ... and universities scrambled to put in place protections to allow research activities to safely return. Also, there were international disruptions to researchers. Di Pietro et al (2020) is in agreement with the result of this study as their study revealed that academic and research institutions find themselves tasked with learning how to adapt in real-time amid the Covid-19 pandemic that is significantly disrupting the global higher-education sector.

## 5. Conclusion

The study has revealed the impact of Covid-19 on academic research among lecturers in higher institutions in Rivers State. The impact includes restrictions on conference, workshop and seminar attendance, suspension of research activities and finding, adoption of virtual learning environment for conferences and paper presentations, etc. The study also concluded that the impact of Covid-19 on academic research was the same for all the lecturers – male and female in the higher institutions in Rivers State. Therefore, there is need to adapt fully to other methods of conducting academic researches as Covid-19 may last longer than expected.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- University authorities should release more funds for research in the universities to fill the gap created during the pandemic.
- All network and internet facilities should be upgraded to enable lecturers have unlimited access to conferences taking place at any location.
- Adoptions of virtual and e-learning platform have come to stay. Lecturers should update their knowledge in line with the recent trend in order to be relevant in the university system.

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