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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CORRELATION BETWEEN THE PROLONGED COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND ACADEMIC REGRESSION AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ENUGU STATE

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#### Abstract

The emergence of the Covid-19 virus represents an unprecedented global health crisis that affected every human endeavor. Intimations suggest that the prolonged lockdown occasioned by the dreaded coronavirus pandemic may have triggered academic regression among school students, especially at the secondary education level in Nigeria. Based on this, we conducted this study to explore if there would be a significant relationship between the prolonged school break and academic regression among a sample of secondary school students in Enugu State, Nigeria. A convenience sample of three hundred and eighteen students randomly pooled from secondary schools participated in the study. The participants completed a self-report measure of the Academic Regression Inventory. The result of Pearson's correlation revealed a significant positive relationship between the prolonged academic break and academic regression. The findings, implications, and conclusion are discussed.

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#### Introduction:-

Nigeria's educational landscape has witnessed a consistent pattern of disruption in the education calendar due to persistent industrial actions, usually between the government, school management, and the labor unions. Numerous authors have underscored the patterns and implications of the consistent strike actions on the educational development of the country (Adavbiele, 2015; Akindele, 2014; Bamigboye & Adeyemi, 2016; Davis et al., 2016; Ibrahim, 2015; Offem et al., 2018; Ohiweri & Onimawo, 2016; Orok-Duke et al., 2016; Suleiman et al., 2019; Ugarr, 2018). Although the strike actions are mainly prolonged, the emergence of the dreaded coronavirus provided a unique challenge to Nigeria's educational system and the world. The virus that is widely suspected to originate from the Republic of China has been confirmed a pandemic due to its rapid spread (Dhall & Singh, 2020). Thus, the dawn of the disease made the world immobile. The rapid spread of the virus created a massive socio-economic predicament (Beland et al., 2020; Dani & Menéndez, 2020; Gratz et al., 2020; Hasheimi-Shahri et al., 2020; Safonov & Borshch, 2020; Schubert, 2020) and led to an enormous personal and public health loss (Hancher-Rauch et al., 2021). Accordingly, the World Health Organization considered the virus a transmittable disease due to its characteristics including rapid infestation (Chaurasia & Pal, 2020). Several reports highlighted the rapid mortality rate associated with disease (Bone et al., 2020; Karim & Chen, 2021; Kreger et al., 2020; Rubino et al., 2020). Also, the impact of the covid-19 outbreaks on mental health attracted considerable research attention (El-Zogby et al., 2020; Goyal & Selixx, 2021; Haider et al., 2020; Mancini, 2020; Narchou et al., 2020; Octavius et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the negative impact of the virus extended to school students' overall well-being.

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To mitigate the widespread of the disease, a global measure of lockdown was initiated, prompting the closure of educational institutions across all levels (Lawal et al., 2020; Oladipo et al., 2020). With this action, the educational system of many societies was affected (Adebisi et al., 2020; Almazova et al., 2020; Balakrishnan, 2020; Ifijeh & Yusuf, 2020; Leacock & Warrican, 2020; Oyediran et al., 2020; Stepanović, 2020). The Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) assumed that many students in about 188 countries were affected by the closure of schools. This prolonged closure could harm students' psychological processes.

In Nigeria, online learning was massively adopted to alleviate the effect of the stay at home on the students. Although the online learning method provided a valid alternative, there were concerns about students' readiness to study online in Nigeria. Accordingly, the IT and web skills of the student were the primary concern of e-learning (Nwagwu, 2020). Perhaps, previous studies have underscored the challenges associated with online learning in Nigeria (Aboderin, 2015; Adanikin et al., 2020; Adeyeye, 2019; Ebelogu et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2021; Igbokwe et al., 2020; Kola & Opeyemi, 2020; Kuliya & Usman, 2021; Nwegbu et al., 2011; Odunayo & Izu, 2013; Philomina et al., 2020). Perhaps, many students were not accommodated in the online platform due to numerous reasons ranging from internet access to ignorance. Thus, the disadvantaged students may have spent the entire lockdown period in non-academics-related activities. This trend could aid memory loss, impede interest and motivation, and increase relapse.

Academic regression is operationalized as the loss of learning occasioned by disruptions in teaching and learning. Perhaps, it could be described as a slippage, diffusion of skills, inability to uphold skills, or poor generalization of abilities relating to academic activities. Similarly, Clopton (2020) contends that the Pandemic prompted academic relapse in many children who suddenly ask for help with tasks they have previously mastered. Amidst learning disruption, skills can wane, leaving the students frustrated and unmotivated. With remote learning being far less effective than the face-to-face, teacher-driven classroom approach, many students have suffered regression in education. Indeed, the Pandemic left many students with gaps in their learning and a need for other means of preserving skills that have regressed or become lost. This indicates that many students struggle to recoup their learning loss as the school reopens.

### **The Present Study**

The protracted academic disruption occasioned by the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic prompted a broad concern that most students may be disconnected from their numerous school activities. Indeed, intimations suggest that students' dedication to their study is implicated in improved academic outcomes (Abubakr, 2018; Dogan, 2015; Lee, 2014; Odu, 2020; Valle et al., 2016; Wonglorsaichon et al., 2014). Conversely, students' inability to fully engage in schoolwork activities could destabilize their academic accomplishment (Enwereuzor et al., 2016). An observation of school-going students suggests that the motivation to copy notes and complete homework is declined, probably due to the more extended stay-at-home period. Regarding the importance of schoolwork involvement in students' academic achievement, research has explored different variables that could explain the variation in schoolwork participation, for example, intrinsic motivation, teacher behaviors, teaching practices, and school environment (Assor et al., 2002; Lavrijsen et al., 2021; McKellar et al., 2020; Shih, 2012). However, research must investigate variables capable of impacting schoolwork engagement. Thus, the present study examined schoolwork engagement based on the prolonged lockdown.

### **Hypothesis:**

There will be a significant correlation between the Covid-19 prolonged academic lockdown and academic regression among secondary school students in Enugu State, Nigeria.

### **Method:-**

A convenience sample of secondary school students comprising males and females from junior and senior classes was randomly pooled from public and private secondary schools between August and November 2021. The students were approached with the assistance of school teachers and research assistants. The objective of the survey was described to the respondents, and they were informed that involvement is voluntary and no injury is associated with the investigation. Three hundred and fifty copies of the study instrument were distributed, and the students were urged to complete the questions following a brief elucidation of the items. The questionnaires were collected on the spot. However, it was observed that nine copies of the questionnaires were not returned, while 23 copies were wrongly filled, thus being discarded. In all, the 318 correctly completed questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis. The study adopted a correlational design.

### Measures:-

Academic regression was measured using a developed Academic Regression Inventory (ARI). The 10-item scale instrument designed to elicit information about cognitive and behavioral commitment towards class engagement is answered in a 5-point Likert form. Score in the scale ranged between 10 and 50, with a higher score indicating higher academic regression. The scale's reliability was ascertained after a pilot study, and a Cronbach alpha  $r = .092$  coefficient was recorded on the scale.

### Result:-

It is expected in the present study that the prolonged lockdown would positively correlate with academic regression in the post-Covid-19 classroom. A Pearson's product-moment correlation was performed to examine the relationship between the variables. Three hundred and eighteen respondents were recruited. The analyses revealed that the relationship was linear with both variables normally distributed, as measured by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p > .05$ ), and no outliers were observed. There was a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between the prolonged lockdown and academic regression,  $r(316) = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ , with pre-retirement anxiety explaining 31.1% of the variation in academic regression.

**Table 1:-** Table showing the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. Prolonged lockdown	2.91	0.34	.12**	
2. Academic regression	4.69	0.51	-.34	.42**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.311			

Note.  $N = 318$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

### Discussion:-

The present study aimed to determine the effect of the Covid-19 related school closure on students' academic regression in a post-Covid classroom. A Pearson's product-moment correlation was conducted on the data. The result indicated a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between the prolonged lockdown and academic regression,  $r(316) = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ , with the extended lockdown explaining 31.1% of the variation in academic regression. The finding corroborated the finding of Sabates et al. (2021), which showed an average learning loss of 66% of previously mastered foundational numeracy during the Pandemic. Similarly, previous studies have indicated a decline in schoolwork due to prolonged school breaks (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Sevilla & Ceballos, 2020). The dynamic learning models had underscored how small academic losses could accumulate into immense difficulties with time (Diprete & Eirich, 2006; Fuchs-Schündeln et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these preliminary finding projects the concern that missing school for a prolonged period will likely have significant impacts on student achievement in the post-Covid-19 classroom. A similar study implied that students made little or no progress while learning from home and suggested losses even more considerable in countries with weaker infrastructure or more prolonged school closures (Engzell et al., 2021). Perhaps, the introduction of remote learning may not have fully moderated the gap in learning during the lockdown. The Covid-19 emergency is a call to action for experts and policymakers alike. As schools are back in session, they must be prepared to support students, many of whom will likely be behind relative to academic. Thus, the study provides insight into the difficulty in academic readjustment following a long break.

### Practical Implication

The severe effects of pandemic-induced education loss and learning relapse impacted numerous students. There is a need to recognize it early and make immediate, harsh course corrections. Thus, the present study provided valuable data for the education sector in the post-Covid-19 policies. The study further implies that the Covid-19 outbreak negatively impacted students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral correlates of education.

### Conclusion:-

This study focuses on the correlation between long academic breaks and academic regression in the post-Covid-19 classroom. It is concluded that the prolonged lockdown is positively correlated with academic regression among secondary school students in Enugu state. Thus, the present study contributes to the literature by revealing the pandemic-induced school closure as a variable that accounts for the variance in academic relapse among secondary school students in the post-Covid-19 era. However, caution is advised regarding the generalization of the finding due to the sample size and data collection method. However, it is recommended that educators and policymakers prepare

for many students who have substantially regressed academically due to the prolonged lockdown in the post-Covid-19 classroom.

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