

# **Influence of covid-19 in the training and academic learning of students at Peleforo GON COULIBALY University of Korhogo (Ivory Coast).**

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## **Abstract**

UNESCO noted in 2020 that 85% of pupils and students in 165 countries are no longer in school because of COVID-19. Indeed, this disease has had several social consequences around the world. One of these is the academic component. In addition, the world has been exploring new methods of teaching and learning at a distance. This method, although innovative, has impacts on the university, the teacher and the student. Hence the need to question the impact of the Covid-19 in university training and learning, particularly at the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University (UPGC). To achieve this, a socio-anthropological study was conducted using a qualitative approach. Its purpose was to describe the impact of the health crisis on the student population of the UPGC. It took place from 10 July to 7 September 2021 in Korhogo, Ivory Coast, specifically at the UPGC. The collection tools were individual interviews and documentary research. According to rational choice sampling, 63 students and 8 members of the various examination commissions, i.e. 71 people in total, were mobilised.

The results reveal that the duration of social distancing has created a sense of isolation for some UPGC students and lost learning time. In addition, the change in assessment procedures has led to a series of problems such as postponed or cancelled exams in some departments and in others replaced by group exercises or individual homework. Also, the use of NICTs to communicate and acquire knowledge has been intense during this health crisis, which could stimulate risks of visual disorders among students and teachers. Thus, the covid-19 crisis not only impacted on students' learning time, but also on the biology and quality of the knowledge received during this period.

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**Keywords:** Influence, covid 19, training and learning, students, Peleforo GON COULIBALY University

## **1- Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has sent education systems into a state of shock unprecedented in history. In early March 2020, only China and a few other affected countries imposed social distancing measures by closing schools. A fortnight later, 120 countries closed schools for varying lengths of time, affecting the daily lives of nearly 1 billion students worldwide (Kaliopé and Trigran, 2020 p2). By mid-April 2020, it was disrupting the lives of nearly 94% of the world's pupils and students, or 1.58 billion children and young people in pre-primary to tertiary education in 200 countries (UNDP, 2020a p.5). School and other learning spaces have expanded to 94% of the world's school-going population overall and up to 99% in low- and lower-middle-income countries. In universities in particular, 220 million students worldwide have been affected by the closure. Higher

education is essential for a country's growth (Victor, 2021 p.5). To this end, the resilience to these school and university closures has been greater or lesser depending on the level of development, with strong disparities. For example, in the second quarter of 2020, nearly 86% of primary school pupils stopped attending school altogether in countries with a low human development index, compared to only 20% in countries with a very high human development index (UNDP, 2020b p.17). At the tertiary level, the crisis has stimulated innovation in the education sector. This innovative initiative was intended to enable the continuation of education and training activities. To this end, as Emmanuelle (2020) reminded us, a thousand paths were possible, but not all of them had the same consistency. It is in this respect that distance education formulas have been developed thanks to the rapid intervention of States and partners throughout the world determined to ensure educational continuity, in particular the Global Coalition for Education set up by UNESCO.

In Africa, COVID-19 has worsened the situation of educational institutions, some of which, before the health crisis, had already been closed for several months due to strikes, climatic hazards and high insecurity linked to terrorist movements. This was the case in the Sahel and in sub-Saharan Africa, where 47% of the world's 258 million children were already out of school, 30% of them due to conflict and emergency situations (UNDP, 2020a p.5). This bleak situation in the African education system was exacerbated by the health crisis, which increased the educational disparities that existed so that many of the most vulnerable children, youth and adults almost did not return to school. Also, in Africa, the shock to education systems from the health crisis has had significant effects beyond the educational sphere. For example, school closures have hampered the provision of basic services to pupils and students, including nutritious food in canteens and university restaurants, preventing many parents from being able to work normally.

In Côte d'Ivoire, digital technology was introduced into university education through the creation of the virtual university four to five years ago before the advent of covid-19. However, its generalisation to other universities following covid-19 has had an impact on the university population. Indeed, the Ivorian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, after assessing the dysfunctions of the Ivorian higher education sector, created the Université Virtuelle de Côte d'Ivoire (UVCI) in 2015, thus establishing the institutionalisation of digital technology in higher education (Djédjé and Adon, 2021 p77). Thus, when Côte d'Ivoire recorded its first positive cases of COVID-19, its National Security Council decided to confine the country. This decision resulted, among other things, in the closure of university establishments from 16 March to 24 May 2020 in order to avoid the rapid spread of the virus in this overcrowded environment. This situation has disrupted and continued to influence the training of students, hence the need to question the impact of Covid-19 on university training and learning, particularly at the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University (UPGC). How did the health crisis cause a time of unlearning?

How did covid-19 force a change in assessment procedures?

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of the health crisis on the university population in general and the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University population in particular.

## **2- Materials And Methods**

### **2 - 1 Geographical scope**

This study was carried out at the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University in the town of Korhogo, which is located 632 km from Abidjan and is the capital of the Poro region in Côte d'Ivoire. The choice of this site was motivated by the fact that the University of Korhogo is still young and does not have sufficient reception and supervision structures for the students who are oriented there. In addition, as a member of the examination commission of the UFR of Social Sciences, we observed during the academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, a phenomenon of unregistered students, students excluded from the university system due to the modification of the evaluation procedures imposed by the health crisis. The data collection took place from 10 July to 7 September 2021 in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire, specifically at the UPGC, mainly with students from

the four departments of sociology, geography, law and economics, which make up the UFR of social sciences of the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University of Korhogo.

## **2 - 2 Sociological field**

The sociological field is the whole population concerned by our study. Thus, within the framework of our work, we first sought to meet with some officials of the examination commission who were aware of the impact of covid-19 on examination results, and then with students who had experienced the period of the health crisis at the Péleforo GON COULIBALY University. All these respondents were from the departments of sociology, geography, law and economics. Most of the students surveyed were at Bachelor's level (1, 2 and 3). In order to include the students most likely to provide information, the purposive sample technique was chosen.

## **2 - 3 Research techniques**

### **2 - 3 -1 The survey**

The survey itself relates to the concrete phase of the study. It consisted of going into the field to collect qualitative data through research tools such as interviews and documentary research. Thus for three months we were in contact with the target populations. This stage began with the administration of the interview guide to the students of the different departments of the selected Training and Research Unit (TRU), during class breaks and also at the end of the year exams. After the student stage, we held interviews with representatives of the departments concerned on the (TRU's) examination commission.

### **2 - 3 -2 The typical or purposive sample**

As regards the selection technique, we opted for the typical or purposive sample for the orientation of our study. According to (N'DA, 2006), *"This is a technique used for the selection of subjects with typical characteristics, such as in the study of extreme or deviant cases, or typical cases etc.* It is called purposive choice because the technique relies on the judgement of the researcher. *On the other hand, reasoned choice leads to the selection of "average" individuals who are declared representative of a group.* Thus, the choice of this technique is explained by the fact that we do not have an exhaustive list of those affected by health crises at the UPGC. However, we do have an idea of their characteristics. For this reason, this technique was considered relevant to our study.

The sample size allows us to present the number of individuals on whom the study will be based. For this purpose, our sample size is 71 in total, distributed as follows: 63 students and 8 members of the examination committee.

## **2 - 4 Desk research**

Documentary research allows for the collection of informative data through the study of documents from reliable sources and official documents. It consisted in the exploitation of the archives and data of the examination commission.

## **3 - Results**

The results of this study were articulated around three axes. First, the duration of social distancing and the learning time lost due to the health crisis; second, the limitation of physical interactions between students and supervisors; and third, the impacts of the change in evaluation procedures and the physical health of students as a result of the type of training imposed by covid-19.

### **3 - 1 The duration of social distancing and the learning time lost due to the health crisis**

The duration of the social distancing imposed by the health crisis had a negative impact on the most vulnerable students. Indeed, during the closure of the universities, students who were obliged to stay at home saw their study spaces or settings and opportunities limited, which could amplify their failure rate. Moreover, their presence in the family has weakened the economic situation of some parents, who are forced to find sustainable

solutions for care or to compensate for the disappearance of meals from university restaurants. This is revealed by the words of a respondent in Licence 3 sociology who recounts her experience:

*“During the closure of the universities, my father, who is a scrap metal dealer, had his activities stagnate so much that he found it difficult to take care of us. My brother, who came from the university campus in Bouaké, and I from the UPGC were forced to return to my mother's village where communication networks were limited”* (Interview of March 20, 2021).

In terms of learning or training time lost due to COVID-19, we have had a reduction in the academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. As a result, some courses or training modules have had their running time reduced by  $\frac{3}{4}$  and others by half. This has not only affected their results in the immediate year, but will have an impact on their achievements in the long term. Given the process of standardisation of academic years initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education, some students who had previous level courses to catch up on, were unable to do so. In this respect, in the verbatim of most of the respondents (district 14) from the sociology degree 2, statements such as *“I was at the lecture of (...) or at the tutorial session of (...) when the lecture or tutorial of (...) of the previous year, i.e. degree 1, took place”* are always repeated. Indeed, the hours of the course (Lecture or Tutorial) often coincided with those of other courses at the student's current level. These failed or incomplete courses also had a negative impact on the knowledge received by this generation of covid-19 students. This has limited the access of some of them, especially female students, to the second and third cycles of university, which risks compromising the objective set by the government, which plans to “improve access to higher education from the current level of about 20% to more than 30% in 2030, and to boost scientific research in order to promote technological innovation and the development of a national elite in “grey matter”. According to the examination commission of the UFR of Social Sciences, for the year 2020-2021, 14.35% of students of the licence 1 and 2 of Sociology did not present themselves at the end of year examinations. Among them, 40.35% are female. Some of the students interviewed revealed problems related to covid-19. This is the case of Bamba (22 years old), Grambouté (18 years old) and 7 others from the first year of study who were confined during the end of year exams.) Mamadou (24 years old), Koudjenétcha (24 years old) and 10 others mentioned the economic situation of their parents who were affected by the health crisis.

Thus, some students with credits from the previous year or students admitted to the next year, i.e. students who had a number of credits between 48 and 59 credits, could also drop out of the system, thus reducing the number of students enrolled in the university. Some were ejected from the system because of the contraction of academic years, such as Cheick (21 years old), Elodie (23 years old) and five other respondents who took the second year of their degree and were unable to obtain the 60 credits. Other respondents such as Adjara (25 years old), Charlotte (23 years old) and 3 others were denied access to the next cycle of studies simply because of the effects of the health crisis. From their verbatim statements, we note the following expressions: for some, *“I validated the Licence 3 but I have 6 credits from the Licence 2”* for others, *“I validated the Licence 3 but I have subjects from the Licence 2 that I did not validate, so I cannot register for the Master's programme”*. In addition to these facts, there is a phenomenon of non-registration which is becoming recurrent and a headache for the examination commissions which cannot enter their marks.

### **3 - 2 The limitation of physical interactions between students and teachers**

Online courses during the Covid-19 crisis also had the effect of reducing physical interaction between students and teachers. This limitation of interaction between higher education learners and their teachers was badly perceived by several of the respondents, such as Ouattara, a sociology undergraduate (L2), who said that *“online courses take us away from our teachers”* or *“After the online course, we cannot see or contact the teacher in private and we are left alone without any recourse”* (interview of Saturday 10 and Monday 12 July 2021). And above all, during the time of confinement and quarantine in Abidjan, there were no pedagogical activities and interactions between teachers and their students for online learning. Although the (UPGC)

provided e-learning training to teacher-researchers, the students did not receive any form of training. Finally, beyond the educational sphere, the health crisis has had important effects such as exposing women and girls, i.e. the female population, to a greater risk of gender-based violence, even sex-based violence. A respondent from the second degree (L2) in sociology revealed that *"I was abused by my cousins with whom we live at home"*, while another respondent from the second degree (L2) in geography said that *"I was the subject of mockery and quarrels for my father's wife during the whole period of confinement"*. This state of affairs can be explained by the fact that this female population, often coveted, was forced by the confinement to stay at home all the time with the men during the closure of the universities.

### **3 - 3 Consequences of the change in evaluation procedures and health problems linked to the type of training imposed by covid-19**

Faced with the spread of the covid-19 virus, one of the possible solutions was the closure of the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University which normally, like the other universities in the country, was to serve as a perfect test laboratory for the implementation of technologies in support of online education and training. Unfortunately, apart from the virtual university, the other Ivorian universities did not have the technical devices ready to face this situation. Thus, at the level of the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University of Korhogo, the health crisis occurred at a time when students were for the most part composing their end of year exams. As a result, the evaluation procedures were modified, which in most cases, was greatly affected. Thus, for this student of licence 2 of the law faculty, *"we were not sufficiently informed of the modification of the evaluation procedure"* or *"we did not know that we would not be composing on the table in the free Teaching Units ...."*, according to another respondent of licence 3 of economic sciences. In fact, various methods were used without being the object of a concerted analysis as indicated by certain members of the examination commission. For some Training and Research Units (UFR), examinations were postponed or even cancelled; in others, they were replaced by group exercises or individual homework. Other assessment procedures such as online exams and mobile phone tests were used.

For health problems related to the type of training imposed by covid-19, interviews with some respondents revealed that whether teachers or students, the health crisis has increased the time spent on mobile phones and in front of computers, which has further exposed the student population to the risks of visual disturbances and all other ailments related to the use of these devices.

## **4- Discussion**

### **4-1 A health crisis impacting on the habits of a university**

The results of this study highlighted the relationship between Covid-19 and learning at the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University of Korhogo. They were able to show the changes that this crisis brought about: exams postponed, cancelled in some UFRs and in others replaced by group exercises or individual homework, and its impact on the quality of teaching and the risks that these rearrangements can generate on the actors in the relationship. What the studies of Abdulrahman et al., (2020) have called enormous disruptions. Indeed, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, university leaders, administrators, teachers and their learners (at all stages of education and training) have been constantly changing the curricula, educational content and activities offered while experiencing severe uncertainty. To better understand these data, the theme Impact of Covid-19 on student learning, and the Teacher-Teacher relationship in the face of Covid-19 will inform this part of the work

### **4-2 Covid-19's influence on university activities**

Covid-19 has had an impact on society. It has affected almost all sectors of activity, including education, especially in academia. This crisis required certain measures to continue classes. These include the mobilisation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in higher education, which already exist in Ivory Coast (virtual university) and are planned at the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University, but are non-existent in other universities. This crisis involved a "rapid change of circumstances, most countries,

institutions, teachers, families and students had little time to prepare and no time to plan comprehensive measures to continue education 'differently' after the closure of schools". (ELearning Africa, 2020 p. 22). Among the adaptation measures, ELearning Africa (2020) notes that:

*"At the university and higher education institutions, institutions were able to decide on teaching continuity measures and many of these institutions already had virtual learning environments which, in principle, allowed them to continue teaching with slight interruptions. In practice, the situation was not so simple. In other cases, institutions mainly offered their students synchronous video-conferencing courses, via Zoom or similar platforms. Not all students were able to access these courses"* (ELearning Africa, 2020, p. 23).

These realities are also observed in the UPGC, where students and teachers have been trained in ICT to manage classes during this crisis. However, as the author points out, the practice poses certain difficulties. At UPGC, it is difficult for some students to access courses due to the lack of internet connections. To this effect, Djede and Adon speak of 'serious violations of ethical principles in the teaching provided under the pretext of the occurrence of COVID-19' (Djede and Adon, 2021 p81), linked according to them to the absence of certain amenities such as Internet connection in public universities. They also show that the preoccupation of these universities is the time limit given to them, rather than the quality of teaching and training, because for them, the teachers give courses with an anti-pedagogical celerity (Djede and Adon, 2021 p81).

Beyond these measures at the structural level, it is also necessary to note modifications and rearrangements in the evaluation procedures which are actualised at the social level, namely the limitation of social relations between teachers and pupils, caused by the measure of social distancing.

Moreover, the physical relationship between these actors contributes to the enthusiasm and improvement of the work, especially for students who move without transition from the teacher-teacher relationship to a relationship of social distancing.

## **5- Conclusion:**

This study aimed to analyse the impact of Covid-19 in university training and learning, particularly at the Peleforo GON COULIBALY University (UPGC). To do this, she mobilised a qualitative study using an interview guide. According to the rational choice sampling, 63 students and 8 members of the different examination commissions, i.e. 71 people in total, were mobilised.

The results showed an impact on the students' training linked to Covid-19 and its corollary, the duration of social distancing. This state of affairs manufactured the modification of the evaluation procedures and the training of the lectures. In terms of evaluation procedures, it should be noted that examinations have been postponed or cancelled in some departments and in others replaced by group exercises or individual homework. In addition, NICTs have been introduced to communicate and acquire knowledge, which is not without consequences for students and teachers.

In view of this fact, it is necessary to note the impact of covid-19 on the learning time of students and the quality of the knowledge received during this health crisis.

It seems essential to further strengthen the capacities of teachers and students to improve the quality of learning at Peleforo Gon Coulibaly University. This should include training in e-learning techniques and a communication strategy that includes an operational communication plan that integrates risk and impact data into education management and information systems, and facilitates the development and implementation of flexible educational policies and strategies in the event of a crisis, including disaster preparedness plans.

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