NAVIGATING CAMPUS LIFE IN A PANDEMIC: THE SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC REALITIES OF STUDENTS IN GHANA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES DURING COVID-19

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Abstract

The covid-19 pandemic affected the lives of millions of people worldwide including tertiary education students. The study explored the impact of covid-19 on social and academic lives of tertiary education students in Ghana. The research was positioned within the exploratory design in ascertaining in-depth data from purposively selected students. The study used the interview guide as an instrument in gathering data and showed that most students obtained their knowledge on covid-19 from families, friends, media and Ghana Health Service. However, information received about the disease from social media was mostly accompanied with myths which impaired the thoughts of students. Psychologically, students' preparedness for academic activities were affected especially for those who did not have funds to buy laptops and/or data bundles. Although covid-19 was an opportunity for family members to reunite, it limited religious activities, social events and family gatherings. It was recommended that the university management and Ministry of Education should provide financial and material assistance via the supply of laptops and the make provision for reliable internet connectivity to students. Ghana's education sector should effectively embrace e-learning as a pro-active measure so as to help cushion the effects of such an event on learning in case of reoccurrence.

Key words: Covid-19, Social Life, Academic Life, Experience, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease (covid-19) is a novel virus that is transmitted through droplets when in close contact with infected persons (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020). After the first case of the virus recorded in Wuhan, a province in China, on 31st December 2019, the world was taken aback in silence. The staggering spread of the virus compelled the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the outbreak, a pandemic on 11th March 2020 (WHO, 2020). This declaration was premised on the increasing spread of cases recorded globally. Statistics showed that as of 15th June, 2021, the virus had spread to 220 countries, infected about 177 million people and killed about 3.84 million deaths (Centre for Systems Science and

Engineering, 2021). Countries severely affected by this major outbreak included the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Russia, Iran, South Korea, Brazil and Columbia (Khachfe, Chahrour, Sammouri, Salhab, Eldeen & Fares, 2020).

In Africa, as of 15th June, 2021, there was over 5 million recorded cases and 100,000 deaths (Africa Centre for Disease Control, 2021). In Ghana, within the same period, the number of recorded cases and deaths was about 94,000 and 790 respectively (Ghana Health Service, 2020). In the wake of the pandemic, several measures have been put in place both locally and internationally to contain the spread within and among countries. These include closure of borders to prevent inter-country spread, lockdown and ban on public gatherings (especially schools, mosques, churches etc.) to prevent intra-country spread. The preceding statistics and control measures show that the increasing rate of the novel Covid-19 has affected the lives of millions of people worldwide in relation to their economic, social and academic lives.

In Ghana and many other developing countries, the pandemic has cost lives, economic investments, jobs, social relations and academic lives. Due to the closure of educational institutions, about 9.2 million students at the basic (kindergarten, primary, junior and senior high schools) and tertiary levels have been affected (UNICEF, 2020). In view of the fact that Ghana's educational system is highly traditional and the teaching and learning approach is face to face, adapting to remote learning has become a huge challenge. The intensity of the problem is more revealing when it comes to tertiary education students in rural areas and those who for reasons beyond their control cannot afford remote learning. In addition, physically challenged persons, students from low-income households, students without internet network accessibility and students in lockdown areas were seriously affected by the covid-19 pandemic. The situation was even difficult given the fact that all modes of remote learning deployed in tertiary institutions did not consider these groups of people and unfortunately, little was done to address it.

During the pandemic, tertiary education students in most developing countries were socially and economically handicapped (Brown, Reay & Vincent, 2013). Extant literature exists on the closure of educational institutions to reduce the spread of infectious diseases in communities by breaking important chains of transmission (Kawano & Kakehashi, 2015; Wheeler, Erhart & Jehn, 2010). Nevertheless, none of these studies have unearthed the experiences of tertiary education students within the social and academic milieu, leaving a gap in literature. Even though, reviewed studies have highlighted the dynamics involved in various institutional lockdowns, the answer to the essential question remains uncertain, thus how did tertiary education students cope with their academic and social lives during covid-19? In light of this, the study explored the perceptions of tertiary education students on covid-19, its impacts on academic and social experiences of tertiary education students in Ghana.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Covid-19: It is a disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). It usually spreads between people in close contact.

Social Life: These are non-paid activities individuals engage in. It involves time spent with the family, relatives, and social activities such as funerals, wedding and naming ceremonies, trips and festivals among others.

Academic Life: Experiences relating to school, college and university work. It involves studying and reasoning.

Experience: It is known as a conscious events or the practical knowledge and familiarity as individuals come into contact with subjects or objects. It is registered and transmitted through the senses.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

The study was underpinned by Blumer's (1969) theory of symbolic interaction. The theory argued that human behaviour is based on three principles. First, human beings develop attitudes based on the meanings attached to things (objects, events, situations or social condition); in this case covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, its severity and effects on the lives of people would determine the meanings people attached to it. Secondly, these meanings are inferred from social interaction. This implies that whether people would perceive covid-19 deadly or not depend on the kinds of information they receive via social interaction. The information they receive on covid-19, whether favourable or not, would influence their attitude and behaviour towards the virus. For instance, when people realise that they can lose their lives due to the virus, they would live a careful life. However, when people realise that they would not be affected by the virus; for that matter its contraction is not deadly, they might be careless. Lastly, based on the interactive process they engage in, the meanings attached to covid-19 might change. This implies that when they realise that their friends or people died from covid-19, that would cause attitudinal and behavioural change.

METHODOLOGY

The study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was deemed relevant because covid-19 was an unfolding phenomenon that had not been extensively explored. Hence, this paradigm, through the qualitative approach, helped understand the varied experiences of tertiary education students on covid-19. The study used the exploratory design to understand how tertiary education students managed their academics and social life.

The population of the study comprised tertiary education students of three purposively selected public universities in Ghana. It included males and females from the undergraduate to the graduate level. The study engaged tertiary education students because they were mature to understand the excesses of the pandemic (the myth/science of covid-19, the influence of recorded cases on their behaviour, risk of contracting the virus, etc.); their social life experiences (sexual relationships, family relationships, attending social events, etc.) and implications of the pandemic on academics (online/remote teaching system, prospects of e-learning in Ghana's education system, out-of-class academic life interactions, etc.).

We obtained the populations of tertiary education students of the University of Ghana (N=61,000), University of Cape Coast (N=78,485) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (N=85,000) (University Student Records, 2022) and respective samples of 382 for each university (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The purposive and accidental sampling techniques were then used to select students. Purposive sampling technique was used to select tertiary education students in public universities in Ghana. The accidental sampling technique was employed to draw other students of the universities until we reached saturation point. The study used an interview guide to gather data from students through phone calls, zoom and WhatsApp to avoid the risk of contracting and transmitting covid-19.

Given the sensitive nature of the study, the researchers submitted the interview guide to the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast. Subsequently, the researchers sought the consent of the students before commencing data collection. The interviews lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. We transcribed, coded the gathered data and analysed it thematically. The study did not disclose the identities of the participants before, during and after the data collection.

RESULTS

The study constituted ten students in University of Cape Coast (UCC), eleven in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), eleven in University of Ghana (UG). The study participants were 20 males and 12 females offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes such as Business Administration, Law, Sociology, Economics and Medicine at various levels of tertiary education (level 100 to level 600). While 25 students were Christians, seven were Muslims with ages ranging from 18 to 33 years. The majority of the students were staying with their families of orientation. This could be attributed to the lockdown measures that were enforced by the government. However, one student offering Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery resided on campus although universities had closed down. The decision to go home was largely due to the fear of contracting and transmitting covid-19 which was inextricably linked with their perceptions about the virus, an important issue that has been elaborated in the ensuing section.

Perceptions about Covid-19

The covid-19 pandemic reached the level of intensity that required a broad public discourse. The height of the pandemic came along with new problems that took a toll on many countries and societies. Within the context of discovery, it was imperative to comprehend how students perceived covid-19. This could have influenced their thought processes and attitudes toward academics and social lives bearing in mind the ramifications of contracting and transmitting covid-19. The themes that emerged from their responses were categorised into knowledge and sources of information about covid-19.

Knowledge on Covid-19

University students were asked to share their knowledge on the virus. The depth of knowledge could determine the level of seriousness attached to the pandemic. A response from a 24-year-old male student offering a natural science programme in UCC was as follows:

> *I know it is a viral infection that affects the lungs and respiratory systems. Infected persons show symptoms like fever, general weakness. I know it is transmitted through droplets and aerosols. The immune system of individuals is the only mechanism for fighting this disease. It draws my attention to the need to keep hygienic practices even in the absence of covid-19. Preventive measures include washing of hands and use of and sanitizers, wearing of face mask, and social distancing.*

When students offering Bachelor of Arts programmes were asked about the virus, their responses were in relation to key prevention protocols of covid-19.

> *I heard it is a disease that you can't see with your eyes even those who are specialist like those who have a lot of knowledge they said you see with your bare eyes and so you will good to keep this and then when you get into contact with ehhmm like it can enter through your pores maybe your eyes when you rub it when or you cough with your hand and those things so you will be best to keep a distance and then sometimes it is transfer through peoples saliva like when people are talking and they spit alongside and you are closer to them you can get it (a 25-year-old female level 300 student in UCC)*

> *Ohhh what I know is that it's a pandemic spreading worldwide (a 26-year-old male student, level 300 in KTU).*

Emerging responses indicated that the level of knowledge on covid-19 has an interconnection with one's academic interest. Natural science students appeared to have deeper understanding on covid-19 as compared to social science students probably because of their specific area of study. Responses on the knowledge of covid-19 demanded further interrogation on whether information about the virus was far-reaching to all and sundry. It appeared that not all tertiary education students were well informed about the nature of the virus; thereby limiting their in-depth knowledge on the pandemic. It must be emphasised that the educational programme offered whipped up one's interest and depth of knowledge about covid-19. Knowing their sources of information was therefore imperative.

Sources of Information

It is expected that, at the very apex of any pandemic, well-meaning countries, governments, international and national agencies share information about the nature of the virus through available means. Inasmuch as the information is important, its source is also crucial. The source of information about a pandemic informs peoples' knowledge, belief systems and attitudes. Perhaps, variations in information sources could lead to differences in knowledge on covid-19. Be that as it may, their knowledge on the virus came from watching documentaries online, television, radio stations, friends in and outside the country and social media. The findings are presented below:

> *hmmm I had a friend who got a scholarship to study at China last year so I was watching his status and realize some Chinese have been wearing nose mask so I did not know the reason until I asked him and he said because of the virus so I was like it only in china so I didn't feel anything so later when he came back to Ghana I ask him why they have return so early and he was like because of the virus they couldn't complete what they are supposed to but they will go back. Later, I heard in the news that the virus is spreading worldwide so we started panicking but what we heard was that in Africa the virus can't survive here because of the hot weather but later I realized it's not so (a 22-year-old male, level 300 student in KNUST)*
> *well yeah I feel that this isn't something the whole world will joke about so I knew that it was real when you listen to the news from TV, radio, and the internet you can see how real it was and people were suffering so there was no time I thought it wasn't real (a 26-year-old male level 600 student in UG).*

Information on covid-19 was far-reaching to students considering the fact that the majority of them gathered knowledge about the virus from different sources: friends, reports on television stations and social media. But it appeared that the majority of students were not interested in what the virus actually is but rather what they could do to prevent them from contracting or transmitting the virus.

Covid-19 and Managing Academic Life

The most effective mode of instruction is to assemble students at one place at a particular time to learn. This traditional teaching and learning approach are still dominant today in many African countries including Ghana. However, the advent of the covid-19 pandemic coerced tertiary education students to eke out time to manage their academic lives from home. Issues raised by students included their attitude towards studying from home, views on online learning and the effect of the pandemic on their academic development.

Attitude of Students Studying from Home

The study revealed, without question, that learning at home was quite difficult for a plethora of regular tertiary education students considering the fact that they were familiar with the didactic approach. Tertiary education students complained that they were distracted by household activities, tiredness and laziness knowing that, first and foremost, e-learning was ongoing and secondly, they would resume to complete the semester. Generally, the majority of the students were passive as far as studying at home was concerned. This was a response from a 22-year-old level 300 female student in KNUST.

> *Hmm… it's not helping me. It's almost a year since I came to Accra to stay with my sister and my niece. They will always come closer to me when crying and so I have to pumper the child and sometimes I have to help my sister in the kitchen though they have baby sitter. So, it has affected me a lot because when you are in school the only thing to do is to eat and study but at home it is not like that.*

A similar response by a 25-year-old female participant in UCC depicted that easy access to audio-visual mass media throughout the period at home as compared to being in school ultimately affected their levels of concentration; hence, a hindrance to their studies.

> *ehhmm... it hasn't been easy… it's really tough especially trying to learn at the house. Personally, I really love to watch television, movies and listen to music. So, being in the house while there is television… and you see I can't also pay attention whiles they are showing a movie or something so it really tough. Sometimes I watch till 2am, but as compare to campus I don't have a television. It is just my radio, so I really get time to study.*

She also emphasised that students were not brought up to speed about their length of stay at home so that they could have sent their reading materials along, continue their studies from home and prepared in time towards examination.

> *…. and then the environment too is not really conducive… you see it's in the human mind that when you are home, you are home and when you are in school, the mind tells you are in school you need to do this and do that… and then most of us too we didn't bring our books because we knew it was going to be just two weeks break and then after two weeks we are going back to school. So personal studies are not the best at home at all.*

It is not uncommon knowledge that a prepared mind is a sin qua non for effective learning. However, because they thought it would be a short break, students were not psychologically prepared to study at home. Moreover, for precautionary reasons, the break lasted longer than imagined making studying from home, which was an unusual norm for tertiary education students in Ghana, a herculean task as compared to when they were on campus. These reactions from tertiary education students were expected since this was their first experience of a pandemic of this magnitude. It was evident that effective learning took place in school as the social environment at home made it extremely difficult for them to concentrate on their studies.

Perspectives on Online Learning

While the period of school resumption overstretched, university management exude their plans to continue teaching and learning via online. As excellent as the plan was, it came along with some challenges. First,

although some sections of university students had a priori knowledge about e-learning, they were ineffective and inefficient with its operation. Others had no form of knowledge what so ever about e-learning; that implied that they had to immediately adopt and adapt to its usage-a move that was quiet challenging for many given the period under consideration. Unlike the preceding varying situations, some students were familiar with the online learning prior to the pandemic and also beneficiaries of data bundle. When students were asked about their views on the online learning, those who had no knowledge about the online learning expressed:

> *Ehhmm before I even answer…. I really want to understand the online thing. Is it online just like what some churches are doing by streaming life? So, if it's an online studies and let say I have a course which is a two-credit hour course, does it mean that I have to be online for two hours? With that it wouldn't help at all… the inconvenient with breakages from the network. It won't help so me the online thing they really have to explain it (a 24-year-old level 300 female student in UCC).*

Other students expressed their pleasure for the introduction of the online learning and welcomed it holistically although they mentioned that it was not effective as planned and posed challenges to users.

> *Oh, this e-learning thing… my school (we) started but we couldn't see top and it was not even done properly so we eventually had to come back to school while other universities were still doing it (a 20-year-old level 100 female student in UCC)*

Although some participants admitted that the online learning approach was good, another problem that came up strongly in the discussion was unreliable network. For this reason, some preferred the face to face teaching and learning. A 28-year-old level 300 male student in KTU articulated:

> *Since the restrictions on movement we do everything online but the challenging part of it is the network. Hmmm…. I always have to move out to my place so that I can get the network but when I am at work it becomes difficult. All is good but the manual is better.*

Students who were familiar with online learning and beneficiaries of data bundle complained about insufficient data. Eventually, they had to buy their own data to compliment the little their universities provided.

> *Ohhhh… it's not all that good per se because in life you don't have to think for your well-being only because we are given a data of 2GB at school and with that it was insufficient so how much more we staying at home it wouldn't reach anywhere so data will be a problem unless you struggle to get your own bundle to continue learning (22 year old level 200 male student in UG).*

In addition to insufficient data bundle to support online studies, issues of unstable electricity and the geographical location of students either in rural or urban areas were considered since these affected effective e-learning. In the narrative of a 22-year-old level 400 student in KNUST:

> *What about those of us living in rural areas with no network or my colleague who is in an urban area but the network is not strong. I heard those with such problems will receive PDFs through Ghana post and stuff. Hmm my worry is I live in the interior and now that Ghana post is at the capital of that region unless I pick a*

> *car four times and consider the transportation. So, it will make us suffer and some*
> *too will be behind.*

A 26-year-old level 600 male student in UG stated:

> *Hmmm… well what I know is drastic situations require drastic measures and I*
> *think one of the best thing especially the university did was the continuation of*
> *studies even whiles we are home…. Okay you know I think…from the beginning it*
> *was very ineffective in a sense that though Legon has contract with Vodafone*
> *where they provide internet bundles to help with our academics but the*
> *unfortunate thing was that it was not easy to have Vodafone internet connection*
> *so I used my MTN, which I bought internet bundle.*

An overview of the descriptive analysis suggested that students consistently struggled to cope with remote learning employed by some universities in Ghana. By far, the e-learning method was unpleasant to the majority of tertiary education students because it was not aesthetically rolled out in some universities. Although the introduction of e-learning had prospects, its challenges affected its efficacy. While online learning was not successfully implemented in UCC as issues of data bundle, network accessibility and lack of student orientation on e-learning were major concerns, other universities (UG and KNUST) had the SAKAI and VCLASS respectively in place for their students. The switching cost to the virtual mode affected not only the universities but also students who had to purchase data bundle before they can consciously and actively participate in online classes.

Academic Progress of Tertiary Education Students

As part of managing academic from home, the study assessed the impact of the pandemic on their academic progress. The section was premised on the fact that university education is time bound; since students had plans after completion, it was important to understand, from their perspective, the impact the pandemic had on their academic plans and development. Some students were least concerned about their careers when the pandemic intensified.

> *One thing we are forgetting is that the academic calendar was done for human*
> *beings and will it be useful when lives are lost. What will happen to my career*
> *when I get covid-19? Whatever should go on, human lives are very important.*
> *Academic work can be looked at later when the whole thing is over… we can still*
> *go back to the calendar and make changes but human life when lost, nothing can*
> *be done so I believe it was the best decision that I took so am really okay with it*
> *(a 25-year-old level 300 female student in UCC).*

On the contrary, other students were concerned about the continuity of academic work as a 24-year-old level 500 male student articulated.

> *A lot of uncertainties. I don't know when we would be asked to come back and*
> *how the rest of the academic year would turn out in terms of lectures and exams.*
> *For medical school, vacation for second semester is mostly July so we were*
> *wondering how we could make up for the lost time. Before we went on break, our*
> *faculty met us and made us aware that though we are asked to go home, we are*
> *not on break so academic work continues. I was wondering how we could study in*
> *the home setting that is full of challenges.*

> *I and my friend got scholarship to study at China but it was delayed and later*
> *cancelled because of covid-19 restrictions. I just missed an opportunity and I don't*
> *know what I will do now (a 23-year-old level 300 male student in KNUST)*

Some students also complained about how the online learning has changed teaching and learning styles especially for those whose programmes include practicum. The online learning will not be conducive for them as confirmed by a 26-year-old level 600 male student in UG.

> *I have undergraduate friends who were psychiatric students and imagine them*
> *having a class on a zoom…they said it was highly ineffective.*

An assessment of their experiences depicted that students have lost huge opportunities because of the pandemic. While halting academic activities was the step in the right direction, some students missed opportunities to travel for exchange programmes, an initiative that would have given them international exposure and academic progress. The online teaching and learning system limited students' access to practicum within the physical space.

Social Life Experiences during the Pandemic

The arrival of covid-19 did not only affect the academic lives of tertiary education students but their social lives as well. The 'new-normal' brought changes in the social lives of people including tertiary education students. These changes intensified due to the protocols that were observed. It is therefore relevant to explore their social life experiences. Per the study, social life experiences that emerged were interaction and gathering with family members and friends, changes in religious lives, funeral activities and wedding ceremonies.

Interaction with Family Members

The social penetration of the pandemic changed the modes of interaction in many families in Ghana. The situation was not uncommon among tertiary education students as the face to face interaction that existed prior to covid-19 drastically changed to virtual and phone calls. That is not to say that family members did not engage in phone calls prior to the pandemic. In fact, the majority of the students used this period to bond with their families. However, to the extent that family members communicated on phone, even when they lived within the same physical space conveyed the gravity of the situation. Also, tertiary education students had to sacrifice gathering with friends, by complying with the covid-19 protocols, to avoid the risk of contracting and transmitting the virus. A 21-year-old level 200 male student in UCC sadly said:

> *Ohhh we do phone calls but at first I used to go to one of my brother's place during*
> *vacation but sake of the Covid am not able to go to them at all, even the one that*
> *takes care of my education is here in Accra but because of the virus I haven't been*
> *to his house (very close to me). Hmm, but under normal circumstances, I would*
> *have gone to him.*

On the other hand, some tertiary education students had time for friends and family because they were less busy due to the closure of schools although interaction was not face to face.

> *My relationship with my family has not changed that much. Regarding my friends,*
> *now I spend more time with them on phone than I used to (a 25-year-old level 500*
> *male student in UCC).*

On the whole, tertiary education students missed face to face interactions and physical contact with their friends and family members. They also stressed on how the pandemic interrupted their interactions with

significant and generalised others amid partying and entertainment-something they relished so much and would quickly make up for when the pandemic was over.

Attending Funeral and Marriage Ceremonies

Funeral and marriage ceremonies are important rituals in Ghana; hence Ghanaians attach a lot of significance to it. Although not on regular basis, tertiary education students attend funerals and marriages of relatives and friends to offer their support. The covid-19 pandemic delayed many of these events such that tertiary education students had to forgo these ceremonies because of the covid-19 protocols. In the voice of a student who did not attend a funeral because it was postponed due to covid-19, he stressed.

> *yeah at my mums home town there was one guy at the age of 34 who used to play with my brothers and he was a sickle cell patient and he died which I even attended the one week celebration and the funeral arrangement was 18th of this month (March) but due to the virus it has been postponed, he is still at the mortuary (23 year old level 300 male student in KNUST).*

With respect to marriage ceremonies, some participants were disinterested in such programmes while others were concerned about how covid-19 affected such ceremonies.

> *ohh for me those things am not all that interested I don't even remember the last time I attended such events like wedding and other stuffs. But I remember a certain guy who is supposed to have his wedding but because of this virus thing I wasn't able to go (a 22-year-old level 300 male student in KNUST)*
>
> *ohh it's a friend's wedding. It was just last week and another one too is on the upcoming week. All has been postponed because of the ban on social gathering. But if it mine like I will be in haste. Corona or no corona I will still do it because I can't wait. eiii until when!! (a 24-year-old level 400 female student in UG).*

The study showed that covid-19 interfered with funeral and marriage ceremonies. Affected persons postponed their ceremonies to avoid the spread of the virus. Although the government of Ghana put measures in place to limit attendees of such gatherings, the fear on contracting and transmitting the virus influenced the masses of missing out on such ceremonies.

Religious/Spiritual Life

The study asked students how covid-19 changed their religious or spiritual life. All the selected students were Christians albeit their association with different denominations. Many people, prior to the pandemic, were physically present at church to worship God. But with the changes during the pandemic, they shared the following experiences.

> *Just cool I mean like as am home now I don't have enough money to buy credit and actually do bundle so since I came home like six to seven weeks I have never streamed to watch my pastor I only get to read sometimes they just at the at the end of the video or they will just give you what he said some scriptures and other things so I do my personal reading from the house as in the bible and other stuff because I don't really have the bundle to stream 45 minutes 50 minutes or 30 minutes live so I have never done it (a 22-year-old level 200 male student in UCC).*

A general outlook of their responses showed that students adjusted to the changes associated with covid-19. Many churches switched their services from face to face to online, similar to the initiatives adopted by the

tertiary schools. Their spiritual lives from home during the covid-19 dwindled relative to when they had service at the church premises.

DISCUSSION

With respect to the perceptions of students on covid-19, the study found that natural science students appeared to have deeper knowledge and understanding on covid-19 as compared to social science students. This position was concurred by Olaimat, Aolymat, Shahbaz and Holley (2020) who revealed that natural science students in India displayed higher knowledge on covid-19 compared to non-science students.

Tertiary education students acquired the knowledge on covd-19 from different sources including friends, reports on television stations and social media. The sources of information on covid-19 from the findings confirms the work of Basma, Sami, Walid and Jihad (2021) who demonstrated that the media and Ministry of Health were the major sources of information on covid-19 to Palestinian university students. The findings also concurred with the work of Olaimat et al., (2020) who revealed internet, social media and mass media as major sources of information on covid-19 to students in India.

As far as managing their academic lives were concerned, the attitude of students towards academics changed during covid-19. A snapshot of the findings depicted that studying from home, which is an unusual norm for tertiary education students in Ghana, was a herculean task for the majority of them as compared to when they are on campus. Generally, the tertiary education students' attitude towards learning from home was poor. Linking the findings to Blumer's (1969) theory of symbolic interaction, it can be argued that students' attitude towards learning from home was based on the meanings they attached to home-based learning.

Universities introduced the online teaching and learning method as short-term intervention. However, students consistently struggled to adapt to the virtual method. This position was supported by Chakraborty, Mittal, Gupta, Yadav and Arora (2020) assertion that students preferred physical classrooms learning to online learning because e-learning made them lazy to academic work. Students had challenges with network connectivity, data bundle and low concentration levels affect active participation of virtual learning. This finding concurred with the study of Grischenko (2020) who found that people in the rural areas had issues of data and were unable join online lectures. The study also revealed that students were worried about their academic progress due to the changes in academic calendar. The findings relate to Jiang (2020) and Essadek and Rabeyron's (2020) argument that many university students suffered mental disorders, depression and anxiety as a result of the pandemic.

In terms of changes in students' social life, covid-19 interrupted with their interactions and social contact with friends and family members. These findings supported Blumer's (1969) symbolic interaction theory which indicated that the severity of the pandemic determined the meanings that people attached to importance of social activities. Due to the perception on the severity of the virus, people have relinquished all forms of parties and social gatherings which has in turn affected their social relations.

Students also forfeited social gathering and events such as funerals and marriage ceremonies due to covid-19. This outcome is in support of Blumber's (1969) symbolic interaction theory which demonstrated that when people realise that they will be affected by the virus, they tend to be more careful and avoid interacting with individuals for fear of their lives. However, if the meanings attached to the severity of the disease is low, then the attitudes of people towards attending funerals and parties may change by frequently attending the programs due to the high social inclination of the Ghanaian society. The spiritual and religious lives of students were curtailed by covid-19. Most spiritual and religious engagements took place on social

and traditional media. Many of the students were unable to constantly access the online church services due to insufficient data bundle or poor network; thereby affecting their spiritual and religious lives. This outcome supports the work of Osei-Tutu, Affram, Mensah-Sarbah, Dzokoto and Adams (2021) who revealed Ghana that covid-19 declined psychospiritual lives, loss of fellowship and community which forced religious leaders to deliver sermons on faith.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The covid-19 pandemic required awareness on the spread and prevention. The study concluded that most students had varying knowledge on the virus which as obtained from families, friends, Ghana Health Service, television and social media. The challenge was that information from the social media were mostly accompanied with myths about the disease which impaired the thoughts of students. The challenge students faced was using e-learning platforms accompanied with poor internet connectivity and lack of laptops to facilitate active academic participation. The psychologically lag in the height of covid-19 pandemic led to students' unpreparedness for academic activities; hence delaying academic progress. Tertiary education students missed social lives due to covid-19 protocols. It was recommended that university management and Ministry of Education should provide financial and material assistance such as supply of laptops and strong internet connectivity to students to aid their studies. The education sector should embrace e-learning as a pro-active measure so as to help cushion the effects of such an event on learning in case of reoccurrence.

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