COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RELATED LOCKDOWN REGULATIONS: WHAT A CHALLENGE TO THE CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

Coronavirus (COVID-19) originated in Wuhan, China in late 2019; the COVID-19 pandemic has spread to over 177 countries and territories around the world (Readfern, 2020). As the pandemic spread like fire in the bush, most of the nations in the world legislated and implemented social restrictions and lockdowns (social distancing, closing non-essential businesses and services, restricting local movement, etc.) all in an efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus (Ashby, 2020). Most of the social interactions changed online, as did the education, with the ways in which we interact changing suddenly, in many cases literally overnight. With the introduction of social distancing and lockdowns, it was soon apparent that the unanticipated effects upon education in Nigeria could be dramatic (Farrell and Tilley, 2020). This quickly led to the closure of schools, colleges

ABSTRACT

The novel coronavirus (COVID – 19) pandemic has put a big question mark to global education. The outbreak of Coronavirus redirected governmental relations to restrictions of movement of persons, closed down schools and other activities globally for the reason to protect lives and minimize the spreads of the disease. Despite the lockdown

and universities throughout the country with government instructions to follow social distancing that could help to flatten the infection curve and reduce total fatalities from the disease.

However, the pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities and shortcomings of the contemporary education systems and has also emphasized the need for virtual learning development, particularly in times like these, for both developed and developing countries. The greater online or virtual educational services and communication may become a norm post-pandemic. The contemporary situation has challenged deep rooted notions about the role of educational institutions in providing quality education, accessibility, mode of delivery, the importance of lifelong learning, and teacher's perceptions about the type of learners. This may provide insight to the education officers and

regulations, yet, global community is found in serious danger as the record of casualties and spread have continually increasing day-after-day as if no any measure was put to deter it. The lockdown give an impression that the world is moving to online activities. With very little warning, the whole approach to education through classroom teaching and learning became unviable, with little planned to replace it. Educational programmes on television and radio were quickly launched by many State governments in Nigeria, they were only accessible to those with access to a television or a radio set. Similarly, virtual learning was only accessible to those with internet access. The study employed a cross-sectional survey method and utilized both primary and secondary method of data collection. Data were collected and analyzed through the use of both quantitative and qualitative instruments. The study revealed that lack of proper planning and, specifically, a failure to consult education officers affect teaching and learning outcomes during lockdown. The study strongly recommends that governments and stakeholders in education should communicate with internet providers for reasonable pricing of their services to students and institutions of learning.

Keywords: Covid-19, Education, Lockdown Regulation, Virtual learning, Teaching

policymakers for the overall improvement of the education systems around the world.

Adaptation and relying on the virtual learning during a pandemic may cause a shift in adopting more online elements in the teaching and learning by the education officers. This, however, has many practical problems and limitations, in terms of availability of technological devices for education. There is a vast "technological devices inequality" that exists in society. One cannot assume that all students, as well as teachers, would have access to internet connectivity and associated technological devices outside of their schools, to be able to communicate. It would be facile to say that the students face major hurdles with remote learning as face-to-face communication is more conducive to the learning process, presenting a better opportunity to sharing knowledge and asking for assisting, "easier" and more interactive (Miliszewska, 2007).

Affordability is another factor to limit the access to virtual learning with students from less privileged society facing a greater burden. The impact of accessibility and affordability can have serious implications on students in education sector unless appropriate government policies are in place which can ensure affordability and accessibility of the internet to students. The sudden change to adapt and implement e-learning or virtual learning has led to over-work, stress among the teaching faculty. The teachers need to re-imagine modes of curriculum planning, development of e-content, e-assessment, and e-reporting which may have been developed without proper planning and forethought. To achieve more focused teaching and learning outcomes and to develop effective e-learning methods, teachers should be provided with professional autonomy and trusted with their judgment; and ensure clear and compassionate communication with all the stakeholders of the higher education (Rashid and Yadav, 2020).

The study focused on one aspect of contemporary educational research and development in the three selected States in Nigeria, the methodological approach may be more broadly applicable, and the substantive findings of relevance for comparisons both to other States of the Federation and other countries with similar socio-demographic

and education profiles. Also the study was carried out in the 3 selected states in Nigeria which include Abuja, Kaduna and Kano. The study was completed in 6 months in total, including planning, field survey, drafting and report writing.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to unearth and unpack the major challenges of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown regulations on contemporary educational research and development in Nigeria. The following are the specific objectives of the study:

1- To mitigates the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes during national stay-at-home lockdown.
2- To identify the effectiveness of virtual learning Approach during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.
3- To examine the biggest obstacle to effective response faced by both teachers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method and utilized both primary and secondary method of data collection. The study employed a triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, comprising questionnaires, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The population for a study was limited to the students themselves and those who are key stakeholders directly involved in operating, managing or controlling the education system. Though the challenges of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown affect everybody in the selected states, it was necessary to limit the scope of participants for reasons of resource management. The population included policy makers, managers of the policies that are implemented, operational staff that implement policies, teachers, lectures, young male and female (if any) students as well as elected leaders.

The lack of comprehensive lists or sampling frame of the students in any location of the selected States during lockdown or the teachers who control and manage them meant that it was not possible to deploy any

form of random selection. The study therefore adopted a multi-stage sampling method that enabled the characteristics of each group to be deployed to best effect. The sample size was finally determined by the available resources for the study. A total of 135 respondents were selected for each of the three states. The entire total number of respondents is 405. The break down for each state is illustrated in Table 1 below.

The sample selection methods were by necessity varied in response to the nature of the population of the study. The only category of respondents that were readily available on a comprehensive list was Head teachers/Principals of the Schools. However due to the nature of government employment each of them have specific duties which clearly identified who qualified to be studied and those who didn't. It was therefore possible to identify the required sample. Unfortunately the numbers of those who actually qualify fall short of what was planned. The selection process against categories is reflected in table 1 below for categories 1 and 5. Other samples were purposively drawn on the basis of informant inputs as stated in 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 in table1 below.

Informants and community guides supported the research teams to identify and purposely select subjects where the purposive sample selection method was indicated.

Table 1: Categories of Population, Units, Data Collection Methods and Sample Selection.

S/N	Category of Population	Minimum of Units	Data Collection Methods	Selection Method
1.	Educational Policy makers (Permanent Secretaries, Directors etc. of key MDAs responsible for education)	10	Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD)	Census (all units)
2.	Education Officers/Teachers in Community/Voluntarily Schools	10	Key Informant Interviews (KII)	Purposive

3.	Education Officers/Teachers in Privates Schools	10	Key Informant Interviews (KII)	Purposive
4.	Education Officers/Teachers in Public Schools	10	Key Informant Interviews (KII)	Purposive
5.	Head teachers/Principals of the Schools (Both community, private and public)	10	Questionnaire	Random (drawn from list)
6.	Lecturers in Post-Secondary Schools/Universities	35	Questionnaire	Purposive
7.	Students (Both Secondary, Post-Secondary and University)	50	Questionnaire	Purposive/ Cluster
		135		

Source: Field survey, 2021

The proposed multi-method approach was necessary to enable the deployment of methods that can best extract data in the most productive manner. Hence, the use of Key informant Interviews (KII), Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) was necessary. Each method was carefully selected after due consideration of each category of samples, its characteristics, potential depth of knowledge of the theme and availability for lengthy engagement. It should be noted that the FGD was utilized to gain in-depth details following the findings from the main study; especially around government policies, interventions, achievements and challenges therein.

The data analysis included a quantitative analysis based on the data generated from the questionnaires and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The intention was to determine distributions, spread, ranges, ratios/proportions, bivariate and multi-variate analysis (where required) to show the relationship between key variables and other variables that influence them especially the variables

that influence the government decision to restricts movements and close schools and its negative effects. The presentation in the subsequent section will show how interesting and widespread some of the major findings have been. Qualitative analysis was conducted for data generated through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and the Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The presentation of this part of the analysis also includes snapshots of what respondents feel or felt about the situation presented in quotes where necessary.

Major Findings

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected teaching and learning outcomes throughout the country, causing Schools, Colleges and Universities to close. The shutdown has affected almost all Nigerian States. 97% of respondents to the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes during lockdown said that schools were forced to close in their State and, of these, 95% said all schools were forced to close.

Have schools in your State been forced to close as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
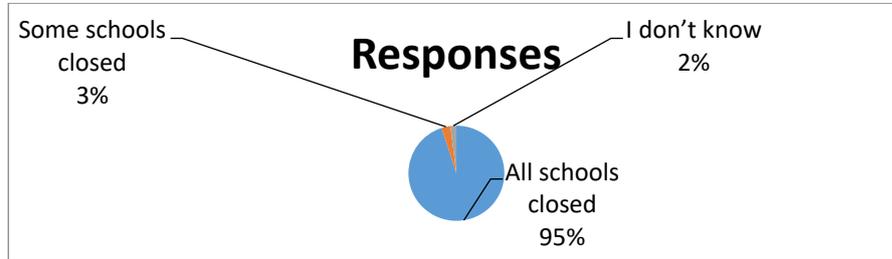
Yes = 97%   No = 1%   I don't know = 2%

Figure 1:
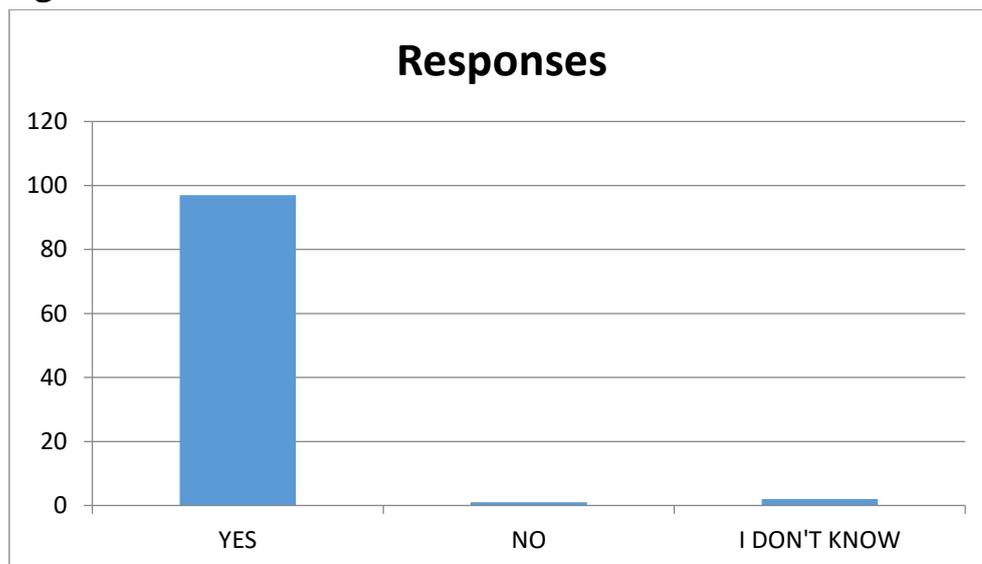
Source: Field survey, 2021

If 'Yes' were

    a. All schools closed   **b.** Some schools closed   **c.** I don't know
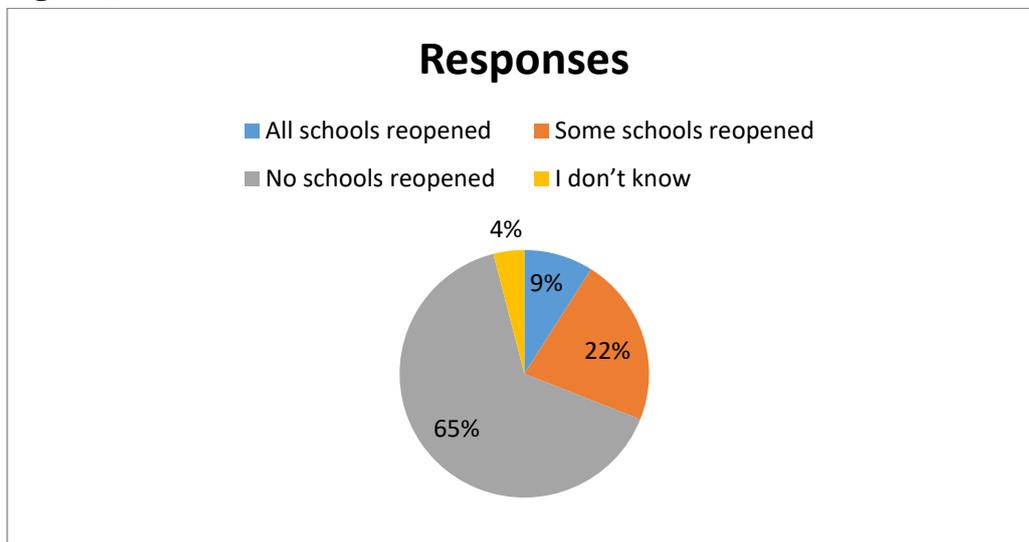
Figure 2:

Source: Field survey, 2021

If 'Yes' have:

a. All schools reopened   **b.** Some schools reopened   **c.** No schools reopened **d.** I don't know

Figure 3:

Source: Field survey, 2021

The closure of schools and colleges, however, represents only one aspect of the response to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes during national stay-at-home lockdown. It is a particularly disturbing one. As UNICEF Report (2020) points out "Global

school closures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic present an unprecedented risk to student's education, protection and wellbeing." Although some international organizations, such as UNESCO Report (2020), established a Global Education Coalition, sought to facilitate virtual learning and to assist countries to reach young people who are most at risk, in practice, but African governments have had little support. As such consequence, many individual education institutions have been left to fend for themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic arrived with very little warning and most State governments had little time to plan an effective response. Despite the fact that many of them coped so well in the circumstances may perhaps be the end result of having to face similar public health emergencies in the recent past. None of them, however, has had to deal with a crisis of this scale with such devastating consequences for teaching and learning outcomes.

So, in light of the high level of support for school closures, the survey shows a much lower level of satisfaction with the response of their State governments. 43% were satisfied with the actions taken by their Government to reduce the effect of the pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes.

How satisfied or dissatisfied with the actions your State Government is taking to reduce the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes?
Figure 4:

Responses

■ Responses

| Satisfied	Dissatisfied	I don't know
43	50	7
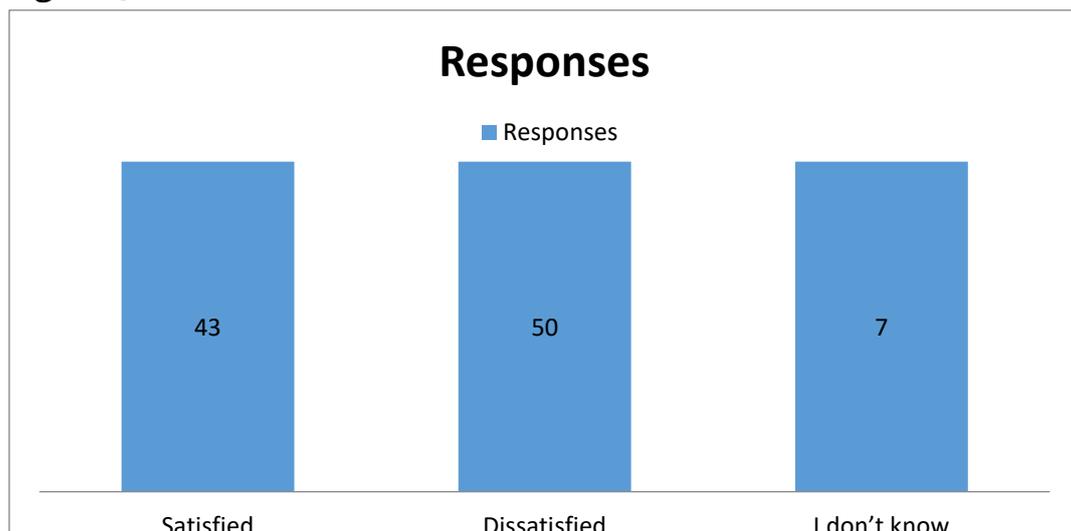
Source: Field survey, 2021

One of the significant criticisms of the approach of many State governments was the lack of proper planning and, specifically, a failure to consult education officers/teachers. 32% of respondents thought that their State Government took insufficient account of the views and experience of education officers in developing its response to the pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes.

Do you think your State Government has taken sufficient consideration of the views and experience of education officers in developing its response to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning outcomes in your State?
Figure 5:
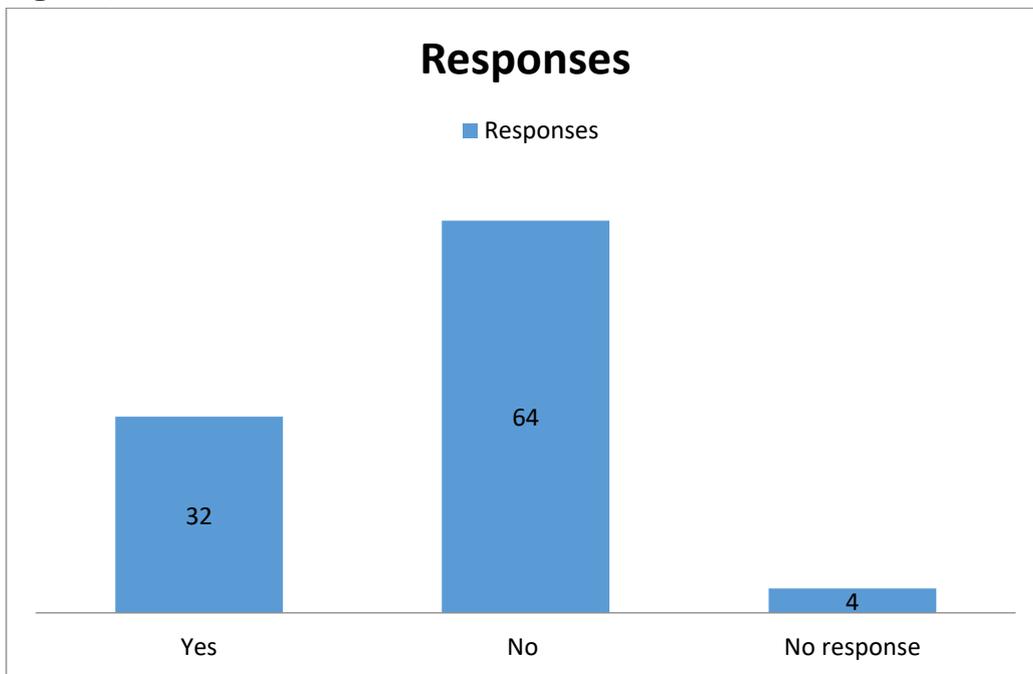
Source: Field survey, 2021

Although 71% said their State Government had announced a virtual learning approach in response teaching and learning outcomes during pandemic lockdown, while 25% responded by saying no and only 4 who have not responded.
Not all State governments are the same in their approaches, though some respondents were very skeptical of their response to their State Government, whereas others were full of praise for the approaches that

were taken. Their responses reflected not only respondents' own experiences, but also the ingenuity, flexibility and room for manoeuvre of their State governments in widely differing circumstances.

Has your State Government announced a virtual learning approach in response to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown?
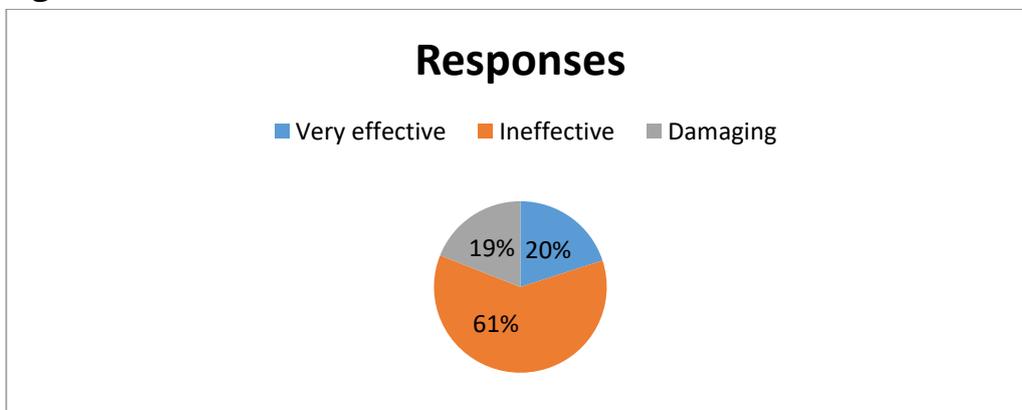**Figure 6:**

Resposes

- Yes
- No
- No response

4%
25%
71%
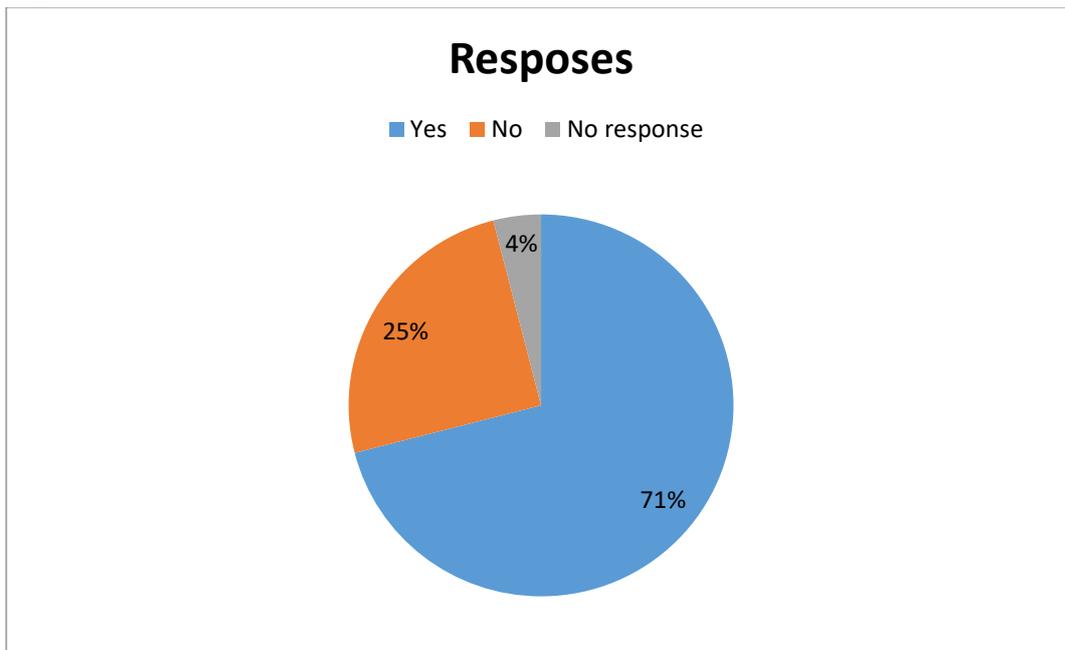
Source: Field survey, 2021

If 'Yes', how effective do you think your State Government's virtual learning approach is in providing teaching and learning outcomes when schools are closed?
Figure 7:

Responses

- Very effective
- Ineffective
- Damaging

20%
19%
61%

Source: Field survey, 2021

COVID-19 pandemic lockdown has seen a huge boost to existing trends towards greater online education, business, work, health, culture, entertainment and leisure. It seems likely that most of these changes will remain once the main COVID-19 pandemic lockdown is over. However, already today it is clear that digital technology, as the 21st Century's general purpose technology that underlines most if not all other technologies and innovations, needs to be seen as complementing and supporting human activity rather than completely substituting it.

The major the biggest obstacles to effective response faced by both teachers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown introduced by governments, institutions and teachers were seen by respondents as the lack of:

- affordable and accessible electricity and connectivity (49%)
- access to appropriate ICT devices (30%)
- conducive learning atmosphere at home (23%)
- accessibility of learning materials and appropriate curriculum (11%)
- capacity building, personal development and training (71%)

In your State, what do you think is the biggest challenge with regard to using virtual learning approach effectively during the COVID-19 lockdown?
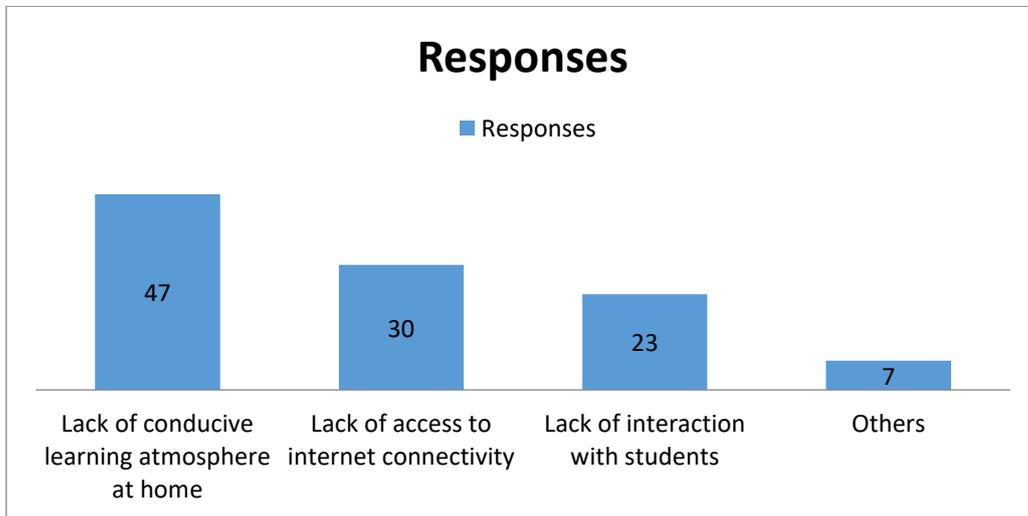
Figure 8:
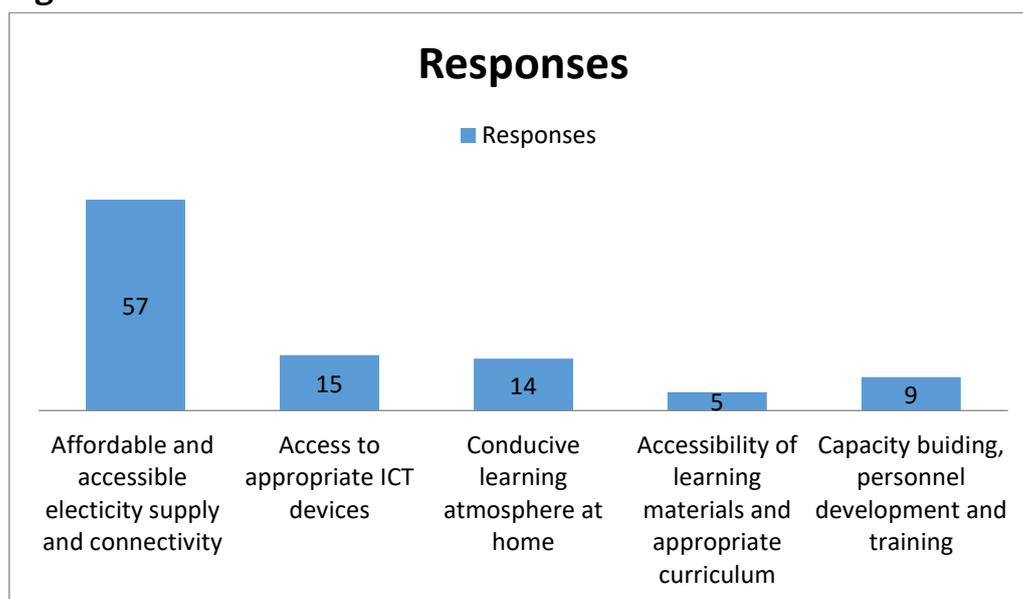
Source: Field survey, 2021

In your State, what do you consider to be the most significant obstacle faced teachers and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?
**Figure 9:**

Source: Field survey, 2021

For many education officers, the major obstacle was the lack of appropriate training to conduct and integrate virtual learning in their teaching (71%). Other groups identified other obstacles; some were distinct, others overlapped and were interdependent.

Do you feel that you received adequate appropriate training before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown concerning how to adjust in providing virtual learning for students?
Figure 10:
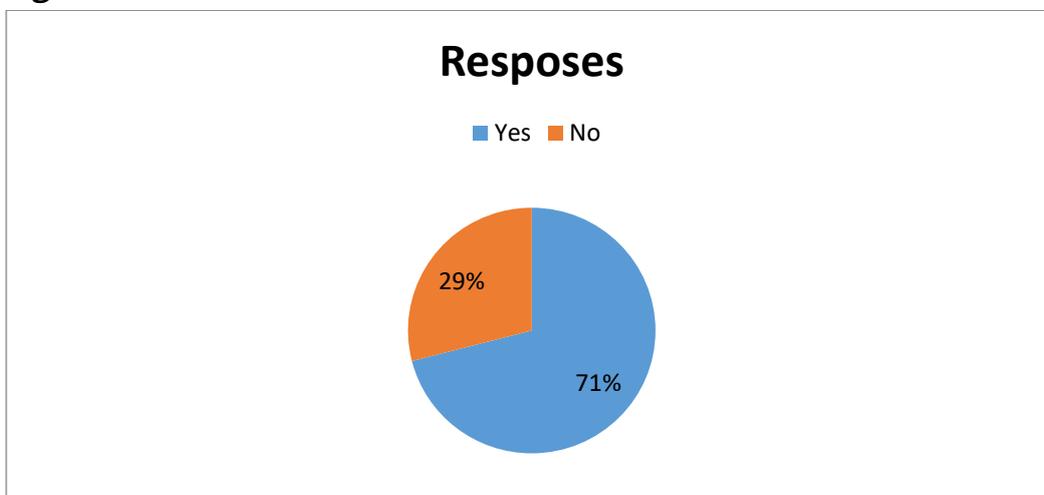
Source: Field survey, 2021

Conclusion

This study has attempted to establish the challenges of educational research and development during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria. Post-pandemic contemporary educational research and development in Nigeria may need to identify the important issues that they may face in teaching and learning outcomes and prepare to take tough decisions in the future. The stakeholders in education need to reflect on their educational vision and mission to ensure students learning outcomes and standards of educational quality are not compromised. The State government will have to engage and consult all their educational stakeholders in the nuanced balancing of financial costs and public health that are intertwined with missions of education, knowledge creation, and service to society. The educational institutions in Nigeria must be ready for a tough road ahead post-pandemic where their decisions will shape and steer the future of their students.

Major Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown experience has provided plenty of lessons for decision makers at all levels in Nigeria and serve as an opportunity to integrate virtual learning across the education sector. Respondents to the virtual learning approach contributed an array of ideas and suggestions for practical improvements to ensure that Nigerian education sector emerges from the pandemic stronger and better prepared for the future. These ideas and suggestions form the basis of the recommendations, which we offer below, for action at various levels. Taken together, we believe they could amount not merely to a plan to make Nigeria contemporary educational research and development more resilient to similar health emergencies in the future, but also to a welcome stimulus for virtual learning and a boost for plans for a transformed Nigeria. Hence, based on these findings it is recommended that the government at all levels should partner with relevant stakeholders and agencies inside and outside the country to:

1- Legalize, recognize and accredit virtual/online learning activities and outcomes.

2- Assist institutions of learning to disregard fears from uninformed students and parents and consider virtual learning as credible as face-to-face qualifications.

3- Communicate with internet providers for reasonable pricing of their services to students and institutions of learning.

4- Reduce or lift taxes and dues on all media and technological equipment and devices.

5- Revisit and review regulations concerning entry requirements for students (give special consideration for IT literacy), and relax staff/student ratio and other requirements for face-to-face setup, since the disease has come to stay.

6- Enter into agreements with internet providers to make all education sites free or at least discounted; Embrace blended learning, dis-aggregate the levels unto more than one platform or embark on massive capacity building of education officers; make standardized content of pre-tertiary schools available on a dedicated platform, teaching lessons through other medium for example radio, TV etc.

7- Take off taxes from data cost, price of devices, give spectrum at a lower cost and ask telecommunication operators to lower prices

8- Draw up, publish and consult widely on pandemic management plans, to ensure the continuity of education research and development in any future pandemic. And also, put in place a platform with policy makers and education officers to provide a set of solutions available to the majority of learners. Design a pandemic plan strategy to maintain the school continuity for the next stoppage.

9- Prioritize the training of education officers in the use of ICT and in conducting lessons online. Finally, encourage and support institutions financially so that they can develop the infrastructure for an online teaching in all institutions. And also, the Government should make it compulsory for all education officers to do a course on integration of ICT in teaching and learning.

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