



The Social and Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Private Higher Education in Rwanda

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Abstract: *This study is entitled “The Social and economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on private higher education in Rwanda.” The purpose of this study is to identify the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on private higher learning institutions in Rwanda. The researchers reviewed the related literature from physical and online documents. This research employed descriptive research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The research adopted purposive sampling technique to determine a sample size of 437 respondents ranged from Students, Staff, and Senior Managers from 26 private HLLs in Rwanda. Data was collected through questionnaire, documentation, and interviews. Primary data were analyzed using SPSS. As results of this study, almost 90% of respondents confirmed that COVID-19 affected the enrolment numbers for both international and local students. Some HLLs, especially local-based ones, reported that this impact would continuously have negative financial consequences over the next 3 to five years. At almost all HLLs, COVID-19 affected teaching and learning activities where 91% of the respondents reported that classroom teaching had been replaced by remote teaching and learning. 100% of HLLs also reported that COVID-19 had affected the planning to carry out exams and it has had an impact on international students and staff mobility at 99% of participating HLLs. As a major recommendation, HLLs should have strategies in place to control future pandemic rather than considering the COVID-19 pandemic as a once-in-a-lifetime crisis.*

Keywords: *Society, Economy, COVID-19, Higher Learning Institutions, Rwanda*

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1. Introduction

In December 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia of unknown origin was reported in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. Pneumonia cases were epidemiologically linked to the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market. Inoculation of

respiratory samples into human airway epithelial cells, Vero E6 and Huh7 cell lines, led to the isolation of a novel respiratory virus whose genome analysis showed it to be a novel coronavirus related to SARS-CoV, and therefore named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). SARS-CoV-2 is a beta coronavirus belonging to the subgenus Sarbecovirus. The global

spread of SARS-CoV-2 and the thousands of deaths caused by coronavirus disease (COVID-19) led the World Health Organization to declare a pandemic on 12 March 2020. To date, the world has paid a high toll in this pandemic in terms of human lives lost, economic repercussions and increased poverty (Ciotti et al., 2020). Deferred decisions and delayed actions have immediate and longer-term business continuity impacts. To minimize private higher education disruptions and protect employees, HEIs must take steps now to create resilience as an immediate solution. This research was conducted at 26 private universities in Rwanda. It was highly significant to its beneficiaries by providing social and economic situation analysis to make post covid-19 educational resilience in Rwanda and facilitated policymakers to evaluate the implementation of existing policies and make new ones. To get a needful and helpful report, all valuable information was gathered and captured concerning social and economy before and during covid-19. Private universities enroll over half of Rwandan higher education students and are concerned that the prolonged shutdown of educational institutions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic not only results in a loss of students, but academic staff as well. Private universities predict high numbers of dropout cases due to COVID-19. The students who usually pay for themselves are employees in private companies, which are either suspended or unable to pay them. Others source their school fees either from parents or other sponsors, all of whom are socially and economically hit by the pandemic. This research project intended to identify the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on private higher learning institutions in Rwanda.

The COVID-19 pandemic has already affected the world in terms of both people's lives and the global and national economies. The impacts are different as countries, and their respective policy responses are varied. There is so far from a mixture of anticipated effects on African economies with little specific cases to demonstrate how each country is responding to the short and mid-term effects of the virus (Alfred & Sibomana, 2020). School closures are one of the non-pharmaceutical measures that were introduced to control the spread of COVID-19. Following the identification of the first case of COVID-19 in Rwanda on 14 March 2020, the government took immediate steps to control its spread. Among the first measures that were announced on 15 March were the closure of schools and churches. These were followed by other measures such as social distancing, a total lockdown and the wearing of facemasks. These measures led to many higher education institutions (HEIs) shifting the teaching and learning process (teaching, learning and assessment) from normal classrooms (face-to-face) to virtual classrooms (online teaching) through the use of various technologies. Although online learning is a

common trend in this new technological era, scholars such as (Naciri et al. , 2020), (Bao, 2020) and (Reimer and Schleicher, 2020) observed that it confronts a number of challenges such as a lack of infrastructure to support online learning, and poor network connections. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a number of challenges in the learning process of students in HEIs.

2. Literature Review

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was declared for the first time in December 2019 in China, Wuhan province, the numbers were increasing dramatically (from one country to another) in each country. COVID-19 had a devastating impact on individuals, families, society, and all nations globally. Worldwide, the numbers were increasing day by day, with over 12.5 million confirmed cases, over 560 thousand confirmed deaths, and over 212 confirmed affected territories. WHO referred to the virus as. COVID- 19, which had challenged global society on the level of preparedness to mitigate the effects of the virus on the quality of life of patients affected, families, and society. The only solution to this pandemic was to establish mechanisms for resilience to mitigate the adverse impact of COVID-19 due to social isolation, distancing, immobility, and the overall social and economic well-being of communities affected. Some measures taken by the Governments were local and international flights being canceled, borders being closed, Universities and Schools being closed, Churches being shut down, shops, offices, restaurants, and bars being all closed, and events were canceled. Some countries closed their borders completely, except for goods and cargo and returning citizens, (Marco Cascella et. al, 2023). Non-essential businesses were closed, traveling between cities and districts was suspended, and non-essential movements outside the home were not permitted. Any travelers or legal residents returning to the country were subject to mandatory 14-day quarantine at designated locations. As all countries suffered economically, most of the universities were seriously facing a big challenge of continuing their main activities (teaching) as unnecessary movements outside the home were banned and almost all activities were no longer running, except for essential services such as health care, pharmacies and shopping for groceries. However, this disruption became a call to think about e-learning as a solution to teaching activities and provide most of the services offered by academic institutions online.

2.1 Social and economic situation of private higher learning institutions

The worldwide expansion of private higher education can be illustrated by the fact that one in three students globally is now enrolled in Private HEIs, and there are very few places in the world where public monopolies continue to prevent the emergence of alternative providers from the private sector. In the UK, the Government recognizes that private, for-profit higher education institutions, the majority of which award degrees in conjunction with state universities, typically function more efficiently and work harder to improve the student experience. Their appeal among non-traditional students dovetails perfectly with Government rhetoric to make higher education more accessible and widen participation. A legal framework has been created that makes it easier for challenger institutions to enter the market and compete with the public higher education sector. A more streamlined, student-focused approach to the regulation of higher education in the UK is also designed to stimulate further growth and competition in the HE sector, ensuring that private colleges and universities remain a viable alternative to the public sector (Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi, Sarwar Khawaja, 2021).

The social and economic effects faced by private higher learning institutions during COVID-19 Pandemic

The social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on private higher learning institutions

In their first attempts to contain the spread of the virus, many countries imposed a lockdown and schools and/or universities have closed for several months across all OECD and partner countries. Out of the 38 OECD countries and 8 partner countries covered by Education insights where the People's Republic of China was the first to close schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures were imposed on 16 February 2020 in some parts of China, where the scheduled spring semester starts earlier, and extended nationwide about a week later. Other countries also began to close schools (closing school premises, without necessarily completely ceasing teaching and learning) as the pandemic expanded. Preliminary information from various sources (see below) provides a snapshot of responses during this ongoing and evolving global pandemic. By the end of March, school closures had been implemented to some extent in all 46 countries covered by Education at a Glance, but to different degrees: 41 countries closed schools across the country while 5

(Australia, Iceland, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States) closed them at a subnational or local level (Figure 3). However, not all countries hit by the pandemic closed all their schools. For example, primary schools in Iceland remained open if class sizes were below 20 students. In Sweden, most primary and lower secondary schools remained open, while upper secondary schools switched to mainly distance learning from mid-March (UNESCO, 2020). It is difficult to estimate accurately the number of instruction weeks affected in all countries, as in some countries individual schools or local authorities have autonomy over the organisation of the school year and the reopening of schools. However, by the end of June 2020, some degree of school closure was effective for at least 7 weeks in 2 countries (4%), 8-12 weeks in 6 countries (13%), 12-16 weeks in 24 countries (52%), 16-18 weeks in 13 countries (28%) and more than 18 weeks in China (UNESCO, 2020). The actual impact may have been less severe as some of these periods included scheduled school breaks. In many European and Southern Hemisphere countries, Easter holidays scheduled in mid-April and/or spring vacations between April and early May mitigated the impact of school closure by up to two weeks. Moreover, some countries have reorganised their school years to minimise the loss of instruction time. For example, as stated by Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019), in some jurisdictions in Australia and Chile, the winter school holidays were brought forward; in Korea the school year started in April (about one month later than the typical start) by shortening the summer vacation, and in Lithuania compulsory school holidays were introduced in the last two weeks of March (OECD, 2020).

The economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on private higher learning institutions

The decline in revenue and financial strain

The highly leveraged firms lose substantial market share to their more conservatively financed competitors in industry downturns. Specifically, firms in the top leverage decile in industries that experience output contractions see their sales decline by 26 percent more than do firms in the bottom leverage decile. A similar decline takes place in the market value of equity. These findings are consistent with the view that the indirect costs of financial distress are significant and positive. Consistent with the theory that firms with specialized products are especially vulnerable to financial distress, it was found that highly leveraged firms that engage in research and development suffer the most in economically distressed periods (Opler & Titman, 2012).

Increased operating costs

According to (Karakose, 2021). Private institutions had to invest in technology and resources to facilitate remote learning and ensure a safe campus environment. Expenses associated with purchasing online learning platforms, upgrading IT infrastructure, sanitization protocols, and personal protective equipment (PPE) increased the operating costs for these institutions. An increase in operating expenses and overhead costs means less profit for a business. They receive the most scrutiny from a company, as these costs may be less fixed than their non-operating expenses, manufacturing costs, and capital expenditures. A company's senior management tries to reduce operating expenses and utility costs by outsourcing areas of the business or allowing some of the existing staff to work from home. This cuts down on the actual physical space needed for staff at the office. Management also implements money-saving techniques such as automating parts of the business or reducing salaries for new hires.

Reduction in philanthropic support and donations

The economic downturn caused by the pandemic affected the ability of private institutions to secure philanthropic support and donations. Many donors and organizations redirected their resources towards immediate crisis response efforts, which reduced the availability of financial aid and scholarships for students. A reduction in philanthropic support and donations can occur due to various reasons, including economic downturns, changes in government policies, shifts in donor priorities, or individual circumstances. When facing a decline in philanthropic support and donations, the following are considered: Assess the situation, review your fundraising strategy, communicate with donors, cultivate relationships, Tailor your messaging, explore partnerships, seek grants and sponsorships, Embrace technology and digital platforms, Stewardship and donor recognition, Review and adapt. The COVID-19 pandemic alone exacerbated consumer demands for nonprofit services while curtailing nonprofit organizations' ability to fundraise. Without fundraising, nonprofit organizations cannot achieve their mission or support their causes, leading to a precarious situation for societal well-being. Meanwhile, consumers are changing their financial behaviors, with younger generations often going cashless. At the same time, governments continue to change policies that affect nonprofit organizations, (Van Steenburg, et al., 2022).

Job losses and salary reductions

The impact of the pandemic and containment measures led

to a severe contraction in economic activity as many people were unable to go to work and businesses could no longer operate. Industrial production declined on average by around 28% in G20 countries in just two months between February and April 2020 (Figure 3). Larger declines of between 40 and 60 percent were recorded in India, Indonesia, Italy and South Africa and relatively small declines occurred in Korea and Russia. The data indicate that a trough in activity occurred in April in all countries except China, where it occurred in February. However, despite a rebound in activity, industrial production in June 2020 remained well below its pre-crisis level except for China and Korea, (ILO-OECD, 2020).

Job retention (JR) schemes have been one of the main policy tools used by a number of OECD countries to contain the employment and social fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. By May 2020, JR schemes supported about 50 million jobs across the OECD, about ten times as many as during the global financial crisis of 2008-09. By reducing labour costs, JR schemes have prevented a surge in unemployment, while they have mitigated financial hardship and buttressed aggregate demand by supporting the incomes of workers on reduced working time. Looking forward, governments need to be vigilant to ensure that JR schemes are not downscaled too quickly, and allow viable jobs to be destroyed, or too slowly, and become an obstacle to the economic recovery. When the health and economic situation improves, JR support needs to be better targeted to jobs that are viable but at risk of being terminated and place a greater focus on supporting workers at risk of becoming unemployed rather than their jobs.

The potential long-term financial impact

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic there have been concerns about the financial impact on universities. Much of this has focused on the potential loss of international students, but there could also be losses in income from lower home student numbers, a drop in research work and less revenue from accommodation, catering and conferencing. In 2018/19 the total income of the higher education sector across the UK was £40.5 billion and total expenditure was £39.1 billion - this provided a surplus of £1.4 billion or 3.4% of income. This excludes £4.9 billion 'costs' due to a pension accounting adjustment. The latest (April 2019) assessment of the sector in England by the Office for Students (OfS) found that overall, the financial health was 'reasonable'. There was, however, considerable variation between providers and some had 'ambitious' assumptions about growth in student numbers. Much of the focus of the financial impact of the pandemic on university finances has been on the loss of international (non-EU) students. International students' fees provide a large and increasing share of

providers' total income and universities gain a surplus or 'profit' on teaching international students. This surplus helps to fund important 'loss making' activities such as research, (Paul Bolton & Sue Hubble, 2020). This 'cross subsidization' can also provide flexibility to support STEM teaching, investment in facilities and widening participation activities in 2018/19 fee income from non-EU students in the UK was £5.8 billion or 14.4% of the total income of all UK universities In 2018/19 teaching of overseas students generated an estimated surplus of £1.7

3. Methodology

This research used a combination of strategies and actions. The analytical study was carried out using both quantitative and qualitative methods including extensive involvement and facilitated interventions with the HLIs' stakeholders ORIPES (Organisations Rwandaises d'Institutions Privées d'Enseignement Supérieur) & non-ORIPES Members and direct partner institutions from Government and private sector. The researchers collected data by using different methods such as documentary review, distributing structured questionnaires and conducting structured interviews as well as internet searches. Detailed structured questionnaires and interviews with the staff members, the senior management (VCs & DVCs), and board members were used at each selected University as well as key external stakeholder institutions which work together with the higher learning institutions in their daily operations.

To determine the relevant stakeholder institutions for consultation, stakeholder mapping was conducted in close consultation with the ORIPES leaders. A review of various documents that included among others but are not limited to the self-assessment report like; Financial Statements (2019-2020), Strategic Plan (5 years), HR and investment reports, The Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS), The Domestic and International students recruitment report(2019-2020, 2021), RDB and HEC Five Year Strategic Plan (2016-2020), Other documents deemed relevant to understand the current National economy. According to (Jennifer A. Espinosa, David J. Ortinau, 2015), the study population is the entire group under study as specified by the objectives of the research.

billion or 43% in England and Northern Ireland combined. Research income was £3.9 billion less than cost; a deficit of (44%) of income. In recent years home student numbers have remained static and the only growth in overall student numbers has been driven by international students. The UK higher education sector had almost 350,000 international students in 2018/19 or 14% of the 2.4 million students at UK universities. China is by far the largest source of international students with just over 120,000 in 2018/19.

To respond to the purpose of this research, 1144 participants were targeted purposively in all 26 targeted private universities located in 13 different districts of Rwanda. Student union members, University staff, Board Members from targeted private universities in all provinces and Kigali city and external stakeholder institutions (Banks, Insurance Companies, Regulator/HEC and RRA and District Labor Inspectors) were targeted. (n=516 where the student unions and board members were selected by using 30% of the population was considered to ensure the representativeness of the sample.

All data and information collected were analyzed by using SPSS to reveal facts, comparisons, and results. There was a triangulation of data and information from different sources. The data analysis presented the facts and information as succinctly and clearly as possible to match the status as a basis to develop synergies and resilient strategies for mitigating the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the private higher education of Rwanda. This research also used a Content Analysis, a research project procedure that used inferential statistics, interpretation, and coding-related data. It was quantitative and qualitative based on descriptive research using five steps namely (a) collecting related data (b) organizing and preparing data for analysis, (c) coding the data (d) identifying patterns and themes, and (e) interpreting the data.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: General Data Analysis and Interpretations

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | ACT | 13 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 3.1 |
| | AIMS | 5 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 4.3 |
| | ALU | 21 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 9.4 |
| | AUCA | 26 | 6.2 | 6.2 | 15.6 |
| | CMU | 27 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 22.1 |
| | CUR | 1 | .2 | .2 | 22.3 |
| | EAUR | 9 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 24.5 |
| | ICK | 7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 26.1 |
| | INES | 20 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 30.9 |
| | KP | 21 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 36.0 |
| | MKU | 2 | .5 | .5 | 36.5 |
| | OCU | 2 | .5 | .5 | 36.9 |
| | PECDTEC | 3 | .7 | .7 | 37.6 |
| | RHIH | 14 | 3.4 | 3.4 | 41.0 |
| | RICA | 6 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 42.4 |
| | UGHE | 28 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 49.2 |
| | ULK | 35 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 57.6 |
| | UNILAK | 40 | 9.6 | 9.6 | 67.1 |
| | UOG | 16 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 71.0 |
| | UOK | 31 | 7.4 | 7.4 | 78.4 |
| | UTAB | 29 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 85.4 |
| | UTB | 52 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 97.8 |
| | VATEL RWANDA | SCHOOL 9 | 2.2 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 417 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 1 indicates the findings from staff and students in HLIs using the questionnaire whereas the study received 417 responses out of 437 that were targeted from 26 HLIs

based in Rwanda that participated in this study excluding NACHS, PIASS, and COSECSA. The level of institutional participation was 88.4%.

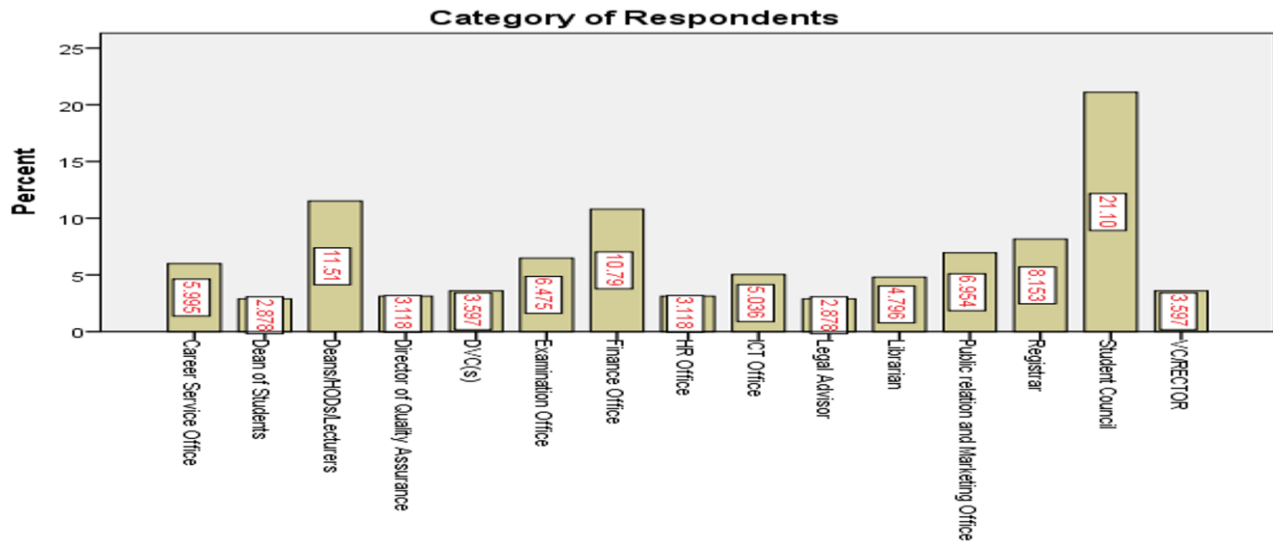


Figure 1: Category of the respondents

The above graph shows the distribution of replies in the level of participation by various categories of students and staff according to their working positions in higher learning institutions, whereas the other project stakeholders were involved through the interview. The

most participating positions of respondents are faculty members, student councils, and finance staff.

The general impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the HLIs in Rwanda

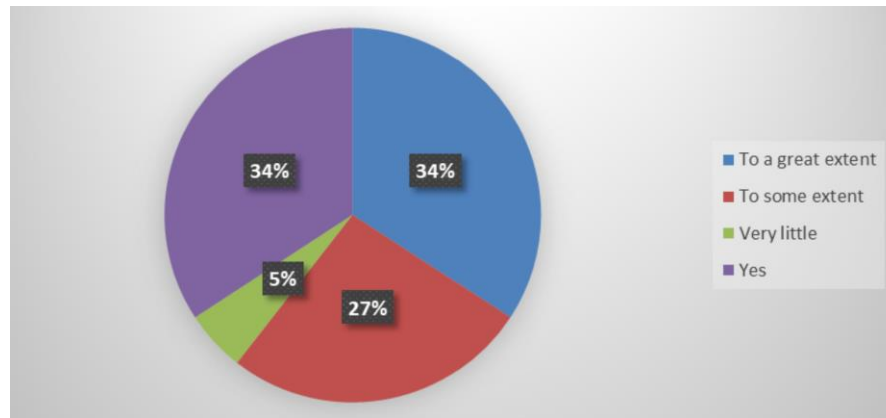


Figure 2: General impact of Covid-19 on HLIs in Rwanda

Almost all institutions that replied to the survey have been impacted by COVID-19. Only 2 institutions out of 23 replied that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted them

financially at a Very little rate, and 95% of them replied that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the implementation of the strategic plan of their institutions as represented below there was financial instability caused by the pandemic.

Table 2: Important Statistics in regard to how HLIs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic financially

| | | To what extent has the pandemic impacted your institution financially: Tuition fees (academic fees) | To what extent has the pandemic impacted your institution financially: Loans | To what extent has the pandemic impacted your institution's finance: Research & Consultancy | To what extent has the pandemic impacted your institution's finance: Grants | To what extent has the pandemic impacted your institution's finance: Other incomes |
|----------------|---------|---|--|---|---|--|
| N | Valid | 417 | 45 | 45 | 45 | 45 |
| | Missing | 0 | 372 | 372 | 372 | 372 |
| Mean | | 1.35 | 2.22 | 1.44 | 1.38 | 1.51 |
| Std. Deviation | | 1.074 | 1.277 | .893 | .747 | 1.014 |

Table 2 shows that the economic shock associated with the COVID-19 pandemic was significantly larger in private higher Learning Institutions. This has led to significant teaching and learning disruptions, drops in student admissions, grants, and consultancies, and the tightening of financial conditions.

Interpretation of findings based on the specific objective of the study

Summary of main findings

Almost 90% of respondents confirmed that COVID-19 hurts the enrolment numbers for both international and local students. Some HLIs, especially local-based ones, reported that this impact will continuously have negative financial consequences over the next 3 to five years. Almost all HLIs, COVID-19 affected teaching and learning activities where 91% of them reported that classroom teaching has been replaced by remote teaching and learning. The shift from face-to-face to remote teaching did not come without challenges, the main ones being access to technical infrastructure, literacy, the digital divide, the Internet, dropouts of students, competencies, and pedagogies for distance learning, and the requirements of specific fields of study.

At the same time, the forced move to distance teaching and learning offered important opportunities to propose more flexible learning possibilities, explore blended or hybrid learning, and mix synchronous learning with asynchronous learning, hence the evidence to reopen and an indication to review the strategic plan. At the same time, 100% of HLIs also reported that COVID-19 affected exams and postponed or canceled them at 100% of all HLIs. COVID-19 has had an impact on international student mobility at 99% of participating HLIs. The type of

impact was diverse and varied from institution to institution. Fortunately, the majority of HLIs responded that they have now put in place contingency plans in place to mitigate this impact. As far as partnerships are concerned, 78.5% of HLIs reported that COVID-19 weakened partnerships and collaborations. Surprisingly, for 21.5% of respondents, reported that the COVID-19 pandemic created new opportunities with partner institutions.

As far as results were concerned, 81% of HLIs reported that research activities were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common negative impact of COVID-19 was the cancellation of international travel at 86% of HLIs and the cancellation or postponement of scientific research conferences at 97% of HLIs. Moreover, field-applied research projects were at risk of not being completed as planned at 92% of HLIs. For the large majority of HLIs, COVID-19 significantly affected their community engagement initiatives. At a bit less than 1% of the respondents from HLIs, the impact was positive - the crisis increased HLIs' community engagement whereas 99% of HLIs responded that there was a significant negative impact as it decreased HLIs' community engagement activities.

Almost all HLIs (91%) responded that they are putting in place the required infrastructures to communicate with their students and staff. Respondents provided more details on the challenges faced in the open questions at the end of the survey. Although the infrastructures exist, several institutions reported that an immediate challenge generated by the lockdown was to ensure clear and effective communication streams with staff and students due to inappropriate and available media devices such as Laptops, Desktop computers, tablets, Ipads, smartphones, and the Internet at large; whereas government established zero Internet access to learning platforms. Some higher learning Institutions were still having their Learning

platforms hosted outside the country and they were obliged to change to local hosting to help the learning process. These findings are supported by (Mutambuka André & Butera Edison, 2022) who concluded that eLearning adoption variables are predictors of learning outcomes. They recommended to future study be conducted to determine the factors that influence 14.2% of eLearning outcomes since this rate was from other variables that are not included in this study. Researchers recommend also to other researchers to conduct the same study where students will answer questions of learning outcomes.

Interview results

The private HLIs' association representative, whereas he said that:

“MTN Rwanda and Airtel Rwanda were offering free access to online learning materials for all students and lecturers from the universities in a move aimed at helping the higher education sector, keep functioning despite the closure of universities and schools. All social and economic crises inevitably affected private Higher education Institutions, the research findings permitted us to make a general conclusion about this impact in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, as it has affected each university differently and each response strategy has been different”.

“It is clear that Covid-19 has altered access to higher education, that is, enrolments; the process of training students, and the inability to pay the staff. All of these affected negatively the employability in the higher education sector and caused so many cases at the district labor inspection level. This situation was mainly due to the poor economic situation that accompanied the pandemic, which increased unemployment and poverty in some households”. Said a MIFOTRA representative.

“In terms of finance, the abrupt halt in face-to-face activities due to the pandemic led to a drop in university enrolment. This increased the pressure on banks to add a grace period for the HLIs which had loans to pay”. Said banks representatives. *The closure of educational institutions caused a situation of greater risk for women, who were susceptible to greater abuse, domestic violence, and an increase in forced and early marriages. In addition, during the pandemic families had more time at home, which led to an increase in the time dedicated to caring for the family and the home; a role that is usually attributed to women. It is therefore women who neglect their work and study time which inevitably increases the gender gap”.* Reported from some Institutions during Interviews with University BoGs.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study findings showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected socially and economically the private higher learning institutions in Rwanda. It was found that some HLIs, especially local-based ones are higher and more affected than international ones. It was also revealed that shifting from face-to-face to remote teaching and learning is the best approach to remain active even if some challenges were observed such as access to technical infrastructure, literacy, digital divide, Internet, dropouts of students, competencies and pedagogies for distance learning and the requirements of specific fields of study.

5.2. Recommendations

The findings of this study generated the following recommendations:

1. There is a need of strong immediate support to the existing Learning platforms, and instruments to ensure their functioning even with a high number of connections. Support can be provided in terms of grant/loaned hardware (servers, Laptop/Tablet per student), but also through the work of IT specialists organized on both partnership and paid basis. Such work could also include Instructional design and strengthening of the university Learning Management System and Digital Library.
2. Universities need to commit to keeping all their staff and students connected; not only those directly affected by the teaching impacts of the pandemic. Universities can assign staff and recruit volunteers to regularly connect with colleagues and students and develop joint activities and events online. Guidance and counseling should not be considered a side issue during the crisis but should become an integral part of an institution's core response.
3. The students should engage in remote learning, for example, with a view to equipment, family responsibilities, home environment, etc., to understand how realistic it is for students to adapt to online plans for learning and to work with the dean of student affairs to adapt according to student capacity to partake in remote learning.
4. Regulating institutions should consider developing new policies in the context of the post-pandemic situation. Also, they should evaluate and approve the blended learning for HLIs to ensure continued access to learning amid

tight Covid-19 restrictions.

5. HLIs should revamp existing strategic plans to adapt to new changes in technologies, strategically allocate funding dedicated to expanding and updating technological infrastructure for digital pedagogy and adequate training of faculty members.
6. Education ministry and other in charge institutions should provide ongoing support to lecturers, parents, and students through the establishment of a Laptop Loaner Program and enhanced technology Infrastructure.

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