

COVID-19 Lockdown Impact on Libyan University Instructors' Scholarly Research Engagement

Muftah Hamed

Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Science, Omar Al-mukhtar University, Elqubba Campus, Libya

Corresponding Author: Muftah Hamed, E-mail: muftah.hamed@omu.edu.ly

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: September 12, 2020

Accepted: October 25, 2020

Volume: 2

Issue: 5

DOI: 10.32996/jweep.2020.2.5.2

KEYWORDS

COVID-19 lockdown;
research engagement;
Omar Al-Mukhtar university
instructors

ABSTRACT

The present study attempted to investigate if COVID-19 lockdown has an impact on scholarly research engagements among Omar Al-Mukhtar University instructors in Libya. Ninety-three university instructors responded to a two-item web-based survey designed via Google forms from 11 May to 12 June 2020. The findings revealed that the COVID-19 lockdown negatively affected the majority of participants' scholarly research engagements. It is concluded that these results could be attributed to three reasons 1) difficulty of collecting field-based data, and 2) stressful life events due to the COVID-19 lockdown, 3) engagement in professional development webinars and online courses.

1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease in the last few months has internationally spread and international concern about a public health emergency has been declared as an outbreak of the disease on 30 January 2020 (WHO, 2020). The World Health Organization called the coronavirus disease COVID-19 on 11 February 2020 (Elhadi, Momen, & Abdulhadi, 2020). On 11 March 2020, the COVID-19 has been named a pandemic (WHO, 2020) as it is widely spread and has impacted well-being, economy, and education around the globe. In response to the Covid-19 lockdown, many countries temporarily closed schools, colleges, and universities in order to mitigate its spread among its citizens. This closure has undoubtedly impacted the educational system all over the world.

Several countries have taken important steps by implementing digital learning system immediately to get through this crisis. However, the teaching-learning process in some developing countries has blocked entirely because of the lack of remote teaching facilities. Libya is among the countries where the higher education system is completely closed after the Libyan government announced a lockdown on 13 March 2020 to control the spread of COVID-19 although no cases were recorded at that time. This complete closure of the higher education system may or may not have an impact on university instructors' academic research engagement in Libya.

Some studies (Marinoni, Land & Jensen, 2020; Sintema, 2020) have examined the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on the educational system. A qualitative study conducted by Sintema (2020) finds that COVID-19 lockdown has a potential impact on education sector in Zambia due to the lack of distance learning facilities. Marinoni et al. (2020) conducted a survey study on COVID-19 impact on universities and other higher institutions in Africa, the Americas, Asia & Pacific and Europe. Their findings show that all institutional activities have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis. However, little or no literature is available on the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on university instructors' academic research engagements. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating whether the Covid-19 lockdown has an impact on instructors' academic research engagements at Omar Al-mukhtar University, Libya. This study is important as it will contribute to the literature related to the COVID-19

lockdown impact on educational academic research in Libya and around the world. In response to the aim of the study, a web-based questionnaire was designed to address the following question:

Does the COVID-19 lockdown have an impact on Libyan instructors' academic research engagement at Omar Almkhtar University?

2. COVID-19 Crisis and Libya

The Libyan government announced a lockdown on 13 March 2020 to contain the spread of COVID-19 lockdown although no cases were recorded at that time. This lockdown undoubtedly is an important step towards preventing the human beings from catching the pandemic. Because of the COVID-19 lockdown, the schools, colleges, and universities were completely closed across the country. Even though the Ministry of Education took a critical step by implementing remote learning via TV but only for primary, preparatory, and secondary schools, this was affected by power cuts for longer hours and inefficient internet connection (OCHA Libya, 2020). To date, colleges and universities are still closed and there is no plan to commence distance learning and teaching. On 24 March 2020, the first confirmed case of the COVID-19 was recorded (Elhadi et al., 2020). The number of COVID-19 cases has subsequently increased, and on 8 June 2020, the Libyan National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) reported 270 confirmed positive cases, with 5 deaths and 53 recovery cases (OCHA Libya, 2020).

3. Methodology

A total of 93 (female= 63 and male=30) university instructors at Omar Almkhtar University located in eastern Libya voluntarily participated in the present study. This group includes 28 instructors holding a Doctorate and 65 Master's degree.

This study employed a quantitative research design. A web-based survey that is commonly used in social and educational research (Bakla, Çekiç, & Köksal, 2013) was used as a tool of data collection since this tool does not cost much and data can be easily analyzed (McPeake, Bateson & O'Neill, 2014). The web-based questionnaire was designed via a well-known survey tool that is Google docs in that the Google docs assist in creating result charts automatically and using different kinds of questions (Travis, 2010).

The web-based survey was created by the researcher himself. Then, the research sent the first draft of the questionnaire including four items to two experts. The two experts were asked to review the questionnaire by adding or dropping items. Some modifications were made based on the recommendation of the experts. The final draft of the questionnaire includes two items rated on the dichotomous question as 1 Yes and 2 No.

The link to the survey was posted on the Facebook page of the Omar Al-Mukhtar University Teachers' Union, and the participants were informed that their participation in completing the survey was voluntary. Only 93 university instructors from different majors were voluntarily responded to the survey from 11 May to 12 June 2020 although a larger number of respondents was expected. The completed surveys were analyzed to calculate the percentage of the two items.

4. Results and Discussion

Results related to the research question (Does the COVID-19 lockdown have an impact on Libyan instructors' academic research works at Omar Almkhtar University?) are presented in Figure 1 and 2.

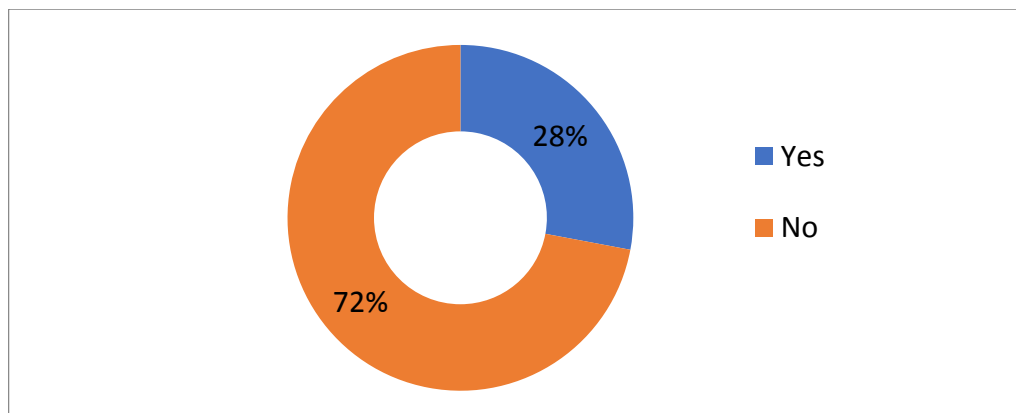


Figure 1. Has the COVID-19 lockdown contributed to your research work by publishing a paper?

Figure 1 shows that a higher proportion (72%, n= 67) of the university instructors answered that the COVID-19 lockdown has not contributed to their research works by publishing a research paper.

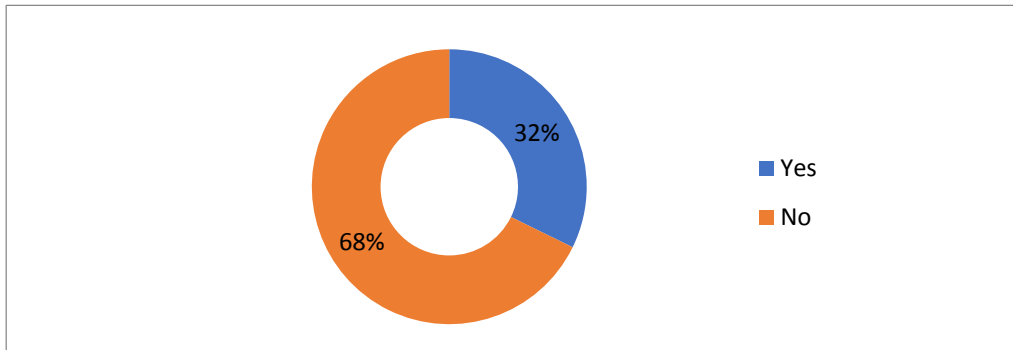


Figure 2. Has the COVID-19 lockdown given you enough time to conduct a lot of research?

As shown in Figure 2, most of the participants (68%, n= 63) said the COVID-19 lockdown has not given them enough time to conduct a lot of research.

In reviewing the literature, no data was found on the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on university instructors' research engagement. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the aim of the study, which is unique by itself, was to explore whether the Covid-19 lockdown has an impact on instructors' academic research works at Omar Almkhtar University, Libya. The current study found that Omar Almkhtar University instructors' academic research engagement was affected by the COVID-19 lockdown. These results confirm that the COVID-19 lockdown not only affects the educational system (Mataka, et al. 2020; Sintema, 2020) but also university instructors' academic research engagement as found in this study.

It was unexpected that most of the participants did not publish even a research paper or conduct a lot of research during the COVID-19 lockdown, as the teaching process at Omar Almkhtar University has entirely suspended since 13/3/2020. It can be said that it is a great opportunity for university instructors to take advantage of COVID-19 lockdown to publish a research paper or conduct a lot of research since they have no work to do, such as preparing lessons plans, correcting assignments, and preparing examinations that are time-consuming.

A possible explanation for these results may be the difficulty of data collection. In Libya, collecting data through online is difficult because of the inefficient internet access or lack of unwillingness of students or teachers to participate in a web-based survey. The researchers, therefore, need to interact face-to-face with either students or teachers to collect data, yet this is not possible under schools and universities closure during the COVID-19 lockdown. Another possible explanation for these results might be that stressful life events during the COVID-19 lockdown could affect university instructors' academic research engagement, as it was found that stress affected students' performance (Alva & Reyes 1999; Oketch-Oboth & Okunya, 2018).

In addition to the two possible explanations mentioned above, the university instructors, instead of doing scholarly research, may engage in professional development webinars or online courses that several well-recognized universities around the world have offered for free. Engaging in professional development webinars or online courses regarding how to integrate technology in teaching or how to teach remotely is important these days for university instructors due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

5. Conclusion

The present study was designed to determine whether the COVID-19 lockdown affects university instructors' research engagement at Omar Al-Mukhtar University in Libya. The results of this study show that scholarly research engagement of about two-thirds of the participants was affected by the COVID-19 lockdown. These results could be ascribed to three reasons: the difficulty of data collection based on field, 2) stressful life events due to the COVID-19 lockdown, and 3) engagement in professional development webinars and online courses. These were only presumptions and they might be right or wrong. Therefore, further studies are needed to investigate the reasons employing other methods such as, interviews to listen to the participants themselves why the COVID-19 lockdown affects their academic research engagements. In addition to this, the sample size (93) is small and thus the findings cannot be generalized to all instructors at Omar Almkhtar University or to any other university instructors across Libya. Accordingly, further research, with a larger number of participants from different universities in Libya or around the world are needed.

About the author

Muftah Hamed received his MA with Honours in Applied Linguistics in 2013 from the University of Griffith in Australia. He is the Head of English department and a lecturer in English department at Omar EL-Mukhtar University, EL-Qubba Campus, Libya. He has taught English in different faculties at Omar Al Mukhtar University. Muftah previously taught English to primary and secondary students at public schools in Libya from 2007 to 2010. His research interests are error analysis, language learning styles and strategies, and teaching English to young learners. His ORCID ID is <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3693-3289>

References

- [1] Alva, S., and Reyes, R. (1999). Psychological stress, internalized symptoms, and the academic achievement of Hispanic adolescents. *Journal of Adolescents Research*, 14(3), 343-358.
- [2] Bakla, A., Çekiç, A., and Köksal, O. (2013). Web-based surveys in educational research. *International Journal of Academic Research Part B*, 5(1), 5-13, DOI: 10.7813/2075-4124.2013/5-1/B.1
- [3] Elhadi, M., Momen, A., and Abdulhadi, O. (2020). A COVID-19 case in Libya acquired in Saudi Arabia. *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease*, 1-4, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tam.2020.101705>
- [4] Marinoni, G., Land, H. and Jensen, T. (2020). The Impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education around the World, IAU Global Survey Report, Retrieved from https://www.iauiau.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.
- [5] McPeake, J., Bateson, M., and O'Neill, A. (2014). Electronic surveys: How to maximize success. *Nurse Researcher*, 21(3), 24-26.
- [6] OCHA Libya, (2020). *Libya: COVID-19 - Situation* (Report No. 6-8/6-2020E-PDF), Retrieved from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/covid-19_situation_report_no.6_libya_8june2020.pdf
- [7] Oketch-Oboto, J., and Okunya, L. (2018). The relationship between level of stress and academic performance of university of Nairobi students. *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 8(4), 1-28, <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v8i4.13840>
- [8] Sintema, E. J. (2020). Effect of COVID-19 on the performance of Grade 12 students: Implication for STEM education. *EURASIA Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology*, 16(7), 1-6.
- [9] Travis, L. (2010). One of Many Free Survey Tools: Google Docs. *Journal of Electronic Resources in Medical Libraries*, 7(2), 105-114, DOI: 10.1080/15424065.2010.482902
- [10] WHO, (2020). COVID-19, Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020ht>