

# The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Young Girls in School and Women in Business/Professional Career use of Technology



**2020**

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## **Executive Summary**

The COVID-19 pandemic became prevalent in late March 2020 and took the world by surprise. The effect of the pandemic is still being felt by everyone and every sector of the economy. Businesses and schools were shutdown to curb the spread of the virus and this led to many losses and gaps in education. W.TEC and TechHer sought to understand how the pandemic affected young girls who are in school and their interaction with technology. The two organisations also sought to understand how working class women have been affected by the pandemic and how their interaction with technology may have shifted.

The purpose of this report is to bring the survey findings together and better understand how the pandemic disrupted women and girls lives and interaction with technology. Two surveys were administered, one for women in business/professions and another for young girls in schools. There was a total of 118 responses across both surveys. The survey for young girls had 46 responses while the survey for Women had 72 responses. Responses were gotten by publicity on our social media platforms as well as through phone calls to potential respondents.

## **Key Findings**

### **Young Girls and Technology**

82.6% of girls have been engaged in educational activities since the lockdown.

Most girls have been engaged in educational activities through videos and courses they find themselves.

87% of respondents use a mobile phone to learn.

87% of respondents are using text-books as a non-technology aide to learn during the pandemic.

69.6% of respondents would rather use a computer or laptop to learn during this period.

### **Women in Business/Professional Development**

70.8% of respondents said covid-19 has affected their businesses negatively.

61.6% of respondents did not have virtual meetings prior to the pandemic.

72.2% of respondents now have virtual meetings

81.9% of respondents use a mobile phone for virtual meetings

Most respondents use zoom or WhatsApp for virtual meetings

95.8 respondents said they use WhatsApp to communicate with their team.

## **Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the world globally in March 2020 and particularly affected the normal way of life in Nigeria by the end of the month. Women and girls were especially affected as a result of school closures and social distancing measures leading to the new normal for women, which is working from home. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report, a third of the world's school children are unable to access remote learning during school closures (UNICEF, 2020). This has disproportionately affected girls and the Malala fund predicts that 20 million girls may never return to the classroom after the pandemic (Malala Fund 2020). For girls in school studying STEM this means major interruptions in their learning.

For working class women and women in business, the covid-19 pandemic caused disruptions in their daily lives which was compounded by having to work from home. Some other immediate impacts of Covid-19 were closed offices, reduction in patronage of businesses, and reduced or zero sales. BBC reports that women, who are already clustered in low paying jobs, are 1.8 times more likely to lose their jobs due to the pandemic. This is compounded by the fact that women do most of the unpaid work at home and the pandemic has only made this worse. The effect of the pandemic was felt in different ways and will be explored in this report.

However, amongst these two groups of women, their interaction with technology increased as detailed in our report. Girls, who are privileged to have a technological device, have been able to connect to either their school or some other learning platform. Other girls have had to depend on textbooks to do their learning which is really a form of self-education and self-development. While women with access to devices have increased their interaction with technology through using applications like zoom. These interactions with technology will be further explained in the findings section of this report.

The following section will discuss the methodology and survey design while the next section will discuss detailed findings. The last section will give a conclusion.

## **Report Description**

W.TEC and TechHer conducted two studies, one to determine how young girls are experiencing education and technology in these days of virtual classrooms and assessments and the other to document the extent of disruptions to business and career development of women, including the changes to business operations and any innovations to stay afloat. The research was conducted via two online surveys to gather data and information on the topic. Both organisations disseminated the survey via our social media platforms, mailing lists and networks. W.TEC also made phone calls particularly to Alumnae of its programs to augment the responses. The survey had multiple choice questions, as well as a few open ended questions. The two surveys had a total of 118 responses, with 72 for the survey for women and 46 for the survey for young girls.

### **Why was the Study conducted?**

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Nigeria without warning and the two host organisations felt that something needed to be done to properly document the disruptions caused by the lockdown and pandemic. Thus, the idea of the COVID-19 response survey was born and young girls and womens' interaction with technology during this time was assessed. The study seeks to answer the question, how are women and girls interacting with technology during this lockdown and pandemic, either as they go to school, run their business or work in their careers.

For the survey for women, we asked them about the nature of their business (theirs or their employers), how large it is, the effect COVID-19 has had on their work, if they had virtual meetings and tools they used for these meetings and how the host organisations can be of help. For the survey for young girls, we asked them details about their study and institution, how COVID-19 has affected their schooling, if they've engaged in educational activities, devices they are using to learn and their preferred means of study.

The results from this study will inform both host organisations about the extent of disruptions caused by the lockdown and pandemic. The study will inform programs that host organisations will use to respond to the effects of the pandemic on the target population. The results could also be used to better plan for the effects of a pandemic on work and school for girls and women in the future.

## **Methodology**

The study used information and data gotten from the two online surveys administered. The first survey targeted girls in secondary school and tertiary institution and how they interacted with technology during and after the lockdown. The second survey targeted women in business/professional careers and their interaction with technology during and after the lockdown. The survey was launched in May 2020 and closed in October 2020.

## **Survey Design**

The Surveys were designed to be brief and short, with demographic questions in the beginning and followed by key information gathering questions. Participants were also asked if they would like to receive a copy of the report when it is published.

## **Background**

### ***Demographics:***

The demographics of the surveys differ intentionally. On the survey for young girls, 19.6% of respondents were aged between 10 and 15, 43.5% of respondents were aged between 16 and 21 while 37% of respondents were aged between 22 and 29. These figures are understandable as younger girls might not have easy access to the internet because of their age while secondary school and university aged girls will have more access to digital devices and the internet. The majority of the students who took the survey were STEM students while a few were arts and commercial studies students. Some STEM related courses represented include Medicine, Software Engineering, Biochemistry, Chemistry and Computer Science. Some non-STEM courses represented were Philosophy, Business Administration, Mass Communication, Sociology and Economics.

There were 28 different schools represented in the data, 8 secondary schools and 20 universities. Some of the universities represented include University of Lagos, Lagos State University, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Bradford, Nasarawa State University, Bowen University, Babcock University and Covenant University. Of all respondents, 60.9% attend public/government institutions while 39.1% attend private schools/institutions. In addition 65.2% of respondents are in university or higher institution, 26.1% are in Upper Secondary and 8.7% are in Lower Secondary.

For the survey on Women, 56.9% of the women were between 20 and 29, while 25% were between 30 and 39 whilst 11.1% were between 40 and 49. These figures indicate that young women might be the most active on internet and the most willing to fill out a survey, while older women might have been pre-occupied with work or may not have come across the survey. Of the 72 women who filled the survey, 47.2% of them are self-employed while 30.6% are full time employees and 11.1% are part time employees.

The most popular occupations of respondents were; Teaching, Software Developer, Nonprofit, Media, Makeup, Journalist, Public Servant, Fashion Designer, Consulting, Catering and Baking. More than half of respondents, 61.1% work in very small businesses (less than 10 employees), while 23.6% of respondents work in small businesses (10 to 49 employees). Also, 8.3% of respondents work in a medium enterprise while 6.9% work in a large enterprise.

## **Detailed Findings**

### **A.) Young Girls in School Survey**

In order to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls in school, we asked them when their schools were closed due to the pandemic. Most of the respondents stated that their school was closed sometime in March 2020. Thus, most schools were closed just as the pandemic hit and a lockdown was enforced. Participants were also asked how their studies have been affected since the pandemic hit and 54.3% said not so badly affected which was quite surprising as it would be expected that they would have been affected to a larger extent. However, 39.1% of respondents said their studies have been affected very badly.

With the intent of investigating the extent of disruptions, the survey asked respondents if they have engaged in any educational activities since the lockdown. 82.6% said they had engaged in educational activities while 17.4% said they had not engaged in educational activities. This is quite impressive and very good for their educational development. When asked how they have been involved in educational activities, 54.3% stated that they have been using online videos and courses they find online, 45.7% stated that they have been using videos and courses from their schools. A slightly shocking discovery as schools were expected to make provision for their students to learn alternatively. On the lower end, 21.7% of respondents said they have been using emails or WhatsApp messages from their class teachers. A smaller number said they have been being taught by their parents, 4.3%, while 6.5% said they hadn't engaged in any educational activities since the lockdown. This

rather small number that haven't engaged in any educational activities is quite encouraging and shows that these young women are actively engaged in keeping up with their education.

In examining devices used, respondents were asked what device they have been using to learn from home. Of all respondents 87% said they have been using a mobile phone to learn, whilst 37% selected computer/laptop. This shows that the mobile phone is a very valuable to young women during this period. 15.2% of respondents said they have been using a tablet, 8.7% said they have been using the Television whilst 4.3% said they have been using the radio. This indicates that some students were able to use the television and the radio to learn as the government invested in engaging with students in public schools through this medium.

In addition to get a sense of what non-technological tools students have been using during this period they were asked what non-technology aides they have been using to learn during this pandemic and the top selected option was textbooks, chosen by 87%. 6.5% of respondents said their parents teach them and at least one person said the following: my parents teach me, my siblings teach me, I teach myself, Google, internet and none. Surprisingly, when asked what their preferred means of studying at this time is, 69.6% said they would prefer learning via a computer or laptop. However, this could greatly have been influenced by the times we are in and many may have understood the context of the question differently than expected. 15.2% respondents said they would rather use a mobile phone, this indicates that if students could choose, they would use a laptop rather than the mobile phone most of them use as noted in the question above.

When asked what challenges young women have faced with learning online, the largest proportion of respondents, 63% said lack of data. 32.6% said electricity was a challenge to them learning on line while 13% stated lack of funds. A small percentage of respondents said they didn't have a phone or laptop, 10.9%, perhaps suggesting that those who filled out this survey are part of the few in the country who have access to a computer or phone but don't necessarily own it. Lastly, participants were asked where they would rather learn from and 82.6% respondents said they would rather learn from school while 15.2% interestingly said they would rather learn from home.

## **B.) Women in Business/Professional Careers Survey**

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a lot of challenges to women in business and those in professional careers. This is backed by the result that 70.8% of respondents say that the pandemic has a bad effect on their work, while 12.5% say it has a good effect. Another 12.5% say the pandemic has had neither effect on their work and 4.2% say they do not know. When asked what type of effect the pandemic has had on their work, respondents gave both positive and negative responses. However, the negative responses were more and they included the following; reduced sources of income and revenue, bad effects on financing and operations, salary reduction/owing, limited supply of materials, high cost of transportation and importation, low cash flow, lack of capital, below capacity operations, low business patronage, loss of job, inability to secure a job, harder key performance indicators (KPIs), performance standard increased and inability to deliver products to customers.

On the other hand, some positive responses obtained include ability to adapt to virtual meetings, people still hiring and using services, ability to use online resources/social media to create engagement with followers and contact list, infinite possibilities of e-learning has helped move all content online and create a virtual classroom using e-learning tools and influx of patients and sales as a result of the pandemic.

When asked questions relating to their use of technology, specifically their use of virtual meetings, 38.9% said they had previously had virtual meetings while 61.1% said they had not had virtual meetings prior to the pandemic. In a follow up question about if they have virtual meetings now, 72.2% said they have virtual meetings while 27.8% said they do not have virtual meetings. When asked what devices they use for meetings, 81.9% said they use mobile phones while 31.9% said they use a laptop.

Respondents were also asked what applications they use for these meetings. 54.2% said they use zoom while 58.3% said they use WhatsApp, 12.5% said they use Microsoft teams and 6.9% said they use skype. This shows that zoom is one the most used application and has been very essential to many businesses and offices. WhatsApp which ranked highest is used by many Nigerians especially small business as it is very practical and easy to use.

In order to gauge the impact of the pandemic on virtual operations, we asked if respondents had been using these applications prior to the pandemic. 61.1% said yes while 38.9% said no. Although one might expect the number who have used these applications to be less, we discovered otherwise and this shows that these applications weren't all that new to most respondents.

Respondents were also asked how they stay in touch with their colleagues, 95.8% said they use WhatsApp while 12.5% said they use telegram and 2 people or less said they use Slack, phone calls, Instagram and Microsoft teams.

In a bid to fully understand what could improve respondents current work environment, they were asked what would increase their productivity. Technology was selected by 72.2% of respondents which could include phone, internet connectivity, computer/laptop while internal/external communication channels was selected by 13.5% of respondents. This indicates the importance of technology in the ability of people to work from home and shows that the pandemic has drawn on the benefits technology brings us.

Lastly, to offer assistance to women in business/professional careers, respondents were asked how W.TEC & TechHer can assist their work at this time. 40.3% of respondents chose training on business tools & strategies while 18.1% chose technology focused trainings and 29.2% of respondents chose provide information about technologies for business growth. This has been duly noted and both organisations will be working to create such opportunities for respondents and the general public.

## **Conclusion**

This report has highlighted key issues and findings that women and girls dealt with especially during the first few months of the pandemic. This period included the lockdown which had quite severe outcomes on many women and girls. Learning was interrupted and many girls were without a good replacement for school. Women lost clients and incomes which had a direct impact on their well-being.

The use of technology increased, with female students who had access being able to connect to classes via the internet, radio and television. However a good number of them had to rely on the good old textbooks for learning. Women began using applications which they hadn't used in the past such as zoom, Microsoft teams and skype.

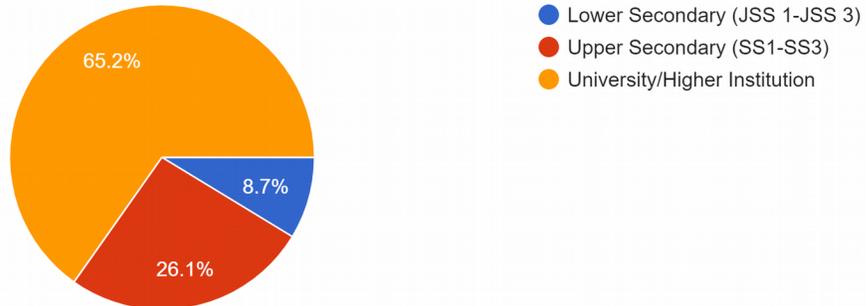
Several issues arose for females learning and it was obvious that the pandemic set some girls back in their learning. Many women now have to pick up themselves and build back better as the restrictions of the pandemic are being eased and business is slowly getting back on track. Through this survey, it is evident that training on business tools and technology are being sought after by women in business and professional careers. The host organizations have already began plans towards such content and will be pioneers in responding to the pandemic in this way to boost the Nigerian economy.

## Appendix

### A.) Young Girls & Technology Survey

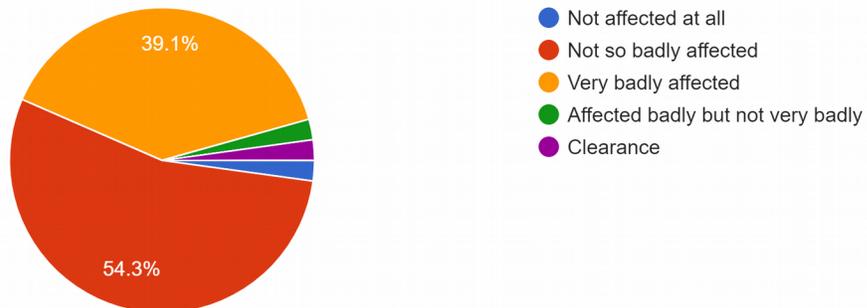
6. Please indicate your education level

46 responses



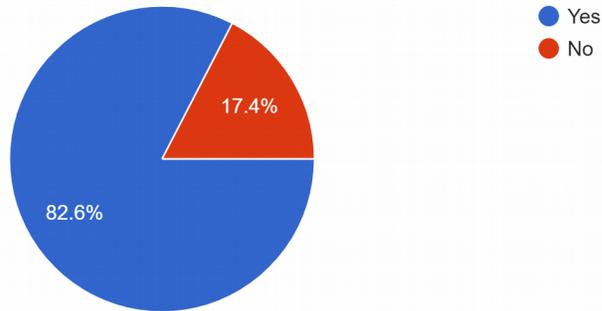
8. How have your studies been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

46 responses



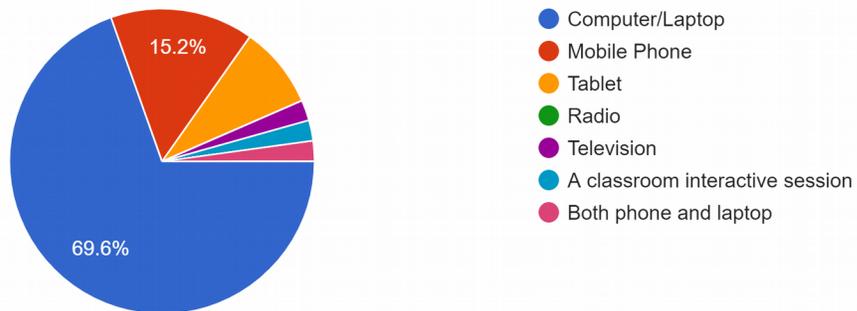
9. Have you been engaged in any educational activities since the lockdown?

46 responses



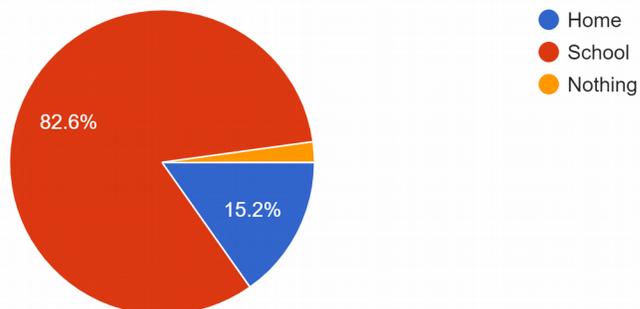
13. What would be your preferred means of studying at this time if possible?

46 responses



15. Where would you prefer to learn from?

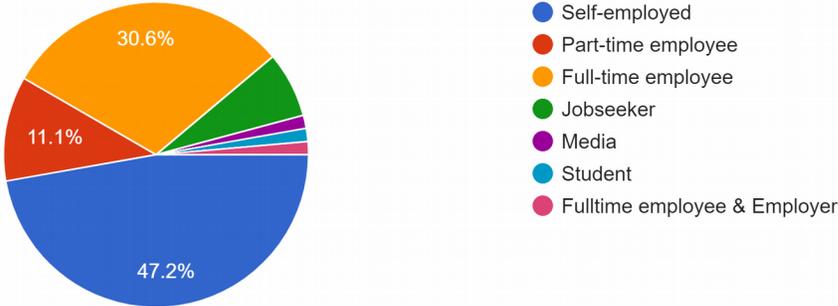
46 responses



### B.) Women in Business/Professional Career Survey

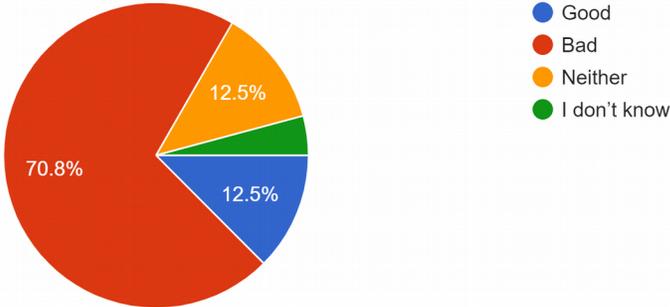
#### 3. Occupation

72 responses



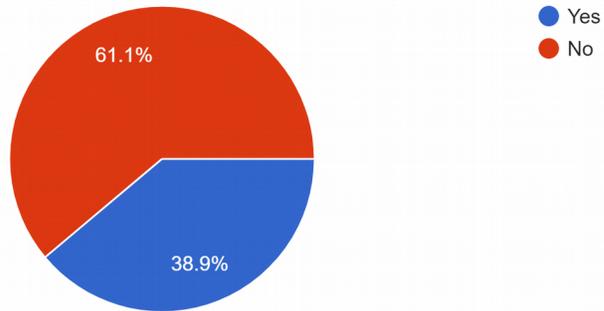
#### 6a. What effect has COVID-19 had on your work?

72 responses



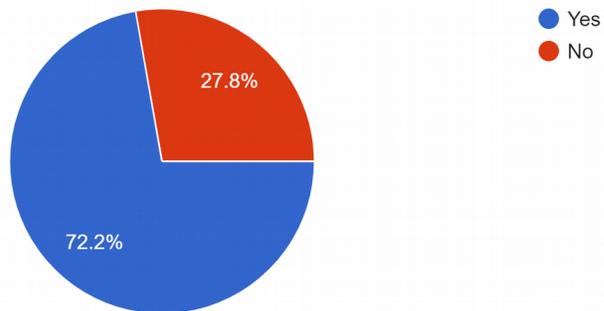
7a. Did you have virtual meetings pre COVID-19?

72 responses



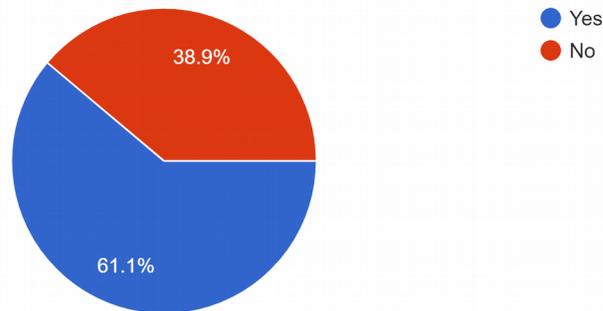
7b. Do you have virtual meetings now?

72 responses



10. Were you using any of these applications for your work/business prior to the lockdown?

72 responses



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