

**Unravelling Food-Security Challenges among Higher-Education-Institution Students  
during Covid-19-Protocols in a Selected State University, Zimbabwe**

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## **ABSTRACT (300WORDS)**

The advent of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) protocols affected food production and availability across cities and communities, creating local food security challenges. Recent studies suggest rising university prices, stagnant family incomes, and increased enrolment of low-income students have relegated many university students to the fringes of food security, with many struggling to meet their basic needs, including adequate, regular nutrition. This article explored lived experiences of university students facing food quality and sufficiency challenges; cultural appropriateness of food provided; coping strategies students use, and how these strategies influence their academic performance. The study used the pragmatic research paradigm for its mixed methods research utility to establish the numerical extent to which HEI students suffered food availability and affordability challenges during the not-so-over global pandemic. Semi-structured questionnaires were distributed to HEI students at a selected State University during three phased blended-learning periods while observing COVID-19 regulations. Data from closed ended questions was entered into and analysed using the SPSS to generate descriptive frequencies and graphs via Microsoft Excel for graph variations while data from open-ended questions were presented as themes in text narratives detailing food availability and affordability challenges explored in terms of quality and quantity. The study found that students made pronounced sacrifices as a result of disrupted food-supply chains, with low food secure students from vulnerable socio-economic demographic groups like orphans and female students grossly exposed to various forms of abuse at the hands of others. Such HEI students survived through student social safety networks by performing campus piece-jobs, including being 'maids' or 'cooks', and doing laundry washing/ironing for high food secure (HFS) students. No interventions were recorded from university administration targeting such students. Even food secure (FS) students downgraded meal choices to inferior food substitutions, choosing less health/nutritious food options against their food preferences. Blocked food-supply chains affected food availability and diversity to cater for the diverse needs to students on campus through non-availability and accessibility of alternatives on campus, which exposed low food secure (LFS) students to menial piece jobs they performed for fellow students in return for food portions arrangements. The study recommends the establishment of university-based food security programmes enrolled through the sister Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare for food distributions during pandemics that alter normal food distribution channels. And systems. Universities should levy students a small fee towards catering for the vulnerable among them.

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19, food security, university students, availability, affordability