

COVID-19 Pandemic and Performance of Civil Servants in Enugu State Ministry of Education

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ABSTRACT

The study evaluates the COVID-19 pandemic and the performance of civil servants in Enugu State Ministry of Education. The specific objectives were to: examine the relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state, evaluate the extent of the relationship between work-from-home policies and the efficiency of the civil servants in Enugu state, determine the relationship between shutdown movement and the quality service of civil servants in Enugu state and ascertain the relationship between government adopting preventive policies and effectiveness of civil servants in Enugu state. The study employed a survey method of co-relational design research. The population of the Study constituted all workers of the Ministry of Education in Enugu state, 298 staff. A primary and secondary source of data was used. The data collected from the questionnaire were presented in frequency tables, means scores, and percentages were used in the analysis and tested using Chi-Square (χ^2). The findings indicated that: there was a positive significant relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state $r(95, n = 298) = .793, p < .05$, there was a positive significant relationship between work-from-home policies and efficiency of the civil servants of Enugu state $r(95, n = 298) = .845, p < .05$, there was a positive significant relationship between shutdown movement and the quality service of the civil servants in Enugu state $r(95, n = 298) = .696, p < .05$, and there is a positive relationship between governments adopting preventive policies and effectiveness of civil servants in Enugu state $r(97, n = 298) = .881, p < .05$. The study concluded that stay-at-home due to covid-19, and work-from-home policies had positive significant relationship with output, efficiency, quality service and effectiveness of civil servants in Enugu state. The study recommended among others that the Ministry of Education should develop strategies for remote learning on a long-term basis to mitigate employee stress and enhance performance.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Civil Servant Performance, Remote Work Policies, Government Preventive Measures, Enugu State Ministry of Education

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the work and workplaces of the civil servants. Civil servants are playing a leading role in the response to the pandemic. This pandemic has brought about recent changes and disturbances in the educational sector that catalyze any nation's growth. Globally, the educational sector is seen shifting to e-learning to cushion the effect of this pandemic. The educational sector is greatly affected as teachers are working from home via social media (e-learning) which causes a great decline in education performance standards. Civil servants are finding novel ways to design and channel unprecedented economic stimulus spending and manage severe spikes in unemployment [1]. However, the difficulty of moving from the conventional teaching system to e-learning during the pandemic is evidenced by Nigeria's experience in developing countries. The challenges arise as a result of the institutions' varying degrees of preparedness, lack of infrastructure, lack of funds, and issues of policy in the education sector in Nigeria [2]. A struggle was going on before COVID-19 to ensure young children stay in school and have access to proper education, as Nigeria contributes approximately 20% of the total global out-of-school population. On 19 March 2020, the Federal Ministry of Education approved school closures as a response to the pandemic. However, on 27 March Enugu State Government directed all primary and secondary schools in the state to close. The state Commissioner for Education, Prof Uche Eze, disclosed this on Thursday in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) in Enugu. According to Prof Eze, the directive was part of measures to ensure that Corona virus does not spread in the state. Ahead of the reopening of

educational institutions, the Federal Government (FG) has outlined conditions to be met by each of the schools. They have advised the schools to put in place preventive measures against Covid-19 before announcing reopening dates [3]. The COVID-19 pandemic is revolutionizing digital and online education globally but kids in rural and underserved communities in Enugu state, Nigeria, are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to the new methods of learning [4]. Children on the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum may experience less disruption to their learning because their private schools are well-equipped with ICT infrastructure and they can afford remote learning resources at home. The majority that would be left struggling are the students from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, who do not have access to computers and other devices outside school [5]. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was an event so unprecedented that governments, with few exceptions, had no benchmark or previous experience to rely on. It required a quick and multi-faceted response. First and foremost, governments had to introduce measures to contain the spread of the virus, flatten the curve of the number of infected, and make sure that healthcare facilities would not be overwhelmed. The measures that governments took led to more or less intensive lockdown of the economies and produced massive, negative, micro, and macroeconomic effects. Consequently, in the second wave of policy responses, governments tried to alleviate the imminent economic crisis and mitigate the impact of the crisis on the economic well-being of citizens [6]. The federal civil service bureaus and offices, the regional equivalents, and local governments focus on institutional-related factors such as establishing a pandemic prevention and control committee; providing public education; approving special leave particularly for staff having blood pressure, diabetes, heart cases, asthmatic and other respiratory cases; providing institutional transportation; rearranging office space to ensure physical distancing; ensuring individual and workplace cleaning and sanitation services; improving service public service process and providing facilities (comprising supplying cleaning and protection facilities, adequate physical distancing and customer sequencing); and reporting civil servants infected by the virus [7]. Notwithstanding the pandemic, performance is of great paramount in any sector which the educational sector is not exempted, however, to commensurate to the education performance standard, a new World Bank note outlined three key principles to strengthen teacher performance during and in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, as well as opportunities for long-run improvement: the principles are to support teachers resilience, instructional and technologically to ensure teachers effectiveness. Based on the above background, the present study tries to evaluate the COVID-19 pandemic and the performance of civil servants in the Enugu State Ministry of Education. Specifically, the study sought to: examine the relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state, and evaluate the extent of the relationship between work-from-home polices and the efficiency of the civil servants in Enugu state.

Statement of the Problem

In the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, however, civil servants are working under life-threatening circumstances. In all Covid-19 pandemic-affected countries they are both expected to deliver services despite the pandemic while at the same time suffering its impact, either by being directly infected or having family members who are. Students, their parents, and educators around the world are feeling the extraordinary ripple effect of the novel pandemic as schools are shutting down and quarantine methods are being ordered to cope with the global pandemic. While governments and health officials are doing their best to slow down the outbreak, global education systems are collaborating to collectively respond and provide quality education for all during these difficult times. The Covid-19 pandemic is a huge challenge to education systems. It is hard to believe that more than three months have passed since schools across the country suddenly closed their doors as a precaution against the spread of the pandemic. As shelter-in-place and stay-at-home directives were issued, districts were forced to make swift decisions that left many teachers with little to no advance notice or instructions about how, and for how long, they would be teaching their students from home. In the wake of COVID-19, educators are facing unprecedented challenges, including the disruption of established instructional programs and routines, the rapid transition from in-person teaching to remote learning, the emotional toll of isolation due to shutdown movement, uncertainty about personal safety and health, and government adopting preventive policies. Thus, the above militating challenges of the performance of the civil servants demand a serious modification and long-lasting solution which failure to adjust could lead to inadequate output, inefficiency, poor quality service delivery, and ineffectiveness of the performance of civil servants of Enugu state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19

COVID-19 disease is defined as an illness caused by a novel coronavirus now called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was initially reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency [8]. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009 [9]. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses [10]. According to Africa Union, [11], Scientists are still learning about the disease, and think that the virus began in animals. At some point, one or more humans acquired an infection from an animal, and those infected humans began transmitting the infection to other humans. The disease spreads from person to person through infected air droplets that are projected during sneezing or coughing. It can also be transmitted when humans have contact with hands or surfaces that contain the virus and touch their eyes, nose, or mouth with the contaminated hands. COVID-19 was first reported in China, but it has now spread throughout the world. With a population of over 200 million people, Nigeria is one of the most populous black nations worldwide. As with the rest of the world, Nigeria is currently dealing with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, but in a somewhat different fashion. On Feb 27, 2020, the first official case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was announced. The patient was an Italian citizen, who had recently arrived in Lagos from Europe and who, a few days later, tested positive for the disease. In Ogun state, a neighboring state to Lagos, another patient was identified and was discovered to have been in contact with the first patient. Since then, the situation has developed with more cases occurring, regardless of measures initiated by the state and federal government to combat the virus and return to normalcy. As of April 22, there were 873 confirmed cases, 197 recoveries, and 28 deaths [12].

Stay-at-Home due to Covid-19

The Nigerian government has asked a category of civil servants to stay at home, the move is connected to the coronavirus pandemic which has forced most states in the country to close schools [13]. Stay-at-home orders related to the COVID-19 pandemic have gone into effect in different areas of Nigeria. WHO has advised several methods to help prevent the spread of the virus and to save health systems across the world from a complete collapse—eg, health washing, social distancing, and staying at home [12]. While the hope is everyone voluntarily complies with these types of orders, having a formal executive order allows some ability for governments to regulate the movements of people and closure of businesses to slow the spread of COVID-19. Restrictions like social distancing physical distancing, or shelter-in-place orders have been found to be effective in some areas, mostly in combination with other strategies like testing and close contact tracing. Stay-at-home orders have been important public health tools to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the Nigerian states and abroad [14]. The "stay-at-home" campaign and proscription of (large) social gatherings mean that social interaction has been limited. Globalization, which signifies the compression of time and space, aids the transmission of diseases on a global scale, facilitating the spread of COVID-19. The world has been witnessing global trade, the movement of people, and the globalization of health [15]. Civil servants are undergoing a massive and unplanned experiment in flexible people management, which - despite logistical challenges - is revealing areas of strength and resilience. Reflection on performance and productivity in this time of crisis will be essential to harvest lessons [6].

Work-from-Home due to covid-19 challenges

Work-from-home is a present situation due covid-19 pandemic, whereby employees work from their houses rather than working from the office. As expected, the first reaction by most organizations has been to direct their employees to work remotely, to protect their employees and clients from the spread of the pandemic [16]. With the lockdown and subsequent closure of most offices, individuals are now forced to work from home, a hitherto unacceptable work style in most of corporate Nigeria where staff in most offices must dress up and show up daily as one of the prerequisites for earning their pay. This stems from the erroneous mindset that, the only way to be accountable and productive is by physically showing up at work. Well, how times have changed, and with it an attendant change in mindset, even if it is 'forced' Individuals, especially those in the corporate world, have now adapted to setting up 'shop' at home using any available/convenient space in their homes for that purpose [17]. In April 2020, when Nigerian workers were forced to work from home due to COVID-19, it came as a pleasant surprise to many. Workers in Lagos were particularly excited by the prospect of finally being able to avoid the typical stress associated with commuting in Africa's most populated city. Many of the professionals who initially favoured the idea of indefinitely working from home, soon became bored as the lockdown persisted. They longed to return to their offices. However, this was not quite going to happen. Even though the Federal Government had introduced the "phased and gradual" easing of the lockdown in early May, some employers directed their employees to keep working from home, out of fear of the contagious Coronavirus [18]. Nigeria is a peculiar country where working from home is difficult. Notably, lack of constant power supply and good internet connection are major problems (the same reason most Lagosians prefer to go to the office despite the four hours they waste in traffic daily). In addition to the age-long problems of erratic electricity and poor internet connection, there are other latent challenges people who are new to working from home might face during this period of social distancing and self-isolation. And inadvertently, how productive workers are during this period of social distancing could set precedence in making a case for or against working from home in Nigeria [19].

**Theoretical Framework
Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory**

Rogers, E.M. 1962 Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory, is one of the oldest social science theories. It originated in communication to explain how an idea or product gains momentum and spreads through a specific population or social system. The result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, or product. Adoption means that a person does something differently than what they had previously. The key to adoption is that the person must perceive the idea, behavior, or product as new or innovative. It is through this that diffusion is possible. There are five established adopter categories; researchers have found that people who adopt an innovation early have different characteristics than people who adopt an innovation later. Based on this model there are five strategies used to appeal to the different adopter categories: *Innovators* - These are people who want to be the first to try the innovation. They are venturesome and interested in new ideas. *Early Adopters* - These are people who represent opinion leaders. They enjoy leadership roles and embrace change opportunities. *Early Majority* - These people are rarely leaders, but they do adopt new ideas before the average person. That is, they typically need to see evidence that the innovation works before they are willing to adopt it. *Late Majority* - These people are skeptical of change, and will only adopt an innovation after it has been tried by the majority. *Laggards* - These people are bound by tradition and very conservative. They are very skeptical of change and are the hardest group to bring on board.

Application of Diffusion Innovation Theory to the Study

The study anchored on diffusion innovation theory as a result of covid-19 pandemic crisis that requires people as part of a social system to adopt a new idea, behavior, and product. In the education sector, most schools engage teachers and students in remote learning. Remote learning is where the student and the educator, or information source, are not physically present in a traditional classroom environment. Information is relayed through technology, such as discussion boards, video conferencing, and online assessments. The sudden and unprecedented shuttering of our nation’s school buildings due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced educators to face the most jarring and rapid change of perhaps any profession in history. Within a moment’s notice, teachers were asked to leave their classrooms indefinitely and, in many cases, to recreate a learning environment that is 100 percent virtual. The Network for Public Education, a nonprofit group that advocates for public schools, recently conducted a survey of parents and teachers to see how they were experiencing the sudden shift to remote learning because of the COVID-19 crisis, some of the teachers said that by checking into Google Classroom to see if students turned in their work. “Many of our students live in crowded apartments with family members who are ill, so the only time that is quiet enough for them to do their work is at night [19]. While trying to adopt new ideas and methods of learning due to the pandemic, Janet Kass, who teaches first grade, in Bloomingburg, shared her inability to adapt to the new idea of learning, she said “Here I am, at 66, within a year of full retirement, having to learn how to use Google Classroom with 35 first graders at various places in their learning. I feel as though I am attempting to drive on a road that I am simultaneously paving while also following a paper map”. Thus, the idea of home-from-home, social distancing, shutdown movement, and government preventive policy is still very difficult for educators to adapt to.

METHODOLOGY

The study area covered all the workers of the Ministry of Education in Enugu State. The population of the Study constituted all the 298 workers of the Ministry of Education. The whole number of 298 was used due to the small population. This was due to covid-19 saga and not all staff were met in the office because of sharing of duties. The instruments used in data collection were questionnaires, oral interviews, books, journals, magazines, newspapers, records from the Ministry of Education, pamphlets, and other publications. All these form parts of primary and secondary sources of data. The data collected from the questionnaire were presented in frequency tables, means scores, and percentages were used in the analysis and tested using chi-square (χ^2).

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 1: Response on the relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu State

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	145	48.7	48.7	48.7
Agree	105	35.2	35.2	83.9
Neutral	12	4.0	4.0	87.9
Disagree	10	3.4	3.4	91.3
Strongly disagree	26	8.7	8.7	100.0
Total	298	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1, indicates that 145 of respondent out of 298 representing 48.7 percent strongly agree, 105 respondents of 35.2 percent agree that there is declining of services by civil servants in the Ministry of Education, 12 respondents 4.0 were neutral, 10 respondents representing 3.4 percent disagree while 26 respondents of 8.7percent strongly disagree that there is declining of services by civil servants in the ministry of education.

Table 2: Response on the relationship between work-from-home policies and efficiency of the civil servants in Enugu State

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	88	29.5	29.5	29.5
Agree	127	42.6	42.6	72.1
Neutral	6	2.0	2.0	74.2
Disagree	49	16.4	16.4	90.6
Strongly disagree	28	9.4	9.4	100.0
Total	298	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 2, reveals that 88 respondents out of 298 representing 29.5 strongly agree, 127 respondents representing 42.6 agree that remote working facilities reduce the efficiency of civil servants, 6 respondents representing 2.0 percent were neutral, 49 respondents representing 16.4 percent disagree While 28 respondents representing 9.4 percent strongly disagree that the remote working facilities reduced the efficiency of the civil servants.

Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis One: There is a positive significant relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation on there is a positive significant relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state

Pearson	Stay-at-home due to Covid-19		Stay-at-home due to COVID-19	Output of civil servants
		Correlation coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 298	.793(**) 000 298 1
	Output of Civil servants	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2 tailed) N	.793(**) 000 298	298

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 is the Pearson correlation matrix on stay-at-home due covid-19 having a positive relationship with an output of civil servants showing the correlation coefficients, significant values, and the number of cases. The correlation coefficient shows 0.793. This value indicates that the correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed) and implies that there was a positive significant relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state (r = .793). The computed correlation coefficient is greater than the table value of r = .195 with 879 degrees of freedom at alpha level for a two-tailed test (r=.793, p<.05).

Decision Rule

The decision rule is to accept the null hypothesis if the computed r is less than the tabulated r otherwise reject the null hypothesis.

Decision

The computed r = 0.793 is greater than the table value of .195, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we concluded that there was a positive significant relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state as reported in the probability value of (r=.793, p<.05).

Test of Hypothesis Two: There is a positive significant relationship between work-from-home policies and the efficiency of the civil servants of Enugu state.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation on there is a positive significant relationship between work-from-home policies and efficiency of the civil servants of Enugu state.

Pearson	Work-from-home policies		Work-from-home policies	Efficiency of civil servants
	Efficiency of civil servants	Correlation coefficient Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 298	.845(**) 000 298 1
		Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2 tailed) N	.845(**) 000 298	298

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** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 is the Pearson correlation matrix on work-from-home polices has a positive relationship with the efficiency of civil servants showing the correlation coefficients, significant values, and the number of cases. The correlation coefficient shows 0.845. This value indicates that the correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed) and implies that there was a positive significant relationship between work-from-home policies and the efficiency of the civil servants of Enugu state($r=.845$). The computed correlation coefficient is greater than the table value of $r = .195$ with 879 degrees of freedom at alpha level for a two-tailed test ($r=.845, p<.05$).

Decision Rule

The decision rule is to accept the null hypothesis if the computed r is less than the tabulated r otherwise reject the null hypothesis.

Decision

The computed $r = 0.845$ is greater than the table value of $.195$, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, we concluded that there was a positive significant relationship between work-from-home policies and the efficiency of the civil servants of Enugu state as reported in the probability value of ($r=.845, p<.05$).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings at the end of this study include the following:

- i. There was a positive significant relationship between stay-at-home due to COVID-19 and the output of the civil servants of Enugu state $r(95, n = 298) = .793, p<.05$
- ii. There was a positive significant relationship between work-from-home policies and the efficiency of the civil servants of Enugu state $r(95, n = 298) = .845, p<.05$.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that stay-at-home due to COVID-19, work-from-home policies, shutdown movement, and governments adopting preventive policies had a positive significant relationship with output, efficiency, quality service, and effectiveness of civil servants in Enugu state. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. The COVID-19 pandemic is revolutionizing digital and online education globally but kids in rural and underserved communities in Enugu state, Nigeria, are being left behind as they are not equipped to adapt or transition to the new methods of learning. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was an event so unprecedented that governments, with few exceptions, had no benchmark or previous experience to rely on. It required a quick and multi-faceted response.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study contributed to knowledge by unveiling covid-19 pandemic and the performance of civil servants in the Enugu state ministry of education. It was ascertained that the independent variables (stay-at-home, work-from-home, shutdown movement policies, and government preventive policies) are the major cause of the decline in the dependent variables (output, efficiency, quality service, and effectiveness) of civil servants in the ministry. The study anchored on diffusion innovation theory as a result of covid-19 pandemic crisis that requires people as part of a social system to adopt a new idea, behavior, and product. The literature review in the study was done in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Hyderabad Metro, and Japan, meanwhile, the study was done in Enugu state, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were proffered based on the findings of the study:

- i. The Ministry of Education should develop strategies for remote learning on a long-term basis to mitigate employee stress and enhance performance.
- ii. There should be readiness and motivation of teachers to improve their knowledge and skills that are needed to advance the quality of education, which can facilitate the creation of opportunities for the development of digital education.
- iii. The ministry should ensure that all educational institutions, educators, and learners adopt the necessary technology to improve their digital skills in line with the emerging global trends and realities in education.
- iv. To curtail the spread of the virus, the Ministry of Education should ensure that all educational institutions observe social distancing.

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