



## ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY PREPAREDNESS FOR PHYSICAL ACADEMIC RESUMPTION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF AL HIKMAH UNIVERSITY ILORIN

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### Abstract

The world is currently still grappling with a pandemic the magnitude of which exceeds that of Ebola, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome combined. First detected in China's Hubei Province in late December 2019, novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) has since spread to all the countries of the world and was declared a global pandemic on 11th March 2020 by the World Health Organization. The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures being put in place to prevent and contain it is impacting on individuals, families, and societies around the world and on every sector in an unprecedented manner. After a long period of shutdown, Nigerian Government now considers reopening of all schools nationwide. While state and private University had reopening in phases, Federal Universities in Nigeria are in process of formal opening of all the schools. There are uncertainties on the preparedness of the academic institution towards the pandemic. It is in keeping with the agitation in mind that several questions on the level of preparedness of academic institution for epidemic especially on the present pandemic have risen. This study seeks to access the mechanisms put in place to forestall large scale outbreak of COVID 19 in an academic institution to prevent uninterrupted academic activities. Therefore, The study was cross sectional explorative and descriptive analytical in design using qualitative methods of data collection was adopted. The study population were the institutional with students, staff and stallholders involved inn COVID 19 management. It was cross sectional study conducted among member of academic and nonacademic staff involved in institutional management for epidemic preparedness and control. Both quantitative and qualitative (key informant interview) method of data collection was adopted. The outcome of the study will benefit not only individual student and parents, but the management of Universities and government at large in prevention of second wave of Covid-19 outbreak.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, epidemic preparedness, assessment of university, management, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Covid-19 has no doubt, caught most institutions in Nigeria unawares. Although, it is expected that certain things must have been set aside in the country for emergencies such as this pandemic, especially in terms of fund, but most are not. This can also be confidently said about institutions in the country. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic which was unprecedented, schools (including institutions of higher education) in almost every nation closed down in the first few months of 2020. This involved both quick transitioning of classes into online teaching as well as closing hostels by sending students off-campus. The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Lagos, Nigeria on 27th February, 2020 (Adegboye OA, Adekunle AI & Gayawan E,2020). As a result, on

the 19th March 2020, the Nigerian government decided to close all tertiary, secondary and primary schools in the country. This is aimed at reducing contact among students, family members, teachers, and school staff as an effective means of reducing disease transmission (Lawal, B. K., Haruna, A., Kurfi, F. S., & David, K. B. 2020). According to UNESCO, approximately 70% of the global student population has been affected, with closures of pre-school, primary, secondary, and higher education institutions (Lopman et al., 2020; Samuel, 2020).

On 18th September 2020 the Federal Government-approved national universities commissions (NUC) directives for the safe reopening of universities during the pandemic was broadcasted (Adeiza, S. & Shuaibu, G et al, 2020). To secure the safety of students and staff, the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with the National Center for Disease Control, NCDC established general guidelines for schools' reopening (NCDC,2020). The guidelines delineated creation of a task force at each university; measures on self-management of health and quarantine; general hygiene measures (including wearing masks indoors); principles on ventilation and sanitization; regulations on school assemblies; a process for reporting suspected cases; and policies on school closing (NCDC,2020). Taiwan is one of the few countries where schools are functioning normally. To secure the safety of students and staff, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan established general guidelines for college campuses. The guidelines delineated creation of a task force at each university to prevent spread of the pandemic in school. It also announced that a class should be suspended if 1 student or staff member in it tested positive and that a school should be closed for 14 days if it had 2 or more confirmed cases. As of 18 June 2020, there have been just 7 confirmed cases in 6 Taiwanese universities since the start of the pandemic. Taiwan's experience suggests that, under certain circumstances, safely reopening colleges and universities this season may be feasible with a combination of safety strategies (Peng & Jimenez, 2021; Cheng, S. Y. et al., 2020).

In order to estimate the resources necessary to mitigate possible transmission on campus so as to consider full physical reopening of Universities, it is necessary to project the number of possible cases, needs for screening and testing, and boarding requirements for persons needing isolation and quarantine. To provide a framework to evaluate these questions, a key informant interview was conducted featuring important personalities in the University expected to keep the University safe. Therefore, the study was conducted to determine the level of preparedness of Nigeria Universities towards physical resumption during Covid-19 era, to assess the availability of Covid-19 preventive measures in place in Nigeria Universities towards physical resumption during Covid-19 era and to identify the appropriate policies and guideline put in place in Nigeria Universities towards safe physical resumption during Covid-19 era. In overall the study will provide answers to the following research questions

1. What is the level of preparedness of Nigeria Universities towards physical resumption during Covid-19 era?
2. What Covid-19 preventive measures are in place in Nigeria Universities towards safe physical resumption during Covid-19 era?
3. What appropriate policies and guidelines are put in place in Nigeria Universities towards safe physical resumption during Covid-19 era?

## Methodology

### Description of Study Area

The study was conducted in Kwara State Nigeria in an academic institution of Al Hikmah University Nigeria one of the first faith-based university approved by National University Commission of Nigeria.

### Study Design

The research was designed with a mixed research approach. The design, one of the mixed research models, which allows the results obtained from different methods and designs to support each other, was used: (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected at the same time. Generally, the results of the two methods are considered together in the interpretation phase (Creswell, 2009). The study was cross sectional explorative and descriptive analytical in design using qualitative methods of data collection was adopted. Qualitative descriptive studies are a type of naturalistic inquiry that provides a venue for the comprehensive summary of phenomena, such as COVID 19 and academic resumption. Qualitative descriptive study allows for the descriptively valid report that is focused, accurate, and representative. A qualitative approach was adopted using in-depth interviews with key informants and group discussions with relevant stakeholders. Individuals are selected for interviews and discussions based on their experiences and involvement in COVID 19 either on development, training and supportive supervision of COVID 19 implementation guidelines and policy. And observation of COVID prevention sections

### Study Population

Purposive sampling was used to identify key participants for the study. In the study locations, heads of various unit that made COVID 19 prevention and treatment are selected. The study population were the institutional with students, staff and stallholders involved in COVID 19 management. Key members of the COVID 19 prevention, identified individual and cases of COVID where available. Key policy makers at the educational sector.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Specifically, the respondents are the students, staff, key stallholders and frontline health workers (such as Nurses, Midwives, CHOs, CHEWs, JCHEWs) that are involved in implementation of COVID 19 interventions within the school premises. However, health care facilities and staff that are not directly involved in COVID 19 services provision were excluded from the study. In addition, cases patients that are positive are excluded.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Key informant interview was done in a private University, Al Hikmah University Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Interview was done with members of the Covid-19 task force of the University to get the information needed following the policy guidelines put forward by the Federal Ministry of Education guided by the National Center for Disease Control, NCDC (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020) for schools' safe reopening during Covid-19 era. Each of the guideline serves as a checklist for the respondent to answer to. It is expected that each of the institution have all these checked and done before they can be certified to be ready to physically resume fully to their academic activities. The report from the interview was collated and analyzed. All the data collected were collated, edited and analysis. The qualitative data from the group discussions and key informant interviews were transcribed, anonymized, and coded using content analysis framework as described by Miles, M. B. and

Huberman A. M. From the themes and sub themes, common emerging issues and concerns were identified and narratives were constructed. Transcripts were read and reread to identify emerging issues and themes by site-specific teams first, thereafter responses were analyzed across type of respondents (policymakers, managers.

Ethical considerations details were followed and complied with. The timing of the KII interviews or FGDs was such that there was no disruption in service delivery at any of the health facilities. The respondents did not receive any compensation for their participation in the study. The research was conducted in accordance to the following the ethical principles.

### Limitations

The study covered only selected institutional the lockdown, limitation of movement and insecurity do not allow large scale study to other institutional.

### Finding

**Table 1.**

*Students Assessment Before Entering the School Premises*

Conditions to be fulfil before resumption to School	Responses		Remark
	Yes	No	
Provision of a medical status form related to Covid-19 to students	√		
Students' parent signed medical consent form on resumption to school			NA
Completed medical status forms kept in confidential files by the school head/ management	√		
Presentation of students covid-19 test results on resumption before they are allowed in	√		
Availability of a well-marked triage point for screening identified in the school entrance	√		
Location of triage point			Gate
Activities at the triage point	√		
a. Temperature check	√		
b. Instruct to wear masks	√		
c. Performing of hand hygiene			
According to task force member consent form were not provided for parent to sign			

**Table 2.**

*COVID 19 Protocol Within the School Premises*

Protocol within the School Premises	Responses		Remark
	Yes	No	
The minimum distance (meters) in sitting arrangement in classrooms			2 meters
Grade for the ventilation of the classrooms			Good
a. Good (at least 2 crossed windows per 10 square meters)			
b. Fair (1 window per 10 square meters)			
c. Poor ( 1 window per 20 square meter)			
Availability of COVID 19 prevention or task force committee	√		

Enforcing the use of facemask by the staff and students	√	
Categories exempted from wearing face masks		None
Specified short breaks from wearing face masks	√	
Corona virus specimen collection site identified and set aside within the school	√	
Sufficient access to runny water, soap and hand washing facilities	√	
Training for staff at the sick bay for covid-19 prevention protocol	√	
Roles of the school health services		Identified
Separate bins for general waste and used face masks at waste collection sites	√	
Availability of a holding/ sick bay/ temporary isolation center for suspected cases of covid-19	√	
Capacity of the Temporary Isolation center	√	
Response protocol/ referral form in place to transmit students that are ill or test positive to the nearest designated hospital facility.	√	

KIII Existence of well-trained task force team facilitated operation and compliance to COVID 19 protocol. Provision was also made for 2-bed capacity in isolation center within the school premises.

**Table 3.**  
**School Premises COVID 19 Implementation of Activities**

Checklist	Responses		Remark
	Yes	No	
Availability of a communication plan for confirmed cases	√		
Availability of Appropriate Communication plan to;			
a. Local Government Rapid COVID 19 Response Team?	√		
b. State Epidemiologists?	√		
c. Other health officials (specify)?	√		
Circumstance for close communication with the team, epidemiologist them and other health officials?			On need
a. Suspected case			
b. Confirmed case			
c. Technical support/advice			
d. Provision of PPEs			
e. Sample collection			
f. Professional training			
Training of members of the institution by the team on covid-19 prevention protocols	√		
Envisaging of challenges with the plans put in place	√		
Level of preparedness to resume school physically:			Fully ready
a. Fully ready (76%-100% fulfils all checklist)			
d. Fairly ready (50%-75% fulfils all checklist)			
e. Not ready (less than 50% fulfilment)			
Visitation by any of the State or Federal authorities to check level of preparedness and the assessment by the visiting authorities	√		

Well-articulated communication plan available at the local government for sample collection, while the state epidemiologists are called upon for drug provision. Other health facilities are contacted only when necessary. Even though the school is fully ready for resumption, there is need to make enough funds available for sustainability of implementation of COVID 19 activities.

From the tables above it shows that majority of the points needed for the University to resume physically to school have been fulfilled, however the forms needed by both the students and parents are not provided yet. Also, there is no screening point in interim of Covid-19 laboratory test in the University, the State Public Health Laboratory which carries out PCR test for Corona virus is the only testing point available for the University. Facilities to maintain good personal hygiene to prevent the spread of the pandemic such as handwashing basins and automatic sanitizers are available in the University.

**Table 4.**

*Summary of the result of the Key Informant Interview at Al Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria.*

Checklists	Fulfilled (%)	Not Fulfilled (%)	Total (%)
Variables	23 (79.31)	6 (20.69)	29 (100)

Table 4 summarizes the achievement and readiness of the University to resume school physically. 80.65% of the requirement has been fulfilled which connotes full readiness of the University to resume.

### Discussion, Conclusion and recommendation

#### Discussion

Based on the analysis of the data above, it was seen that majority of the needed things have been put in place. This is as expected in academic institutions. However, one of the most important activity that is still lacking which is the provision of a testing center within the campus. A testing strategy whereby symptomatic students, staff and faculty are identified, administered viral testing, and isolated is effective at controlling transmission. We find that the success of this strategy relies on contact tracing and quarantining most contacts of infected individuals. Screening would have to be performed at least monthly to have much of an impact on the course of the outbreak on campus and increases the sample collection and assay requirements considerably. Recent COVID-19 testing pipeline include nucleic-acid and serological tests. The cost of COVID-19 rRT-PCR test in laboratories in the country ranges between ₦42,000 – ₦51,000 (\$17,178,00 - \$20,859,000) (GloEpid, 2020). This can be seen to be a limitation, especially with private Universities as most of their funding are internally generated without financial support from any other organized body. Although, scholars note that it is still unclear which children should be targeted for testing and treatment, considering some don't show symptoms of infection such as a fever and sore throat. In recent weeks, as schools have reopened in the United States, new COVID-19 cases have emerged. In Mississippi, 22 schools reported 34 cases of coronavirus among students and employees (German et al., 2020).

The tool used for the key informant interview was able to assess most of preparedness conditions and resources for this study, however, since the model was designed to serve all level of schools, some of the parameters do not really fit in for tertiary institution as there are no children in the Universities. Other academic institutions in Nigeria are also mandated to use this model, however, majority, especially the Government-owned, are yet to resume academic session physically due to some other administrative issues and not the fear of Covid 19 pandemic and limited researches are available from the other Universities. This case study will allow the University and other universities planning to resume physically to improve on

all possible strategies in making the environment safe for both staff and students. It will also stand as a form of tool to assess the readiness of any academic institution to determine their level of preparedness.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

It can be concluded that there are clear cut requirements that are expected of every educational institution to meet for them to be able to resume physically back to school without exposing the staff and students of the institution to Corona virus. These measures taken by Al Hikmah University has given the institution some level of confidence to be able to prevent the spread within the campus except for few other things identified which could not be met, such as the testing laboratory, due to financial crisis. If the other measures can be adhered to and well monitored, it will go a long way in breaking the spread of the disease in the nation generally. The following are hereby recommended:

- Government should give full support to all the educational institution whether they are privately owned or government owned as everyone in the country is involved
- The school authorities should endeavor to provide a private testing center for their institutions by seeking support from the Federal or State government
- Institutions should ensure that rules and regulations put in place to break the chain of spread of the virus should be put in place by empowering the Covid-19 task force to enforce the rules on everyone on campus
- Schools opening should be done in phases for better control and for easy settling in
- There should be proper record keeping in the School Health Services unit and they must work hand in hand with the State government Covid-19 task force in ensuring all the effort put in place are effective by monitoring the indicators for the pandemic
- The whole world should not relent in effort to keep to the rules and regulations to prevent further spread of the pandemic and to see to the end of the pandemic.

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