

**AN IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON NIGERIAN
ECONOMY AND EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY: STUDY OF
ABAKALIKI METROPOLIS, EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: The infectious disease COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei province, China and has spread to almost all the parts of the world causing huge death and losses of millions of jobs. In Nigeria, the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Nigeria on the 27th of February, 2020. This study examined the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian economy and employee productivity: study of Abakaliki Metropolis, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. To achieve the objectives of the study, two research questions were formulated to guide the study. Literatures related to the variables were reviewed and structural functionalism was employed as theoretical framework. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 120 respondents for the research from twelve organizations. In-depth Interview (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were used to elicit data from the respondents. Qualitative analysis was employed to assess the two research questions. Among the findings, the study revealed that the spread of infectious COVID-19 was entirely driven by human-to-human transmission. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic effects triggered an economic crisis which put at risks the Nigerian economy and employee productivity since large numbers of employees remained in their homes to avoid the disease. Based on these findings, the study concluded that government should find the right balance and sequencing of health, economic and social policy interventions to curtail the spread of the pandemic and increase employee productivity. Sequel to this, the study recommended amongst others that Nigeria government should establish strong commitments to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Global Health Security (GHS) to assist employees access the quality health services without suffering financial hardship. Again, Nigerian governments, particularly Ebonyi state government should adopt fiscal measures to provide support to workers by reducing tax, increase wage and income supplements as well as granting insurance to help employees overcome the storm of COVID-19 pandemic

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Employee Productivity, Nigerian Economy, World Health Organization, Universal Health Coverage (UHC), Global Health Security (GHS)

INTRODUCTION

The world was gripped with horror of possible occurrence of death for everyone following the detection of the infectious disease COVID-19 in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei province, China (WHO, 2020). With a cluster of pneumonia cases from an unknown virus surfaced in Wuhan, China, initial laboratory findings showed that the spread of infection is entirely driven by human-to-human transmission, and several thousands of people have died and hundreds of others in critical conditions hoping for miracles since there are no known cures yet (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). No sooner had it been detected than the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared it a pandemic in March 2020, just three months after its discovery, meaning that the disease was spreading at a faster rate. Supporting this assertion, Farooq & Sultana (2021) averred that the COVID-19 outbreak spread to over 250 countries globally. As a matter of fact, the disease was named Coronavirus disease 2019 (abbreviated as COVID-19) to avoid stigmatizing the virus's origins in terms of populations, geography, or animal associations. In a nutshell, COVID-19 is an illness caused by SARS-CoV-2, a several viral infection of the lungs characterized by fever, a dry cough, breathing difficulties and fatigue.

Consequent upon this, Alon and Bretas (2021) said the pandemic effects were felt on all levels: individuals, businesses, countries, and supranational institutions had to deal with the devastating impacts of COVID-19 health crisis as it triggered a global economic crisis which put the jobs and incomes of millions of people around the world at risks. In addition, the strict containment measures adopted in order to flatten the rise in contagion put a substantial brake on most economic and social activities. According to the ILO-OECD paper at the request of G20 Leaders (2020), Covid-19 pandemic is considered one of the major challenges the world has faced. According to the paper, five months after the World Health Organization declared it a pandemic, precisely at the end of August 2020, 25 million confirmed cases were confirmed and 840 thousand deaths reported worldwide, with G20 economies accounting for 77% of all cases and 82% of all deaths (ILO-OECD, 2020).

In Nigeria, several employees were laid-off; it was conspicuous that the country's economic growth was negatively affected beyond anything experienced since the end of the country's civil war (1967-1970). Writing from a global perspective, Alon & Bretas (2021) said several adverse consequences, such as prolonged social distancing and other mitigation policies resulted in the rise of unemployment and economic downturns. While the pandemic continued to spread to all sectors of the world's economy, including that of Nigeria, employee productivity declined due to the policy of social distancing. Corroborating this assertion, the World Tourism Organization - UNWTO, a United Nations agency that promotes tourism, said that international arrivals in 2020 decreased by 60 to 80 percent with respect to 2019 (UNWTO, 2020a). The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) verified that, in April 2020, the air traffic fell drastically to nearly zero. Some of the economic sectors most affected by the pandemic were tourism, food service, and retail outlets (UNWTO, 2020b). In Nigeria, the

Federal Government disclosed that a total sum of N30, 540,563,571.09 had been spent within four months to fight the scourge of COVID-19 pandemic in the country (Omondi, 2020).

While the country was still sluggishly grappling with recovery from the 2016 economic recession which was a fall out of global oil price crash and insufficient foreign exchange earnings to meet imports, COVID-19 pandemic emerged to further weaken the economy. In the spirit of economic recovery and growth sustainability, the Nigerian federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations, but with contestable realizations. The approved budget had projected revenue collections at N8.24 trillion, an increase of about 20% from 2019 figure (Omondi, 2020). The revenue assumptions were premised on increased global oil demand and stable market with oil price benchmark and oil output respectively at \$57 per barrel and 2.18 million barrels per day. But the projection of the oil sale, according to Omondi (2020) fell drastically due to the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on global economy. Following this, large number of organizations postponed investment decisions, laid-off workers, including those who previously had been on unpaid leave, and in some cases shut down production (Alon & Bretas, 2021). Complicating the economic situation of employee was social distancing that affected employee work configurations thereby disrupting employee set-goals. Clearly, there were substantial increase travel restrictions in response to the pandemic and this lowered employee productivity which ultimately increased the costs and deterioration in the competitive position of organizations. As a matter of fact, many businesses were closed and people across the world became jobless. In spite of governments' bold efforts to support firms and protect jobs through job retention schemes, millions of workers across the G20 have lost their jobs. Meanwhile, many self-employed workers saw their incomes collapse (ILO-OECD, 2020). In other words, companies across the world began to have fewer employees working from the offices. Put differently, COVID-19 negatively impacted businesses. Tourism, food service, and retail are some of the sectors most affected by the pandemic. Amongst the Multi-national Corporations (MNCs), there were chain breakdown, demand and supply shocks, loss of revenue and profits, and other operational problems derived from travel restrictions. According to the World Bank's report about the impact of COVID-19 on foreign investors, the pandemic has affected 80% of MNCs. The top 5000 MNCs made downward revisions of their 2020 earnings by 30% (Bretas & Alon, 2020; Saurav, Kusek, & Kuo, 2020; UNCTAD, 2020a).

Based on these dissertations, this study, therefore, assessed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian economy and employee productivity with emphasis on Abakaliki metropolis, Ebonyi state, Nigeria

Statement of the Problem

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious that the study, an impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian economy and employee productivity with emphasis on Abakaliki metropolis, Ebonyi

state, Nigeria has been on the front burner since the detection of the infectious disease COVID-19 in the month of October, 2020 in Abakaliki. At the heat of the pandemic was the intensification of social distance which affected employees' productivity and also significantly affected businesses negatively; workers were laid – off and this increased unemployment and economic downturns. In addition, organizations across the globe began to have fewer employees working than ever as retrenchment of employees was heightened during this difficult time without considering their previous contributions to the growth of these business outfits. Sequel to this, employee productivity declined since productivity is not just about time lost, but also more mistakes and resources wasted on unneeded tasks. COVID-19 pandemic affected all and sundry, and this explained why organizations ought to have exercised caution in sacking workers considering their previous contributions to the growth of the organizations (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). Multi-national Corporations (MNCs) faced supply chain breakdown, demand and supply shocks, loss of revenue and profits, and other operational problems leading to underutilization of employees. Furthermore, the pandemic-related economic and human costs were visible in the tragic loss of life and job losses that derailed careers and permanently shuttered businesses (De Vos, 2020).

It is therefore the objective of this paper to provide an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian economy and employee productivity with emphasis on Abakaliki metropolis, Ebonyi state, Nigeria. The specific objectives this study was two- pronged, and outlined hereunder:

- a) To examine the impact of COVID-19 on employee productivity.
- b) To assess the implications of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigeria's economy

In the attempt to achieving these objectives, two research questions were also formulated to guide the study. These were:

- a) What is the impact of COVID-19 on employee productivity?
- b) What is the implication of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigeria's economy?

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was carried out in Abakaliki Metropolis, the capital of Ebonyi State, southeastern Nigeria. Ebonyi state is one of the five states that constitute the south-east geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Abakaliki is located at the intersection of Enugu, Afikpo and Ogoja Roads. Before it assumed the status of a state capital in 1996, she was a small town known for its overflowing food markets. The original inhabitants of Abakaliki were primarily Izzi, predominantly Igbo-speaking people. They are farmers who have taken advantage of their abundant and fertile land

to produce rice, yams, cassava, and palm oil and kernels fruits, vegetables, livestock and also non-food items like limestone, rocks and gravel – all of which are abundant in the area. As a matter of fact, Abakaliki has grown into a much larger town with modern facilities and a workforce that includes a growing number of civil servants, service providers and migrant workers who commute to work from neighbouring towns. She boasts of one of the most modernized markets in the country, the Margaret International Market as well as many factories, namely, food processing factories including dozens of rice mills, fertilizer blending plant, and a large poultry (Nkali Poultry) said to be one of the largest in the country. There are also dozens of hotels, restaurants and night clubs, an amusement park and other relaxation joints. There is also a Federal Medical Centre and a teaching hospital. Besides these, there are several government ministries and departments, the State House of Assembly complex, the State High Court complex, Ebonyi State University (popularly known as EBSU) which has several campuses in and outside Abakaliki.

Descriptive Survey Design

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. It is a systematic empirical method of collecting information by interviewing a sample of respondents. It is the best methods employed in collecting original data for the purposes of describing a population which is too large to observe directly. Purposively, the area of study was narrowed down to three areas, namely, the Ogoja-Afikpo area typified by the Margaret Umahi International Market; Army Barracks, Timber/Building market areas and lastly, the Mile 50 area populated by many business establishments. Out of over forty business organizations in the different designated areas of study, twelve business organizations were purposely chosen for the study. These twelve business organizations included FLORA Rice Mill, IKEMKA Poultry, DIVINE Suites, AMAKA Gardens, IKEMBA Auto-Engineering workshop, EXCELLENT Fashion Institute, NAKA Supermarket, MUMMY Restaurants, UNIQUE Bakery, SWEET MOTHER Confectionery, JOVAT Hair Salon, and IKEM-KA Group of Schools. Based on this, purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 120 respondents for the study from the twelve organizations which were also purposively drawn to constitute the target population. At this juncture, it must be observed that considering of socio-economic activities within these designated areas of study, no other sampling technique would have been ideal to employ to select the target population other than the purposive sampling technique. As a result, each of three designated areas of study supplied four business organizations each. In the same vein, ten respondents were drawn from each of the twelve business organizations.

In-depth-Interview (IDI), a type of data collection technique that involves oral questioning of respondents individually was adopted to obtain in-depth information on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian economy and employee productivity with emphasis on Abakaliki Metropolis, Ebonyi state, Southeast Nigeria. This method was employed in order to gather data from twenty interviewees with the assistance of three research assistants who conducted the

face-to-face interviews. The in-depth-Interview (IDI) was characterized by extensive probing and open-ended questions. In addition, the researcher provided an interview guide that included a list of questions meant to be explored in order to achieve the study objectives. As expected, the interview was usually unstructured as it encouraged capturing of interviewees' perceptions in their own words; a very desirable strategy in qualitative data collection.

Aside from the in-depth-Interview (IDI) employed in the study, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) technique was used to compliment it. Focus group discussion is primarily a qualitative method of administering open-ended questions in non-directive interviewing manner. The adoption of FGD was to obtain in-depth information on beliefs, opinions, attitudes, perceptions and ideas of a group of participants on the subject matter. Participants were recruited purposively before the discussion began. The researchers conducted ten different sessions (each session had ten discussants) with three research assistants. One served as time keeper, the second, a recorder of discussions held and the last, but not the least, maintained orderliness over the period of four weeks the study lasted. By implication, out of the one hundred twenty respondents selected for the study, twenty (20) were employed in the in-depth-Interview (IDI), while the remaining one hundred (100) were used in the Focus Group Discussion. A guide was developed from the study objectives to moderate the discussion mainly on the subject matter. There was no high table arrangement during the sessions; the researchers acted only as moderators. The use of open-ended questioning format was preferred because it created room for free and full discussion on the subject matter. The venue was conducive with no disturbances, sufficient quietness, and above all, the FGD was conducted in a neutral setting which encouraged discussants to freely express their views.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism is a broad perspective which sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated parts. The theory addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements. The basic assumption of the theory is that the society is a living organism made up of component parts, which function harmoniously for the survival of the whole system. If any part fails to contribute to an identifiably useful function, neither does it promote value consensus among members of the society – the entire body will be dislocated. The basic tenets of structural functionalism include the following: firstly, it entails interaction among various parts within the system. What this means is that, social phenomenon can be explained in terms of the part they play in the existence and survival of the larger society. Furthermore, there is inter – dependence of various parts within the system. This means that the function of a part of a system usually affects the system as a whole. Moreover, there is the need for the system to maintain equilibrium in order to survive. This means that the social system tend towards equilibrium. That is, when one variable of the system changes in magnitude, the other

variables are subjected to strains and are transformed. As a result, the system changes its pattern of performance and the dysfunctional components are disciplined by a regulatory mechanism and the equilibrium of the system is re-established (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). This theory captured the poor state of the country's health sector and how it failed to arrest the spread of D-19 when it was first detected in Nigeria. Due to this failure, the theory further captured how the spread of COVID-19 health pandemic dislocated the entire social system, particularly the employee sector of organizations. Without a clear understanding of when the global health would fully be restored, some measures such as social distancing was put in place to contain the spread of the virus. This notwithstanding, the COVID-19 pandemic was particularly severe for workers as job and income losses rose far above the ground. In addition, many workers in informal employment with their limited means and protection suffered the devastating impacts of the infectious disease COVID-19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implication of Covid-19 pandemic on the Nigerian Economy

In Nigeria, COVID-19 case was officially identified on 27th February 2020 and few more cases were identified after then (Effiong, et al. 2020). The consequences of COVID-19 on the economy of Nigeria are: economic lockdown of major cities (Abuja, Lagos, Ogun states) on 30th March 2020 leading to economic loss especially for daily income earners from small-medium scale businesses, withdrawal of money by investors from the market and fall in oil prices (Ozili, 2020). With a cluster of pneumonia cases from an unknown virus surfaced in Wuhan, China, initial laboratory findings, the disease named Coronavirus disease 2019 (abbreviated as COVID-19). Having been described as an infectious disease that is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, the World Health Organization (WHO) in a world health emergency in January 2020 declared it as pandemic in January 2020. The COVID-19 outbreak has since spread to over 250 countries globally. As the spread of infection is entirely driven by human-to-human transmission, several thousands of people have died and hundreds of others in critical conditions hoping for miracles since there are no known cures yet.

Beyond the tragic health hazards and human consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic uncertainties, and disruptions have caused the global economy significantly. While the United Nations Trade and Development Agency (UNCTAD, 2020b) conservatively puts the cost of the outbreak at about US\$2 trillion, other sources said the emergency has evolved into a global public health and economic crisis that has affected the \$90 trillion global economy beyond anything experienced in nearly a century.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that for most developing economies, the odds of sliding into a downturn are gradually expected as the global coronavirus outbreak puts severe pressure on

the economy (Akanni & Gabriel, 2020). According to Akanni and Gabriel (2020), Nigeria, the country is still sluggishly grappling with recovery from the 2016 economic recession which was a fall out of global oil price crash and insufficient foreign exchange earnings to meet imports. In the spirit of economic recovery and growth sustainability, the Nigerian federal budget for the 2020 fiscal year was prepared with significant revenue expectations but with contestable realizations. The approved budget had projected revenue collections at N8.24 trillion, an increase of about 20% from 2019 figure (Chukwu, 2020). The revenue assumptions are premised on increased global oil demand and stable market with oil price benchmark and oil output respectively at \$57 per barrel and 2.18 million barrels per day.

The clamour for drastic review and changes in the earlier revenue expectations and fiscal projections was at the instance of the emergence of COVID-19 (Akanni & Gabriel, 2020). Compared to events that led to recession in 2016, the current state of the global economy, Akanni and Gabriel (2020) assert, poses more difficulties ahead as the oil price is currently below US \$30 with projections that it would further down going by the price war among key players in the industry. Unfortunately, Nigeria as a nation has grossly underachieved in setting aside sufficient buffers for rainy days. Thus, in addressing these daunting economic challenges, the current considerations to revise the budget downward are inevitable. However, certain considerations that are expected in the review must be based on realizable thresholds and estimates to ensure optimum budget performance, especially on the non-oil revenue components (Chukwu, 2020).

In addition, the already excluded group and vulnerable must not left out to bear the brunt of the economic contraction in cutting expenditures. Essentially also, the economic and growth recovery programmes aimed at increasing social inclusion through jobs creation and providing support for the poorest and most vulnerable members of society through investments in social programs and providing social amenities must not suffer setbacks. Furthermore, the downward review of the budget and contractions in public spending must not be devastating on poverty and unemployment. In its last report the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) ranks Nigeria 21st among 181 countries with an unemployment rate of about 23.1 % (Chukwu, 2020). In other words, the country has also been rated as the poverty capital of the world with an estimated 87 million people living on less than \$2 a day threshold. The government's decision to increase the electricity bill as well as the retail price of gasoline under a price modulation arrangement was very insensitive. The implication is higher inflation rate, and this ultimately affects food prices. However, rather than increasing the price as was done already, the Petroleum Products Price Regulation Agency (PPPRA), it is expected that the government would completely deregulate the petroleum industry in line with existing suggestions and reports. Basically, the Nigerian government essentially must lead economic diversification drive. It is one practicable way to saddle through the current economic uncertainties and instabilities.

Beyond the tragic health hazards and human consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic uncertainties, and disruptions have caused so much havoc to the Nigeria's economy. For example, the Federal Government disclosed that a total sum of N30, 540,563,571.09 had been spent within four months to fight the scourge of COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The figure represents 84 per cent of the N36.3 billion public funds and donations received by government between 1st April, 2020 and 31st July, 2020, leaving a balance of N5.9 billion. Specifically, the PTF spent N22 billion while 36 states spent N7 billion to support the COVID-19 initiatives. Further, the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) also spent N877 million for deployment of assets in support of COVID-19 operations while the Nigeria Police spent N500 million on personal protective equipment. Of the amount, N17, 865.09 was paid as bank charges (Chukwu, 2020).

As a result of these alarming figures, independent economic experts took solace in the prediction that the impacts might be sharp but short-lived, and economic activities would return to normal thereafter. This line of thought mirrored the thinking of the events that shaped the 2007 global financial crisis. However, it is quite instructive to note that the 2007 crisis which emanated from the United States' subprime mortgage crisis was mainly an economic phenomenon, with its fallout spreading across many regions of the world. When juxtaposed with Covid-19, the 2007 crisis could simply be described as a child's play because it was minor and manageable (Akanni & Gabriel, 2020). In Nigeria, the chaotic situations caused by COVID-19 have impacted the country's economy negatively. In buttressing this, the Accountant-General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris, released an undated statement in response to the Freedom of Information (FoI) request from two rights organizations: the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and Connected Development (CODE) dated August 10, 2020 on the details of the expenditures (News telegraph newspaper, September 7, 2020). While admitting the disclosures, the SERAP's Deputy Director, and CODE's Chief Executive, said the released documents did not contain significant details such as a breakdown of the number of Nigerians who directly or indirectly benefited from the spending and details on plans to spend the balance of N5.9 billion in the COVID-19 Eradication Support Accounts as indicated in their FoI request dated 10th August. Following this, they expressed dissatisfaction with the response and consequently demanded a more specific details and additional information on the spending of N30.5 billion between April and July, and details on plans to spend the balance of N5.9 billion in the COVID-19 Eradication Support Accounts. According to their joint statements:

We note among others that the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 spent N22 billion; and 36 states spent N7 billion to support their COVID-19 initiatives. We also note that the Nigerian Air Force (NAF) spent N877 million for deployment of assets in support of COVID- 19 operations; while the Nigeria Police spent N500 million on personal protective equipment. N1 7, 865.09 was paid as bank charges....It is

refreshing to note that 115 ordinary Nigerians donated between N1 and N100 to support the authorities' efforts to fight COVID-19, despite the fact that it is the country's poorest and most disadvantaged sectors of the population that continue to bear the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic.....We would, therefore, be grateful to receive more specific details and additional information on the spending of N30.5 billion between April and July, and details on plans to spend the balance of N5.9 billion in the COVID-19 Eradication Support Accounts.

From the foregoing discourse, it is evident that the rapidly spreading virus and its compounding effects on the country's economic growth have been challenging.

COVID-19 pandemic and employee productivity in Nigeria

The coronavirus pandemic is corona virus disease which has affected many, leading to deaths and have had great impact on Nigerian economy and employee productivity. Therefore, arising from the fall-out of COVID-19 health pandemic, prolonged social distancing and other mitigation policies have had several adverse consequences, such as the rise of unemployment and economic downturns. As a matter of fact, the pandemic affected employee productivity negatively as many workers in informal employment or in diverse work arrangements, were the least able to face the consequences of the crisis (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). Apart from this, Farooq and Sultana (2021) further argued that one of the possible reasons for a decrease in productivity of remote employees was the lack of face-to-face supervision. Buttressing further, they stated that managers believed that the absence of face-to-face interaction reduced access to managerial support and communication leading to a decrease in employee productivity. Substantiating, Sharma (2020) said 27 million youth in the age group of 20–30 years lost their jobs in April 2020 following a lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Corroborating this submission, Brynjolfsson *et al.*, (2020) said large numbers of employees remained in their homes to avoid the disease. With this, organizations faced supply chain breakdown, demand and supply shocks, loss of revenue and profits, and other operational problems leading to underutilization of employees.

In their contribution to the discourse, Larson *et al.*, (2020) put forward that in “the case of a sudden transition to virtual work, there is a much greater chance that employees would be contending with suboptimal workspaces and unexpected parenting responsibilities.” By implication, COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated that mitigating the impact of the virus is not solely the task of health professionals. It is up to every member of the public. Individuals and communities hold many of the keys necessary to stopping the spread of COVID by adopting simple public health measures such as hand hygiene, social distancing and the wearing of masks.

Following this, employee productivity dropped as the fear of being laid-off gripped employees. Aside from this, Onyekwere, and Obuzor (2020) asserted that finding a sustainable and valuable human resource to regain lost grounds is very important at the moment than ever, but the intensification for competent personnel to propel the growth of organizations beyond the COVID-19 plague was thrown overboard going by the plethora of sack letters delivered to workers. There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic affected all and sundry, and this explained why organizations ought to have exercised caution in sacking workers considering their previous contributions to the growth of the organizations. Relying on fewer employees working than ever would not increase employee productivity since productivity is not just about time lost, but also more mistakes and resources wasted on unneeded tasks. Supervision is a key to higher yield, but with no one taking responsibility to direct production, more mistakes and resources wasted on unneeded tasks.

Productivity is one of the most widely used tools for evaluating, monitoring, and improving the performance of industries and national economies. At every level, productivity indicates how well an employee uses resources to produce goods and services for the growth of the economy (Bitran & Chang, 1984). However, a decline in productivity clearly shows how Covid-19 has slowed economic growth and caused high inflation by not allowing employee properly utilize resources provided to increase their productivity. On the other hand, improved productivity with adequate protection from infection reveal how effective an employee can be in achieving organizational set-goals: higher rate of economic growth and higher living standards for organizations. It is also important to state that at an organizational level, productivity measures how well an organization through the instrumentality of an effective employee free from social distancing can able in converting input resources (labour, materials, machines, etc.) into goods and services in order to achieve set-goals (Bitran & Chang, 1984). Unambiguously, the resultant effect of the detection of the infectious disease COVID-19 culminated in lower productivity due to social distance health policy. This ultimately increased the costs and deterioration in the competitive position of an organization. It was, therefore, in this vein that Bashir, Alzebdeh, and Al Riyami (2014) asserted that an improvement in employee productivity is obvious when an employee is guaranteed job security. In other words, there will be an improvement in quality, and therefore a growth in organizational market will be assured. Similarly, Kazaz and Ulubeyli (2007) argue that productivity is one of the most important factors affecting the overall performance of employees.

Following this, COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way organizations used to think about remote workers. Working remotely presents new challenges for staying productive, connected and engaged. However, organizations can improve employee productivity by motivating their employees to develop a knowledge-sharing plan, use the right communication channel for their message, maintain social interaction and measure productivity, not hours (Ludema & Johnson, 2020). Productivity has been described as an outcome of the performance – the quantity of output that results from performance behaviours as well as external contextual and opportunity

factors (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Schmidt & Hunter, 1983; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Sole and Schiuma (2010) argue that the problems related to the use of performance measures can be associated owing to the lack of effective measures, and the measures that have been developed in a very selective way. According to Wanyama and Mutsotso (2010):

[. . .] employee productivity depends on the amount of time an individual is physically present at a job and also the degree to which he or she is “mentally present” or efficiently functioning while present at a job (Wanyama and Mutsotso (2010, p. 73)

A variety of terms have been used to describe employee productivity. For Damanpour and Evan (1984); Richard *et al.*, (2009); and Farooq (2014), organizational performance is it! In another vein, Anitha (2014) and Luthans *et al.*, (2008) held employee productivity to mean same as employee performance. While the rebranding of the concept was going on, Carbonara and Schiuma (2004) used the term: new product development performance and Dana *et al.*, (2021) zeroed it down to corporate performance respectively. In a nutshell, employee performance indicates the financial and non-financial outcome of the employee that directly affects the performance of an organization (Anitha, 2014). While there are several ways to explain performance measures, the most popular, according to Bommer *et al.*, (1995) has been between objective and subjective measures. Subjective measures of productivity are capable of making cross-industry comparisons but can have problems with common method bias, social desirability and supervisor biases (Vij & Bedi, 2016). The use of subjective measures of productivity is preferred over objective measures because managers can use the relative measures of performance. Improving employee productivity is one of the important objectives of the organizations because higher levels of employee productivity can be beneficial to both its employees and organizations (Hanaysha, 2016). According to Desyatnikov (2020), “many people already worked from home before the pandemic hit, but the way we measure employee productivity has been evolving for years.” Bendor-Samuel (2020) proposes that before an organization tries to improve its productivity (even in the WFH model), it should understand how to measure and monitor productivity on an ongoing basis. Menon (2020) argues that there is no doubt that in some cases, but not all, longer working hours would increase employee productivity and but this move will shift the burden onto the employees. It is the working hours that can determine employee productivity during the COVID-19. Ghosh (2020) suggests that employee monitoring can be one of the best ideas to track employee performance and productivity. However, if employees are working from, it seems to be a hectic task to know who is working and who is not. Employee monitoring can help organizations in knowing the total productive and non-productive hours.

Corroborating, Jackson, *et al.*, (2020) hold that the human costs in terms of lives lost will permanently affect global economic growth in addition to the cost of rising levels of poverty, lives upended; careers derailed, and increased social unrest. In Nigeria, Nigeria’s COVID-19

outbreak has pushed some five million people into poverty as the effects of the disease batters the West African country's economy (World Bank, 2020). Existing vulnerabilities have been exposed, and inequalities entrenched. The shock caused by the pandemic, compounded by a global oil collapse, and has hit Nigeria hard; especially considering the country is Africa's largest economy mainly because it is the continent's top crude producer.

Globally, projections by the *ILO* suggest that working hours declined by 14% between the final quarter of 2019 and the second quarter of 2020. This amounted to approximately 400 million full-time jobs, assuming a 48-hour working week. For G20 economies, total hours of work also declined by 14% or the equivalent of 265 million full-time jobs. For many men and more particularly for many women, this reduction of hours spent in paid work went hand-in-hand with an increase in time spent in unpaid care work as a consequence of: school and day care availability of domestic workers, and the need to look after family members with COVID-19 (ILO, 2020),

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

This section deals with the analysis of research questions formulated and the presentation of the findings of the study. Data collected from in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD) adopted for the analysis. As earlier noted, the major objective of this research work was to provide an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Nigerian economy and employee productivity with emphasis on Abakaliki metropolis, Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

Research Question 1:

What is the implication of COVID-19 pandemic on the economy of Nigeria?

The implication of Covid-19 pandemic on the economy of Nigeria has been very disturbing. The aftermath of the global financial crisis caused by the pandemic showed that workers had lost touch with the labour market, re-connecting them with good jobs was very hard with potentially long-lasting scarring effects (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). The consequences of COVID-19 on the economy in Nigeria are: economic lockdown of major cities (Abuja, Lagos, Ogun states) on 30th March 2020 leading to economic loss especially for daily income earners from small-medium scale businesses, withdrawal of money by investors from the market and fall in oil prices (Ozili, 2020). As an aftermath of the pandemic, it was agreed amongst discussants during the focus group discussion that Nigeria's economic situations had remained highly fluid due to COVID-19. Also, they sustained that the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic did not fall with equal severity on all shoulders (Farooq & Sultana (2021). Complicating the economic situation was a historic drop in the price of crude oil. While prices recovered somewhat from the low of nearly \$20 per barrel in April, they continued to hover around \$40 to \$45 per barrel, reflecting the decline in global economic activity, while

also contributing to the decline of the global economy through various channels (Alon & Bretas, 2021)

In addition, majority of the interviewees in the in-depth interview conducted, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive damage to the country's informal economy; in fact, they submitted that the situation for women workers is even more worrisome. From this perspective, it was obvious that the pandemic negatively affected the country's economic growth beyond anything experienced in nearly a century. Juxtaposing it with the global level, Sharma (2020) observed that 27 million youth in the age group of 20–30 years lost their jobs in April 2020 following a nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Research Question 2:

What is the impact of Covid-19 on employee productivity?

From the literature review, COVID-19 has spread and its impacts on employee productivity have been devastating. From the in-depth interview (IDI), and Focus group discussions, discussants and interviewees unanimously agreed that the infectious disease COVID-19 triggered prolonged social distancing and other mitigation policies to curtail its several adverse consequences, such as the rise of unemployment and economic downturns. Concurring to their position, Farooq & Sultana, (2021) maintained that social distancing at the individual level affected the work and study configurations. Apart from this, they also argued that one of the possible reasons for a decrease in productivity of remote employees was the lack of face-to-face supervision. Buttressing further, they stated that managers believed that the absence of face-to-face interaction reduced access to managerial support and communication leading to a decrease in employee productivity. Besides, COVID-19 plague was thrown overboard going by the plethora of sack letters delivered to workers. There is no doubt that COVID-19 pandemic affected all and sundry, and this explained why organizations ought to have exercised caution in sacking workers without taking into account their previous contributions to the growth of the organizations (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). Relying on fewer employees working than ever would not increase employee productivity since productivity is not just about time lost, but also more mistakes and resources wasted on unneeded tasks. Supervision is a key to higher yield, but with no one taking responsibility to direct production, more mistakes and resources wasted on unneeded tasks. Furthermore, the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic were particularly severe for employees as job and income losses rose far above the ground. This assertion was in agreement with the findings of World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) that when a virus is circulating widely and causing numerous infections, the likelihood of the virus mutating increases. Agreeing with the discussants during the focus group discussion sessions, Farooq and Sultana (2021) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly transformed how people work. Corroborating this declaration, Brynjolfsson *et al.*, (2020) contend that large numbers of people remained in their homes to avoid the disease or because of shelter-in place

orders. Consequent upon this, fewer employees have been engaged by organizations across the globe than ever, and in most cases as contended by discussants during the sessions that many businesses were shut down and workers across the world became jobless. In Nigeria, industrial closures ultimately led to high and persistent unemployment and underemployment. Generally speaking, the increased burden of unpaid care brought by the crisis affected Nigerian workers in every respect. For example, universally, it is frightening to observe that as of end-August 2020, five months after the World Health Organization declared the infectious disease COVID-19 a pandemic, 25 million confirmed cases and 840 thousand deaths had been reported worldwide, with G20 economies accounting for 77% of all cases and 82% of all deaths (ILO-OECD paper at the request of G20 Leaders, 2020).

Conclusion

Since the COVID - 19 outbreaks were first diagnosed; it spread to over 250 countries and negatively affected global economic growth beyond anything experienced in nearly a century (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). Estimates so far indicated the virus has trimmed global economic growth by 3.0% to 6.0% in 2020, with a partial recovery expected in 2021, assuming there is not a second wave of infections (UNCTAD, 2020a). The economic fallout from the pandemic raises the risks of a global economic recession with levels of unemployment not experienced since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The human costs in terms of lives lost will permanently affect global economic growth in addition to the cost of rising levels of poverty, lives upended, careers derailed, and increased social unrest. In Nigeria, the Federal Government disclosed that a total sum of N30, 540,563,571.09 had been spent within four months to fight the scourge of COVID-19 pandemic in the country (Chukwu, 2020). The figure represents 84 per cent of the N36.3 billion public funds and donations received by government between 1st April, 2020 and 31st July, 2020, leaving a balance of N5.9 billion (Omondi, 2020). Also, measures like social distancing, quarantine, closure of educational institutions taken to reduce the transmission of the disease have impacted students' academic learning to a great extent. The significant effects of this pandemic have crippled the conventional tertiary education system. The shifting to online education by some private institutions was commendable, but it created stress, anxiety, disappointment due to some unavoidable issues concerning virtual learning strategy.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the paper proffered the following recommendations:

1. Since COVID-19 has clearly shown the fragmentation and under-resourcing in our health systems, it has demonstrated just how important Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Global Health Security (GHS) are. In achieving these, government should as a matter of concern assists not just organizations alone, but everybody to access the

quality health services without suffering financial hardship. Nigeria government should establish strong commitments to UHC in combination with GHS and population-based health promotion are better prepared to manage the health impacts of the pandemic and its subsequent economic impacts.

2. Solving the health crisis is an essential precondition to addressing the economic and jobs crisis. As the economy is reopened, it is important to introduce or extend measures and guidelines to ensure a safe return to work. Small and medium-sized enterprises will require additional support to implement workplace health and safety practices. Extraordinary sickness benefits and paid care leave entitlements, including parental leave, may have to be kept in place and extended to groups of workers who are not covered while promoting return-to-work measures to prevent long-term labour market exit. Connecting workers on sick leave with occupational rehabilitation and employment services will be critical to prevent long-term labour market exit. In addition, public revenues have decreased due to declining economic activity; countries are increasing their deficit financing which, in turn, is increasing debt for years to come. It is highly likely that out-of-pocket expenditure for healthcare will rapidly increase.
3. Government should strengthen the institutions of work with action on a number of fronts. By this is meant that there should be improved working conditions by revisiting existing regulatory frameworks to ensure equal treatment of workers regardless of their employment status in order to ensure adequate working conditions for all workers. In addition, employment services and making them more flexible should be modernized. Above all, there should be a strengthening of employment and social protection systems so that they cover all workers and ensure that they focus on risk prevention as much as on helping people cope with problems when they materialize.
4. At this critical period, Nigerian government should desist from making life unbearable for her citizens. The recent hike in prices of electricity, fuel is most inconsiderate. Ordinarily, governments should have adopted fiscal measures to provide support to the health sector, households, and firms, although the size and scope of the programmes vary. These measures broadly include tax cuts and tax deferrals, wage and income supplements to individuals, including expanding unemployment insurance; and tax cuts, tax deferrals, and other payments to businesses.
5. In addition, international organizations also took steps to provide loans and other financial assistance to the country in need. These and other actions have been labeled “unprecedented,” a term that has been used frequently to describe the pandemic and the policy responses. In addition, Governments are adopting fiscal packages to assist households, consumers have sharply increased their savings as they face limited spending opportunities, or a form of involuntary saving, and concerns over lost jobs, incomes, and the course of their economies, or precautionary saving.

6. Governments should take urgent steps to provide technical resources and improve internet connection for ensuring uninterrupted online education to fulfill the education needs of students in this crisis period of COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.
7. With the rising level of poverty coupled with loss of jobs due to the Covid-19 pandemic Supports from the family, friends, and government are needed to minimize the social, physical, mental, and educational disruptions of students.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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