

## Secondary school teachers' perception of reopening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria

Veronica Folasade T. Babajide, Patricia Agnes O Etejere & Omotayo Adewale Awodiji

University of Lagos, Lagos, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, UNICAF University, Larnaca, Cyprus

### Abstract

The global outbreak of COVID-19 disease and its devastating consequences have been issues of great concern which led to the closure of schools. The safe re-opening of schools became more worrisome due to how the prevention and spread of the virus will be curtailed in the school system. Therefore, this study investigated secondary school teachers' perceptions of the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The study adopted an ex-post facto type of survey research design. The unknown population sample size calculator was adopted to arrive at estimated 385 participants. Snowball sampling technique through virtual and face-to-face means was used to select 310 respondents. A validated structured researcher-designed instrument, 'Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of Re-opening of Schools Questionnaire' (SSTPRSQ) was used to collect the data online and physically. The reliability co-efficient value ( $r$ ) of SSTPRSQ was 0.86 using Ordinal Alpha. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to provide answers to the research questions and while inferential techniques were used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance respectively. Results showed that perception of secondary school teachers is high. Appropriate conclusion and recommendations were drawn and made respectively based on the findings of the study.

**Key words:** *Perceptions, secondary school teachers, COVID -19 pandemic, re-opening of schools, coronavirus disease*

### Introduction

Education is regarded as an instrument formational development (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 2004). The role of education in the development of man and his society cannot be over-emphasized because it provides social security and economic development for a nation (Chakraborty, et.al. 2018; Yekini, 2013). Education gives a basis for the development upon which the entire national economic and society well-being is laid and imperative to increasing economic efficiency, social consistency and national security (Ozturk, 2001). Education, skills, and knowledge acquisition are imperative determinants of an individual and a nation's efficiency (Ozturk, 2001). No nation has attained constant development, economic wise, without considerable and constant investment in education. Past studies have established quality and impactful returns to various types of education and training such as basic education, secondary education and higher education (Ozturk, 2001; Awodiji & Ijaiya, 2019; Malan,

2020).

In recent times, some parts of the world have witnessed so many health crises, among which are SARS, Ebola and very recently, the corona virus disease (also known as COVID-19) which broke out in China in the late 2019. By the end of 2019 and early 2020, the corona virus disease had invaded many countries including Nigeria.

Nigeria had her first blow of the COVID-19 attack on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 when it was discovered that an Italian who had just arrived the country was already infected by the disease. COVID-19 became a pandemic and its manifestations and symptoms were as serious as its impact. Within a short time, it has affected almost every aspect of human endeavour. All over the world, many people have died from the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 while many more people have tested positive to the virus and are undergoing treatment in clearly designated isolation centres.

The education sector is one of the sectors badly hit by the devastating effects of the virus. In an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, many schools were shut down all over the world. Many institutions of learning (secondary schools inclusive) in Nigeria and globally suspended their classroom teaching due to the appearance of novel coronavirus pandemic outbreak. Also, Ijaiya (2020) observed that challenges of Nigerian education are worrisome before the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Thus, the pandemic has now made it more threatened.

In Nigeria, all schools were asked to close in the third week of March, 2020. Schools remained closed for a period of more than six months as all businesses were on lockdown due to restriction of movement within the country. During the time, the Federal Government, through the federal Ministry of health and other allied agencies monitored the situation in the country.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) presented certain guidelines for all citizens to stay healthy and the common precautions to be followed are: Frequent washing of hands, maintaining physical/social distance, coughing/sneezing into the elbow (or into a disposable tissue paper), refraining from hugging/embracing or shaking hands (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). In addition to these COVID-19 protocols, doctors also advise that citizens should eat well and maintain a desirable level of immunity against the disease. The pandemic raged in Nigeria for six months. During this period, the Presidential Task Force (PTF) for COVID-19 pandemic and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) observed that the public displayed a poor perception of the disease. Many people doubted the existence of the virus in Nigeria and thus, there was an equally low compliance or adherence to the COVID-19 protocols/guidelines for prevention against the spread of the disease (Plan International, 2020). As time went on, the subsequent decline in the total number of cases with respect to new infections, the treated and the number of deaths also worsened the low compliance of Nigerian citizens.

However, this is not to say that Nigeria was free from the pandemic. Nevertheless, the Federal Government felt that schools could reopen and adhere to COVID-19 protocols as much as possible. This implies that learners, teachers, parents, school administrators and staff would all be responsible for the safety of persons in the school system during the pandemic (Gokulades & Baby Sam, 2020). Although each of the categories of stakeholders mentioned has specific roles in ensuring the safety of learners in the COVID-19 pandemic era, it is believed that the role of the school teacher is the most critical because the teacher is one of the most important factors in the school system. He is the closest human resource to the learner. It is therefore necessary to investigate the perception of the teacher towards the re-opening of secondary schools.

Qiong (2017) defines perception as the process of attaining awareness or understanding of (sensory) information. To a lay man, perception has to do with the way one thinks about something and the idea of what it is like or the natural ability to understand or notice things quickly. It could also refer to the way that one notices things with one's senses of sight, hearing, etcetera. Our perceptual outcomes are therefore the result of the physical and psychological dimensions of perception. However, it is people's values, attitudes or motives (the psychological dimension) rather than their sensory organs (the physical dimension) that determine what will arouse people's attention (Qiong, 2017).

### **Statement of the problem**

Globally, the debilitating impact of COVID-19 disease on daily activities and the increase in the number of cases led to a total lockdown in many countries, with many facts of life being heavily affected. After several months, when the situation abated, lockdowns were eased and the Nigerian government started looking at the possibility of safe re-opening of schools, businesses and office operations.

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders in the school system (namely learners, teachers, parents and school administrators) in the school

system to ensure total compliance with the WHO protocols guiding the prevention and spread of the corona virus disease. While parents are supposed to provide the nose masks for their children and wards, school administrators are to ensure the provision of safe infrastructure and facilities in the school. On the other hand, teachers as well as school administrators are to monitor the compliance level of members of the school community.

Apart from the fact that teachers are the largest set of human resources in the school system, they are also one of the most important factors to reckon with (Mupa, & Chinooneka, 2015; Tehseen, & Hadi, 2015). In addition to their primary duties in the school system, they are now expected to assist in the prevention of the spread and transmission of the corona virus when school re-opens. It is therefore imperative to find out what secondary school teachers feel about the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, there is the need to investigate their perception of the re-opening of schools in terms of their attitude towards school re-opening, their awareness of COVID-19 protocols and their experience with government in terms of unfulfilled promises in the area of teachers' welfare. In other words, they felt that government may not put their interest into consideration in the provision of necessary protective measures. Hence, teachers may not support the opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers' motivation towards school re-opening and teachers' emotions are also sub-variables to be examined under teachers' perception.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study investigated secondary school teachers' perception of re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

1. identify the general perceptions of secondary school teachers on the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic.
2. determine the extent to which gender will cause a difference in secondary school teachers' perception of re-opening of schools in the face of

COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the general perceptions level of secondary school teachers on the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria?
2. To what extent will gender cause a difference in secondary school teachers' perception of re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance in the study:

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Secondary school teachers' gender will not cause a significant difference in their perceptions of reopening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical framework**

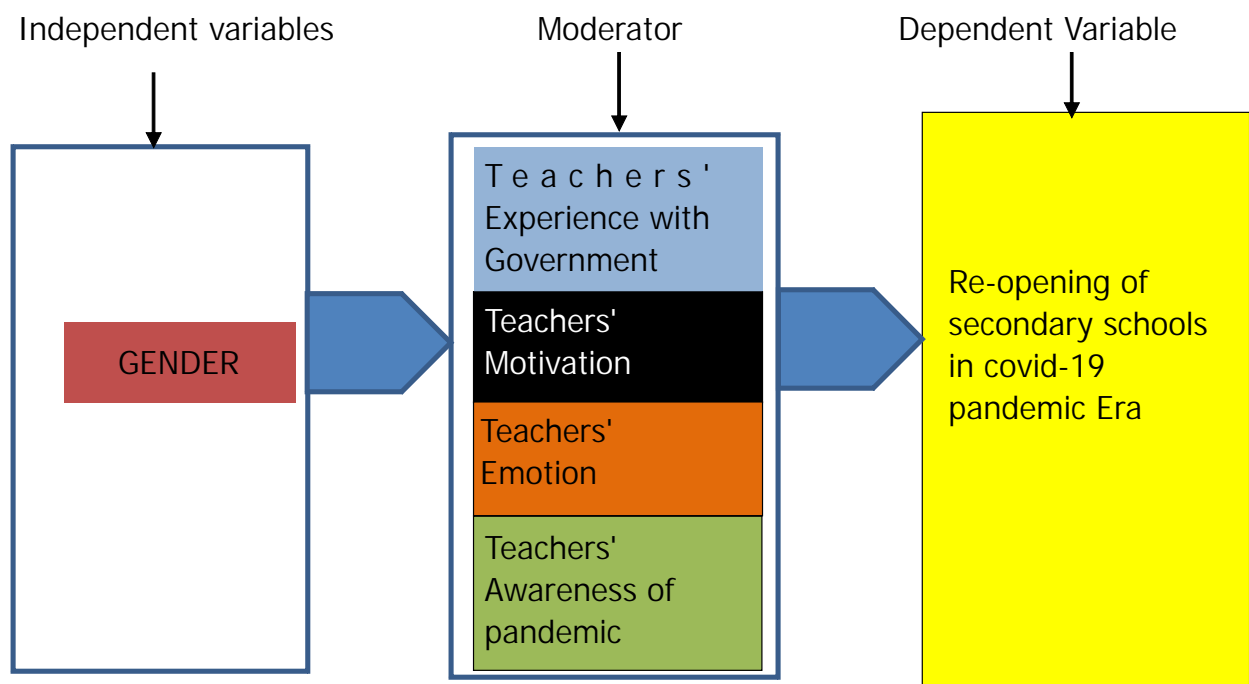
This study is hinged on the theories of perception as propounded by Gibson and Gregory (Demuth, 2013). Gibson's theory of direct perception is one of the bottom-up theories in the study of perception. According to Gibson, people may acquire all the essential information about objects through a detailed analysis of data gathered from the environment (Demuth, 2013). Gibson believed that a person's perception is based on the amount of information available to the sensory inputs. These sensory inputs are further processed through an explanation of the available information, adding that objects are viewed directly in the way they originated.

On the other hand, there is the top-down indirect perception theories, among which is Gregory who believed that perception involves the use of higher cognitive functions. Here, there is an interaction between the stimulus and the expectations, experiences and knowledge of the person. This view was also reported in an earlier study by Kean in Demuth (2013) when the former observed that perception is influenced by a wide range of individual factors.

As a proponent of the constructivist theories of perception (which put forward the idea of top-down processing of information), Gregory believed that an object needs contents and ideas more than a great amount of sensory information. In other words, context,

motivation, experience, attitudes and expectations influence what we observe or perceive. In this research, teachers' perception of the reopening of schools was examined in the light of their awareness, experience, attitude, motivation and emotion.

## Conceptual Framework



**Fig.1:** Perception of secondary school teachers towards reopening of schools in Covid -19 pandemic era

**Source:** Babajide, Etejere &Awodiji,2020

Fig1 showed the variables involved in this study namely: One independent variable (gender), moderator variables (Teachers' experience with Government, Motivation, Emotion and Awareness) and Dependent variable (Re-Opening of Schools). Gender is a categorical and nominal scale which makes it an independent variable in the re-opening of secondary schools in a COVID -19 pandemic era.

Relationship of the variables is as follows:

The experience of male/female teacher on how government in each state has been faithful to their promises in dealing with teachers in the past will cause a difference in his/her perception of re-opening of secondary school in the era of

COVID-19 in such a state. If the government had been faithful, the teachers will believe that government will put all safety amenities in place. Hence, teachers will have positive perception towards the reopening of secondary schools and vice versa.

Motivation of male and female secondary school teachers in their various states through different means will lead to positive perceptions towards the re-opening of secondary schools in the era of COVID -19 pandemic and lack of motivation will lead to negative perceptions on the parts of the teachers.

Teachers' emotion could influence teachers' perceptions of re-opening of schools. Bad

emotion as a result of some tragedies or bad happenings will lead to negative perception while good emotion will lead to positive perceptions.

Teachers' awareness of COVID-19 protocol will make them to have positive perception because they will be sure of their safety and the safety of the students if secondary schools re-open.

### **The Concept of Perception**

Generally, perception has to do with the way in which a person thinks or views ideas, opinions, situations and circumstances in such a way that such thoughts or views shape his behavior, attitude or reactions. Lumen (n.d.) sees perception as the way in which information from the senses are arranged, assigned meanings and consciously experienced. This involves a bottom-up and a top-down processing. When perception arises only as a result of input from the senses, it can be described as bottom-up processing. On the other hand, a top-down processing of information refers to the extent to which these sensations are influenced by our knowledge, our experiences and our thoughts.

Lewis (2020) feels that when we talk about perception, the implication is that there is an experienced person or perceiver and that an object, a person, a situation or a relationship is being perceived. It was added that other fundamental elements such as the context in which the object, events or persons are perceived as well as the process of perception (that is, starting from the point at which the stimulus [or stimuli] is felt by the senses to the point at which the perception is formed).

### **Gender and Perception**

The principle of individual difference cannot be over ruled in the approach to life experiences and situations. The individual perception of a situation or occurrences may be factor of many elements such as emotion, experience, gender, location among others. Abdullah, (2017) study showed that gender played a significant role in the high school students' perception of career choice. Gender perception is an important aspect of understanding workplace work performance and gender inequality (Tom, 2014). Perceptions of workplace discrimination may contribute to

the persistence of gender gaps in different areas of discipline (Miller, & Katz, 2018). Hence, gender could play a significant role in teachers' perception towards reopening of schools. Witthoft, (2007) submitted that perception vary across people or even within the same person at different times in which gender play a pivotal in perception to event or object

### **Experience**

Experience usually refers to an encounter or an occurrence that leaves an impression. According to Dewey, experience is based on the interaction between the human being and the world whereby some ideas or situations are conceived, felt and enlivened (Hohr, 2012). With respect to Nigerian education, Inegbedion (2010) observed that successive administrations in Nigeria have paid lip service to the welfare of teachers. As a result of this, teachers' experiences with regard to the unfulfillment of government policies in the past may affect their perception towards the reopening of schools in the pandemic era in Nigeria. Witthoft, (2007) expressed that experience will cause shape or change in perception. Experience can play a role in determining perception (Ward & Simner, 2003). Hence, the teachers experience with government fulfilling promises over time can influence their perception of reopening schools.

### **Motivation**

Motivation can be referred to as a means of creating a high level of zeal to achieve organisational objectives by satisfying the individual needs of the employees (Haques, et al, 2014). Having recognised the fact that teachers are "the head and heart" of the educational system, Thomas (2020) feels that governments can take steps to maintain and protect the teaching force through the continuous payment of salaries. He added that governments should also ensure that health and safety measures are upgraded, as well as guidance on issues like handwashing and health education. Research has shown that teachers are poorly motivated and are dissatisfied with their living and working conditions (Adelabu 2005). Adelabu added that some of the reasons attributed to this low level of motivation for teachers are low wages, low status, high

teacher-pupil ratio, inadequate fringe benefits, poor work environment and irregular payment of salaries.

### **Emotion**

Emotion can be referred to as a strong feeling arising from one's circumstances, mood or relationship with others. In other words, it has to do with the mood or inner state of the mind of a person. According to Cabanac (2002), emotion is usually defined with reference to a list of feelings such as anger, disgust, fear, joy and surprise. He added that these emotions can be considered as mental objects that react to a stimulus. In this study, COVID-19 virus is the stimulus and the teachers' reaction or response to the virus may be that of fear, disgust and so on. These responses or reactions may thus influence their general perception of the reopening of schools.

### **Awareness**

Awareness denotes a situation where one is conscious of one's environment, place, circumstance, and people. Gafoor (2012) sees awareness as the state of knowing, realizing or having an interest in something. In this study, it is apparent that all citizens of Nigeria, including teachers are aware of the onset of the deadly attack of the corona virus disease (also known as COVID-19) and the fact that Nigerian schools were closed down in March 2020 to prevent the spread of the disease (Nigerian Education in Emergencies Working Group, 2020). Nigerian teachers were also notified of the reopening of schools nationwide in October, 2020 and the guidelines and protocols that need to be adhered to for protection (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). In other words, teachers are aware of the protocols and all the necessary preventive measures against the spread and this awareness may or may not influence their perception of the reopening of secondary schools in Nigeria during the pandemic.

### **Methodology**

The design adopted for this study is ex-post facto of survey type. This was done since the study explored the perception of the teachers on the re-opening of schools based on their experiences. Structured questionnaire was used

to collect data via online and face-to-face approaches. As a result of unavailability of either actual or estimated data on secondary school teachers in Nigeria and the COVID-19 lockdown as at the time of this research was carried out, unknown population sample size calculator was adopted ( $n = Z^2 Pq / e^2$ ) where  $n$  = sample size,  $Z$  = z table at 95% confidence level of 1.96,  $e^2$  = margin error at 0.05,  $p$  = maximum variability of the population at 50%,  $q = 1 - P = 0.5$  (Gert, 2013) with estimated sample of 385 participants. Therefore, snowball sample technique was used to arrive at 310 participants considering the nature of the study and the teachers were scattered all over Nigeria.

The instrument used was developed by the researchers. Face and content validity was done by experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation while their observations were noted. Pilot study was carried out on 102 cases. The data obtained were subjected to exploratory factor analysis in order to establish the validity of the study using R Studio software. Out of the 49 items raised, only 24 items were loaded under four factors. Hence, the remaining 25 items that were not loaded were removed from the final instrument used for data collection. Furthermore, Ordinal Alpha was used to confirm the internal consistency of the scale with the result  $r = 0.86$  coefficient which is found reliable (Nunnally, 1978; Hair, et al., 2012; Drost, n.d.). Due to the COVID-19 second wave incidence in Nigeria, online Google survey was used to reach out to willing participants via WhatsApp, Telegram and E-mail. To support this, paper questionnaire was also adopted in areas where schools have resumed and teachers are accessible. A total of 310 participants were used. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to provide answers to the research questions. The T-test analysis was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

## Results and Interpretations

The results are presented as follows in line with the stated research questions and hypotheses.

**Table 1:**

Descriptive Statistics on General Perceptions (Awareness, Attitude, Experience, Motivation and Emotion) of Secondary School Teachers' on the Re-Opening of Schools in the Face of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
PERCEPTION	310	24	120	87.97	.697
AWARENESS	310	3	15	11.63	.154
EXPERIENCE	310	4	20	14.96	.158
MOTIVATION	310	4	20	14.66	.187
EMOTION	310	9	45	31.97	.297

Table 1 shows the descriptive estimate of secondary school teachers' perceptions in terms of their awareness, experience, motivation and emotion. The result reveals that the estimated mean for general perception is  $(24+120)/2 = 72.00$ , while the calculated mean is 87.97. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. Thus, the general perception of secondary school teachers on the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is favourable and high.

Moreover, considering the extent of their perception in terms of awareness of COVID-19 protocol, the estimated mean is  $(3+15)/2 = 9.00$  and the calculated mean is 11.63. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. This implies that the level to which secondary school teachers' awareness of COVID-19 protocol could cause a difference in the perceptions of re-opening of schools in the face of COVID – 19 pandemic is high.

Furthermore, the estimated mean for their attitude is  $(4+20)/2 = 12.00$  and the calculated mean is 14.75. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. It means that the extent to which secondary school teachers' attitude will cause a difference in their perception of re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is high.

It was also revealed based on teachers' experience with government that the estimated

mean is  $(4+20)/2 = 12.00$ , and the calculated mean is 14.96. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. This shows that the extent at which secondary school teachers' experience in dealing with government caused a difference in their perception of re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is high.

In the same vein, the estimated mean of teachers' motivation is  $(4+20)/2 = 12.00$  whereas, the calculated mean is 14.66. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. Thus, the extent at which secondary school teachers' motivation will cause a difference in their perception of re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is high.

Lastly, the estimated mean of teachers' emotion towards re-opening of schools is  $(9+45)/2 = 27.00$  meanwhile, the calculated mean is 31.37. The calculated mean is greater than the estimated mean. By implication, the extent at which secondary school teachers' emotion will cause a difference in their perception of re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is high.

### Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance in the study:

**Table 5:**  
**Independent sampled T - test on the Difference between the Male and Female Teachers' Perception of Re-opening Schools in the Face of COVID-19 Pandemic**

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig.
Perception	Male	141	85.62	12.558	1.058	-3.132	308	.002
	Female	169	89.94	11.710	.901			

Table 5 shows that the mean and standard deviation of male and female teachers' perception are 85.62, 89.94 and 12.558, 11.710 respectively with a t-value of 3.132 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a significant difference in the male and female secondary school teachers' perception on re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Hence, hypothesis was rejected.

### Discussion of Findings

The researchers of this study estimated the general perceptions of secondary school teachers on the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The result indicates that the general perception of the teachers across board is high. This implies that the general perception of secondary school teachers on the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is favourable and high. That is, teachers are interested and ready for the reopening of schools. This might have been caused by their long time stay back at home that has denied them the social interaction which is very important to their survival. Also, teachers, like other parents would have been willing to have their wards back in school to secure the future for these children. In the course of data collection, it was observed that teachers are personally ready to get the school running just like health workers in their clinic to rescue lives.

Furthermore, the extent at which the secondary school teachers' awareness of COVID-19 protocol could cause a difference in their perceptions of re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic was found to be high and significant. Hence, since their general perception was high, awareness of the COVID-19 protocol which was also high could have

informed their readiness for re-opening of schools, meaning they might have been fully educated on how to prevent the spread of the virus among school children. Researcher's experience during visitation to a school in Ibadan reveals that principals and teachers have been trained on protocol like social distancing, bringing out of students into sunlight during the period of 11.am for some minutes among others. In like manner, the extent at which secondary school teachers' experience, motivation and emotion could cause a significant difference in their perception of re-opening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is high. Although, the mean values of these factors are high and significant, teachers, perception (experience, motivation and emotion) toward the re-opening of school during second waves of COVID-19 could have been informed by the personal experience of their love ones who have suffered isolation or death. According to Cherry (2020), teachers' attitude which is emotion may be positive or negative and even be uncertain. Ziauddeen et al., (2020) submitted that teachers may express some fear or anxiety concerning the risk of reopening schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic era which might have affected their perception. This is in line with the findings of Kurtz and Bushweller (2020) in UK who reported that about a quarter of teachers say they would not return to their physical classroom if they reopen without social distancing measures. Kurtz and Bushweller, (2020) reported that teachers confessed that they are less effective when working from home, but the vast majority will return even if virtual learning continues in the Fall. That said, perceptions do differ by role, with 82 percent of teachers versus 64 percent of school leaders saying that they are more effective in offices/schools. This is in line with Qiong, (2017) submission that people's values,

experience or motives which are psychological rather than their sensory organs which are physical determine what will induce people's attention. Kurtz & Bushweller, (2020) in partnership with Teach for America reported that most teachers (80 percent) predict that the vast majority of their colleagues (more than 80 percent) will return to the classroom even if schools remain online or becomes a hybrid of in-person and online learning. Ijaiya (2020) suggested that before school resumption, teachers should receive thorough orientation/training on COVID-19 to reduce their emotions or fears and to take precautions seriously as well as information on what to do if they suspect a case.

Lastly, a significant difference was found in the perception of male and female teachers towards the re-opening of schools in the face of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The perception was in the favour of female teachers because their mean value is greater than their male counterparts. This could have been informed by the nature of women as mothers and their fears of consequence of going back to school in the face of COVID-19. Male teachers may be indifferent to the reopening of school based on their emotional stability which could have served as basis for their support for re-opening of schools.

### Conclusion

The study has found that secondary school teachers' perception of reopening of schools in the face of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is high. Also, a significant difference was obtained in the perception of male and female teachers with female teachers having high perception compared to their respective male teachers.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the findings of the study.

1. Teachers' emotion should be given a high priority while considering teachers' perception of re-opening of schools, followed by teacher' motivation, next is teacher' experience followed by awareness.
2. Teachers gender should also be considered and factored into the study while considering teachers' perception since there are variations in the opinion of male and female teachers.

3. Teachers' emotion, motivation, experience, and awareness as well as other factors not considered in this study should be taken into consideration while concerning teachers' perception generally and specifically, of re-opening of schools in the face of Covid-19 pandemic.

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