# Opening up during COVID19 Lockdown: Trajectory of Social Responsibilities of Academics during COVID-19 Period

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# OPENING UP DURING COVID19 LOCKDOWN:
# TRAJECTORY OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACADEMICS AT COVID-19 PERIOD

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It is evident that the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic created barriers to teaching, learning and research process. Schools were closed and students and faculty that were not prepared for the sudden pandemic were left to start thinking on how to make the most of the ample time at their disposal. While some students were willing to learn, there were no lectures to facilitate online as there was no adequate arrangement for digital facilities to promote online teaching and learning. As noted by Harsha and Thara (2020), higher education suffered terribly during the COVID-19 lockdown, owing to the fact that students and lecturers could not maximize online resources due to several challenges.

Our insatiable thirst for helping humanity prompted us to think of what to do to help students during the lockdown necessitated by COVID-19. The injunction of Napoleon Hill that it

is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed also fueled our relentless effort to think out a solution. From experience, we have seen that helping others is equivalent to helping oneself. Also, we considered some adverse effect that idleness of students could generate. Youths could engage in risky behaviours when they are idle as some of the characteristics of adolescents include inquisitiveness and willingness to try out new things. Several issues relating to juvenile delinquencies are being recorded on a daily basis and they are on the increase especially during this pandemic. It is on this premise that we tasked our minds to churn out strategies that could cushion the effect of this lockdown.

Several philanthropists donated lots of money during this pandemic and it is apt to appreciate their generosity and social responsibility to humanity. Some critics said their responsiveness was mainly for further advertisement of their firms and others even said it was to further negotiate contracts with government. The truth remains that at such a time as this, they parted with fortune which was not initially in their budget. We may not have as much as they do but such as we have, we must also give at such a time as this. Our intellectual properties could also go a long way in ensuring that one idle young person is engaged while another is prevented from trying out products of evil thoughts occasioned by idleness. We thought of the best way to occupy the minds of these youths with smart blood which is quick to propel any act, reasonable or unreasonable. In Nigeria, students in Federal universities appear to be the worst hit as their lecturers are on inevitable strike for just cause.

We were thinking Africa, not just Nigeria for sure. Relying on our international connections, we contacted friends across Africa on how best to help students. It was in the course of our interaction that we reasoned that Telegram is a strong platform that could cater for the plans we had. Could there be a single classroom for students on same level all over Africa? All

100 level students maintaining a single class in the same field. That is how we started. We decided to focus on a specific discipline: Library and Information Science. We contacted facilitators from across Africa, and the response was massive! These persons are distinguished lecturers from several countries in Africa and they were willing to teach for free which they are currently doing. A platform known as ChecheSkyBoard was created on Telegram and immediately the link was made public, it was like a dry land soaking water in dry season. Students started informing one another and before we could spell Jack, students were into thousands, covering 100 levels to 400 levels and postgraduate students. In total we have 1,317 student in enrollment

The beautiful thing about the classes is that students are appreciative of the efforts. This has also proven to us that youths in Africa are not lazy, they only need focused leadership and enabling environment. We do not offer our facilitators money to buy data, it has been by sheer love for humanity and passion for knowledge sharing. We use this medium to appreciate our volunteers: Dr James A. Aiyebelehin, Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria; Dr Opeyemi Soyemi of Babcock University, Nigeria; David Okhaku and Azeez Adeoye of Lead City University, Nigeria; Idris Dauda and Ibrahim Yusuf of Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria; David Adepoju of African Leadership University, Rwanda; Ify Evangel Obim, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Oluseyi Josephs of Tai Solarin University of Education, Nigeria; Olugbenga Oke of Ty Tihyauni Difur of University of Jos, Nigeria; and Abel M'Kulama of the University of Zambia.

**Research Questions**

The questions were tailored towards the following:

1. How can you rate the online classes during lockdown?

2. Can you explain the relevance of the classes to your academic pursuit?

3. If you were not engaged in the online classes what other activities would you have engaged with?

4. What challenges limited your access to the online classes?

**Methodology**

This study employed interview of participants using electronic devices such as Telegram, e-mail, Zoom and telephone considering the medium convenient for each participant. A comparison of data from the interviews with each participant was done to identify the common themes. The research questions of this study were answered based on the themes synthesized from the interviews.

**Population of the study**

The online intervention classes focused mainly on Library and Information Science Students from across universities in Africa. The number of participants is as follows: 100 level, students were 313 in number, 300 level 252, 300 level 413, 400/500 levels were 172 while post graduate students were 186. The sum total of students is 1336. The chart below represents the number of students and their levels.

**NUMBER OF STUDENTS**
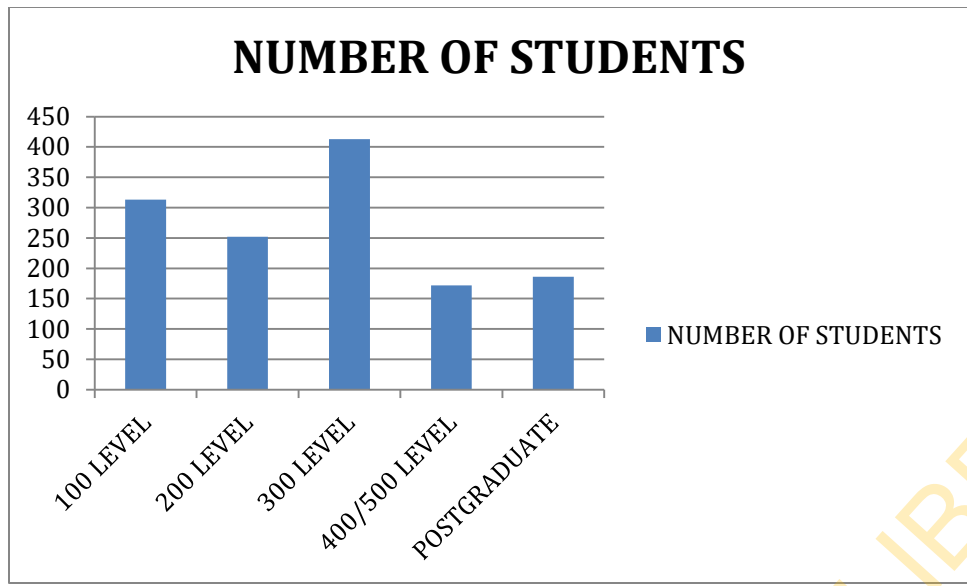
## Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a nonrandom purposive sampling technique. The sampling technique is adopted because the population is homogeneous. All the students are studying Library and Information Science in their respective universities. 5% of the students from each level of study was purposively selected. The sample is presented in the table below

| LEVEL | NUMBER OF STUDENTS | 5% SELECTED AS SAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| 100 LEVEL | 313 | 16 |
| 200 LEVEL | 252 | 13 |
| 300 LEVEL | 413 | 21 |
| 400/500 LEVELS | 172 | 9 |
| POSTGRADUATE | 186 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 1336 | 68 |

To further establish the impact of our intervention during the lockdown, an assessment through interview was carried out with focus on participating students and faculty. It was firmly established that students and faculty immensely benefitted from it.

**Common Themes in the Interviews**

**Theme 1:** Rating of the online classes

Among the participants in the interview, 60 of the 68 rated the online classes as very good and comfortable while 8 of them noted that it would have been better if the online classes have been organized through Zoom instead of Telegram. They however did not give any cogent reasons for preferring Zoom above Telegram. Since this study did not set out to compare the two social media platform, we decided to be silent about it. Participants altogether noted that the online classes fulfilled the purpose for its establishment during the lockdown.

**Theme 2:** Relevance of the classes to academic pursuit

Students at different levels of study were involved in the study. They all have positive responses in relation to the question on whether the online classes were relevant to their academic pursuits. Among the 100 level students, few of the excerpts of the responses are presented below:

*"I did not have any experience in Library and Information Science as some of my classmates do. Some of them have been working in libraries, they only came to acquire further knowledge and certificate. I didn't apply for Library Science but I was offered the admission instead of English Language I applied to study. I have just gained admission and in first semester of my study before the lockdown necessitated by COVID-19. The*

*online classes actually exposed me to almost everything about librarianship and I can say I am more than well prepared for the field of study. Thank you CheCheSkyBoard!*

Another 100 Level Student noted thus:

*"This online class was just designed for me! I applied for Library Science because my uncle is a librarian and he's doing well. I have been wondering if anything was so special about library science than arranging books. This classes have exposed me to what my uncle did not have the time to explain to me. I am so excited about cataloguing and classification; children literature and library marketing etc. I appreciate the organizers of the online classes"*

Among the 200 Level students, excerpts of two participants have also been pointed out

1st Excerpt:

*"Thank you so much! At the beginning of the course, I was only attending to keep myself busy but as the classes continued, I discovered that the class is more interesting as most of the lecturers were vibrant and were bringing several new topics I have never heard about. One of them is big data management. It sounded so new. Even, user analysis appeared to be so new the way it was handled. Thank you all."*

2<sup>nd</sup> Excerpt:

*"The classes are wonderful and the facilitators understand the rudiments of the course. My interest in Library and Information Science has further been boosted by the online courses. I hope the organizers will also give us certificates at the end of the online classes."*

Among the 300 Level Students, participants discussed more about the insight they have on careers they could pursue in the field of Library and Information Science. Many of them were excited that they have opportunity to set up their own businesses. Below are excerpts of the interview:

*"I am particularly interested in the course Information Products and Services that exposed us to careers that one can pursue in Library Archival and Information Science. I never knew that one can start an enterprise in records archiving, data analysis and indexing services. Library Science is becoming more interesting to me"*

Another 300 Level Student noted:

*"I now have the tools and techniques to navigate the field of library science. I had this fear as per how to get work after graduation but I have been better exposed to opportunities embedded in Library Science. I am sure that the sky is just the beginning"*

400 and 500 Levels were grouped together because Library and Information Science in some universities is a 5-year course while others it is four. Students in this class discussed the impact of the class in relation to their research works. They focused more on how the classes have helped them to coin titles for their final year projects. Some of their responses are noted below:

*"I was planning to get complete project from another institution and convert it to my own as I was yet to understand how to go about the writing of undergraduate project. The classes have exposed me to project writing now. I am not yet good in carrying out analysis but I think that I am a bit confident on how to coin the right title and write background and statement of the problem. I am getting better."*

Another Final Year Students also noted:

*"Going through tis class has been so exciting. Research has been made easy for me. I now know that title conception emanates from understanding what problems I am intending to solve. There is even no research title without first identifying what the problem is. I now understand the rudiment of research far better that what I used to know."*

Postgraduate Students also talked more on their research work. They were all at several stages of their research work. While some were at the final stage of their research work, some were just starting. Majority of them noted that they got good advice on how to go about their research work and they got assistance on data analysis. They noted that apart from what they got from the classwork, they have been able to build enduring relationship with some of their facilitators and online classmates. Relating with others made them to know that they were not alone in the challenges being encountered in relation to their research works.

**Theme 3:** Alternative activities

Most of the undergraduate students have alternatives go online classes while most of the postgraduate students said they would have used the time to seek more assistance on their research work. Undergraduate students mentioned alternatives such as using the period to learn how to do commercial makeover which is common among young ladies. Another set said they would have used the period to learn web design, braiding, fashion design, art work. Some of the undergraduate students said they didn't know what they would have used the period to do. Some of the excerpts are presented below:

*"I have several things I would have used the time to do. I have been planning to learn how to do website design but I didn't really have the time and money. Now that I have the time, there is still no money to pay the person that wants to teach me. I cannot rely on online videos to learn website design. Since I didn't have the money, I decided to enroll for this free online class and it has really paid off"*

*"I planned to use this period to learn how to do makeover, which I have not abandoned. I have been using weekends to do that instead of the fulltime earlier planned. The classes have really helped me. Thank you"*

*"To be sincere, I don't know what I would have used the time to do. I have several seasoned movies sha. I am happy that one of my friends encouraged me to join these classes."*

*"I have been concentrating on my research work. I need to finish on time as I need my certificate for promotion at work. I actually do not have time for any other thing. The reason for engaging in this classes and staying for so long is because I know that the experience from the class will further enhance my research work and I am not disappointed."*

**Theme 4:** Challenges associated with online classes

On challenges associated with the online classes, majority of the participants focused on cost of data and electricity. These have become major challenges in Africa and are also seen as some of the causes of barriers in development.

We are optimistic that our story will inspire others to make better contributions and keep the unbroken chain of love going from persons to person. From our experience, we discovered that we are better for this engagement because we have been able to learn new skills, relate with new set of people we wouldn't have met in our lifetime and we have contributed to the success stories of the next generation of leaders. We also discovered that we do not have to hold any office or have so much money to make impact, all that is needed is a willing heart.

**References**

Harsha R. and Thara B. (2020). Covid -19 Lockdown-Challenges to Higher Education. *Cape Comorin*, 26-28. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.16290.25281

*Figure 1-Ayodele John Alonge*

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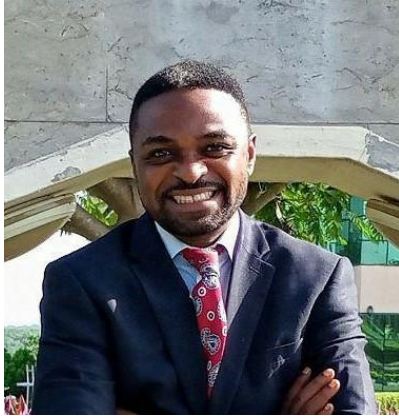
*Figure 2-Sola Owolabi*

**Mr Sola Owolabi,** a Chartered Librarian is currently the Readers' Services Librarian, Centre for Learning Resources, Landmark University.  He is the Registrar of *ChecheSkyBoard* Initiative https://lmu.edu.ng/lmu_staffs/MR_OWOLABI_SOLA_