



## The impact of health policy implementation on the management of the covid-19 pandemic in federal tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State

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### Abstract

This paper discussed the impact of health policy implementation on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria. The authors noted that social distancing measures, such as remote learning and reduced in-person interactions, had several potential effects on teacher-student relationships, including limited opportunities for face-to-face interactions, increased reliance on technology, limited access to resources, changes in the nature of feedback and evaluation, and a possible impact on mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The scholars, however, emphasized the importance of finding alternative ways to establish personal connections and maintain a sense of community during periods of social distancing, such as through online learning platforms, virtual meetings, and other digital communication methods. They further stated that teachers may need to be more mindful of the emotional needs of their students and find ways to support them through remote learning.

**Keywords:** Health Policy, Covid-19, Public Universities, Disease, Virus

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### 1. Introduction

The emergence of the coronavirus (COVID-19) has resulted in a global crisis that has affected almost every aspect of human life. The virus has rapidly spread since it first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, leading to a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of countless people and caused considerable fear and ambiguity (World Health Organization, 2021) <sup>[30]</sup>. The impact of COVID-19 has been felt across every continent, with countries implementing stringent measures such as lockdowns, travel bans, and social distancing to try to contain the spread of the virus (Adeyemo & Adeyemi, 2020) <sup>[4]</sup>. The pandemic has presented a significant challenge to policymakers and the public sector. Governments around the world are struggling to balance the competing demands of maintaining public health, reviving struggling economies, and protecting individual freedoms. Decisions related to quarantine policies, vaccine distribution, and school closures have become highly politicized, with many people questioning the effectiveness and fairness of these measures. A pivotal point in the global fight against the disease has been reached with the World Health Organization's formal declaration of the virus as a global pandemic. The declaration underscored the need for urgent and coordinated action on a global scale to tackle the pandemic. As of January 28, 2021, there had been over 100 million confirmed cases and over 2 million deaths worldwide, with many countries experiencing a second or third wave of infections.

Igwe (2020) <sup>[14]</sup> observed that the global pandemic had major and lasting effects on various elements of human society. Social distancing, working from home, and remote learning have become the new norm, with many people struggling to adapt to these changes. The pandemic has also exposed existing inequalities and injustices in many societies, highlighting the need for more equitable systems and policies.

Governments worldwide have implemented policies to contain the pandemic's spread, including mitigation (slowing but not necessarily stopping epidemic spread) and suppression (reversing epidemic growth and maintaining low case numbers). Policies such as school closures, travel restrictions, bans on public gatherings, and stay-at-home orders were implemented to reduce virus transmission. Transmission occurs through contact between susceptible and infectious individuals, and measures aim to suppress social contact in workplaces, schools, and public spaces to reduce transmission. Additionally, emergency investments in healthcare, social welfare, contact tracing, and COVID-19 vaccines were also implemented (Ezeh *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Policy implementation is a crucial phase in achieving policy goals, as it involves anticipating and making adjustments for deviations from planned performance. A policy consists of a problem definition, goals, and policy instruments. Public policy pertains to societal welfare and continuity, while organizational policies are aligned with organizational objectives. The execution of public policies in both the public and private spheres has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic epidemic (Ogunwale & Fatusin, 2021) <sup>[19]</sup>. Health policy implementation during the pandemic has become a significant factor in public policy discussions. The study underscores the crucial role played by the COVID-19 epidemic in influencing organizational policy change. However, given reports of altered interactions between students and teachers, it is still important to look into how this epidemic is altering policy dynamics and implementation. The effect of COVID-19 on the implementation of public policies, particularly in higher education institutions, has not been well studied, despite being a significant concern in the fields of health, public administration, and social development. In order to fill this gap, this study will look at how the COVID-19 epidemic affected the implementation of health policy in tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State.

## 2. Literature Review

### Conceptual Clarifications

Trein (2019) <sup>[27]</sup> defined health policy as a set of decisions, actions, and measures taken by governments and other stakeholders to ensure the provision of effective and affordable healthcare services to individuals and communities. This policy encompasses a broad range of areas, including healthcare financing, healthcare delivery systems, the healthcare workforce, healthcare technology, and healthcare quality improvement. This involves designing and implementing programs and policies that promote healthy lifestyles, improve access to preventive care, and provide effective treatments for illnesses. One significant challenge in health policy is balancing the interests of different stakeholders, such as patients, healthcare providers, insurers, and government agencies. Policymakers must take into account the needs and perspectives of each stakeholder and find a way to balance competing interests.

Healthcare is one of the most expensive fields of public policy, and the cost of providing medical care continues to rise. Policymakers must find ways to control costs while still ensuring that people have access to the care they need. Policymakers must ensure that healthcare services are effective, safe, and meet established standards of quality. The approach comprises supervising and evaluating healthcare professionals, setting standards for patient care, and

developing strategies to raise the standard of healthcare services. Finally, policymakers must ensure that healthcare services are accessible to everyone, regardless of their income, race, or ethnicity. This requires addressing health disparities and implementing policies that promote equity in healthcare access and outcomes (Trein, 2019) <sup>[27]</sup>.

According to Ezeh *et al.*, (2020) <sup>[11]</sup>, health policy is a multifaceted and intricate process that encompasses several stages. It begins with identifying the health needs of individuals and communities. The data collected during this stage helps policymakers understand the health challenges faced by different groups of people and develop policies that are tailored to meet their specific needs. Once the health needs are identified, policymakers formulate policies to address them. Health policy formulation also requires careful consideration of political, economic, and social factors that can impact policy implementation. They argued that the final stage of the health policy process involves implementing interventions that aim to improve health outcomes. This can involve a range of activities, including the provision of healthcare services, education campaigns, and the development of new technologies. Successful implementation requires the coordination of different stakeholders, including healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations (Ezeh *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Health policy refers to a systematic approach or framework for decision-making that guides the allocation of resources and the implementation of interventions to improve health outcomes. It involves the development of strategies, plans, and actions that are designed to promote and protect the health of individuals and populations. At its core, health policy is concerned with the identification of health needs, the evaluation of the most effective interventions and services to address those needs, and the allocation of resources to support those interventions. The development of health policy typically involves a range of steps, including the identification of health issues and concerns, the assessment of evidence and research to determine the most effective interventions, the development of policy options, consultation and engagement with stakeholders, and the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs (Adekoya, 2020) <sup>[3]</sup>.

According to the World Health Organization (2023) <sup>[29]</sup>, coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can also spread through contact with contaminated surfaces or objects and through close contact with an infected person. COVID-19 has had a profound impact on global health and the economy, leading to widespread illness, death, and disruption of daily life. Efforts to control the spread of the virus have included measures such as social distancing, wearing masks, and vaccination campaigns. Scientists and medical professionals continue to work to better understand the virus and develop effective treatments and vaccines to combat it.

Okereke *et al.*, (2021) <sup>[22]</sup> state that COVID-19 is a contagious illness caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. This virus belongs to the same family of viruses as the ones that cause the common cold, as well as the more severe illnesses SARS and MERS. COVID-19 primarily spreads from person to person through respiratory droplets that are released when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes. These droplets can enter the body through the nose, mouth, or eyes of another person who is nearby. Symptoms of COVID-19 can vary in severity and range from mild to severe. Some of the most common symptoms include fever,

cough, and fatigue. Other symptoms can include body aches, headaches, sore throats, loss of taste or smell, and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, COVID-19 can cause respiratory failure, pneumonia, acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), and even death. COVID-19 can be especially dangerous for older adults and those with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or compromised immune systems. The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to practice good hygiene habits such as frequent hand washing, wearing a mask, and practicing physical distancing. Vaccines are also available to help protect against COVID-19 and reduce the severity of the illness if someone does become infected.

On their part, Oyebanji *et al.*, (2021) <sup>[24]</sup> see COVID-19 as a contagious disease that is caused by a novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2. The virus is primarily transmitted through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, talks, or breathes. Once the virus enters a person's body, it can cause a range of symptoms, from mild to severe. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. Other symptoms may include fatigue, body aches, headaches, loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea. It is important to note that not everyone with COVID-19 will experience all of these symptoms, and some people may not have any symptoms at all. While most cases of COVID-19 are mild or moderate, some individuals, particularly those with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, or compromised immune systems, are at higher risk for severe illness and death. This is why it is crucial to take precautions to prevent the spread of the virus, such as wearing masks, practicing physical distancing, washing hands frequently, and avoiding large gatherings.

On tertiary educational institutions, the World Bank (2021) <sup>[28]</sup> defined it as an educational level that comes after secondary education and includes a wide range of formal post-secondary education opportunities such as public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools. This level of education is crucial in providing individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to enter the workforce and pursue successful careers. Tertiary education is instrumental in fostering economic growth, reducing poverty, and boosting shared prosperity. It equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to be competitive in the job market, which, in turn, stimulates innovation and productivity, leading to economic growth. Tertiary education is also essential to reducing poverty, as it provides individuals with the tools to increase their income and access better employment opportunities. Moreover, tertiary education is crucial to boosting shared prosperity by promoting social mobility and reducing inequality. It enables individuals from different backgrounds to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve their full potential, regardless of their socioeconomic status. By promoting social mobility, tertiary education allows individuals to move up the economic ladder and contribute to their community's overall prosperity. Tertiary education is a crucial stage of the education system that comes after the completion of secondary education. It is commonly referred to as third-level, third-stage, or post-secondary education. Tertiary education is designed to provide individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to enter their chosen career or profession. It is a continuation of education that enables students to further their academic and personal growth and

achieve their career aspirations. Tertiary education plays a significant role in the development of individuals, societies, and economies. It provides individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in their chosen careers and contribute to the growth and development of their communities. Tertiary education is also an important driver of economic growth and development, as it produces skilled workers who can contribute to innovation, productivity, and competitiveness (World Bank, 2021) <sup>[28]</sup>.

### Empirical Review and Theoretical Framework

Okaisabor (2021) studied the impact of government policies and actions against the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, which has resulted in a daily increasing rate of morbidity and mortality. The healthcare systems of most countries have been overstretched due to community transmission of the virus, resulting in medical emergency responses and restrictions from governments. The study assessed Nigeria's preparedness before the detection of the index case, challenges in early response, and supports against COVID-19. The paper also examined failed policies that have compounded the COVID-19 situation in the country. The scholar acknowledged the level of success made so far by the government through some of its policies and responses in curbing the spread of the pandemic. However, it concludes that perceptions disbelieving COVID-19's existence must be dissipated with a risk-communication strategy to defeat the virus.

The study by Nwoye *et al.*, (2021) <sup>[17]</sup> examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on science education in Anambra State, Nigeria, using historical research methods with secondary data. As a result, educators have turned to virtual teaching, leading to groundbreaking improvements in the educational system. The research question's nature calls for the use of secondary data in the study, thus making the historical research method a suitable option. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity of instructing students on safety measures to prevent infection and underscores the government's responsibility to enforce compliance with COVID-19 regulations to control the pandemic's spread. The study recommends sustaining e-learning methods and providing necessary gadgets to students, increasing budgetary allocation for education, teaching safety measures, and monitoring compliance with COVID-19 guidelines to curb the spread of the pandemic.

The study by Okeke *et al.*, (2021) <sup>[21]</sup> investigated the impact of online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on selected primary schools in Anambra State. The study used a descriptive survey research design and collected data from 530 respondents, including 480 teachers and 50 parents, through questionnaires. The results revealed that the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown studies (teaching) in primary schools in Anambra State had a low impact on the children's knowledge and understanding of concepts, and the desired behavioral objectives (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) were not achieved. The recommendations provided by the researchers are practical and relevant, particularly the need for the government to equip primary schools with online teaching devices and to train teachers in the acquisition of ICT skills. The use of Zoom and webinars for online teaching is also a practical recommendation given the prevalence of these technologies during the pandemic.

Igwe (2020) <sup>[14]</sup> conducted a study on the COVID-19 pandemic and the restructuring of educational pedagogy in

Nigeria. The work argues that a redesign of the educational system to incorporate appropriate technology for both teaching and learning would pave the way for innovative insights into knowledge acquisition by using the cognitive theory framework. The research study highlights a number of issues preventing the advancement of the Nigerian educational system, such as insufficient or nonexistent resources for online learning, financial barriers that prevent students from accessing e-learning, exorbitant data fees, unstable power supplies, and limited network and internet connectivity, particularly in remote areas. The study recommends that the government increase its financial support for the education sector and collaborate with other significant stakeholders to build reliable electricity access, high-quality internet connectivity, and other crucial infrastructure in order to overcome these challenges. These recommendations are essential for restructuring the educational pedagogy in Nigeria and ensuring that Nigerian students have access to quality education, regardless of their location or economic status.

In order to scientifically analyze the concerns addressed in this study, it was anchored within the scope of stakeholder theory. It suggests that organizations must balance the interests of different stakeholders, including shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, and the broader community (Freeman, 2010) <sup>[13]</sup>. The first recorded use of the term "stakeholder" was in a 1963 classified communication that was passed around the Stanford Research Institute. The idea didn't start to take off in academic circles, though, until the 1980s. R. Edward Freeman, a renowned academic at the prestigious Darden School of Business, University of Virginia, was one of the most significant proponents of stakeholder theory. The ground-breaking book "Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach" by Freeman, which debuted in 1984, played a significant role in the stakeholder theory's rise to popularity. This theory emphasizes how crucial it is to take into account the interests of all parties involved when conducting operations or making business choices. Stakeholders refer to any group or individual that is affected by an organization's activities, including shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, and the wider community. According to this theory, organizations have a responsibility to balance the interests of their stakeholders in order to create long-term, sustainable value.

In the context of the study mentioned, the stakeholder theory could be used to analyze how tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it could be used to examine how these institutions balance the interests of their stakeholders in implementing health policies to prevent the spread of the virus. The stakeholder theory would suggest that institutions need to consider the needs and concerns of each of these groups when making decisions about health policies. For example, they might need to balance the need to protect the health of students and staff with the need to maintain educational quality and ensure that students are able to complete their degrees on time. They might also need to consider the interests of parents, who may be concerned about the safety of their children, and the broader community, which may be impacted by the spread of the virus on campus. By using the stakeholder theory, the study could provide insights into how tertiary educational institutions can effectively manage the COVID-19 pandemic while balancing the interests of their stakeholders. It could also highlight the

challenges and trade-offs that institutions face when trying to meet the needs of different stakeholders.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The paper utilized the qualitative research method, which is a type of research that is designed to explore and understand social phenomena in their natural setting. The researchers aimed to investigate how the implementation of health policies impacted the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in federal tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State. To gather data for the study, the researchers consulted and analyzed thirty (30) literature sources, which included textbooks, journal publications, and internet sources that were relevant to the topic of the study. The purpose of this was to identify relevant publications and extract useful information that could help answer the research questions. The study focused on three federally funded universities in Anambra State in Nigeria. These academic institutions are Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, the Federal Polytechnic in Oko, and the Federal College of Education (Technical) in Umuze. These institutions were chosen because they are all located in different local government areas within Anambra State, specifically Awka South, Orumba North, and Orumba South. A famous federal institution in Nigeria with a large student body of more than 40,000, Nnamdi Azikiwe institution is located in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The Federal Polytechnic, Oko (Orumba North North Local Government Area), on the other hand, is a federal polytechnic and differs from the prior institution in terms of its academic programmes and educational concentration. The town of Umuze, situated within the Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State, is home to the Federal College of Education (Technical). It was established in 1986 but started operation in 1989 and is known for its strong focus on technical education. By focusing on these three institutions located in different local government areas, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of health policy implementation on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in federal tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State.

### 4. Result and Discussion

According to Olusoji *et al.*, (2016), the World Health Organization (WHO) is a dedicated arm of the United Nations tasked with overseeing global public health initiatives. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO has provided guidelines and recommendations to governments and institutions worldwide on how to respond to the crisis. In Nigeria, the government has been taking measures to control the spread of COVID-19, including the adoption of the WHO's policy guidelines. These guidelines provide information on how to prevent and control the transmission of the virus, as well as how to manage cases of infection. Following the adoption of these guidelines, public institutions in Nigeria, including federal tertiary educational institutions, have taken steps to implement them. This has included measures such as the enforcement of social distancing, the provision of hand sanitizers and other personal protective equipment, and the implementation of remote learning programs. In the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the three main federal tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State—Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Federal Polytechnic, Oko; and Federal College of

Education Technical, Umunze—took proactive measures to combat the spread of the virus.

One of the most important safety measures put in place is frequent hand washing. The colleges have placed numerous handwashing stations throughout their campuses in an effort to encourage excellent hygiene habits. Additionally, the use of hand sanitizer is highly encouraged, especially in situations where hand washing is not possible. The institution made it mandatory for all students, faculty staff, lecturers, and visitors who may need to enter the school for any reason to wear face masks at all times while on campus. According to the Anambra State Government (2021), this measure helps to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus through respiratory droplets. They have also enforced social distancing measures by rearranging seating arrangements in classrooms and lecture halls to ensure that there is adequate space between individuals. Additionally, the institutions have limited the number of people allowed in certain areas of the campus, such as the library and offices, to reduce overcrowding and promote social distancing.

While Anambra State did not experience a significant outbreak of the virus, the institutions recognized the importance of prevention measures to avoid any potential spread. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (2023), the rate of infection in Anambra State as of April 20, 2023, stood at 2,825 cases.

**Table 1:** Confirmed Cases by State

State	No. of Cases Confirmed by lab.	Cases on Admission	No. Discharged	No. of Death
Anambra	2,825	46	2,760	19

*Source:* Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (2023)

However, there has been a gradual decrease in the spread of the virus in Nigeria and the world over, and many institutions and individuals are becoming complacent and disregarding safety guidelines meant to prevent a resurgence of the virus (Oyebanji, 2021; Ogunbode, 2021) <sup>[25, 18]</sup>. This behavior is concerning, as it implies that many people are underestimating the potential risks and dangers of another outbreak of a similar virus. If the current attitudes towards safety measures continue, it could lead to a potentially catastrophic situation if another outbreak were to occur. The lack of adherence to safety protocols in our institutions could create fertile ground for the rapid spread of the virus, putting many lives at risk. It is essential for each person to take the required measures to stop the virus from spreading, despite its decline, as the pandemic still poses a significant threat.

## 5. Conclusion

The World Health Organization has provided guidelines and recommendations to governments and institutions worldwide on how to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In Nigeria, the government and public institutions have adopted these guidelines, including federal tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State, which have taken proactive measures to combat the spread of the virus. These measures include frequent hand washing, the use of hand sanitizers, the mandatory use of face masks, social distancing measures, and limiting the number of people in certain areas. Despite the gradual decrease in the spread of the virus, it is concerning that many institutions and individuals are becoming complacent and disregarding safety guidelines, which could lead to another potentially catastrophic outbreak. Therefore,

it is crucial for everyone to take the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the virus, even as it appears to be winding down.

## 6. Recommendations

The ideal situation that should be on the ground for the impact of health policy implementation on the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in tertiary educational institutions in Anambra State would be a comprehensive approach that involves various stakeholders in the management of the pandemic.

To begin with, it is essential to establish a comprehensive and unambiguous health policy framework that delineates the actions to be implemented for the avoidance and control of COVID-19. This framework should be developed by health experts in collaboration with the management of tertiary institutions and communicated to all stakeholders, including staff, students, and visitors.

The implementation of the health policy should be strictly enforced and monitored to ensure compliance. This can be achieved through regular training and sensitization of staff and students on the importance of adhering to the health policy guidelines.

It is imperative to ensure that there is sufficient availability and accessibility of personal protective equipment (PPE) including facial masks, hand sanitizers, and hand washing stations. These should be made available at strategic locations within the polytechnic, including lecture halls, offices, and other public areas.

There should be regular COVID-19 testing and contact tracing to detect and isolate infected people. One effective approach to accomplish this objective is to work closely with the pertinent healthcare organizations and establish a specialized facility for conducting tests and isolating individuals within their premises.

Finally, there should be a continuous evaluation of the impact of the implementation of the health policy on the management of the pandemic in the polytechnic. One way to accomplish this is by consistently gathering input from stakeholders and examining pertinent information for analysis.

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