

# COVID-19 AND THE WORKPLACE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN DEVELOPING MARKET ECONOMIES: LESSONS, POLICY OPTIONS AND THE EMERGING NEW NORMAL

Michael Sunday Agba<sup>\*</sup>, Regina Ingekem Ocheni<sup>\*\*</sup>,  
Stephen Ikani Ocheni<sup>\*\*\*</sup>, Godwin Ettah<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>, Pius Otu Abang<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>,  
Salisu Ojonemi Paul<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>, Grace Eleojo Michael Agba<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria  
Contact details: University of Calabar, Cross River State, Etagbor, PMB 1115, Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>\*\*</sup> Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja, Nigeria

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Department of Accounting, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> Department of Public Administration & Local Government Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

<sup>\*\*\*\*\*</sup> National Health Insurance Scheme Unit, University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar, Nigeria



## Abstract

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The COVID-19 pandemic, which was declared a global health crisis by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2020, has affected entire sectors of the globe, including the educational sector of developing market economies. This paper attempts to add value to the extant literature and debates on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workplace of higher educational institutions in developing market economies (WHEIDMEs). Using content analysis and a multiple perspective approach (MPA) that is mainly descriptive, the paper argues that beyond the generic view of the catastrophic effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on tertiary educational institutions in developing market economies and the world in general, the pandemic has propelled positive lessons and changes in the management and administration of higher educational institutions (HEIs) in developing market economies. Agba, Ocheni, and Agba (2020) revealed that the COVID-19 outbreak has altered and transformed the fabric of the workplace. The study recommends, among others, that managers of HEIs in developing market economies should build capacity in the area of information and communication technology (ICT), seek adequate funding for the sector from relevant authorities, and take steps that will prepare the educational industry for future emergencies and shocks. Conclusively, lessons leading to pragmatic policy options that are collaborative, adaptive, innovative, and digital are the emerging new normal in HEIs in developing market economies. The study is significant because the findings, lessons, and recommendations of the paper will to a large extent, if adopted, enhance the effective management of HEIs in developing market economies.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Pandemic, Workplace, Higher Education, Institutions, Policy Options, New Normal, Developing Market Economies

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one [COVID-19 pandemic] is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next” (Roy, 2020).

As the topic of this discourse suggest the paper aims to examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workplace of higher educational institutions (HEIs) in developing market economies, particularly the lessons, policy options, and the new normal emanating from the crisis. We decided to open this disquisition with Arundhati Roy’s quotation stated above because, in our thinking, the quote is apt and captivating; especially considering the radical changes the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced in the educational sector, research space, and other aspects of social life across the globe.

Problematically and on an evaluation note, the performance of HEIs (majorly established for teaching, human capital development, research, and community service) in developing market economies has plummeted primarily because of the influence of environmental factors. Against this backdrop, studies have been conducted to examine factors affecting HEIs’ performance in developing market economies (Agba, Ocheni, & Agba, 2020; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013). Among these existential factors is the COVID-19 pandemic. The study progresses from the assumption that a healthy workforce and institution are fundamental in accomplishing strategic goals and objectives at the micro and macro levels of developing market economies. Furthermore, how managers of the educational sector and society respond to emergencies in their environment is key to building sustainability in tertiary education.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which was declared a global health crisis and pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020, has affected entire sectors of the worldwide economy, including the educational sector and the workplace of developing market economies. The virus started in China and spread on a rapid scale to hundreds of countries, including developing economies located on the African continent. As countries live with the scars and pains of COVID-19 and make efforts to recover from its effects, it is germane to undertake a paper of this nature to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Workplace of Higher Educational Institutions in developing market economies (WHEIDMEs). The paper offers insight into the lessons, policy options, and the emerging new normal presented by the COVID-19 pandemic in developing markets. Attempt is made in the study to add the value of knowledge (VoK) to the thesis that the COVID-19 outbreak has altered and transformed the fabric of the workplace in the world (Agba et al., 2020). These are emerging realities that academic staff, students, education managers, and administrators will have to live in a world where change has become a permanent characteristic.

The paper is divided into sections for clarity and enhancement of the understanding of the basic argument promoted. Section 1 sets the scene of the paper by presenting the problem statement of the study. Section 2 reviewed some relevant

literature within the basic paradigms of the topic. A brief research methodology was presented in Section 3. Section 4 further drives the purpose of the paper by examining the lessons, policy options, and the emerging new normal occasioned by COVID-19 and Omicron in the context of developing market economies. Finally, Section 5 makes concluding remarks and areas that need improvement in the management of HEIs in developing market economies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the paper focuses on reviewing relevant and related literature on COVID-19 and its implications on the workplace of HEIs in developing market economies. In doing this, the study adopted the thematic style of literature review.

### 2.1. Strategic role of higher educational institutions

Higher educational institutions (HEIs) are strategic in developing market economies’ socioeconomic and political development. Strategically, they are established for human resources development, teaching, research, and community service (Ocheni & Agba, 2018). Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck (2013) took a historical reflection on the changing role of higher education in Africa and concluded that HEIs in Africa have been performing the diverse function of economic development, Africanisation, nation-building, and engines of the knowledge economy; as well as, executing foreign interest (p. 35). The World Bank (2021a) captures the strategic role of higher education by noting that it is the mechanism for fostering growth, mitigation of poverty, and boosting the distribution of prosperity, innovation, and creativity. According to Bloom, Canning, Chan, and Luca (2014), higher education is an instrument for closing technological gaps and has the potential of maximising Africa’s economic growth and reduction of poverty. These points have long been acknowledged by Plato when he observed that the purpose of higher education is to transform, cultivate, and refine man for the good of the ideal society; the citizens are to be assisted in achieving inner happiness, which would permit the state to profit from the harmony of satisfied citizens accomplishing their proper roles (Alemu, 2018; Allen, 1988, p. 89).

Given the strategic role of HEIs, the sector has recorded some explosive growth and expansion in Africa and other developing market economies. In 1980, Africa possessed 294 universities; this figure expanded to 784 in 2000 and 1682 in 2018. In terms of enrollment, the students’ population in African HEIs in 2017 was estimated at 14.6 million compared to the worldwide population of 220.7 million (Zezeza, 2021). The expansion and growth of HEIs are not unconnected to the importance of the sector to the development of Africa. The former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan points to this role he when expressed in a speech:

“The university must become a primary tool for Africa’s development in the new century. Universities can help develop African expertise; they can enhance the analysis of African problems; strengthen domestic institutions; serve as a model environment for the practice of good governance, conflict

resolution, and respect of human rights; and enable African academics to play an active part in the global community of scholars” (United Nations, 2000).

HEIs operate in a work environment that is unique, and impacts their performance. The work environment refers to the social and organisational settings and physical conditions in which academics and non-academic staff perform assigned tasks. As Berry and Worthen (2012) put it, higher education is a workplace consisting of academic staff/faculty and other categories of workers. The authors of this paper think that HEIs represent a workplace for faculty, non-academic staff, and those who do business within the academic community. A positive, healthy, safe, and excellent workplace environment plays a significant role in motivating workers and stimulating productivity and performance at individual and organisational levels. It is therefore vital to examine how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the workplace environment of HEIs in developing market economies.

## 2.2. Pre-COVID-19 higher educational world of work in developing market economies

The workplace environment of HEIs in developing market economies is diverse and varies from country to country and institution to institution. Largely, the condition and status of the workplace environment depend on the employers. In this regard, Thobaben and Woodward (1996) observe that in most cases, most employers consider the provision of a comfortable workplace environment as having the capacity to sustain a conducive, worker-friendly workplace environment and increase the running cost of the entity.

According to the UniRank database of 2020, the Africa continent boost of about 1,225 (which represents about 8.9% of the world university population) officially recognised HEIs (“Universities in Africa: Higher Education in Africa”, 2021). South Africa, one of the countries in Africa, currently has 26 public universities distributed within 9 provinces of South Africa. By assessment, South African universities demonstrate a relatively stable and good work environment and this is the explanation for the migration of academic staff from other countries in Africa to enhance the human capital and academic staff profile of South African universities. This assessment agrees with Oluwafemi (2012), who observed in an article that South African universities are way ahead of other African universities and may well account for the collaboration between South African universities and those in America and Europe. Since the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, South Africa has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the restructuring and repositioning of university education to catch up with the global competitiveness that has confronted tertiary education in recent times. HEIs have been restructured into three categories: traditional universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology. This restructuring and categorisation were matched with a strong emphasis on the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms (Portnoi, 2015). Generally, South African universities despite, the remarkable progress made at improving the workplace environment for academics, still experience challenges such as workload issues, especially among black academia,

and the challenge of adaptation to changes in the sector; unwelcoming institutional environment affecting female academics and blacks; inhospitable institutional workplace; male-dominated workplace environment; alienating workplace environment affecting female academic staff (Potgieter, 2002; Portnoi, 2015; Perumal, 2003; Austin, 1999). Based on the above, Portnoi (2015) recommended the need to enhance the workplace environment of academic staff in South African HEIs.

Generally, in African countries, there are efforts on the part of government and private owners of higher educational institutions (POHEIs) to improve the workplace and learning environments to build competitiveness, achieve internationalisation and attract international patronage. For example, in Uganda, efforts are made to reposition the sector into an attractive study and learning destinations to attract patronage from Eastern and Southern Africa. To accomplish this, there is a focus on recruiting academic staff from other African countries; accreditation of academic programmes through emphasising quality assurance as defined by Uganda’s National Council for Higher Education in 2001 (Hassan & Macha, 2020). Despite the emphasis on quality assurance and accreditation as stated above, an empirical study conducted by Wilson (2015) revealed an appalling workplace environment in most Ugandan universities with no significant effort to mitigate the situation. This, he concludes, has impacted negatively on the job performance of academic staff, and to reverse the trend, there is a need to put in place good physical facilities, equipment, working spaces, flexible working conditions, etc. Most African universities were confronted with this workplace condition during the outbreak of COVID-19 which aggravated the already deplorable and precarious conditions in HEIs.

The workplace of Nigerian HEIs is not significantly different from that of most African countries. The country has an estimated number of 170 universities spread into 43 federal universities, 48 state universities, and 79 private universities. In the face of global competitiveness and an increase in students enrollment, the need to produce graduates that are employable and productive to themselves and society as well as contribute to building the country’s economy. There are calls and emphasis to improve the workplace and learning environments in the nation’s public universities that are currently on 7 months of industrial action that has further worsened the appalling and deplorable situation. Describing the workplace environment of tertiary educational institutions in Africa, Sawyerr (2004) notes that “African universities have shared fully in the substantial ferment to which the world of higher education has been the subject over the past two decades and more” (p. 1). This account for the poor ranking of Nigerian public universities in the world ranking index except for a few private universities like Covenant University and Afe Babalola University. The Nigerian university system is characterised by the insecurity of lives and property, lack of physical working facilities, poor electric power supply (Agba, 2011, 2015), and persistent agitations/strikes from the Academic Staff Union of Universities in an attempt to press home their demand for increase funding of the system by the Federal Government. With the advent of democratic governance in 1999,

there have been agitations for the delivery of democratic dividends and governance (Agba, Coker, & Agba, 2010) that includes tackling insecurity in Nigerian schools; guaranteeing access to affordable, relevant, and qualitative education from primary to tertiary level.

The governments of developing market economies, as policymakers and regulators saddled with the responsibility of providing quality higher education, are constantly pressured to increase funding through improved budgetary allocations to the education sector. It is in this kind of working and operational environment that African universities operated until COVID-19 broke out in 2020. The next sub-session of the paper will examine a country-to-country response to the COVID-19 pandemic in developing market economies.

### **2.3. Country-to-country response to the COVID-19 pandemic in developing market economies**

Developing countries, otherwise called developing market economies, employed various measures to combat the outbreak COVID-19 pandemic in their localities. These measures briefly discussed below, were strategically aimed at mitigating the catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers, people, societies, communities, families, economies, and institutions. These responses present immediate and futuristic lessons and policy options for developing market economies.

#### *2.3.1. Ghana's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*

Ghana, a country with an estimated population of 32,395,000 as of 2022 was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic (PopulationStat, 2022). The country recorded its first two cases of the pandemic outbreak on March 13, 2020 ("Ghana", 2020), prompting the government to embark on nationwide fumigation disinfection exercises which began in April 2020. To abate the further spread of the virus, the government took the following measures: enforcement of lockdowns, social distancing, expansion of the capacity of health facilities, closure of borders, aggressive contact tracing of infected individuals, public bans, closure of schools, wearing of face masks in public places, the introduction of COVID-19 Alleviation Fund (CAF), the commitment of \$100 million (Dadzie, 2022; Kenu, Frimpong, & Koram, 2020; Centre for Policy Impact in Global Health [CPIGH], 2020) as financial resources to enhance the country's preparedness and response plan to the outbreak of the virus. In terms of impact, the virus affected the place of higher institutions causing disruptions in academic activities and the need to navigate to e-learning platforms as part of the coping strategies during the peak of the crisis in the country.

#### *2.3.2. Botswana's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*

As of September 20, 2022, there is a cumulative figure of 125,994.48 confirmed cases of the virus infections in Botswana (Mathieu et al., 2022). Like most countries, the Botswana government responded to the outbreak of COVID-19 by taking

systemic measures to curtail the spread of the virus in the country. These measures, among others, include government interventions via the setting up of a Presidential Task Force (PTF), enactment of 6 months state of emergency, lockdowns, wearing of face masks, social distancing, closure of schools, reactivation, and capacity building of the National Emergency Operations Centre (Mthimkhulu, 2022). The country's response to disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic is grounded on the philosophical belief that change is inevitable and disasters will continue to affect human life and social activities; thus, the need to constantly review government policies and measures to catch up with disaster challenges as they occur. Botswana policymakers and actors have constantly reviewed the country's National Policy on Disaster Risk Management in line with the current trend in disaster management and environmental changes. From the perspective of implications, the virus affected the workplace of higher institutions causing disruptions in academic calendars and the need to employ ICT and online platforms as part of the measures to cope during the peak of the crisis in the country.

#### *2.3.3. Angola's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*

Angola, a country with a population of 31 million persons, was not excluded from the COVID-19 pandemic. It recorded its first two confirmed cases of the virus on March 21, 2020. This number increased to 103,131, and 1,917 total death from the virus was reported to WHO by September 2022 (WHO, 2022). To curtail the spread of the virus, the government declared a state of emergency, adopted lockdowns, and social distancing, the adoption of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) as a major preventive measure to reduce the spread of the diseases, implementation of emergency cash transfers to vulnerable persons and families, provision of distancing learning support through radio and TV classes, etc. (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). It is vital to note that in Angola, the workplace of higher institutions was altered as workers had to build capacity in the use of ICT as alternative means of delivering academic services.

#### *2.3.4. Zambia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*

Zambia, a country located in Eastern Africa with a population of 19,521,724 (Worldometer, 2022) was equally attacked by the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, in March 2022, the health statistics of Zambia revealed 4,100 new cases of the virus infection bringing the total to 316,850 and a total of 3,966 deaths associated with complications from the virus (Centre for Health Protection, 2022). Workplaces and social activities were affected by the outbreak of the virus in the country. This prompted the government, through its appropriate agencies, to adopt the following measures to mitigate the spread of the virus: preventive measures through the emphasis on personal hygiene, use of face masks, social distancing, public enlightenment, lockdowns, closure of schools which was followed by a focus on remote/e-learning as alternative learning outlets.

### 2.3.5. Tunisia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Tunisia, a country of 12 million persons, is located in Northern Africa. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 to date, there have been reported cases of the virus infections, which have caused over 20,000 deaths in the country due to poor management and a lack of strong political will in handling the crisis. Although, the government of Tunisia has taken steps to vaccinate its people, only 12% of the population has been vaccinated against the virus. Public dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the crisis has been reported in Tunisia (Guesmi, 2021). The virus has negatively affected the workplace of high education institutions as academic activities were disrupted.

### 2.4. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on workplace of higher educational institutions in developing market economies

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the workplace of the educational sector in developing market economies compounding and complicating the already worsening situation in the system. The pandemic has helped to expose the inadequacy of the university system in terms of infrastructure, equipment, safety and health measures, suspension of the academic calendar, loss of academic sessions and lack of strategic management to cope with exigencies and emergencies, inadequate funding, and lack of diligent and prudent utilisation of available financial resources. It has shown that the educational sector in developing market economies and other parts of the world needs prudent and proactive managers and leaders. To this end, foresighted and visionary leadership is urgently required in the sector to galvanise educational resources and prepare for emergencies caused by natural disasters and other intervening variables.

Flowing the above, working from home and teaching remotely through an online learning management system (a strategy adopted to mitigate the spread of the virus) was actually a strategy for which most African universities were not prepared because of infrastructural deficiencies. Schleicher (2020), in describing the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational institutions, observed a loss of instructional duration and time delivered in a school environment and setting. Schools in the global context were shut down, with options to resort to online learning platforms where the technology was available for usage by staff and students. As Reimers and Schleicher (as cited in Schleicher, 2020, p. 15) put it in the context of OECD countries:

"Countries used a variety of resources to support students' learning while they were unable to come to schools, including instructional packages (textbooks, worksheets, and printouts), radio education, educational television, and online instructional resources. Countries usually used several tools in order to reach the largest proportion of students possible. In the OECD and partner countries, online platforms were the most popular tool used during school closing".

Unfortunately, in HEIs located in developing markets economies, most universities could not resort to online learning management systems mainly because of notable deficiencies like

infrastructural inadequacies and lack of basic training to make use of learning management systems (LMSs). This observation and concluding remarks on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic equally apply to countries outside developing market economies. As Schleicher (2020) posits the COVID-19 pandemic:

"... has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our educational systems — from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environment needed to focus on learning, up to the misalignment between resources and needs... Teachers also had to adapt to new pedagogical concepts and modes of delivery of teaching, for which they may not have been trained" (p. 4).

Also, the pandemic gave rise to social distancing in the workplace that required adjustment in HEIs in developing market economies. This led management in the educational sector to emphasise hand washing and the use of face shields to curtail the spread of the virus among staff and students. Governments of African countries implemented restrictions on movements and social distancing strategies/programmes during the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak by advising their citizens to limit the number of travels, keep away from crowded and congested areas, stay at home, and maintain a physical distance of at least 1 meter from others (Ocheni, Agba, Agba, & Eteng, 2020; Agba, Agba, & Chukwurah, 2021). Such a restriction is alien to Africans who are culturally used to community-based and close ties in life and conduct. Writing in relation to this effect, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020) argues that "... the long-term consequences of the pandemic could affect the very fabric of African societies as we know them today, leading to the fragmentation of families and communities, breaking the relation and the trust between States and citizens even further" (p. 4).

Other changes that were introduced in the workplace of educational institutions in Africa were: maintenance of healthy and well-ventilated workplace environments, use of hand sanitisers and nose masks; good hygiene via regularly washing of hands; regularly cleaning and disinfecting the workplace and surfaces in the university environment, etc.

In some African universities, work processes and tasks were decentralised to maintain and encourage social distancing. These compelling adjustments in the workplace became imperative as a great part of staff was directed to work from home. For University Teaching Hospitals, which served as practical grounds for medical colleges for most universities in developing market economies running medicine and surgery academic programmes, there was an increase in the workload and pressures mounted to recruit additional hands. In addition, teleworking and telecommuting became the new trend in the educational sector of developing market economies. Describing one of the effects of COVID-19 in the world of work, Agba et al. (2020) opined that the COVID-19 pandemic escalated existing cracks in the workplace and as the trend remains unabated, it affects social relationships, occupational health, and safety, deepened workplace discrimination and escalated global unemployment.

Recent COVID-19-related researchers reveal both positive and negative effects of the pandemic on educational systems and learners. On the positive side, some visionary countries are using their COVID-19 managerial and policy responses to tackle strategic educational priorities, including building new and enhancing existing educational facilities and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in the sector. Nevertheless, insufficient financial resources in the educational sector and “unexpected shocks” during this crisis are causing unprecedented systemic disruption in the sector and risk long-term damage defined in terms of the closure of low-fee private schools accessible to low-income families

and societies, with a consequential effect of learners’ displacement and a loss of employment for teachers in the sector (ADEA, AU/CIEFFA, & APHRC, 2021). Furthermore, the closure of educational institutions and academic activities and the resulting disruptions in academic calendars, school participation, and academic learning are estimated to have incurred up to \$10 trillion in losses in terms of affected students’ future earnings (The World Bank, 2021b).

Generally, some of the government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa have been associated with direct effects as described in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Direct effects of the measures adopted to fight COVID-19

S/N	Government measures and responses	Immediate consequences
1.	Systematic testing of people arriving from a foreign country via an airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure on the capacities to receive and manage patients for healthcare services due to the sudden increase in the number of cases.</li> <li>• Identification and allotment of additional budgetary resources.</li> </ul>
2.	Wearing protective face masks is recommended and initiation of social distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulation and adaptation of local capacities for the production of masks and hydro-alcoholic gel.</li> <li>• Increased spending of households and decentralised structure.</li> </ul>
3.	National border shutdown and quarantine of positive cases and travellers arriving from abroad for 14 days at public expense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restricted number of tourists and visitors.</li> <li>• Reduced business trips.</li> <li>• Pressure on the capacities to receive patients for hospitals and accommodation facilities.</li> <li>• Increased government spending.</li> </ul>
4.	Closure of educational institutions and (mixed) implementation of remote education; public appeals for donations, solidarity, and generosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational discontinuity for students.</li> <li>• Unemployment of teachers and other administrative staff and managing personnel.</li> <li>• Closure/Malfunction of non-educational school institutions.</li> <li>• Pressure on households’ resources to meet the needs of distance learning, with an additional challenge for parents in their ability to manage the students as a substitute for conventional teachers.</li> <li>• Hasty cessation for children and young people at risk of dropping out of classes.</li> <li>• Increased deterioration of school infrastructure and facilities due to lack of regular attendance and maintenance.</li> <li>• Strong loss of private, community, and religious teachers.</li> </ul>
5.	Prohibition of meetings of more than 50 people, closure of places of worship and entertainment, regulation of public transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social distancing and disruption of cultural practices for the communities.</li> <li>• Isolation of senior citizens, who are more fragile.</li> <li>• Decrease in the economic activities of entertainment companies, especially the ones working at night.</li> <li>• Drop in consumption of oil products.</li> <li>• Limitation of atmospheric pollution.</li> </ul>
6.	Establishment of remote work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitation of interaction and increase in spending for remote communication.</li> <li>• Family pressure for active workers.</li> <li>• Drop in consumption of oil products.</li> <li>• Limitation of atmospheric pollution.</li> <li>• More frequent interactions with family members.</li> <li>• Staff cut/temporary layoffs/separation with non-essential personnel.</li> <li>• Other solicitations.</li> </ul>
7.	Curfew at night	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limitation of people’s movements.</li> <li>• Closure of enterprises at night.</li> </ul>

Source: UNESCO (2020, p. 8).

As can be observed from Table 1, the government response to the outbreak of the virus in Africa has been diverse and manifold. In some cases, like the case of Nigeria, it involved the adoption of palliative measures by government and non-governmental agencies to cushion the adverse effect of the pandemic on the citizens, civil servants, and masses. Unfortunately, the implementation of the palliative measures and subvention programmes in terms of food items and financial disbursement was associated with corruption, bribery, marginalisation, accusations, and counter-accusations. For instance, it was alleged that while the federal government provided financial subsidies for academic and non-academic staff in federal universities to cushion the adverse effects of the pandemic, this palliative measure was shared among a few individuals in some affected universities. Furthermore, monies meant for

the setting up of COVID-19 isolation centres were not transparently used by the managers and administrators of the tertiary institutions. The above problems including other social problems encountered by the masses led to the #EndSARS protest, which almost led to the collapse of the Nigerian state. Government interventions, measures, and programmes failed in some quarters because of the people involved in their execution. Public programme and project implementation have been a challenge in Nigeria and Africa in general. Egonmwan (1991) acknowledges this when he wrote that the problem with governance in Africa has been that of poor policy implementation. Africa sometimes seems to portray good policy intentions, but at the level of implementation, things go wrong. He described the implementation stage of public programmes as the stage, we grapple with realities.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a descriptive research design which involves the collection of data via the means of secondary sources. The qualitative data of the paper were sourced from secondary outlets like textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, and non-governmental publications. The secondary outlets used in the paper are available on the Internet and respective websites. The data gathered from these sources were organized in a thematic format which was aligned with the key variables of the topic. In organising the thoughts and qualitative data of the paper, a content analysis and a multiple perspective approach (MPA) that is mainly descriptive were adopted. The MPA involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative data which allows for a balanced, complementary, and objective debate. The thematic style of the literature review was adopted in the paper to enhance the clarity of the points presented. The study also carried out a country-by-country analysis of government response to the COVID-19 pandemic in developing markets. The analysis covered five countries, with each country selected through purposive sampling technique from the five major divisions of the African continent — Western Africa (Ghana), Southern Africa (Botswana), Central Africa (Angola), Eastern Africa (Zambia) and Northern Africa (Tunisia). To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis/discussions, data were generated from reputable websites and textbooks. The authorities of these websites and secondary resources are considered experts in the subject area covered in the discourse. Related further studies could adopt a quantitative statistical approach which might involve the administration of questionnaires to the targeted population and study elements and the analysis of data obtained from the field could be done via statistical techniques.

### 4. LESSONS, POLICY OPTIONS AND THE EMERGING NEW NORMAL

Developing market economies have gone through the first, second, and third waves of the virus with the recent variant called the Omicron. In all these waves, the pandemic has taught developing market economies some vital lessons and opened several policy options and new normal. The COVID-19 pandemic presents multiple lessons for developing market economies. As it is often observed we learn from life experiences that constitute a potential source of knowledge acquisition and which, if properly deployed, can help ameliorate unpleasant consequences from reoccurring. It is for this reason, the dictum is usually expressed that “experience is the best teacher” (Agba, 2014). The following are the obvious lessons that flow from the COVID-19 pandemic in the context of developing market economies.

1) *The health sector* is a vital component of public governance that must not be compromised for the sake of the effective running of other institutions of governance. As is usually postulated, “a healthy population makes for productive workers”. We cannot talk of high performing workforce where the persons to do the job are unhealthy. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the

workforce of higher educational institutions and other organisations on the continent of Africa and the world to health crises, and victims of the health crisis caused by the pandemic had limited health facilities to offer affordable and accessible medications and healthcare. According to Holtz (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted healthcare services in Africa and directly caused the deaths of about 200,000 people on the continent. It was further observed that globally, in 2020, access to healthcare services dropped significantly compared to 2019. This decline is alluded to have been caused by some factors: difficulties faced in both medical facilities and the patients’ community; patients’ fear of contracting COVID-19 from their visit accounts for the most reason for not seeking medical care and the inability to reach healthcare facilities as a result of the disruptions in public transportation and stay-at-home orders from the government (Holtz, 2021). Africans had to learn the lesson of building capacity in the health sector and expanding medical care facilities to cope with the challenges caused by the pandemic.

2) *Budgetary allocation and investment in the educational sector*: The COVID-19 pandemic reveals the need to properly and adequately fund the educational sector and ensure the transparent utilisation of fiscal resources and allocations. The transition to online learning management system (OLMS) as a coping strategy during the pandemic was easy for educational institutions in Africa that could judiciously use budgetary provisions to digitalise their educational systems. Governments in Africa must take steps to close the gaps and deficiencies in the system by investing massively in education. Although digitalising the learning delivery operations and channels in HEIs in Africa is costly, the prudent use of budgeted funds is one of the sure means of accomplishing this, and restoring about 1.6 billion learners who were affected as a result of the closure of schools across the world (UNESCO, 2020) meant to mitigate the spread of the virus the world over.

3) *Initiating and implementing planned learning recovery programmes*: As a policy measure directed at recovering the educational sector from the disruptions in academic activities and learning losses occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to initiate and implement learning recovery programmes funded and supported by the government and international donors. This according to The World Bank (2021b), may take the form of supporting and preparing all lecturers/teachers to address learning losses among their students and integrate digital technology into their teaching activities. Extra lessons and live streaming of lectures/classes may be delivered to students in their homes and locations outside the classroom.

4) *Protection of educational budgets and establishment of educational endowment fund*: This has become inevitable since the budgetary allocations of most countries in developing countries have consistently fallen below the global recommended standard. It will be recalled that UNESCO, in one of its policy documents, advocated that about 26% of the national budget of countries be allocated to the educational sector. This has to be adopted, sustained, and well-implemented to serve as a driver for the development of the educational sector in Africa.

5) *Reforming the educational sector to incorporate employable skills for staff and students:* Because of the associated hardship associated with the COVID-19 pandemic most faculties and staff working in private owned tertiary institutions in Africa and the world (primarily because they were laid off from their teaching jobs occasioned by the inability of proprietors to pay salaries and allowances), there was need to re-engineer the educational sector by redesigning the curricula and training programmes to incorporate employable/saleable skills largely in the area of digital skills that have the potentials of creating opportunities for remote jobs and teleworking. It is statistically estimated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020) that the COVID-19 pandemic led to the loss of 195 million jobs globally. This is collaborated by Loayza and Pennings (2020) who observed that the COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in unemployment and underemployment rates and threatened the survival of many firms worldwide. The uncertainty in the air was so high for a sector like education largely considered as the pillar of development and social peace. Thus, rebuilding and reequipping the educational industry as a means of preparing for future shocks became an obvious lesson and policy agenda emanating from the COVID-19 outbreak.

6) *The call for leadership reorientation and the emergence of thorough breed politicians:* Leadership and political questions lies at the heart of public and corporate governance in Africa. Thus, the social and economic shocks that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa and other developing countries exposed the leadership ineptitude in Africa, especially in the area of education, health, security, and other sectors. For instance, Achebe (1983) had long argued that leadership crisis lies at the heart of Nigeria's (and Africa's) predicament and this became obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic. Political leaders and bureaucrats must pay attention to the educational, health, security, and other sectors. They are called to serve the masses and distribute the gains of democracy through public programmes, projects, and policies for which responding positively to pandemics is critical.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As the educational sector in Africa and the world generally struggle to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to prioritise government spendings and provide integrated support for staff, students, and educational institutions. In operational terms, this will require increased funding for the sector and interrelated sectors, judicious utilisation of financial and non-financial resources, training and retraining of staff and students, capacity building, collaborations, and team spirit. Migrating from the conventional ways of educational delivery to an educational system that is highly digitalised will remain a viable option to be considered in developing market economies. The digital economy is evolving rapidly, and data remain an economic and strategic resource facilitated and reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic as most scientific, commercial, and socio-economic activities move online (United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2021). Thus, integrating African educational institutions into the global digital economy that is rapidly changing is a new normal for the continent. According to Mukhisa Kituyi, the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), "By the end of the next decade, growth, productivity gains, and human development will be determined by levels of integration into the digital economy. To guard against new forms of inequality, the international community must do more to help developing countries close the connectivity gap" (Kituyi, 2018). The economic gains and competitive advantage emerging from the digital economy as indicated in the quotation below is captivating and should be duly utilised:

"Although there is difficulty in measuring the contribution of the digital economy because of its rapid change, researchers estimate that the digital economy is worth \$11.5 trillion globally, equivalent to 15.5% of the global GDP, and has grown two and half times faster than global GDP over the past 15 years" (Nwoziri, 2020).

Developing market economies possess the intellectual human resource to fit into the digital economy emerging out of the post-COVID-19 pandemic. What they need essentially is the political will and collaboration with relevant international and domestic agencies to drive the process. The WHEIDMEs will be more digitalised in the coming years and decades. For staff and students to be relevant and play a strategic role in the sector, they must possess relevant digital skills and knowledge. This means educational managers and administrators must collaborate with staff and students to identify the specific ICT training needs in the workplace and provide/reinforce capacity building in this direction. As we conclude this disquisition and analysis, it is important to note that, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath effects have altered the workplace of academic delivery in HEIs of developing market economies and there is an urgent call for goal-oriented reforms in the sector to assist staff, students and the public to adjust to the new normal.

Following the postulation of the generosity moment theory (Akware, Agba, & Edino, 2013), the paper concludes by recommending the need for political elites across the developing market economies to be generous to the educational sector by deploying governance, financial and legislative resources to enhance infrastructural development, initiate funding of programmes/schemes that will promote employable skills among staff and students through necessary empowerment and compensation of academic staff in the sector. Furthermore, to revamp the educational sector and facilitate its recovery from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the rise of advocacy for innovative financing of the sector through means like impacts bonds which must be based on informed data decision-making and schemes (Gustafsson-Wright et al., 2022). Funding and prudent deployment of financial resources for the sector is critical if the sector must be strengthened and proactively equipped to face the challenges of the future.

The study has the following limitations and constraints. Methodologically, the study is utilised content/descriptive analysis and did not employ



a quantitative approach that allows for the design and administration of research instrument to a targeted population. Second, the study is limited to developing market economies and assumes that the findings will permit generalisations and can be reasonably applied to most developing countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of the conclusion, it is pertinent to state that the paper has opened areas for future research. For instance, future research could investigate in qualitative and quantitative terms how

the COVID-19 pandemic has affected human capital development in developing market economies. Furthermore, future research could also consider studying the impact of navigating to online learning platforms on public and private educational institutions. Such studies could also examine the effect of e-learning on human capital development in times of national and global crisis and how the online learning alternative can be sustained by developing market economies.

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