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## Assessment of Schools' Reopening after COVID-19 Closures

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### To cite this article:

Nnebedum, C., Obuegbe, A. S., & Nwafor, H. E. (2021). Assessment of schools' reopening after COVID-19 closures. *International Journal on Studies in Education (IJONSE)*, 3(2), 86-91.

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### Article Info

#### Article History

Received:  
30 June 2020

Accepted:  
15 September 2020

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#### Keywords

Principals  
Compliance  
Federal Ministry of  
Education  
Guidelines  
Schools' reopening  
COVID-19

### Abstract

The study assessed principals' compliance with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria. One research question guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 1,378 principals in 1,378 public secondary schools in south east, Nigeria. A sample size of 689 principals was drawn for the study using multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument titled "Federal of Ministry of Education Joint Assessment Checklist for Safe Reopening of Schools and Learning Facilities (FMEJACSRSLF)" was utilized for data collection. The instrument was duly validated by three experts and using Cronbach alpha method for test of internal consistency, reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. Data collected were analyzed using arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The results of the study revealed among other that principals' comply with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria to a great extent. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the State Ministry of Education should ensure that at least two qualified health personnel are employed and posted on full time basis to man each of the secondary schools to provide services to contain and minimize the spread of the virus.

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### Introduction

Human existence has been threatened by coronaviruses (COVID-19) virus which originated from in Hubei province of China in December, 2019 and subsequently spread across the world in three months. To buttress this, Adegboye, Adekunle and Gayawan (2020) noted that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2(SARS-CoV-2) emerged in the city of Wuhan, China in late December 2019 and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). Ogunode, Iriogebu and Abashi (2020) noted that SARS, for instance, was transmitted from civet cats to humans while MERS moved to humans from a type of camel. Ogunode (2020) stressed that Chinese researchers said that the virus could have spread from an infected animals species to humans through illegal-trafficked pangolins which prized in Asia food and medicine.

This disease spreads primarily through contact when an infected person either coughs or sneezes openly, when a person touches a surface or object and then touches the eyes, nose, or mouth (Agusi, Ifynneke, Nnochin, Njoku-Achu, Nwosuh & Meseko, 2020). Some common symptoms of COVID-19 are sore throat, high body temperature, fever, dry cough and difficulty in breathing among others. There is no yet standard vaccine or cure for COVID-19. To buttress this, Lone and Ahmad (2020) averred that there is no drug/vaccine currently available to treat COVID-19; therefore, implementation of precautionary measures to contain the spread of this virus is being practiced throughout the globe; which includes social distancing, isolation and quarantine, community containment, national lockdowns, and travel restrictions. Furthermore, WHO (2020) pointed out that preventive measures against this virus includes frequent hand-washing for at least 20 seconds; with soap and running water or using alcohol based hand sanitizer; covering the nose and mouth with disposable tissue or flexed elbow when coughing or sneezing; avoid touching the eyes, nose and mouth if hands are not clean and, avoiding close physical contact (1 meter or 3 feet) also known as social distancing. AbdulAzeez (2020) stressed that other common preventive measures must be strictly followed, including good respiratory hygiene, hand washing, reduced or no movement into and out of infected areas except for necessity.

An Italian citizen was the first confirmed index of COVID-19 in Nigeria. Ogunode (2020) stressed that the Italian citizen who returned to Lagos State, Nigeria on 25<sup>th</sup> February through Murtala Muhammad International

Airport fell ill on 26<sup>th</sup> February and was transferred to Lagos State Biosecurity Facilities for isolation and testing. The result came out positive of COVID-19. After Nigeria recorded her index case, the Federal Government of Nigeria commenced the screening of airports, contact tracing and isolation. A Nigerian, who was in contact with the first patient (the Italian citizen), contracted the virus in Ogun state, a neighboring state to Lagos. Kalu (2020) asserted that 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.

On 30<sup>th</sup> March, President, Muhammadu Buhari announced two weeks lock down of Lagos, Ogun, and Abuja. The Presidents came up with some palliative measures of disbursing funds and food items to the affected states in Nigeria. These palliatives were received by small proportion of the population in the affected areas. Kalu (2020) stressed that a large number of citizens have disobeyed the lockdown order in the hope of making sales or trying to earn money through other services, but they were apprehended by the police. Kalu added that the combined effort of the police and the military to enforce the lockdown may have caused more deaths than the infection itself. Aifuwa, Musa and Aifuwa (2020) pointed out that as the Coronavirus pandemic continues to rise, businesses are forced to shut down the operation, and as a result of this employees become jobless. During the period, there was uproar of robbery activities in Nigeria. Hebebcı, Bertiz and Alan (2020) averred that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected many areas in the world that directly concern human life, particularly health, tourism and the economy.

The Federal Government of Nigeria through the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 in collaboration with Federal Ministry of Health and Nigerian Centre for Disease Control review WHO guideline COVID-19 guideline to reduce the spread of the virus. The Federal Government of Nigeria came up with measures such as social distancing, compulsory wearing of face masks in public places, banned on religious and social gatherings, ban on inter-state movement, temporarily closure of business, regular hand washing and other hygienic practices among others. Spread of the infectious virus is still on the rise despite the preventive measures put in place by the Federal Government of Nigeria. In response to the increasing cases of COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Government of Nigeria implemented school closures across the country as a measure to minimize social contacts among learners and staff to reduce COVID-19 transmission. Similar to this, Angelova (2020) reported that anti-epidemic measures taken by many governments around the world in an attempt to prevent a greater spread of the infection in fact have affected not only the economic life in all levels and sectors but also have influenced the big changes in education systems in all stages such as primary, secondary and tertiary education. On 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2020, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural organization estimated that 107 countries had implemented national school closure related to COVID-19 affecting children and adults (Viner, Rusell, Croker et al, 2020). Some primary and secondary schools had to commence their second term examinations before the official closure of schools.

The national school closure by Federal and State Governments interrupted academic activities and year. The online learning activities were initiated by some primary and secondary schools to encourage learning and completion of the syllabus for the academic session. The online learning involves the use of mobile phones, computers and laptops with internet connectivity to deliver instruction to students at home. Shivangi (2020) noted that the online pedagogy is relatively cheaper mode of education in terms of the lower or no cost of transportation, accommodation and the overall cost of institution-based learning. However, students in remote areas have no or inadequate access to internet facilities to promote online learning. To buttress this, Korkmaz and Toraman (2020) noted that the problems experienced by the educators during online learning practices in COVID-19 pandemic are about students internet connection problems, lack of educator-student interaction, not being able to make a reliable assessment of learning, lack of knowledge about how to evaluate the learners' knowledge and skills, not being able to provide skills teaching, not being able to reach all the learning outcomes determined for learning, difficulty in providing feedback to students, difficulty in teaching according to the individual interests and abilities of the students among others. Unger and Meiran (2020) stressed that there is some evidence of student anxiety toward online learning when compared to more traditional, or in person, in class learning environment. In July, The Ministry of Education announced reopening of school for secondary school exit classes on August 4<sup>th</sup> to enable them prepare for the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) to commence August 17<sup>th</sup>. According to Federal Ministry of Education (2020), the guidelines for the safe reopening of schools and learning facilities after the COVID-19 pandemic outline actions, measures, and requirements needed for all formal and non-formal learning spaces for all ages, including, but not limited to, Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCE), basic and senior secondary schools, and tertiary institutions:

1. Ensuring adequate preparedness of schools and learning facilities for re-opening and resumption of academic and other ancillary activities without placing the health, safety, and security of learners, teachers, administrators, and other education personnel at risk;
2. A systematic, phased, safe reopening that factors resource availability to meet basic requirements and differentials in COVID-19 effect (e.g., fumigation and disinfection of schools; provision of learning material; impact and vulnerabilities across schools, learning facilities, communities, localities, local governments, and states); and
3. Continued safe and quality teaching and learning activities by learners, teachers, and administrators that meet prescribed standards through remote and e-learning platforms with adequate safeguarding of their health, safety, and security during school shutdown period;
4. Entrenching and institutionalizing good practices in health, safety, and security in the nation's education sector in the long term to strengthen systems and make them resilient against future similar occurrences.

Strict adherence or compliance with the COVID-19 directives is always a serious challenge in Nigeria. As of August 13<sup>th</sup>, there were 48,116 confirmed cases, 34,309 recoveries, and 966 deaths in Nigeria. There is partial adherence to WHO COVID-19 preventive in Nigeria. Typical scenarios include; poor practice of good washing and social distancing in public places like Bank, public offices and business organizations among others. Agusi et al (2020) stressed that the defaulters of COVID-19 preventive measures could be attributed to insubordination and tendency for civil disobedience in developing country where the citizen's patriotism and respect for government is poor. Failure to abide by Ministry of Education guideline poses a great danger in Nigeria where there is a decaying health care system. Thus, it becomes imperative to investigate assessed principals' compliance with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

The following research question guided the study: To what extent do principals' comply with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria?

### **Method**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive survey is the design which aims at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics features or facts about a given population. The design was adjudged appropriate for the study because the researchers collected data from given representative of the population in order to systematically assessed principals' compliance with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria. The area of the study was South-East which has five states namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The population of the study comprised 1,378 principals in 1,378 public secondary schools in south east, Nigeria. A sample size of 689 principals was drawn for the study using multi-stage sampling procedure.

The instrument titled "Federal of Ministry of Education Joint Assessment Checklist for Safe Reopening of Schools and Learning Facilities (FMEJACRSRLF)" was utilized for data collection. The checklist was developed from Federal of Ministry of Education Guideline for Safe Reopening of Schools and Learning Facilities. FMEJACRSRLF contains 17 items structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts who are lecturers, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy and one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Educational Foundations, all in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha which yielded co-efficient value of 0.81.

Copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents by the researchers together with eight research assistants who are secondary school teachers in East-East, Nigeria. Out of the 689 copies of questionnaire distributed, 661 copies which indicate 96% were dully completed and retrieved and used for data analysis. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering the research question. Mean scores that fall between: 4.00-3.50, 3.49-2.50, 2.49-1.50, and 1.49-below were taken to indicate VHE, HE, LE and VLE respectively.

**Results and Discussion**

Research Question: To what extent do principals’ comply with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria?

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Principals’ Compliance with Federal Ministry of Education Guidelines on Schools and Learning Facilities Reopening after COVID-19 Closures in South-East Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	Sd	Decision
1	Fenced-in premises with manned gates to controlling alternative learning timetables and managing social distancing	2.42	1.13	Low Extent
2	Visible designated drop-off and pick-up point outside of the school entrance for parents, guardians, and visitors	2.46	1.08	Low Extent
3	Availability of schedule outlining staggered arrival and departure times of learners to avoid crowding	2.67	1.11	High Extent
4	Adequacy of classrooms learning spaces to promote social distancing	2.71	1.18	High Extent
5	Operation of alternative timetables and/or shifted classes in order to promote social distancing guidelines	2.65	1.04	High Extent
6	Adequacy of learners’ and teachers’ furniture in line with two-meter guidelines for safe distancing	2.74	1.12	High Extent
7	Adequacy of doors and windows to ensure good ventilation			
8	Disinfection of the entire school premises	2.56	1.15	High Extent
9	Schedule for disinfection is aligned to shifts in class timetable	2.52	1.04	High Extent
10	Availability and adequacy of recommended infrared thermometers for temperature checks at the gate upon entry	2.61	1.01	High Extent
11	Availability of hand sanitizers at the gate, communal areas (e.g., classrooms, staff rooms, and	2.79	1.17	High Extent
12	Students and staff personnel wear face masks at all times while at school	2.65	1.10	High Extent
13	Readily available stock of face masks for vulnerable learners in schools	2.53	1.09	High Extent
14	All disposable face masks are disposed of properly in school	2.66	1.14	High Extent
15	Availability of safe water supply to maintain WASH requirements, including hand washing	2.77	1.11	High Extent
16	Availability of soap and disinfectants to support WASH requirements, including hand washing	2.58	1.02	High Extent
17	Availability of hand washing facilities at strategic points	2.60	0.98	High Extent
18	Availability of school clinic or other designated space for isolating sick staff and students			
19	Schedule in place for school clinic or other designated space is cleaned and disinfected at least twice per day	2.43	1.03	Low Extent
20	Beds are positioned at least two meters apart	2.46	1.11	Low Extent
21	Availability of health activities and programs where all learners sensitized and trained on COVID-19 pandemic and appropriate application of preventive measures	2.40	1.07	Low Extent
22	All staff personnel are sensitized and trained on COVID-19 pandemic and appropriate application of preventive measures	2.47	1.00	Low Extent
23	The school community sensitized on COVID-19 pandemic and preventive measures, changes to rules for entry to the school	2.45	1.08	Low Extent
<b>Overall Scores</b>		<b>2.58</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>High Extent</b>

Table 1 revealed that items 1, 2 and 19-23 fall within the mean range of 1.50-2.49 indicating low extent of compliance with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures with respect to the items. Items 3-17 fall within the mean range of 2.50-3.49 indicating that there was high extent of compliance with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning

facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures with respect to the items. The cluster standard deviation score of 1.08 indicated that there is homogeneity amongst respondents' mean scores. The overall mean score of 2.58 falls within the range 2.50-3.49. This finding indicated that principals' comply with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria to a great extent.

The finding of the study indicated that principals' comply with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria to a great extent. Availability of schedule outlining staggered arrival and departure times of learners to avoid crowding, adequacy of classrooms learning spaces to promote social distancing, operation of alternative timetables and/or shifted classes in order to promote social distancing guidelines, adequacy of learners' and teachers' furniture in line with two-meter guidelines for safe distancing, adequacy of doors and windows to ensure good ventilation, disinfection of the entire school premises, availability of hand sanitizers at the gate, use of infrared thermometers for temperature checks at the gate upon entry, availability of safe water, facilities soap and disinfectants to support WASH requirements. This is in agreement with the finding of Atiya and Poorva (2020) which reported that COVID-19 awareness and preventive practices include avoiding social gathering, maintaining distance while talking, hand washings, avoiding physical contact, using sanitizers, wearing face masks and avoid touching nose, and mouths among others. This also supported the finding of Kebede, Yitayih, Birhanu, Mekonen and Ambelu (2020) reported that preventive practices towards COVID-19 pandemic in Universities include; frequent hand washing, avoidance of hands shake and use of hand sanitizers. The agreement between findings could be due to the fact that COVID-19 is a global pandemic with no cure and can also be easily contracted. The absence of a vaccine or standard cure for COVID-19 is bound to contribute the high extent of Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures. No wonder there is any increasing number of confirmed COVID-19 cases after school reopening in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

Based on the finding, it is concluded that principals' comply with Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures in South-East Nigeria to a great extent. The guideline incorporates preventive measures such as: hand washing, social distancing, operation of alternative timetables and/or shifted classes, use of infrared thermometers for temperature checks at the gate upon entry and wearing of face masks to contain and minimize the spread of the virus. The compliance to Federal Ministry of Education guidelines on schools and learning facilities reopening after COVID-19 closures is the right directions toward reducing the health and safety dangers that COVID-19 pandemic poses to students, school staff, parents and members of the public. The reopening of school for exit class for WASSCE is a positive staff to toward further deterioration of learning facilities and educational system in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that:

1. Ministry of Education should organize regular awareness campaign to sensitize school staff and students to improve compliance of the COVID-19 guidelines in school.
2. The State Ministry of Education should ensure that at least two qualified health personnel are employed and posted on full time basis to man each of the secondary schools to provide services to contain and minimize the spread of the virus.
3. State Ministry of Education should encourage and support secondary school principals and staff to participate in training programs in order to acquaint them with knowledge of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the school system.

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