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IMPACT OF COVID-19 DURING NIGERIAN EPIDEMIC: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY OF FINANCIAL CHALLENGES FACED BY PRIVATE SCHOOL PROPRIETORS IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The outbreak of Covid-19 has significantly affected the lives of all parts of the society. One of the most instant changes launched was the closure of educational institutions to decelerate the spreading of the virus. The study examines the financial challenges faced by private school proprietors in katagum local government area of Bauchi state, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrospective Cross Sectional Survey Research Design was used for this study. The study data were collected by face to face interview using structured questionnaire titled ''Investigation of the Impact of COVID-19 on private school proprietors in Azare Questionnaire (ICPSQ)'' from 22 June to 26 July, 2022. Descriptive statistics (frequency count and percentages) and inferential statistics of Pearson Moments Correlations were used to analyse the data. Results showed that 46 (100%) of the respondents agreed that COVID-19 pandemic has impact on private school finances and correlate with decline in enrollment and revenue, as well as increased operating costs related to COVID-19 prevention measures (r= -0.364,p=0.012). Additionally, it correlates that proprietors faced difficulties in accessing government-intervention fund (r = 0.318, p = 0.017) and palliatives (r = 0.318, p = 0.017). The study highlights the need for government innovative solutions to address the financial challenges faced by the private schools during the pandemic, and the need to ensure equitable access to education for all students.

Keywords: Covid-19; Pandemic; Private school; Health promotion; Lockdown; Intervention fund

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic influenced the lives of all segment of society as people were requested to self-quarantine in their homes to stop the outspread of the virus. The private schools in developing countries like Nigeria have been particularly vulnerable to the economic shocks caused

by the pandemic (Isiaka 2021). There were over 1.5 billion children in primary and secondary schools worldwide have been asked to stay at home as measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (UNESCO, 2021). The lockdown had consequential economic impact on private school proprietors, triggering financial problem encompassing job losses, pay cuts, and making it difficult for parents to afford private school fees. This has left many private school proprietors struggling to keep their schools afloat, pay their teachers and other staff, and maintain the facilities (Ogunode, 2020; Gbenemene, 2020).

The first case of covid-19 was reported in Nigeria by the federal ministry of Health on 27th February, 2020. This was the case of an Italian citizen who work in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February 2020. As at 30th September, 2021, Nigeria remained one of the ten countries most affected by COVID-19 on the African continent (Evelyn, 2022). From the emergence of the infectious disease in 2019 up to 30th August 2021, 216,229,741 persons have been infected with the disease and 4,496,681 of those infected have died globally. Nigeria alone has recorded 190,983 confirmed cases of COVID19 with 2,361 deaths as at 30 August 2021 (Evelyn, 2022; WHO, 2021).

The greatest fear associated with Covid-19 virus is that it can be transmitted through contact, droplets, and fomites, and by people who are asymptomatic (WHO, 2020). As a result, people are forced to remain isolated for fear of spreading the pandemic. These enabling people to increase control over their health and its determinants is the major concern of health promotion. Health promotion therefore is the process of enabling people to increase control over the determinants of health and thereby improve their health (WHO, 1998). As such, health promotion might incidentally be more important at the time of COVID-19 crisis than was ever before. The Nigerian government has taken numerous health, social, and economic measures to cushion the impact of COVID-19. Some of these measures include: mandatory quarantine, creation of dedicated treatment and isolation centers for COVID-19, intervention funds, palliative measures, and closure of schools and restriction of social gathering (lock down).

The major hypothesis in this study was the outbreak of Covid-19 has significantly affected the lives of all parts of the society. One of the most instant changes launched was the closure of educational institutions to decelerate the spreading of the virus. The study examines the financial challenges faced by private school proprietors in katagum local government area of Bauchi state, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of this study could have significant implications for private schools in the local communities and could inform future crisis planning and management for the private education sector. This study was conducted in response to the dearth of empirical research on the impact of the pandemic on private schools over long period of time in

the local communities in the North East Nigeria.

Method and Materials

Study Design: The research adopted a cross-sectional survey approach combined with a retrospective design. This design enables the exploration of associations and relationships pertinent to understanding the effects of COVID-19 on school proprietors' finances during the Nigerian epidemic

Study participants and Settings: The study participants consisted of school proprietors representing various private schools across primary and secondary education levels. These proprietors were sourced from diverse communities within the Katagum Local Government Authority.

Sample size: The sample of the study comprised 46 private schools proprietors/proprietress/administrators drawn from the population using purposive sampling technique. A proprietor in Nigeria, who owns private secondary schools, employs school administrators to help them manage it (Ogunode, 2020). It was purposive because the sample was drawn from the 46 registered private schools.

Study Procedures: The survey questionnaire was administered between June 22nd and July 26th, 2022, precisely two years following the COVD-19 pandemic. Data collection utilized a questionnaire as the primary instrument. The questionnaire adopted for this study was originally developed by Ogunade (2020) and was subsequently modified by the researcher specifically for this investigation. Prior to use, the questionnaire underwent a validation process by experts. The instrument was titled "Investigation of the Impact of COVID-19 on Private School Proprietors in Azare Questionnaire" (ICPSQ).The questionnaire comprised two distinct parts: Part A aimed to gather respondents' personal information and Part B solicited responses related to the perceived impact of COVID-19. The questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale format, wherein respondents rated their agreement level using categories: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD).

Validity of research Instrument: The adopted research instrument was submitted to the experts and jurors for corrections, observations and comments for content and face validity to ascertain the degree of accuracy with which the instrument measures what it was designed to measure.

Reliability of the research instrument: Reliability of the research Instrument was established by test re-tests method. A trial test was used to establish the reliability of the instruments. The procedure measured the degree of consistency overtime. A total of 10 copies of the questionnaire after establishing the validity, were distributed to the sample of the population. Two weeks later, the same questionnaires were redistributed to the same group of the respondents. The pilot testing provided the cronbach alpha of 0.76 as the index of reliability.

Method of Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics of simple percentage and frequency count was used to analyse the demographic

information of the respondents. Inferential statistics of Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the stated hypotheses using SPSS version 25.0.

Presentation of Results

Table 1 showed there were three sets of schools from Nursery, primary to secondary school. However, there are 11 (25.00%) primary school and 2(4.50%) nursery school, where there was 18 (40.90%) secondary school. It was also observed that 13 schools (28.3%) have all the school categories. Data on school ages reveals that the oldies schools were above 20 years, which was 7(16.30%), followed by13 (30.20%) schools that were 15-20 years old. Also, schools with 10-15years were 11(25.60%), and schools with 5-10 years were 12 (27.90%). The gender of the school proprietors were 22(52.40%) males and 20(47.60%) females, however, most of the school administrators were female despite the school was owned by males' proprietors.

Table 1: Information on demographic characteristic of the Respondents

variables		Frequency	Percentage
School category	Nursery	2	4.50
	Primary	11	25.00
	Secondary	18	40.90
	All	13	29.50
	Total	44	100.00
Age of school	5-10 years	12	27.90
	10-15 years	11	25.60
	15-20 years	13	30.20
	20 years above	7	16.30
	Total	43	100.00
Proprietor gender	Male	22	52.40
	Female	20	47.60
	Total	42	100.00

Table2: Responses on Impact of covid-19 pandemic during Nigerian epidemics among private school proprietors. Summary results of the research questions using simple percentage and frequency.

S/N	Items	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	%	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	%	Total
1	COVID-19 pandemic has effect on private school finances	33	13	100	-	-	100	46
2	COVID-19 pandemic influences retrenchment of staff in private schools	10	32	91.3	4	-	8.7	46
3	Received of COVID-19 intervention fund to alleviate financial constraint of private schools	20	12	71.1	11	2	28.8	46
4	Private school do paid their staff salaries during COVID-19 pandemic	2	7	21	22	12	79.1	46
5	Private school should be considered for federal government Palliative	20	15	76.1	9	2	23.9	46
6	International Organisation should extends aids to private schools	22	17	84.8	4	3	15.2	46

Table 2 shows the results analyses of the responses on the items to answer the research question.

Item 1: Does COVID-19 pandemic have impact on school finances? The result for the research question was on item one (1) that revealed 46 (100%) of the respondents ticked agreed that COVID-19 pandemic has impact on private school finances.

Private schools proprietors rely on tuition fees to operate and pay staff salaries. With many parents losing their jobs or experiencing reduced income, they may not be able to afford to pay tuition fees, resulting in a loss of revenue for the school. Additionally, schools had to spend money on additional cleaning and sanitation measures to ensure the safety of staff and students.

Item 2: Does COVID-19 influences retrenchment of staff in private school? The result for the research question was on item two (2) that revealed 42 (91.3%) of the respondents ticked agreed that COVID-19 pandemic has influence on retrenchment of staff in private school. With the closure of schools and the resulting loss of revenue, some school proprietors have had to lay off teachers and staff to cut costs. This has led to job losses and further financial hardship for the affected employees.

Item 3: Does private schools received any COVID-19 intervention fund from the federal government? The result for the research question was on item three (3) that revealed 31 (71.1%) of the respondents ticked agreed that private school received COVID-19 pandemic intervention fund. However, 13(28.8%) of the respondent ticked disagreed that private school received COVID-19 pandemic intervention fund.

Item 4: Does private school do paid their staff salaries during COVID-19 lock down? The result for the research question was on item four (4) that revealed 34 (79.1%) of the respondents ticked disagree that private school do paid their staff salaries, while 9(21%) of the respondents ticked agreed that private school do paid staff salaries during COVID-19 pandemic lock down.

Item 5: Does private school should be considered for federal government Palliative? The result for the research question was on item five (5) that revealed 35 (76.1%) of the respondents ticked agreed that private school should be considered for federal government palliative during COVID-19 pandemic.

Item 6: Does International organisation should extend aid to private school proprietor? The result for the research question was on item six (6) that revealed 39 (84.8%) of the respondent ticked agreed that international organisation should extend aid to private school proprietor during COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3: Correlations between impact of COVID-19 pandemic and private schools during COVID-19 pandemic lock down

Variables	r/p	Finances	Retrenchment	Intervention fund	Staff salary	Palliative	Aid
COVID-19 pandemic effect on finances	r	1	0.153	-0.136	-0.346	-0.110	0.244
	p		0.155	0.187	0.012*	0.232	0.051
COVID-19 pandemic influences on retrenchment	r	0.153	1	-0.136	-0.326	0.096	0.207
	p	0.155		0.187	0.016*	0.263	0.084
COVID-19 pandemic on intervention fund	R	-0.136	-0.083	1	0.000	0.318	0.076
	p	0.187	0.294		0.500	0.017*	0.309
COVID-19 pandemic on salary	r	-0.346	-0.326	0.000	1	0.241	-0.226
	p	0.012*	0.016*	0.500		0.060	0.072
COVID-19 pandemic and palliative	r	-0.110	0.096	0.318	0.241	1	0.005
	p	0.232	0.263	0.017*	0.060		0.487
COVID-19 pandemic and aid	r	0.244	0.207	0.076	-0.226	0.005	1
	p	0.050*	0.084	0.309	0.072	0.487	

r Pearson moment correlation test, p probability test. *p < 0.05, significant probability test.

Table3: Showed correlations between impact of COVID-19 pandemic and private schools during last year lockdown. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson moment correlation co-efficient.

HI: Private school proprietors in Nigeria experienced significant financial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H0: There is no significant relationship between Private school proprietors financial challenges in Nigeria and COVID-19 pandemic

1. **H0** There is no significant relationship between COVID-19 Pandemic and private school finance during last year COVID-19 lock down.

The representation that the COVID-19 pandemic had impact on private school finances have a slight negative correlation with staff salary payments(r= -0.364, p=0.012).There was significant relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and private school finance.

1. **H0** There is no significant relationship between COVID-19 Pandemic and retrenchment of staff of private school during last year COVID-19 lock down.

The representation that the COVID-19 pandemic had influence on retrenchment in private school have a slight negative correlation with staff salary payments(r= -0.326, p=0.016). This means that there was significant relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and retrenchment in private school.

3. H0 There is no significant relationship between private schools and COVID-19 government intervention fund during last year COVID-19 lock down.

The representation that the private school received federal government intervention fund during COVID-19 pandemic shows moderate positive correlation with palliative (r = 0.318, p = 0.017). There was significant relationship between private schools and COVID-19 government intervention fund.

4. **H0** There is no significant relationship between private school and payment of salaries during last year COVID-19 lock down.

Representations that the private school payment of salaries have a moderate negative correlation with finances during last year COVID-19 lock down (r = - 0.346, p = 0.012) and staff retrenchment (r = -0.326, p = 0.016). There was significant relationship between private schools and payment of salaries during last year COVID-19 pandemic lock down.

5. H0 There is no significant relationship between private school and federal government palliative during last year COVID-19 lock down.

The representation that the private school should be considered for palliative during COVID-19 pandemic was moderately positively correlated with federal government intervention fund (r = 0.38, p = 0.017). There was significant relationship between private schools and federal government palliative during last year COVID-19 pandemic lock down.

6. H0 There is no significant relationship between private school and International organisation aid during last year COVID-19 lock down

The representation that the private school should receive aid from international organisation during COVID-19 pandemic is moderate positively correlated with private school finances (r = 0.244, p = 0.05). There was significant relationship between private schools and the need of aid from international organisation during last year COVID-19 pandemic lock down.

Discussion

This research delves into the financial hardships encountered by private school proprietors within local communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that private schools in local communities experienced a significant decline in enrollment and revenue during the pandemic, reporting a decline of up to 60% in pupil/ student enrollment. This demonstrated the financial challenges faced by private school proprietors in local communities, who play a critical role in providing access to education for a larger segment of the local population in North - East, Nigeria.

In a study by Gupta et al. (2020) found that the pandemic has had a significant impact on private schools in local communities in India, with many school owners reporting a decline in revenue and an increase in operating costs due to COVID-19 prevention measures. This is consistent with the present study on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on education systems in local communities. Similarly, this study contributed to the literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector in local communities, particularly in low- and middle-income communities in North- East, Nigeria.

In a retrospective study conducted by Okereke and Nwobodo (2021) described the financial challenges faced by private school proprietors in Nigeria cities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Echoing similar findings, Adekunle and Adekunle (2021) conducted a similar study in a big city like Lagos, their research highlighted notable financial downturns attributed to declining enrollment and revenue, coupled with heightened operational costs arising from COVID-19 preventive measures.

In a holistic approach Okeke and Ofoegbu (2021) examined the impact of the pandemic on the entire education sector. The study found that the pandemic had resulted in the closure of many private schools which particularly affected their financial capacity due to their reliance on tuition fees. However, in a similar retrospective study conducted in 2020 by Olaniyan et al. (2021) found that private schools in Nigeria had experienced a significant decline in enrollment and revenue due to the pandemic. This study also highlighted many parents unable to pay school fees due to financial hardship in the local communities.

In a study by Akpan and Etuk (2021) highlights the need for government to support private schools in Nigeria. By providing tax relief, grants, and low-interest loans. Similarly, a study by Dang and Nguyen (2021) suggested that government

should support for private schools in Vietnam, which could include financial assistance for the implementation of COVID-19 prevention measures. This study highlights the need for government support to ensure the sustainability of private schools, which are an important component of the education system in local communities in Nigeria. Policy interventions and financial support are needed to help private schools in Nigeria and other developing countries to survive the economic impacts of this pandemic or similar one in the future.

One of the strengths of this study, its focus on the financial challenges faced by private school proprietors in local communities, which have received limited attention in the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on education. Strengths of the study are the use of a retrospective analysis, which allowed the researchers to examine the impact of the pandemic on private schools after a longer period of time.

However, the study has some limitations that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the sample size of 46 registered school proprietors is relatively small and may not be representative of the larger population of private school proprietors in local communities in Bauchi -State. Secondly, the study does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector in Nigeria communities, as it only focuses on the experiences of private school proprietors only in North-East Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has invaluable contribution to the literature on the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector in Nigeria. It demonstrates the financial challenges faced by the private school proprietors in local communities. It showed the need for government support to ensure the sustainability of private schools. However, further research is needed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector of the local communities in Nigeria.

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