

The Effect of COVID-19 on Tertiary Students in Ghana: The Case of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA)

Joshua Edem Agomor^{1,*}, Kingsley Senyo Agomor²

¹School of Technology (SoT), Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Accra, Ghana

²School of Public Service and Governance (SPSG), Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Accra, Ghana

Email address:

joeagomor@gmail.com (Joshua Edem Agomor), ksagomor@gmail.com (Kingsley Senyo Agomor)

*Corresponding author

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Abstract: The study examined the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary students in Ghana, using the students of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) as a case study. Many tertiary institutions in Ghana and the world over implemented measures to fight the COVID 19 pandemic. The Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) were forced to adapt to the new reality. The study examined the challenges faced by students during the pandemic, their coping strategies, and the implications of the pandemic on their academic performance. It also provided insights into how tertiary institutions in Ghana could better support their students during times of crisis and help them to succeed academically. The study adopted a descriptive research design, and the data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The data were analyzed with the social learning theory. The study found that the COVID-19 had negative and positive effects on students' education. There was a decline in their academic performance during the pandemic. The major challenges faced by the students included limited access to resources, lack of social interaction, and psychological stress. The coping strategies employed by the students included learning online, seeking emotional support, and engaging in physical exercise. A positive effect of the pandemic on students was the increased focus on health and wellness; students did not encounter the risk of exposure to external threats, making them learn in peace. The study recommended that the students should learn how to use e-learning platforms to supplement classroom learning.

Keywords: Academic Performance, COVID 19 Pandemic, Education, Effects, Ghana, Students, Technology, Tertiary

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had had a profound effect on virtually every aspect of human life, including the education sector. The pandemic had caused significant disruptions to the way educational institutions operated, with many shifting to online and remote modes of instruction. Tertiary educational institutions had not been spared, and instructors and students had had to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning [19]. Ghana, like many other countries, had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the first case of the virus being reported in the country on March 12, 2020. Following the outbreak, the government implemented measures such as a

partial lockdown and social distancing rules to curb the spread of the virus [9]. These measures had significant implications on the educational sector, and tertiary institutions such as the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) were forced to adapt quickly to the new reality. GIMPA is a public tertiary institution that offers a wide range of programs, including business, public administration, law, and social sciences and technology [12]. The institution has, over the years, built a reputation for providing quality education and producing graduates who go on to occupy leadership positions in various sectors of the Ghanaian economy and outside the country as well.

Given the significant disruptions caused by the COVID-19

pandemic, it is essential to understand the effect of the pandemic on tertiary students in Ghana. This study focused on GIMPA, as it is one of the leading tertiary institutions in Ghana and has a diverse student population. The study investigated the challenges faced by students during the pandemic, their coping strategies, and the implications of the pandemic on their academic performance. The findings of this study provided insights into how tertiary institutions in Ghana could better support their students during times of crisis and help them to succeed academically. The subsequent chapters elaborate on the literature review, the methodology, the analysis, and the conclusion of this paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had had a profound effect on various aspects of life globally, including the education sector. The rapid spread and severity of the pandemic had resulted in various responses ranging from lockdowns and school closures to the implementation of remote learning from governments worldwide, to limit the spread of the virus. The following literature review provides an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the education sector, with a focus on tertiary education. According to UNESCO [22], the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in the most extensive disruption of education systems in history, affecting more than 1.6 billion learners worldwide. The pandemic had resulted in the closure of schools and universities in over 190 countries, affecting over 91% of the world's student population. This had necessitated the implementation of remote and online learning, which had had varying levels of success in different regions and countries.

The implementation of remote and online learning had posed various challenges to students, particularly those in developing countries with limited access to technology and the internet. As noted by [4], the pandemic had highlighted the digital divide and inequities in education globally. The authors argue that the pandemic had further widened the gap between the haves and have-nots, with students from disadvantaged backgrounds facing increased difficulties in accessing education.

Tertiary education had also been significantly affected by the pandemic, with students facing various challenges, including disruptions to academic schedules, limited access to resources, and the lack of face-to-face interactions with peers and faculty [1]. According to a study by Suryaman et al [20], the implementation of remote and online learning had resulted in mixed outcomes for tertiary students, with some students experiencing higher levels of stress, anxiety, and disengagement from learning.

Moreover, the pandemic's effect on tertiary education had not been uniform across countries and regions. As noted by [21], developing countries such as Ghana, where this study had taken place, faced unique challenges, including limited access to technology and internet infrastructure, making the

implementation of remote and online learning more challenging.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic had had a profound effect on the education sector globally, resulting in widespread school closures and the implementation of remote and online learning. While these responses had helped limit the spread of the virus, they had posed various challenges to students, particularly those in developing countries. Tertiary education had not been immune to these challenges, with students facing disruptions to academic schedules and limited access to resources. Further research is necessary to understand the effect of the pandemic on tertiary education and to identify effective strategies for mitigating its effects.

2.2. Global Effect of COVID-19 on Tertiary Education

The COVID-19 pandemic had had a significant effect on tertiary education worldwide. The implementation of lockdowns and social distancing measures had led to the closure of campuses and the suspension of face-to-face classes, forcing institutions to adopt remote learning. This shift to remote learning had posed several challenges for students, teachers, and institutions, particularly those in developing countries [2]. According to UNESCO [22], as of mid-2020, over 220 million students were affected by school closures globally, with 1.6 billion learners affected by September of the same year. This disruption necessitated the implementation of alternative forms of learning, such as online and remote learning. These alternative modes of learning, however, had been met with varying degrees of success in different countries and regions, with some students facing technological and infrastructural barriers to accessing remotely-delivered lessons [13]. Moreover, the pandemic had disrupted academic schedules, leading to extended semesters and delays in graduation for some students [2]. This disruption had also led to job losses and financial hardships for students and their families, particularly those who depended on part-time work to pay for their education [7]. The shift to remote learning had also affected the quality of education, with some students experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and disengagement from learning [7].

The effect of the pandemic on tertiary education had not been uniform, with some countries and regions facing unique challenges. In developing countries, for instance, the lack of infrastructure, limited access to technology, and the digital divide had posed significant challenges to the implementation of remote learning [13]. Similarly, the effect of the pandemic on international students had been significant, with travel restrictions and the closure of borders affecting their ability to obtain visas to study abroad [20].

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic had had a significant effect on tertiary education globally, affecting students, teachers, and institutions in different ways. The shift to remote learning had posed several challenges, particularly for those in developing countries and for international students. Institutions and governments implemented various strategies to mitigate the effect of the pandemic on education. Nevertheless, further research is necessary to identify

effective strategies for ensuring equitable and accessible education for all students during a pandemic.

2.3. Effect of COVID-19 on Tertiary Education in Africa

The COVID-19 pandemic had had a significant effect on tertiary education in Africa. Many universities and colleges had had to close their campuses and switch to online learning in response to the pandemic [9]. This transition to online learning had not been without its challenges, as many students in Africa lacked access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity [20]. Furthermore, the pandemic had led to a decrease in international student enrollment in African universities [18]. This had had financial implications for universities, as international students were a significant source of revenue. The pandemic had also led to the cancellation or postponement of academic events and activities, such as conferences and research trips, which had affected academic progress and research productivity in the region [15]. In addition, the pandemic highlighted existing disparities, such as unequal access to resources and infrastructure [15] in the African higher education system. This had prompted calls for increased investment in tertiary education in Africa to address these disparities and ensure that students were not left behind as the world moved towards a more digital future.

2.3.1. The Effect of COVID-19 on Tertiary Education in Ghana

The COVID-19 pandemic had had a significant effect on tertiary education in Ghana. Like many other countries, the Ghanaian government ordered the closure of all universities and colleges in March 2020 in response to the pandemic [11]. This closure resulted in the disruption of academic activities, including teaching, learning, and research.

The closure of universities and colleges in Ghana led to the adoption of online teaching and learning as a means of continuing academic activities. However, the shift to online learning had not been without challenges. Access to the internet and technology was a significant barrier for many students in Ghana, particularly those in rural areas [11]. The lack of access to reliable internet connectivity and technological devices had limited the effectiveness of online learning in the country.

The pandemic also had financial implications for universities and colleges in Ghana. The closure of universities and colleges resulted in a decline in revenue from tuition fees, as well as from other sources such as the rental of facilities for events and conferences. This had had an effect on the ability of universities and colleges to provide quality education and maintain their infrastructure.

In addition, the pandemic has highlighted existing disparities in the Ghanaian higher education system, such as unequal access to resources and infrastructure. This has prompted calls for increased investment in tertiary education in Ghana to address these disparities and ensure that students are not left behind as the world moves towards a more digital future.

2.3.2. Relevant Studies on the Effect of COVID-19 on Tertiary Students

Several studies have been conducted on the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary students, providing valuable insights into the challenges faced by students worldwide. Some of these studies include one that highlighted the effects of COVID-19 on the mental health of students in China. It found that the pandemic had led to increased levels of anxiety and depression among students, particularly those who had been in quarantine or had been exposed to the virus.

This study provided an insight into the effect of COVID-19 on the mental health of medical students worldwide. It found that the pandemic had led to increased levels of anxiety among medical students, particularly those who were involved in treating COVID-19 patients.

A report by UNESCO [22] provided an overview of the effect of COVID-19 on higher education globally. It highlighted the challenges faced by students, including the disruption of academic activities, the shift to online learning, and the effect on mental health.

In addition, a study examined the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary education in Ghana, using the University of Cape Coast as a case study. It found that the pandemic had led to significant disruptions in academic activities, with students experiencing challenges such as poor internet connectivity and the lack of access to technological devices.

Furthermore, a study examined the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary education in Cameroon, using the University of Buea as a case study. It found that the pandemic had led to significant disruptions in academic activities, with students facing challenges such as poor internet connectivity, lack of access to technological devices, and the closure of libraries and laboratories.

This literature review explores the use of technology-enabled learning to support students during pandemics. It provides insights into the potential benefits and limitations of online learning and highlights the need for adequate infrastructure and support for both students and educators.

2.4. Theory Underpinning the Study

The social learning theory proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977 suggests that learning occurs through observing, modeling, and imitating the behavior of others. This theory posits that people learn from the behaviors of others, such as family members, peers, and role models in their social environment. The theory also emphasizes the importance of cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and motivation, in shaping behavior. In the context of the present study, the social learning theory can be applied to explain the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary students in Ghana. As the pandemic disrupted traditional modes of education, students had had to adapt to new modes of learning, such as online classes and virtual lectures. In this process, students were influenced by the behaviors of their peers, instructors, and other role models who were also adapting to the new educational environment. Moreover, the social learning

theory could explain how students perceived and responded to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Students observed and modeled the coping strategies used by others, such as their peers, family members, or instructors in their social environment. Additionally, students might have been influenced by the attitudes and expectations of others in their social environment, and this could shape their own behavior and motivation to adapt to the new educational environment.

In summary, the social learning theory provides a useful framework for understanding the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary students in Ghana. By emphasizing the role of social influences and cognitive processes, this theory can help explain how students perceive, adapt to, and cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic in their educational environment.

2.5. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the following key variables:

2.5.1. Effect of COVID-19

This refers to the effects of the pandemic on tertiary education, including disruptions to academic activities, changes in teaching and learning methods, and challenges faced by students and educators.

2.5.2. Tertiary Education

This refers to post-secondary education at the tertiary level, including universities, colleges, and vocational schools.

2.5.3. Student Performance

This refers to the academic performance of tertiary students, including grades, course completion rates, and overall academic achievement.

2.5.4. Technological Infrastructure

This refers to the availability and accessibility of technology and related infrastructure to support online learning and other forms of remote education.

2.5.5. Institutional Support

This refers to the support provided by tertiary institutions to students and educators during the pandemic, including access to resources, counseling services, and other forms of support.

Several studies have examined the relationship between these variables in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, a study by Afrifa & Ashiagbor [1] found that the pandemic had a significant effect on tertiary education in Ghana, with students facing challenges such as poor internet connectivity and the closure of libraries and laboratories. Another study by Karakose [13] examined the effect of the pandemic on tertiary education in Cameroon, finding that students faced similar challenges in accessing technology and related infrastructure.

Other studies have explored the role of technological infrastructure and institutional support in mitigating the effect of the pandemic on student performance. For example, [8] Judd, Kennedy, & Cropper [8] found that technology-enabled learning could support students during pandemics, but highlighted the need for adequate infrastructure and support for both students and educators. Karakose [13] provided a review of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in postsecondary education worldwide, highlighting the importance of institutional support for student success.

In this study, the aim was to build on these findings by examining the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on tertiary students in Ghana, with a specific focus on the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). The role of technological infrastructure and institutional support in mitigating the effect of the pandemic on student performance, was investigated using a mixed-methods approach to gather data from both students and educators. Through the analysis, it was hoped that insight could be provided into the strategies that could be used to support tertiary students during a pandemic, and to inform policy and practice in this area.

2.6. Methodology

The research was designed as a qualitative case study. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary education in Ghana. The qualitative research is a valuable tool for exploring complex social phenomena, as it allows for the collection of rich and detailed data that could provide insight into the experiences and perspectives of participants [6]. A case study approach was appropriate for this research because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary students at GIMPA. The case study approach enabled the researcher to collect rich and detailed data about the experiences of students and faculty members during the pandemic and the measures put in place by the institution to mitigate the effects of the pandemic [3].

The GIMPA was purposively selected because of the focus of the subject under investigation [6]. The GIMPA is a financially self-sustaining public university in Ghana and Africa. It was established in 1961 as a joint Ghana Government/United Nations Special Fund Project as the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) to develop the public administrative systems and to produce civil servants with the administrative and professional competence to plan and administer local, national and regional services. GIMPA has

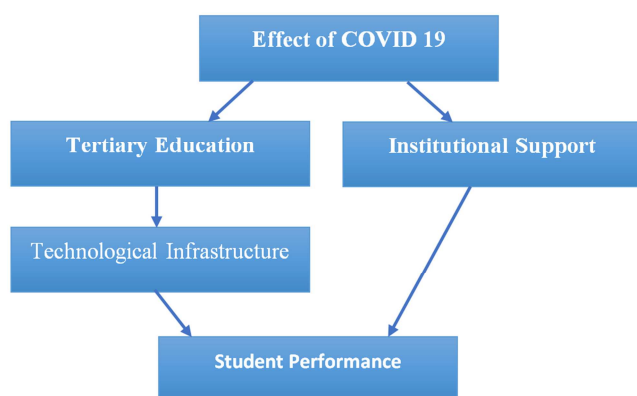


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

transformed from small public service institution to a tertiary institution offering a wide range of programs. Presently, it is made up of six schools, namely: School of Public Service and Governance (SPSG), Business School (GBS), School of Technology (SOT), Faculty of Law (FLAW), School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (SOLASS), and School of Research and Graduate Studies [5].

The study used convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher. The primary advantage of convenience sampling is its ease and speed of recruitment, which is particularly useful when time and resources are limited.

However, the use of convenience sampling also has several limitations that could affect the generalizability of findings of the study. One limitation is that the sample may not be representative of the larger population of interest, as participants are not randomly selected. This means that the study results may not be applicable to the wider population and cannot be used to make inferences about the general population.

Additionally, participants who were readily accessible and available might have certain characteristics or experiences that differed from those who were not accessible, and this could lead to bias in the sample. This could affect the internal validity of the study and limit the ability to draw accurate conclusions [16].

The sample of 37 made of 24 students and 13 staff provided a strong basis for deeper qualitative analysis because Guest, Bunce, & Johnson [10] have argued that the point of data saturation could be reached within the first 12 interviews. The interview responses and secondary data were carefully analyzed and categorized under various themes, and these themes formed the basis for the analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

Table 1. Sample Distribution of the Study.

Description	Sample
GIMPA Staff	13
Top Management	1
Directorates	3
Deans	2
Lecturers/Professors	3
Middle level administrative staff	2
Lower-level administrative staff	2
GIMPA Students	24
Faculty of Law	4
Business School	4
School of Public Service and Governance	4
School of technology	4
School of liberal art and sciences	4
School of Research and Graduate Studies	4
Total	37

Source: Field Data, 2023

Data was collected in February and March 2023 through face-to-face interviews with the help of semi structured interview guide. This allowed unexpected answers to be elicited from the interviewees and for issues to be deeply

interrogated. All the interviews with staff and students were conducted at the GIMPA main campus. In the process of conducting interviews for this study many challenges had been encountered. These included non-availability of most management staff to be interviewed, which made the process to take longer than it should have: some of them declined completely to be interviewed with the excuse that they did not have time at their disposal; appointments with some of them who had agreed to be interviewed had been postponed many times, and some of these interviews could not come on, eventually. The distribution of the final sample is illustrated in Table 1.

This high-profile sample provided a rich understanding of the effects of COVID 19 on GIMPA students.

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussions section of this research paper presents the findings of the study and analyzes them in light of the research questions and objectives. The section is organized thematically based on the key themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis.

The findings of the study were then presented, highlighting the experiences and perspectives of students and faculty members at GIMPA during the pandemic; the institutional response to the pandemic were presented as well.

The section identifies the key themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis and provides a detailed analysis of each theme. For instance, the section discusses the effect of the pandemic on students' academic performance, mental health, and financial situation, as well as their experiences with online learning and the availability of resources to support their learning. It also discusses the experiences and perspectives of faculty members regarding the transition to online teaching and the challenges they faced in adapting to the new mode of instruction.

This section then compares and contrasts the findings of the study with the relevant literature on the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary education, both globally, and in Africa. This comparison helps to contextualize the findings and draw broader conclusions about the effect of the pandemic on tertiary education.

The results and discussions section provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of the effect of COVID-19 on tertiary students at GIMPA, as well as the response of the institution to the pandemic. The section contributes to the broader understanding of the effect of the pandemic on tertiary education in Ghana and provides insights that could inform policy and practice in the sector.

3.1. The Use of Zoom

As students indicated, I have found Zoom to be a game-changer during the COVID pandemic. Thanks to this platform, I have been able to attend my classes from the comfort of my own home, without the need to travel or be physically present in a classroom. This has given me the flexibility to manage my schedule more effectively and has

made it easier for me to balance my academic work with other responsibilities. Additionally, Zoom has allowed me to collaborate with my classmates in real-time, even if we are in different locations. This has enabled us to work on group projects and assignments more efficiently, and has facilitated more interaction and engagement among students. Overall, I believe that Zoom has had a positive impact on my education and has helped me to overcome some of the challenges posed by the pandemic. While I appreciate the convenience of using Zoom for online classes, I have also experienced some negative effects during the COVID-19 pandemic. Technical issues such as poor internet connection or device compatibility problems have disrupted my learning and caused me to miss important information. Additionally, the lack of in-person interaction on Zoom can be isolating and less engaging than traditional classroom settings. I have found it harder to connect with my classmates and engage in discussions, which has negatively impacted my motivation and overall learning experience. Finally, the numerous distractions around me, such as social media or other devices, have made it difficult to focus and concentrate during Zoom classes. Overall, while Zoom has been a helpful tool during the pandemic, it has also had some negative effects on my education that I hope will be addressed in the future.

3.2. The Use of Moodle

Moodle has been a valuable learning platform during the COVID pandemic. One of the most significant benefits of Moodle is its highly customizable features, which allows instructors to create learning environments that suit the unique needs of their students. This customization has led to more engaging and interactive learning experiences that have helped me stay motivated and focused on my studies. Another positive effect of Moodle is its collaboration features, including discussion forums and chats, which have allowed me to connect with my classmates and engage in peer-to-peer learning. This has been especially important during the pandemic when we cannot be in the same physical space. Finally, Moodle's ability to integrate with other tools, such as video conferencing software and multimedia resources, has provided a more holistic approach to education that has been beneficial in a remote learning environment. Overall, Moodle has been a helpful tool that has positively impacted my education during the COVID pandemic. From my experience as a student during the COVID pandemic, I have found Moodle to be a helpful learning platform. However, it does have some negative effects that should be taken into consideration. One of the main issues with Moodle is its complexity, which can make it difficult to navigate for students who are new to the platform. This can create a steep learning curve that can interfere with the learning process. Another issue with Moodle is the potential for technical difficulties, such as slow loading times or server problems, which can negatively impact the learning experience and cause frustration and stress. Lastly, while Moodle does offer some interactive tools, it can still lack the in-person social interaction that is crucial for deeper learning and

understanding. This can lead to feelings of isolation and disengagement among students. Despite these negative effects, I believe that Moodle can still be an effective tool for online learning when used correctly. It is important for educators to provide support for students who may struggle with the platform and to create opportunities for social interaction and engagement within the virtual learning environment.

3.3. The Use of Microsoft Teams

As a student navigating the challenges of remote learning during the pandemic, I have discovered the many benefits of Microsoft Teams. One of the most significant advantages is the platform's seamless integration with other Microsoft Office applications, which enables collaboration and document sharing in real-time. Additionally, the virtual breakout room feature in Teams has facilitated group discussions and project collaborations, making it easier for students to engage in active learning. Another positive feature of Teams is the interactive whiteboard, which allows for visual learning and annotation. As a result, the platform has provided a range of useful tools for remote learning and has helped me stay engaged and focused on my coursework. During the COVID pandemic, GIMPA used Microsoft Teams for online learning. While there were some positive aspects, there were also some negative effects. One of the main drawbacks was the limited customization options available for teachers, which made it difficult for them to tailor their approach to individual student needs and preferences. Additionally, technical difficulties like connectivity problems or device compatibility issues could arise, which could lead to frustration and hinder the learning experience. Finally, while Teams had some interactive features, it lacked the in-person social interaction that can facilitate deeper learning and understanding, which could negatively impact student engagement and motivation.

4. Strategies Employed by the Interviewees During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many tertiary students faced various challenges that affected their academic progress. In order to cope with these challenges, students employed different strategies to maintain their academic progress. Some of the coping strategies employed by the participants in this study are discussed below.

One of the strategies employed by the participants was the use of online resources for learning. This was evident in the responses of the interviewees who indicated that they had increased their use of online resources for academic purposes since the outbreak of COVID-19. According to Mahyoob [14], the use of online resources for learning had become a common coping mechanism for students during the pandemic. This was because many institutions have had to switch to online learning platforms to ensure continuity of academic work. Another coping strategy employed by the participants was time management. This was evident from the responses of the

interviewees who indicated that they had improved their time management skills since the outbreak of COVID-19. According to [17], effective time management was critical for maintaining academic progress during the pandemic. This was because the pandemic had disrupted the normal routines of students; as a result, they needed to develop new time management skills to cope with the changes.

In all, the coping strategies employed by the participants in this study suggest that students were finding ways to adapt and cope with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These coping strategies could help students to maintain their academic progress and achieve their educational goals despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected tertiary education in Ghana, including students at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA). The study conducted a research to analyze the effects of the pandemic on students' education using social learning theory. The findings revealed that the pandemic had both negative and positive effects on the students' academic performance. The major challenges that the students faced included limited access to resources, lack of social interaction, and psychological stress. However, the pandemic had a positive effect as the students' focused on their health and wellness.

6. Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that educational institutions in Ghana, specifically, the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) should provide more training and resources to students on how to use e-learning platforms to supplement classroom learning. This would enable students to access educational resources and continue their learning even during a future pandemic.

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