

SCHOOLS LOCKDOWN AND ITS IMPLICATION ON SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The consequence of school lockdown on secondary education in Rivers State is a major concern to education stakeholders. The study which was carried out using 160 students from senior secondary schools in River State showed that majority of the students are willing to return to school after the lockdown. It was revealed that students during the lockdown have been occupied through online learning and part time jobs. The study also showed that students look forward to a switch to digital teaching and learning after school lockdown as well as a review of educational schedules. It was concluded that the lockdown has had several academic implications on students and a review of academic calendar in schools was recommended.

Keywords: *Consequences; Lockdown; Secondary Education; Covid-19; Rivers State*

Introduction

The year 2020 is a period that cannot be forgotten in a hurry as the world was awakened to one of the worst pandemic in human history. Although the Corona Virus Disease also known as COVID was first noticed in Wuhan China in December, 2019 (World Health Organization (2020) and this earned it the popular nomenclature; COVID-19 and it has since spread to different parts of the world with casualty rate around a million deaths. Covid-19 which has since being declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) has affected all sectors of national and global economies and the education sector is not left out of this disasters. However, individuals, organizations and governments are in a race to proffer solution to this pandemic by developing a vaccine to deal with the virus. This does not rule out the fact that life after COVID-19 remains an issue of concern to everyone irrespective of nationality, race, religion or ethnicity. In the same manner, concerns are increasing on the effects that COVID-19 will have on the education sector in the post covid-19 era especially at the secondary level of education where students are being groomed to transit into higher levels of education where they can operate independently.

In Rivers State like every other part of the world, schools across all levels were on lockdown as a way of curtailing the adverse effects of the covid-19 pandemic. Educational researchers were therefore worried about the outlook of the education sector in a post covid-19 economy. Prior to the pandemic, UNESCO as cited in Development and Cooperation (2018) noted that 27% of world illiterates are still traced to Africa with Nigeria inclusive. Concerns are therefore rising on how the education system will thrive after the covid-19 pandemic.

Secondary schools in Rivers State no doubt are still trying to compete and stay among the best across the different States of the country. It is therefore important for educational stakeholders to prepare for the unforeseen in terms of how schools will be managed in the post covid-19 era so that the goals and objectives of secondary education on the continent will not be eroded. In order to put measures in place to salvage secondary education from imminent collapse after the covid-19 pandemic, the objectives of the study was to:

1. Find out if students in secondary schools in Rivers State are willing to return to school after the covid-19 pandemic
2. Examine how students have been engage during school lockdown in secondary schools in Rivers State
3. Evaluate the academic implications of school lockdown on secondary school students in Rivers State
4. Identify students expectations from their school after the lockdown in secondary schools in Rivers State

Research Questions

The research questions answered in the study were:

1. Are students in secondary schools in Rivers State willing to return to school after the covid-19 pandemic?
2. How have students been engage during school lockdown in secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. What are the academic implications of school lockdown on secondary school students in Rivers State?
4. What are students' expectations from their school after the lockdown in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Methodology

The study adopted an analytical form of survey design since it was a qualitative research. The study population covered all senior secondary school students in Rivers State out of which 160 students (91 males and 69 females) were selected as sample for the study through convenience sampling technique. The convenience sampling technique enabled the researcher to select any student within reach using social media platforms as part of the sample drawn for the study. The students were drawn across different local government areas in the State. The instrument used for the collection of data was an open and close ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by Measurement and Evaluation experts in University of Port Harcourt. The reliability co-efficient of the instrument was between 0.81 which was considered adequate for the study. The instrument was electronically administered to respondents who were available as at the time of the study. The research questions raised were answered using percentage with the results presented on bar graph and pie chart.

Results

Statistics of Respondents

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents

Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	91	56.9	56.9	56.9
Female	69	43.1	43.1	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

Fig 1: Distribution of Respondents

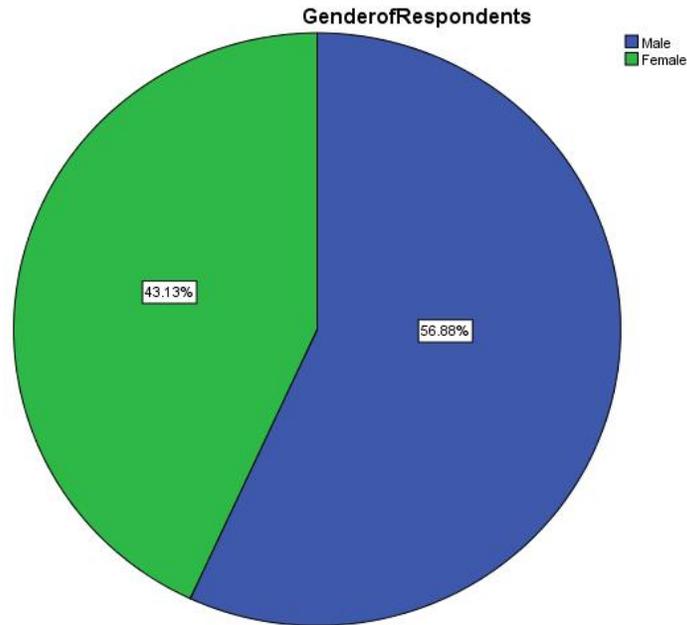
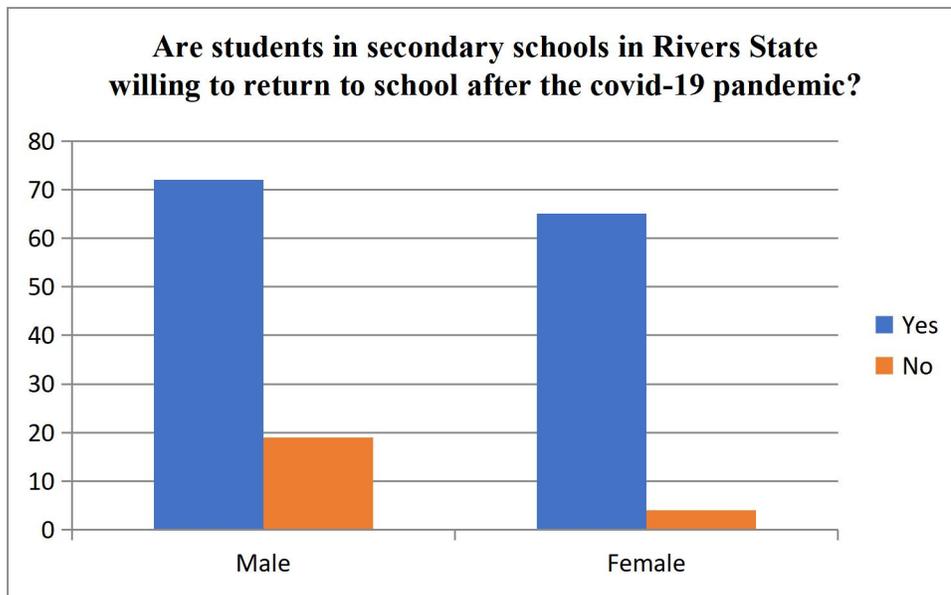


Table 1 as well as Fig. 1 above shows the distribution of respondents used for the study. There were 160 students used as sample for the study and this comprised of 91 males representing 56.9% of the respondents as well as 69 females representing 43.1% of the respondents who were selected using convenience sampling method.

Research Question One: Are students in secondary schools in Rivers State willing to return to school after the covid-19 pandemic?

Fig 2: Percentage Scores on Willingness of Students in Secondary Schools in Rivers State to Return to School after the Covid-19 Pandemic

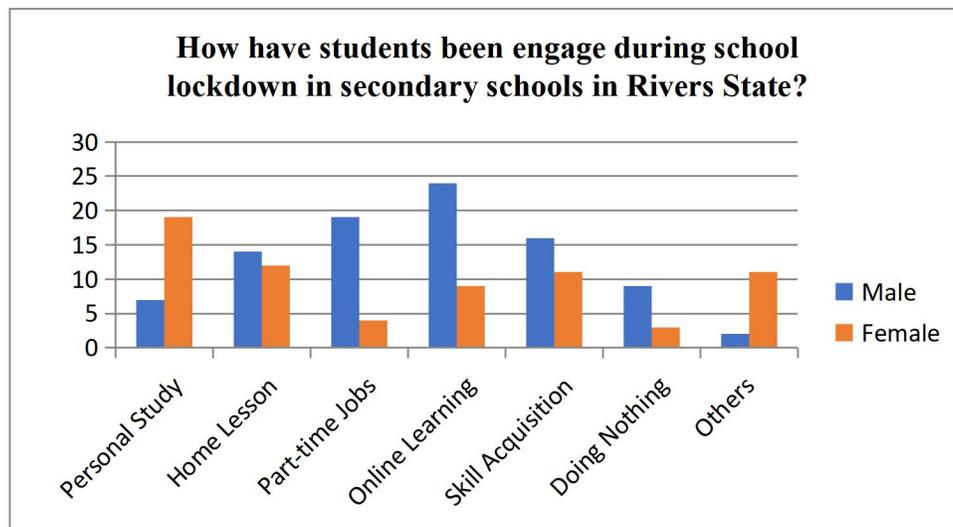


In Fig 2, out of the 91 male respondents used for the study, over 70 students responded that they are willing to return to school after the lockdown while almost 20 students reported that they are not willing to return to school after the lockdown. On the other hand, out of the 69 female respondents used for the study, over 60 of them are willing to return to school while less than 5 students reported that they are willing to return to school after the lockdown. The response ration suggests that more male students than female students appear to be unwilling to return to school after the lockdown. This points to the need for immediate sensitization among educational stakeholders on the need to return to school after the lockdown. Previous studies by researchers such as Gorges, Schwinger, and Kandler (2013) has shown that students lacked internal motivation to willingness to learn and this places a need for students to be encouraged by all means to return to school after the lockdown.

The figure above no doubt suggest that students look forward to return to school after the lockdown but the enrollment rate is likely to drop in schools if proactive measures are not taken before resumption of schools. According to a related research study by Mohammed, Khidhir, Nazeer and Vijayan (2020), it was noted that returning to normal schooling may not be a priority to all educational stakeholders at the same time and as such the government as well as school administrators need to use every available means to encourage students, parents and guardians to encourage massive return to schools after the lockdown on schools have been relaxed or lifted. This will help to ensure that the effort of governments of different countries of the continent to promote increased school enrollment especially at the secondary education level is not jeopardized after the lockdown.

Research Question Two: How have students been engage during school lockdown in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Fig 3: Percentage Scores on How Students have been engaged During School Lockdown in Secondary Schools in Rivers State

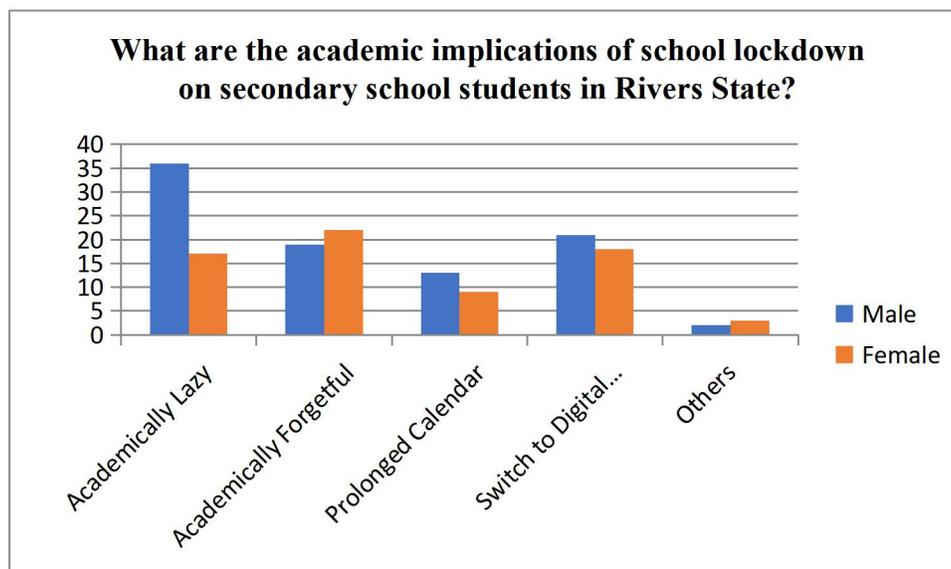


In Fig 3, the various ways by which students have been engaged during the lockdown of schools were itemized between the male and female students. Majority of the male students responded that they have been engaged in online learning while majority of the female students are engaged in personal study. This finding correlates with a related study carried out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies reported by Andrew, Cattan, Costa-Dias, Farquharson, Kraftman, Krutikova, Phimister and Sevilla (2020) which showed that both primary and secondary school students spent major part of the lockdown online both for learning as

well as for leisure. This reveals that online platforms have been significant in keeping students busy during the lockdown and this trend is likely to continue even when the lockdown of schools is over. Similarly, while the least number of male students engaged in other activities during the lockdown, their female counterpart were engaged in part time jobs during the lockdown. These students appear to have spent majority of their time during the lockdown on personal development activities and this was closely related to the outcome of study conducted by Elmer, Mephram and Stadtfeld (2020) which showed that social network was limited during the lockdown among students as students concentrated more on personal studies. The lockdown can therefore be said to have negatively affected the social life of students and this has resulted to several cases of anxiety, depression and other mental and emotional conditions which needs to be resolved before the re-opening of schools. Similarly, since the lockdown was spent on academic and economic activities, school curriculums need to be reformed to capture these realities in order to gain the attention of students on and off school after the lockdown.

Research Question Three: What are the academic implications of school lockdown on secondary school students in Rivers State?

Fig 4: Percentage Scores on the Academic Implications of School Lockdown on Secondary School Students in Rivers State

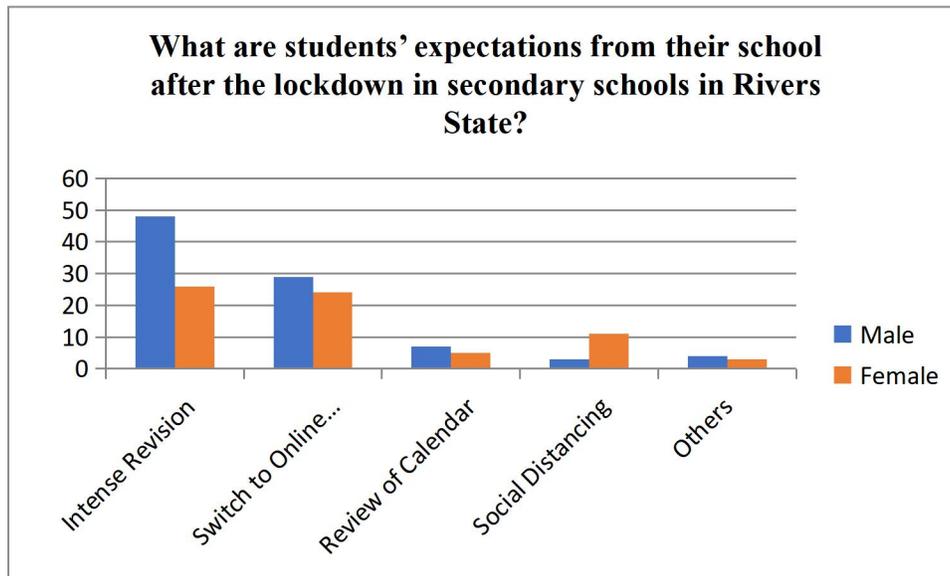


The consequence of school lockdown on students can only be imagined even after the resumption of schools. It was revealed in Fig. 4 that majority of the male students reported that the lockdown has made them academically lazy while majority of the female students also corroborated this position by stating that the lockdown has made them academically forgetful. The students also pointed out that the lockdown has compelled them to switch to digital learning platforms which is one of the positive academic effects that school lockdown has had on students. Cases of academic losses and laziness during periods of students' absence from school appear to be a common condition as Di-Pietro, Biagi, Costa, Karpiński and Mazza (2020) also pointed out in their study that learning loss and negative cognitive and non-cognitive skill acquisition are common academic implications of students' prolonged absence from school. Students therefore need to be assisted in order to overcome these negative academic effects occasioned by prolonged school lockdown on the continent.

Furthermore, study by Vallejo and Maron (2020) also identified the lack of comprehension of text as a result of emotional changes especially among students with learning disorder as one of the effects of student's prolonged absence from school. Teachers who handle special need students therefore need to develop relevant strategies to assist special needs students who will be returning to school after the lockdown. These students who must have suffered different academic challenges as a result of their special condition need remedial services in order to be able to quickly return back to normal academic life.

Research Question Four: What are students' expectations from their school after the lockdown in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Fig 5: Percentage Scores on Students Expectations from Their School after the Lockdown in Secondary Schools in Rivers State



There is no doubt that when schools are finally re-opened in Rivers State, students will be looking forward to different reforms in order to adhere quickly to the new normal in school. Majority of the students used for the study pointed out in Fig. 5 that they look forward to an intense academic revision after the lockdown. Similarly, substantial number of the students also pointed out the need to switch to online learning platforms after the lockdown. This finding clearly agrees with the outcome of a related study conducted by Giovannella (2020) which showed that students expectation after school lockdown is that they are ready for novel educational processes. This includes a switch from the traditional method of teaching and learning to the adoption of digital method of interaction in schools.

Similarly, students also showed concern on the need for a review of academic calendar when schools finally reopen. The essence of this demand is better understood from the position of a related study conducted by Aucejoa, French, Paola, Araya and Zafar (2020) which revealed that 55% of students from low income families are likely to have delayed graduation. After the lockdown and this may explain why some of these students are demanding for a review of educational programmes and plans after the school lockdown. This will enable them to be able to meet up with their academic and career plans when schools are finally reopened.

Surprisingly, the students showed very little concern about the issue of social distancing after school resumption despite the wave of the covid-19 pandemic. This calls for concern among health practitioners

and government as neglect for precautionary measures when schools finally resume may harm the purpose of school resumption. Special consideration needs to be given to health issues in schools especially in the areas of adhering to preventive measures as this will help to ensure that school resumption after the lockdown is not an invitation to more issues.

Conclusion

The period of school lockdown no doubt had various degrees of socio-economic effect on students and education generally in Rivers State. During this period, students were engaged with different activities personally as well as by their parents and guardians. However, in post covid-19 era, while some students are willing to return back to school, others are not as a result of the different activities with which they have been engaged during the period of school lockdown. This implies that students during the period of school lockdown have developed new interest which in very little cases has overridden the interest of these students in formal education. The implication of this is a re-orientation of these students on the fact that no other venture can take the place of education as education is the key that open door of opportunities in other ventures.

School lockdown across Rivers State has exposed students to different other socio-economic activities such as acquisition of skills, job hunting, personal study as well as exposure to different learning platforms. The major activities which have kept these students engaged during these lockdown as indicated by the respondents is personal study, home lesson with tutors, online learning, skill acquisition as well as part-time jobs. This means that the period of the school lockdown has been spent by these students basically between continuous studies as well as personal economic empowerment programmes. This development occasioned by the school lockdown places a demand on the school system to develop alternative means of keeping students academically engaged within and outside the school environment as well as introducing programmes that will fascinate the economic interest of these students for personal as well as economic development.

It was equally revealed that the period of lockdown of schools in Rivers State has contributed to cases of academic laziness and forgetfulness among students as indicated by the respondents. This means that a lot of students will find it difficult to recall what they have been taught while others pointed out that they are concerned about the disruptions in their academic calendar. Government and other educational stakeholders therefore need to consider organizing refresher and revision programmes for these students in order to avoid the long term implication of the school lockdown on the students as well as the society in general in the form of poor academic performance, increased educational wastage as well as lack of interest in education as a result of dwindling performance. The school calendar must therefore be reviewed to take care of these developments so as to put students on the path of academic recovery after a long period of school lockdown on the continent.

Respondents of the study have pointed out the need for revision, introduction of online learning platforms as well as review of the academic calendar of schools on the continent as part of their expectations from their schools. Therefore, while schools await a full re-opening in a post covid-19 era, school administrators and the government must begin to strategize on how to engage online learning platforms to cover for the academic losses occasioned by the long period of school lockdown as a result of the covid-19 pandemic as well as revisit previous school curriculum in order to take care of disruptions which has so far affected the school calendar. Similarly, there is need for joint stakeholders action among parents, teachers, the government and even students on how to review previous educational plans and programmes so as to close the educational gap created by the period of school lockdown.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for schools to introduce revision programmes for students during and after regular school hours after the covid-19 pandemic. Students have not only lost a lot of time and learning opportunities but majority of them appear to have forgotten what they have been taught in the classroom during the school lockdown period. It is therefore important for schools to introduce refresher programmes for students in order to re-learn as well as cover up for the academic losses occasioned by school lockdown as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.
2. School stakeholders need to collaborate for the introduction of online learning programmes in secondary schools across the continent. Online learning platforms which have enabled these students to be engaged academically during the lockdown period need to be introduced as part of school curriculum. This will enable teachers and students to develop a sustainable learning environment where educational inclusion is possible and curriculum objectives can be easily achieved. Similarly, these learning platforms will also enable students to learn on and off school periods through regular interaction with their teachers.
3. The emphasis on skill acquisition and job seeking among secondary school students on the continent places a high demand on the introduction of entrepreneurship and skill acquisition programmes in secondary schools as obtained in some tertiary educational institutions. Since students see trade and entrepreneurship as an alternative to classroom teaching and learning, these programmes should be fully integrated into the school system so as to groom these students to contribute meaningfully to their immediate society on and off school periods.
4. It has also become a matter of urgency for academic calendars and programmes to be reviewed to fit into the present learning conditions. This will require the collaboration of all educational stakeholders and not just the government alone who are expected to interface on how current educational activities should be structured so as to take care of the lapses created by the long period of school lockdown across the continent. Similarly, a draft review developed should be explored before it is finally adopted as the new normal in these schools.
5. The long period of school long down shifted academic activities again from the teachers to parents who were at home with their children during the long period of school lockdown. This development shows that educational responsibilities can be shifted and shared among parents and the teachers who act as in-loco-parentis. Based on this development, it is important for school administrators to incorporate parents fully into the academic programmes of the school by allowing them contribute to the educational needs of students based on emerging trends as well as giving them home-front responsibilities that will culminate to an all-round development of these students in the long run.

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