

## SEVEN

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### **COVID-19 impact on China-Nigeria education and cultural exchanges**

#### **Abstract**

The rapid development and modernization of China today have pushed it into the realm of an economic global power that is facilitating investment in many countries of the world including Nigeria. Nigeria, a resource-endowed country has become the largest trading partner for China, making them bedfellows with their different agendas and programs. China's investment in Nigeria goes beyond resources, it is well exhibited by inviting Nigerian students to learn and imbibe Chinese education and knowledge first-hand. The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Wuhan, China posed a threat to the cultural and educational exchange programmes that exist between China and Nigeria. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to identify how the Coronavirus epidemic has affected or influenced the cultural and educational exchange programmes between China and Nigeria. Data for this paper were obtained using the historical descriptive method and content analysis was used to study this work. Certain factors such as diplomacy, aid, soft-power, skill transfer, acquisition and development were selected for study in this work. This research work adopts the Social Exchange Theory as the framework to comprehend this study and ascertains that certain states make calculations to gain more benefits from their actions. It argues that Chinese investment in the Nigerian educational sector goes beyond any form of sympathy or empathy but it hinges on the platform of certain rewards, values, gains, benefits, human learning, social progress and international cooperation. It discerns that a good educational background can help Nigerians to create wealth and employment opportunities while eliminating poverty and crime

rates. Thus, China-Nigerian educational exchanges have the full prospects of a positive policy aimed at alleviating the challenges of Nigeria. This work concludes that Chinese investment in Nigeria education aims to bolster bilateral cooperation between the two countries while aiding China's show of its soft power in the continent.

**Key words:** Diplomacy, soft-power, skill transfer, Acquisition and Development.

*Impact du COVID-19 sur l'éducation et les échanges culturels entre la Chine et le Nigéria*

### **Résumé**

*Le développement rapide et la modernisation de la Chine aujourd'hui lui ont permis d'être parmi les puissances économiques mondiales. Ce qui a facilité les investissements dans de nombreux pays du monde, dont le Nigéria. Un pays doté de ressources est devenu le plus grand partenaire commercial de la Chine, ce qui fait d'eux des compagnons avec leurs différents agendas et programmes. L'investissement de la Chine au Nigéria va au-delà des ressources, cela se voit à travers l'invitation des étudiants nigériens à apprendre et à s'imprégner de l'éducation et des connaissances chinoises de première nécessité. L'épidémie de coronavirus (COVID-19) à Wuhan, en Chine, constitue une menace énorme pour les échanges culturels et éducatifs qui existent entre la Chine et le Nigéria. L'objectif de la présente communication est donc d'identifier comment l'épidémie de coronavirus a affecté ou influencé les échanges culturels et éducatifs entre la Chine et le Nigéria. Les données de cette recherche ont été obtenues par une méthode descriptive et historique. En outre, une analyse de contenu a été utilisée pour effectuer ce travail. Certains facteurs tels que la diplomatie, l'aide, le soft power, le transfert de compétences, l'acquisition et le développement ont été sélectionnés pour être étudiés*

*dans cette présente communication. Dans le cadre de cette recherche, nous avons adopté la théorie de l'échange social comme cadre théorique ce qui nous a permis de comprendre et de constater que certains États effectuent des calculs afin de tirer davantage de leurs actions. Elle soutient que l'investissement chinois dans le secteur éducatif nigérian va au-delà de toute forme de sympathie ou d'empathie, mais il repose sur la plateforme de certaines récompenses, valeurs, gains, avantages, apprentissage humain, progrès social et coopération internationale. Elle reconnaît qu'une bonne formation et des connaissances peuvent aider le Nigéria à créer de la richesse et des opportunités d'emploi tout en éliminant les taux de pauvreté et de criminalité. Ainsi, les échanges éducatifs sino-nigériens ont toutes les perspectives d'une politique positive visant à atténuer les défis du Nigéria. Ce travail conclut que l'investissement chinois dans l'éducation au Nigéria vise à renforcer la coopération bilatérale entre les deux pays tout en aidant la Chine à montrer sa puissance douce sur le continent.*

**Mots clés:** *diplomatie, soft-power, transfert de compétences, acquisition et développement*

## **Introduction**

The history of the China-Nigeria relationship dates back to February 10, 1971, and ever since then bilateral relations between the countries have soared greatly. China began offering scholarship to Nigerian students in 1993 and began cultural exchanges with the Nigerian workforce such as the military in 1980 and the navy in 1998 (Chinese Embassy, 2020). However, before this rosy relationship, Nigeria was one of the countries that were sceptical about communist China's influence in Africa. This was based on the fact that Nigeria was pro-Western, democratic and a conservative entity. Likewise, political events such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70) and the Cultural Revolution (1966- 76) further estranged the relationship between the two countries

(Ogunsanwo, 2008). However, with a pragmatic foreign policy, Nigeria and China formally recognized each other in 1971 and in 1972, Nigerian-Chinese Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreements were signed. The Nigerian head of state, Yakubu Gowon visited China in 1974 and met with Chairman Mao to formalize and strengthen the ties that had been forged already (Ogunbadejo, 1976).

While Nigerian engagement with China began in 1971, other African countries like Egypt began much earlier, historically as of 1956, Egyptian students were already going to China to study and ever since the number has been increasing dramatically. Tracing such antecedents, we can divide the history of African students in China into four periods. The first period can be traced to the 1956 to 1966 era when ideologies and philosophies were the drives for such engagement. The second era can be seen in the period of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA) construction era from 1968-1976 when expertise and exchange of skills was the motivation. The third era runs from 1970 to 1995 when China was trying to build its international relations, status and power in the global community. The fourth era can be seen from 1996 till date in which China-Africa Cooperation Forum was held and fostering education through bilateral cooperation and support for African countries was the objective of such engagements (China Africa Education Cooperation Group, 2005).

The first period of contact with African students from the year 1956 to 1966 introduced delegates from Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Madagascar and French Africa-speaking countries that attended the International Conference of Defence of Youth Rights held in Geneva. This platform enabled students to establish links at an early stage of China-Africa relations. Prior to the formalization of bilateral ties between China and Egypt on May 30, 1956, these two countries had already built cultural ties and cooperation on April 15, 1956. The cultural exchange between China and Egypt facilitated the exchange of students between the

two countries - four Egyptians travelled to China for an exchange programme in 1956. Three of them learnt Chinese painting under the tutelage of a Chinese famous artist called Prof. Li Keran at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in China. After their training, these Egyptians became renowned artists in the country thereby transmitting and reflecting their knowledge from China (Li & Liu, 2013).

During the second era, many African countries had gained their independence from their erstwhile colonial masters and as such China built educational cooperation with them. We had countries like Cameroon, Kenya, Uganda and Malawi sending students to China based on different agreements and cooperation. It was also the era of brotherly friendship and the building of ties was crucial at this time, most especially with the construction of the TANZARA. Thus, we had railway technology trainees coming to China for training since it was the Chinese that assisted to build a magnanimous project in South Africa which impacted the lives of the citizenry. The third era was facilitated by Chairman Mao's theory of the three worlds in 1974 when he met with the then Zambian President, Kaunda. A lot of African students were offered scholarships to China to study courses related to public transportation, locomotive engineering, vehicle engineering, communications and finance disciplines (Sautman, 1994). The fourth era which began in 1996 was also facilitated by the visit of President Jiang Zemin of China to six African countries - Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Mali, Namibia and Zimbabwe. During his visit, he put forward five proposals for China and Africa to build a long-time stable and all-round cooperation for the 21st century based on the principles of sincere friendship, equality, solidarity, cooperation, common development and future. The visit of the then Chinese premier increased African students' sojourn to China for cultural and educational exchange programs (Gong, 2014). From then till present, different African countries have had the opportunity to send students to China under one form of cooperation or agreement, while there might be many factors

mitigating against such engagement, the outbreak of the current COVID-19 poses a huge threat to such relationship.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to identify how the COVID-19 epidemic has affected or influenced the cultural and educational exchanges between China and Nigeria. Specifically, it aims to discuss how the current outbreak of the virus has influenced the lives of people positively or negatively. It intends to determine the implication for the bilateral relationship between China and Africa and ascertain if there will be any repercussions or consequences from the interplay.

### COVID- 19 Outbreak in China

COVID-19, a genus of the Coronaviridae family are enveloped viruses with a large plus-strand RNA genome. The genomic RNA is 27-32kb in size, capped and polyadenylated. Coronaviruses have been identified in mice, rats, chickens, turkeys, swine, dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, cattle and humans (Sawicki, & Sawicki, 1995). The outbreaks of infectious diseases have continued to threaten and challenge the very existence of human life. There have been many disease outbreaks such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and coronavirus (SARS-CoV) which emerged seventeen years ago. In December 2019, a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) emerged through cross-species barriers and infected humans through person-to-person transfer thereby leading to a pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan, China. Coronavirus disease was reported to have symptoms similar to influenza causing severe lung injuries and multi-organ failure which eventually results in death, especially in older patients (Guan et al., 2020). Thus, on December 31st 2019, Chinese authorities in Wuhan announced a cluster of pneumonia cases of aetiology, most of which included patients who reported exposure to Wuhan's Huanan Seafood wholesale market. Consequently, on February 10, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) named the disease, caused by the new coronavirus, COVID-19. Accordingly, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic

because of the manner in which verified cases of it were revolving rapidly and spreading greatly (WHO, 2020).

COVID-19 has been found to have higher levels of transmissibility and pandemic risk than SARS-CoV. The effective reproduction number of COVID-19 (2.9) is estimated to be higher than the reported effective reproduction number of SARS (1.77) at its early stage. Studies of COVID-19 have estimated the basic reproduction range from 2.6 to 4.71. Its average incubation was estimated to range from two to eleven days. Chinese health authorities have described three main transmission routes for COVID-19 infections; they are droplet transmission, contact transmission and aerosol transmission. Droplet transmission was reported to occur when respiratory droplet produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes are ingested or inhaled by people nearby in close proximity. Contact transmission may occur when a subject touches a surface or object contaminated with the virus and subsequently touches their mouth, nose or eyes. Aerosol transmission may occur when respiratory droplets mix into the air, forming aerosols and may cause infection when a high dose of aerosols is inhaled into the lungs in a relatively close environment (Wei & Ren, 2019).

To stop the spread of the virus, prevention and control strategies were reported at three levels of government in China: the national level, case-related population level, and the general population level. At the national level, the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China issued the No.1 announcement on January 20th, 2020, which officially included COVID-19 into the management of Class B legal infectious diseases and allowed for Class A infectious disease prevention and control measures to be implemented. Under this policy, medical institutes can adopt isolation treatment and observation protocols to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19. On January 22, 2020, the National Health Commission published national guidelines for the prevention and control of COVID-19 for medical institutes to

prevent nosocomial infection. China, therefore, issued protocols for rapid prevention and control measures in order to contain the spread of the epidemic through big isolation and disinfection policy. Public health measures were introduced to prevent or slow down the transmission of COVID-19. These included case isolation, identification and follow-up of contacts, environmental disinfection and use of personal protective equipment (National Health Commission of People's Republic of China, 2020).

One inherent setback in tackling COVID-19 is that there is no antiviral vaccine discovered for its prevention, the best prevention was to avoid being exposed to the virus. Airborne precautions and other protective measures were adopted in mainland China, it included the use of face masks, covering coughs and sneezing with tissues that are then safely disposed of, use of a flexed elbow to cover the cough or sneeze, regular hand washing with soap or disinfection with hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol, avoidance of contact with infected people and maintaining an appropriate distance as much as possible and refrain from touching the eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands (WHO, 2020).

The outbreak of COVID-19 on a global scale in the world today has threatened the existence of humanity; it has defined our lifestyles and reshaped our mode of thinking and social interactions. A lot of lives have been lost and COVID-19 casualties continue to increase on a daily basis. In Nigeria, the government has banned all forms of large gatherings and social distancing has been encouraged nationwide. Schools, churches, bars and mosques were shut down while all forms of social engagements like parties, weddings and housewarmings were restricted to a limited number of participants. Hygienic modalities were also prescribed for our lives such as washing our hands with sanitizers, maintaining social distance and using masks when outdoors. Furthermore, we have seen a lot of sensitization by the



Nigerian government through its health agencies and institutions such as the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

### **Literature Review**

Scholars, government officials and policy documents have documented and given many reasons for China-Nigeria cultural and educational exchanges. Scholars have posited many reasons for China in Nigeria such as its soft power policy, improvement of bilateral relations, internationalization and human resource development. Some of these notions will be examined in this part of the research work. Chinese policy documents over the years have stressed the importance of China-Africa cultural and educational exchanges. Succinctly, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (2006, 2009 and 2012) all stated firmly the Chinese government's action plan on these exchanges. This state policy document has been a core factor that has influenced China's educational exchanges in Nigeria.

Chinese soft power approach is seen when the Asian giant committed to improving education, cultural exchanges and infrastructure of many African countries as this is propelled by its ever-extending economic capabilities and the emergence of China as a new global power. Beijing has devoted tremendous financial resources to making friends and winning hearts among African governments. Nigeria is important to China for many reasons such as the rich natural resources and energy capabilities. China's diplomatic ideologies in Nigeria and many African countries portray China as a responsible global power. It defines a security concept of China's peaceful rise, development and harmonious world policy. China also needs a strong ally and a supporter at key moments in the international community, these it has found in Nigeria (Deng, 2008). These are some of the driving force for Chinese massive investments in Nigeria which has been discussed and exhibited in the FOCAC meetings held in China. This was a platform to engage Nigeria and transport its ideologies to many African countries as discussed below:

First, in 2006, a government document stated that it would assist African countries to set up 100 rural schools in the next three years, and increase the number of Chinese government scholarships to African students from the current 2,000 per year to 4,000 per year by 2009, provide annual training for a number of educational officials as well as heads of universities, primary, secondary and vocational schools in Africa and establish Confucius institutes in African countries to meet their needs in the teaching of Chinese language and encourage the teaching of African languages in relevant Chinese universities and colleges (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation: 2006). In Nigeria, the first Confucius Institute was established at Nnamdi Azikwe University in 2007 and then at the University of Lagos, Akoka in 2008. The aim of the Confucius Institute is to develop the teaching of the Chinese language and promote educational and cultural exchange between China and its host country (Hanban, 2020).

Then in 2009, China established the African Human Resources Development Fund (AHRDF) which has facilitated 300 training programs. Nigerians from the railway, engineering and oil and gas industries have been to China to be trained in their specialized fields of work (NCDMB, 2020). Likewise, African professionals were trained in the fields of diplomacy, economic management, national defence, agriculture, medicine and health, education, transportation, technology and culture. Under this framework also, China sent more than 500 specialists and teachers to Nigeria for training. Furthermore, China donated money to the construction of the African Capacity Foundation which was established by International Monetary Fund (IMF) and started 20 technological seminars under the Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries projects which were specially designed for African Students (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2006). All these initiatives are aimed at improving diplomatic relations and engagements through their friendly intentions and promoting the interests of developing nations.

Likewise, in 2012, a government document stated that both China and Africa would improve their cooperation with higher quality and in more diverse forms. The 20+20 Cooperation Plan for Chinese and African institutions of higher education was initiated. The plan focused on improving research through regional and country studies and supporting the establishment of China research centres. China also pledged US\$ 2 million annually under the framework of the UNESCO trust fund to support education development programs in Africa. It also stated that it would help to build educational and training facilities and provide more opportunities for short, medium and long-term training and scholarships (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, 2015).

Furthermore, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation's (FOCAC) meeting laid the foundation for events which shaped the strategic partnership between China and Africa, especially in the areas of cultural exchanges, intercultural learning, short-term and long-term programs. Shortly after the FOCAC meeting, China signed annual plans for the implementation of cultural agreements with 15 African countries to set up Chinese Cultural Centres to expedite the learning of Chinese culture. Nigeria also signed strategic partnership deals with China in the areas of agriculture, water conservancy, telecommunication, railway, manufacturing and tourism. China and Africa held –Culture in Focus activities through the exchanges of Chinese artists and African artists. Programs such as the 2008 African Culture in Focus and the 2009 Chinese culture in Focus all promoted the cultural exchanges between China and African countries (Taylor, 2011).

In addition, China launched the African Cultural Visitors Program which laid the framework for the visitation of 61 African cultural officials to deliberate and engages in the Round-table Conference on Cultural Policy, African Guest Painters Visit China Project and the Museum Professionals on Work Replacement and Research. To further boost cultural exchanges, the Chinese-African Peoples

Friendship Association launched the monthly magazine called Africa. This magazine served as a new resource for the Chinese people to learn about African culture, traditions, values, philosophy, economy and lifestyle. To ensure mutual learning, increase cultural exchanges and strengthen the bond between the two continents, China and Africa launched a series of projects such as the Youth Exchange Program, China-Africa Youth Festival, All-China Women's Federation Forum, FOCAC- Women's Forum and the Forum of China-African Cooperation- Women's Forum Declaration 2009. These projects ensured people-to- people exchange between China and African countries, and provided volunteers to offer services, training, aid and discourses which centred on the challenges China and Africa faced with the aim of expediting development. They also deliberated global issues such as women participation, the Millennium Development Goals, the financial crisis and gender equality. Scholars of international relations have argued that cultural exchanges with China were a policy that aimed to present a positive image of China, boost its international public opinion and reveal China's cultural achievements (Alden, & Large, 2019).

Niu (2013) asserted that by 2009, China was offering Africa a lot of short-term training courses under the human resources training projects. The courses engaged African government officials from different African countries in information exchange and experience training with the central aim of promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. The short-term training courses also involved professional technicians with the objective of improving their practical skills, technicians from agro- meteorology; farming, horticultural production and marine organism culture were engaged in this training program. The program's main objective was to improve the quality and the effectiveness of technicians with practical skills. King (2014) also observed that China designed short-term programs that benefitted up to 50,000 Africans in the field of capacity building,

supervisory expertise, innovative training and knowledge that will improve the sustainability of infrastructural projects in Africa.

Changsha (2014) indicated that China provided long-term training for Africans in the form of scholarships in its universities. African students on scholarships in China increased from 20,000 during the fifth FOCAC of 2012 to 50,000 in the FOCAC of 2018. To him, he stated that the Chinese scholarship for African students was a diplomacy China was using to strengthen mutual understanding and friendship between the host country and many African countries. Other scholars claimed these scholarships aimed at promoting capacity building and internationalization of higher education institutions between Chinese and African universities.

King (2018) argued that most of the training for African students were long-term initiatives, he posited that the FOCAC of 2013 facilitated university cooperation with the Confucius institute framework. It facilitated the development and spread of Chinese language studies in many African countries, 54 Confucius Institutes and 27 Confucius Classrooms were established across Africa. To him, the Confucius institute program provided not only long-term cooperation but also short-term since they offered four-week of language training, one semester, one year, bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctoral degree training in China. King further stated that the Confucius Institute programs in Africa were a central way of promoting Chinese culture, language and tradition which was a philosophy that was key to China's soft power and diplomacy on the continent. This notion had been enshrined in the Chinese policy documentation since the inception of the Chinese communist party, this was clearly stated by Chairman Mao when he proclaimed culture serves socialism and culture serves the people. Likewise, the government initiated the *yang wei zhongyong* meaning making foreign things serve China (Mao, 1964). The foremost communist leaders such as Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai then incorporated the notion of

publicizing the great success of the Chinese revolution, developing friendships and reinforcing relationships with youngsters from other countries while studying news ideas (Wu, 1993). Wu further observed that Chinese cultural diplomacy was evident in its exchanges with other countries, diplomatic relations were created and consolidated, and subject areas such as literature, arts, education, physical education, publishing, media, broadcasting, movies, libraries, museums and preservation of relics were key areas of engagements.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Social Exchange Theory has been postulated in different forms by many scholars, to them, it involves the exchange of certain elements for economic or political benefits. They constructed certain elements as facilitating the exchange, the notion of trust and power. Homans (1958) asserted that the social exchange theory is one of the oldest theories of social behaviour and is very popular in sociology and social psychology literature. He posited that exchanges between actors always include certain elements of rewards and costs. Ap (1992) described this theory as a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interactive situation. Social Exchange Theory posits that all individual decisions to engage in an interaction process are based on the use of subjective cost- benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. Actors will engage in exchange if the resulting rewards are of value to them and the perceived costs do not exceed the perceived benefits. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) argued that actors always weigh in on the benefits of the exchange relationship before engaging in it. Homan (1961) posited that human behaviour or social interaction is an exchange of activity, tangible and intangible, especially as it relates to rewards and costs. To him, exchange is the basis of human behaviour.

These sociologists have attributed the concept of power and trust to the notion of social exchange. Emerson (1962) claimed that the

concept of power is a central component of the Social Exchange Theory. Ap (1992) divulged the fact that power is absolutely necessary in social exchanges because it determines the partner's ability to take advantage of the outcome of the exchange. To him, it is the capacity to attain ends, usually to produce intended effects on others. March (1996) also suggested that power is a function of resources, economic, social, cultural, environmental, political, position and skills. On the notion of trust as an important factor for social exchange, Gilson (2003) emphasized that trust is a core factor for building relationships that underlie economic development, legitimacy of government institutions and promoting outcomes which are in the best interests of the society. Luhiste (2006) asserted that trust propels actors involved in a social exchange to evaluate the relationship in a behavioural context and look beyond short-term inequities and concentrate on the long-term benefits.

This theory is applicable for this research work because it explains the exchange of people and skills between China and Africa. It depicts the rationale behind the exchange of people as being for certain rewards and value. Specifically, it also offers insight into the concept of Chinese soft power in Africa which is a core reason that has facilitated cultural and educational exchanges over the years. Likewise, for social interaction and social exchange trust is a key factor that actors have to build upon. China and Africa have built trust over the years and as such, it has facilitated the exchange of students, government officials and skilled workforces.

## **Methodology**

The methodology for this research work is quantitative analysis and as such data were collected from two major sources, China and Nigerian databases. Data for this research work were obtained through historical descriptive method and content analysis was used to study this work. Data was analysed to understand the influence of COVID-19 on the cultural and educational exchanges

between China and Nigeria. Cultural and Educational exchanges as depicted in primary and secondary materials were downloaded from Chinese and Nigeria databases through the internet. Relevant information as related to the subject matter was selected through the purposive random sampling method. COVID-19, educational, cultural, diplomacy, soft-power, skill transfer, acquisition and development resource materials were downloaded from the internet specifically on how they influence and facilitate exchanges between China and Africa. Hence, the data for this work were considered representative of how COVID-19 influenced cultural and educational exchanges within the central notion of social exchanges.

## **Discussion**

The outbreak of COVID-19 in China and the world brought about many decisions that affected educational and cultural exchanges. Governments and regimes have to formulate policies that would curb the incessant spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to their shores. China itself had a responsibility to reduce the spread of the virus internationally. In a bid to reduce the spread of COVID- 19, it adopted some measures in line with the WHO's response to this pandemic. Scientists have argued that one of the most important things is to interrupt human-human transmission which also includes reducing secondary infections among close contacts, preventing transmission amplification events and preventing further international spread. Likewise, another measure is seen in the need to communicate critical risk and event information to all communities and minimize social and economic impact through multi-sectoral partnerships (WHO, 2020).

China, therefore, responded by first suspending most of its scholarship admissions scheduled for the 2020 spring session, most universities sent notices to their students informing them of the current situation in the country. A case study comes from China's renowned university, Tsinghua University where the university authorities asserted that -the first priority is for



institutions to care for the people involved, students, staff and the communities they serve. This is a human situation, people are fighting hard now but the war on the virus will be won and life will go on, therefore we hope our foreign students can understand the postponement of their Spring admission process (Times Higher Education, 2020). Similarly, a notice from Zhejiang University to its foreign students asserts that –the deadly COVID- 19 outbreak presents a host of challenges for different sectors of the society. The university campuses with their congregate settings are considered particularly susceptible to contagion. As China continues to battle the epidemic, universities across the country have followed public health guidance to shut campuses so as to reduce and eliminate the incessant spread of the virus (Weforum, 2020). Cultural exchanges were also halted as the Chinese government through a press release suspended all tour groups and the sale of flights and hotel packages for its citizens who were heading overseas (Ny times, 2020). Simultaneously, many political entities responded to the COVID-19 outbreak in China, the Zamfara state government amongst others reacted by suspending all its 20 applicants who had secured governmentscholarships to go to China for further studies. Information from the government house disclosed that these students were asked to hold on as the decision was taken for the safety of the lives of the students. The prospective students were expected to go to China to study medicine, radiology, computer technology and architecture in their respective schools (Africa News Agency,2020).

With China isolating itself from the international community due to this outbreak, certain consequences arose for it for African students. In the first instance, most Nigerians might have missed the opportunity to have an international experience, studying abroad offers great insights, widens horizons and introduces new knowledge from a different perspective and angle. Likewise, the financial burden reduced by the offer of a Chinese government scholarship is magnanimous, a large number of Nigerian families

grapple with financial difficulties and might not be able to afford the exorbitant costs of sending their children overseas for studies. Furthermore, perception arose and stigmatization developed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Terminologies like the Wuhan virus, Chinese virus, Made in China virus and Yellowman virus became a way to categorize China in the wake of the epidemic. China's image as a safe haven for international students in Nigeria has been dented by these perceptions and these occurrences; as such we have a lot of resentment coming from Nigerian students choosing China as their next abode of study and international experience. Additionally, disrupted academic calendars and student plans were significant impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. Academic calendars of most schools were suspended; students were contained and restricted into their apartments and international students were barred from coming to China. Students' plans of studying in China were dashed and their hopes dissolved into the air with their admissions were postponed indefinitely. Economic implications also arose from the pandemic. Millions of renminbi and foreign currencies have been lost as a large amount of these monies are accrued by different countries' GDP. Lack of spending on travel, tourism, entertainment services, food and consumer goods all have a shocking effect on the economies of both China and Nigeria.

The unparalleled effect of COVID-19 on Nigeria's educational system is alarming and shocking. As most schools are shut down, students stand a risk of continuity in their learning process. Students are exposed to academic stagnation, low learning outcomes and high dropout rates due to their inability to attend formal schooling. Also, teaching, learning and research activities have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. News reports have revealed that stakeholders have lost a lot of revenues such as salaries, wages, tuition, government grants and donations that might have been meant for educational institutions during the COVID-19 crisis. A lot of teachers, lecturers, local workers, contract staff and scholars are engaged with the universities, these

people are major drivers of the economy and their inability to make a living adversely affects the nation and its GDP. Obviously, there might be a countercyclical effect of the COVID- 19 pandemic on the educational systems of China and Nigeria, the reason emanates from the fact that certain agreements, memorandum of understanding and partnerships between the two actors will have to be suspended or put-on hold indefinitely. There are high possibilities that these agreements might be cancelled due to this pandemic and as such respective nations will lose the resultant benefits. Notably, teachers and students are all susceptible to attacks by COVID-19 despite government lockdown directives to contain the spread of the virus. There are many Nigerian and international students in China at the initial stage of the outbreak and their lives were in great danger. COVID-19 attack is deadly death or acute upper respiratory tract infection which includes fever, fatigue, myalgia, cough, sore throat, runny nose and sneezing. It could also lead to pharynx abnormalities or digestive diseases such as nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea (Dong, et al., 2020). Lastly, China's bilateral relationship is at a threat due to the multifaceted reasons stated above, nations might have to consider relying so much on China for academic and cultural exchanges. The inability to predict a virus outbreak from China of such magnitude is alarming to many Nigerians and there are many theories in the media circulating on its origin.

### **Conclusion**

China-Nigeria relationship over the years has been built on cordial ties, mutual respect and a policy of win-win cooperation. However, the current outbreaks of COVID-19 in China have dug trenches in the relationship that exists between the two actors. COVID- 19 is a deadly disease ravaging the continent and if not properly managed could wipe out the entire human race. At the forefront of our relationships and engagements, human life, its survival and existence are of paramount importance. Therefore, nations have to work together to fight COVID-19 like all other

pandemics and conquer it successfully. WHO and relevant health authorities have set down guidelines that will assist nations in to fight against the pandemic, they have also mentioned that nations should collect data, make assessments, develop coordination mechanisms, define and prioritize their key objective, identify key audiences and develop a strategy that would fit into countries response strategy. The overall objective should be to detect or ensure that all people at risk of acquiring COVID-19 are identified, reached and involved in proper treatment and monitoring (WHO, 2020). Educational and cultural institutions in Nigeria have a multivariate role to play in the current pandemic seeping across the globe, first, they can offer information and knowledge on the preventive measures as stipulated by WHO, they can sensitize their communities through digital information online, and they can become advocates for disease preventions and controls at home, in addition, they can maintain clean and hygienic environments both at home and in the school. Furthermore, Nigerian researchers can collaborate and share information together on joint projects and works that would investigate and examine how to guide against the such pandemics in the future. Governments and epidemiologists have to find practical ways of ensuring the safety and the welfare of their populace through the detection, prevention and response to a virus outbreak. Health institutions have to update their curriculum to suit the current demands of the present situations in the country.

Education and cultural exchanges have a vital role to play in the bilateral relationships and government diplomacies. With interaction, sharing of knowledge, and learning of cultural values, traditions and philosophies, mutual understandings are created while certain images are formed and conceived by the different actors. It's also a way to strengthen international linkages with China and the African continent, thereby ensuring and building allies around the globe. While China has used it to fortify its foreign policy agenda it has also used it to impact the lives of many Nigerians simultaneously. Most Nigerians have developed

intellectually and have a broad concept of ideas and philosophies due to their contact with the Chinese. Education and cultural exchanges also facilitate skill acquisition and skill building among the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled technicians that are engaged in the international cooperation that exists between China and Nigeria. However, all these benefits can be attained in societies that are healthy and safe to live in. Nations have to ensure that their societies are free of epidemics or pandemics to be able to fully engage other nations.

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