


COVID-19 Pandemic and Strategizing the Higher Education Policies of Public Universities of Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on higher education policies and their effect on students' academic performance at public universities in Ethiopia. The study adopts a quantitative approach followed by causal analysis by applying structural equation modeling. A sample of 384 has been selected through simple random sampling out of a large population of academic staff spread homogeneously across Ethiopia. The study variables are COVID-19, higher education policies, digital learning, teacher preparedness, and student academic performance. The findings reveal that the hypothesized model becomes a perfect fit. Based on the standardized coefficient, the most influencing path is the effect of higher education policy on digital learning, followed by the impact of COVID-19 on higher education policy, academic performance, and teacher preparedness, respectively. The study has further observed the partial effect of teacher preparedness on the students' academic performance.

KEYWORDS

Academic Performance, COVID-19, Digital Learning, Higher Education Policies, Teacher Preparedness

INTRODUCTION

The world is under a tremendous economic crisis due to novel coronavirus emanating from China's Wuhan as pandemic that has had an enormous impact on sectors like education, energy, agriculture, employment, and the social well-being of the people. The educational institutions have been closed since the advent of Covid-19 because of immediate emergency lockdown by most countries, thereby severely arresting the ongoing education system worldwide.

Background of Study

The outbreak of pandemic forces most of the nation's resorting unprecedented measures to prevent the death of people, breaking the falling economies to a halt from the point of collapse and to firefight

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the conventional education system from a standstill to stirring in the form of distance mode through a virtual learning platform. The higher educational institutions and schools were shut down in Hong Kong when China had forced one million school going kids staying at home during the SARS virus epidemic in the year 2003 that challenged about 50,600 instructors to use digital technology to provide learning (Fox, 2004). The pandemic caused due to the coronavirus is severe in African regions compared to the other regions. This outbreak has arrested economic activities due to sudden lockdown and social distancing measures adopted by most African countries to contain the virus. (Ozili, P., 2020). Nearly 2000 higher educational institutions in the African context are grappling with an acute shortage of public funding for the Universities because of competing needs from citizens' health care facilities. The funding problems are further aggravated by meager fee collection from parents and loan repayment by students due to sudden employment loss because of the pandemic spreading amongst the communities. The educational institutions are exploring a potential shift from the traditional teaching pattern and learning to distance-based virtual delivery to the learners.

The present scenario has forced higher educational institutions' closure by sending back the students to their homes. Such unprecedented action taken allows the education regulators to rethink their current education policy, strategies, and pedagogies to operate how higher education could be delivered by innovative technology to garner the benefit of expert teachers worldwide regardless of conventional semesters. Universities will have the opportunity to transform the ongoing education system to redesign service delivery by leveraging online technology for current students and non-traditional students. This seismic shift in the management of change in higher education policy could be possible due to their forward-looking approach and transformational leadership through strategic formulation and implementation in resuming the stalled situation due to pandemic. The Govt. of Ethiopia has ordered to close down all the Universities on 16th March 2020 amid the Covid-19 pandemic since Ethiopia's Government has banned public gatherings. The students have been sent back home with immediate effect to prevent the virus's spread that has crippled the conventional education system to a halt. The higher educational institutions are under severe pressure of managing the challenges of ongoing learning and delivery to the students to mitigate the effect of the crisis.

Ethiopia is next to Nigeria in terms of population in Africa after Nigeria, a low-income and least developed country with 173 among 189 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. Because of the rapid population growth, Ethiopia is currently facing a lack of an inclusive education system (UNDP, 2018). It is a fact that Ethiopia has been deprived of economic development for decades for which the education structure is undersized, afflicted with low attendance of students coupled with quality issues. The World Bank has observed that Ethiopia is an educationally most impoverished country due to armed conflict, famines, humanitarian issues, and ethnic crises (World Bank, 2017).

The quality of teaching and learning in Ethiopia is stressed by poor infrastructure, inadequate academic preparedness of students and a dearth of qualified academic staff, overcrowded classrooms, and, most importantly, scarce funding. Private sector higher education was its peak since the 1990s, after which gradually flattened due to the growth of public Universities in Ethiopia. There is tremendous potential for rising income levels due to rapid population growth and mounting upper-secondary enrolments of students. Such a step has attracted many foreign education providers to offer higher education programs either solely or in collaboration with local institutional partners.

Statement of Problem

The pandemic's spread due to the Covid virus has squarely disturbed the college-going students' daily teaching and learning schedule. The active hours meant for the scholars and students' learning at home amidst lockdown measure has kept them behind their learning schedule. Higher educational institutions' temporary closure has arisen during lockdown due to public health emergencies arising from the pandemic. The current crisis has changed many conventional sectors and industries due to a radical shift in consumer behavior vis-à-vis change in nature and mode of demand because of human

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