



## PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: A NEED TO REVIEW THE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

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**ABSTRACT:** *The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe disruptions to educational systems globally, with significant psychosocial implications for students in low- and middle-income countries. This study investigated the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 on the Nigerian educational system, focusing on students' perceptions of the pandemic, depression, hopelessness, and perceived social support. A descriptive survey design was employed, involving 200 undergraduate students (109 males, 91 females) from Ekiti State University, Nigeria. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire incorporating adapted measures from the Beck Depression Inventory, Beck Hopelessness Scale, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Independent t-tests were used to test four hypotheses. Findings indicated that students' perceptions of COVID-19, levels of depression, and hopelessness significantly influenced their perceptions of the educational system, reflecting increased psychological distress and reduced educational optimism following prolonged institutional closures. In contrast, perceived social support did not significantly influence educational perceptions, suggesting the relative stability of social networks during the pandemic. The study underscores the substantial psychological impact of educational disruption. It highlights the need for policy interventions that integrate digital learning infrastructure and institution-based psychological support services to enhance resilience within the Nigerian educational system.*

**KEYWORDS:** Psychosocial effects, COVID-19 pandemic, Educational System and Policies.



## INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus, also known as the COVID-19 pandemic, is basically and majorly a medical and health crisis that needs a collective approach to curtail its spread. However, a lot of measures have been put in place to curtail the spread of the virus in countries all over the world. Many countries have shut down educational institutions from primary to tertiary level. The pandemic forms the dilemma national policymakers are facing to decide between closing all schools (to reduce physical contact among pupils/students and teachers) or keeping schools open (allowing workers to work and maintaining the economy). The shutdown of schools was seriously felt by many families around the globe: homeschooling is not only a massive shock to parents' productivity but also to children's social life and learning. Teaching is moving online on an untested and unprecedented scale. Student assessments are also moving online with a lot of trial and error and uncertainty for everyone. Many assessments have simply been cancelled. Importantly, these interruptions will not just be a short-term issue but can also have long-term consequences for the affected cohorts and are likely to increase inequality (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020).

Closing down of schools is not only felt by students, teachers, and families but has far-reaching economic and societal consequences. The shutting-down of educational institutions due to the pandemic revealed various social and economic issues that have been existing for decades ranging from student indebtedness, digital learning ability, national food security, parent-child relationship, and homelessness, as well as access to basic human facilities such as perfect childcare, standard health care facility, economic downturns, poor housing schemes, epileptic power supply, internet access, the poor banking system and disability services. The impact of the pandemic was more severe for disadvantaged children and their families compared to its effect on families with high socioeconomic status, causing disadvantaged families and their children to experience interrupted learning, compromised nutrition, childcare problems, and consequent economic cost to families who could not work (UNESCO, 2020). As of 27th July 2020, approximately 1.725 billion learners were affected by the school closures in response to the pandemic. According to UNICEF monitoring, 106 countries are currently implementing nationwide closures and 55 are implementing local closures, impacting about 98.6 percent of the world's student population, but 48 countries' schools are currently open (UNESCO, 2020).

The word psychosocial is a compound word consisting of two different words: psychological and social. Psychosocial refers to variables or issues that are psychological and social. It encompasses two categories of variables; the first consists of psychological attributes like hostility, depression, and hopelessness, which exist at the individual level and are likely to be a result of the process of socialization. The second category is more structural, such as work conditions. These two categories work synergistically at the individual level, as can be seen from social support at work, which is a function of both work conditions and personal social interaction skills.

Psychosocial factors like attitude, self-efficacy and social interaction of students play a great role in students' academic performance and are essential for the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning processes. The term "psychosocial" has a broad meaning when considering health research and social epidemiology. A study has revealed that psychosocial factors are key determinants of students' academic performance (Fishbein, 1967; Bandura, 1986; Brophy, 2001). But in the course of this study, the psychological variables will be limited



or streamlined to depression and hopelessness, while social variables will be limited to social support.

Depression can be a hindrance to every aspect of a person's life, especially one's academic performance. According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (2012), clinical depression is defined as a mood disorder caused by many factors, including genetic predisposition, personality, stress, and brain chemistry. A few common symptoms of depression are changes in appetite and weight, sleep problems, loss of interest, withdrawal from family and friends, irritability, fatigue, trouble concentrating, and suicidal thoughts (Caroline, 2016).

A study conducted by Hysenbegasi, Hass, and Rowland (2005) to determine the relationship between depression and academic performance had two groups: the control group and students with depression. The control group had no diagnosis of depression and no self-report of at least three symptoms of depression, while the students with depression were diagnosed at the on-campus Health Centre. The academic performance of the students was measured using their GPAs. Students completed a survey that asked them about their employment status and whether their mental health impacted their ability to attend class, study, and complete assignments. The outcome of the study revealed that depression has a significant relationship with a lower GPA of 0.49, which is equivalent to half a letter grade. Also, depressed students reported missing more classes, tests and assignments compared to the control group. They also dropped more courses and missed more social events.

The word "social support" for students could be seen from different perspectives, ranging from fellow students, family, and friends (peer group), to teachers, the immediate environment and community, or even the social network group in which they belong. Social support can be in the form of material assistance or the form of emotional support (Safree & Adawiah, 2011). Several study outcomes have indicated that the individual's adjustive capacity is strongly linked to the quality of availed and received social support (Nahid & Sarkis, 1994; Holahan, Valentiner & Moos, 1995; Safree & Adawiah, 2011). Findings of numerous studies appear to be convergent on the idea that social support constitutes a very significant factor in determining positive outcomes among children and adolescents (Arslan, Cardark & Uysal, 2013; Uglesia, Stover & Liporace, 2014).

Steinberg and Darling (2005) examined the relationship between social support and academic achievement among a sample of students and found that social support emanating from family and friends appeared to have some significant influence on the academic performance and long-term educational plans of the students. The crucial role played by social support, particularly from family and friends, in an individual's performance has been underscored by many studies. In a study carried out by Steinberg and Darling (1994), students were directly requested to report on the extent to which their parents and friends encourage them, inboard ramifications, to put up an excellent academic performance in their institutions of learning. On the part of the concerned parents, they were asked to indicate their level of involvement in their wards' school activities, the standards of performance, as well as their expected outcomes for their wards' performance. For friends, the questions were about the level of premium they attached to academic achievements and the extent to which they were supportive of high performance among their friends. Findings of the study revealed that both family and friends significantly influenced the academic performance of the students.



## **Objectives**

COVID-19 affected the educational system in Nigeria in many ways. It abruptly stops the academic calendar of every institution, from primary to tertiary schools, which gives room for the students to become a burden to their parents and society in general. Children who are supposed to be in the classrooms learning are now roaming about the street aimlessly, which in turn poses various threats to the children, who are of age to be endangered in one way or another, and also affects society as a whole.

The objectives of this study are to identify the potential psychosocial side effects of COVID-19, to examine its impact on academic performance, and to review the country's educational system to prevent a similar future occurrence.

## **Statement of the problem**

The sudden emergence of the pandemic worldwide has become a threat to the health, social, economic, and political situations of individuals and countries globally. COVID-19 paralyzed almost everything in the entire world, which made every country introduce possible measures by which the spread of the pandemic could be controlled and curtailed. The measures that were put in place by governments in every nation affected the educational system of their respective nations. This measure caused all schools to be closed down, ranging from lower schools to tertiary institutions, which in turn made nearly all wards lose touch with educational values. Based on this observed outcome of the measures put in place to curb the spread of the pandemic, the study examines the extent to which COVID-19 affected the educational system by viewing it from a psychosocial perspective.

The purpose of the study is to determine whether students' perception of COVID-19 will have a significant influence on the educational system, to know the significant influence of hopelessness on the educational system, to determine the level of the significant influence of depression on the educational system, and to know if social support will have a significant influence on the educational system.

## **Research hypotheses**

The hypotheses for the study are

- i. Students' perception of COVID-19 will have a significant influence on the educational system.
- ii. Hopelessness will have a significant influence on the educational system.
- iii. Depression will have a significant influence on the educational system.
- iv. Social support will have a significant influence on the educational system.



## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Design and Population**

The design used for this study was a descriptive survey. The population used for the study was undergraduate students in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, comprising male and female students.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

The samples for the study were students who, during the period of this research, were in the second and final level of their studies at the university. A small-scale study was adopted, which covered only a university in Ekiti State. At the period of this research, and due to restrictions on movement and gathering of people based on the pandemic experience in the nation, the researchers made the questionnaire available for the participants online using the Google Docs application, and the researchers shared the link for the questionnaires on a social platform where different students in the second and final years responded to the questionnaire items. The participants used for the study were 200 students, comprised of 91 female and 109 male students.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument used for the study was a well-designed questionnaire by the researchers. Items of the questionnaire that deal with the perception of students on the influence of COVID-19 on the educational system were developed by the researchers to meet the purpose of the study, while some items that deal with the psychosocial variables were extracted from the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS), and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The researchers developed the questionnaire, and the items were validated; the face and content validities were established by a panel of experts. The responses to the items in the questionnaire are "yes" or "no." The reliability coefficients of the scales used for the study were: for the hopelessness scale, the reliability score is 0.90; for the depression scale, it is 0.74; for the perceived social support, the reliability score is 0.63; while for the scale used to measure the perception of students towards the educational system, its reliability score is 0.83. All these reliability scores were obtained through test-retest reliability.

### **Administration of the instrument**

The research instrument was administered by the researchers with the aid of a social media platform by sharing a Google link for the participants to answer the researcher-designed questionnaire items based on the variables to be tested. Enough time was given to them for the completion of the questionnaire. After completion, they click a submit button in their respective locations, and clicking the submit button authenticates that a participant has attempted the items. The researchers gathered the responses to the questionnaire after completion on the twenty-first day. Care was taken to check that all items were answered correctly and all responses to the questionnaire were used for the study. Questionnaires were properly filled out and correctly answered by the participants.



The data collected were analyzed using the appropriate statistical tool to answer the research questions raised and hypotheses generated.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

**Table 1: Independent t-test table showing the influence of students' perception of COVID-19 on the educational system.**

	P.COVID-19	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	p
Educational System	High	109	34.6484	6.78949	.71173	198	3.212	<.05
	Low	91	34.8814	6.24799	.81342			

Table 1 revealed that perceived COVID-19 (P. COVID-19) has a significant influence on the educational system ( $t(198) = 3.212, p < .05$ ). This shows that COVID-19 has changed the perception of students towards the educational system. COVID-19 has made students have a different view of the educational system in the country. One of the main factors that caused the change in perception was the fact that schools were closed down for a long time, making them lose interest in school activities.

**Table 2: Independent t-test summary table showing the influence of hopelessness on the educational system**

	Hopelessness	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	p
Educational System	High	124	31.5288	6.69148	.65615	198	2.79	<.05
	Low	76	28.5395	7.60077	.87187			

The result from Table 2 showed that hopelessness has a significant influence on the educational system ( $t(198) = 2.79, p < .05$ ). The result revealed that hopelessness affects the perception of students towards the educational system, which is as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic has caused the students to lose hope about what their plans could be as regards their educational careers or their academic abilities. It shows that the hope that the students had towards the educational system has changed, meaning that they have lost hope in their educational performance.



**Table 3: Independent t-test table showing the comparison between high and low depression on the educational system**

	Depression	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	p
Educational System	High	124	28.0484	5.55513	.49887	198	3.80	<.01
	Low	76	24.9352	6.88934	.66293			

Findings from the table above revealed that there is a significant influence of depression on the educational system ( $t(198) = 3.80, p < .01$ ). The result showed that depression has significantly affected the perception of students towards the educational system, which is as a result of the pandemic outbreak. The pandemic has caused the students to be depressed, which has affected their educational and academic abilities. It shows that depression has changed the perception of the students towards the educational system, meaning that depression has a way of affecting students' educational performance.

**Table 4: Independent t-test table showing the influence of perceived social support on the educational system**

	Perceived Social Support	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t	p
Educational System	High	99	29.2323	3.15526	.31712	198	-.528	>.05
	Low	101	29.4653	3.08728	.30720			

The table above showed that perceived social support does not have a significant influence on the educational system ( $t(198) = -.528, p > .05$ ). The result revealed that the perception of students towards social support in their education has not changed despite the pandemic experience. This is an indication that nothing has changed their perception or view about the social support they had been enjoying with their education before the pandemic and nothing will change it even after the pandemic. The pandemic has nothing to do with their perception of the social support they enjoyed in their education.



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## CONCLUSION

Based on the outcome of the study, it revealed that Covid-19 has caused many of our students to lose focus of hope in their educational abilities due to the long-time closure of schools in the nation as a result of curbing the spread of Covid-19. The study also revealed that our students have developed some features of depression because they have lost hope in their educational abilities, which was due to the long-time closure of schools. The result also revealed that students wouldn't have lost touch with the educational system had our educational system not been 100% physical. One of the foci of this study is to see how the educational system of the nation can be improved in order to protect students from being at the receiving end in a time of pandemic that might warrant the closure of schools. The study that was carried out on social support also showed that the students still believed that their parents/guidance will still contribute to their education after the pandemic, meaning that they will still enjoy the social support they had before the pandemic when the pandemic is over or when they resume academic activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKING

Based on the study's outcome, it is recommended that the country's educational policy be reviewed to guard against future school shutdowns due to pandemics. The government can achieve this by considering the following.

- i. Inclusion of digitalization in the educational system of the country.
- ii. Everything about education should not be classroom-based; some should be made available online, using the learning management system (LMS).
- iii. All internet providers should make their services friendly to students.
- iv. Every town and village in the nation should be connected with good internet facilities.
- v. Sensitization programs should be put in place to reassure every student on how to deal with their fear about the future and not to lose hope.
- vi. Availability of clinical intervention programs at all educational levels to guard against possible psychological breakdowns, such as depression and hopelessness, that might be a result of the pandemic.
- vii. More investment should be devoted to paving the way for the digitalization of the educational system.



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