

The impact of COVID-19 induced crisis on rural Zimbabwe: A case study of selected students' perceptions

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Abstract

The outbreak of the novel Corona virus disease (COVID-19) in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, had a serious impact on people's lives, especially on students residing in rural Zimbabwe who were sitting examinations at the end of 2020. In order to curtail the spread of COVID-19, governments across the world instituted lockdowns. When positive cases rose exponentially in Zimbabwe, the government imposed a national lockdown for an indefinite period, from 30th April 2020, restricting movement within the country. Universities found themselves in a crisis as time went by without meaningful lecturer-student interaction. As a result, they resorted to using online platforms, particularly Google Scholar and WhatsApp, in order to reach out to their learners. This qualitative study was a case study in its design and twenty students were sampled using the convenience sampling technique for semi-structured interviews and to complete semi-structured questionnaires. The interviewees revealed that they were so poor that they could hardly afford buying gadgets such as laptops and smart phones. Some also bemoaned that, even if they could afford, they found it difficult to operate the gadgets. Furthermore, other students observed that they experienced Internet connectivity challenges which would require that they travelled to places far away from where they lived. The study recommends that the Government considers uplifting the lives of the rural students and the general rural populace by attending to connectivity issues and rural electrification as priorities that would culminate in bridging the digital divide between the rural and urban population.

Key words: COVID-19, digital divide, online platforms, restrictions, rural electrification.