

THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHING IN AFRIKA

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Abstract

This study explored the consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic did to primary school teaching in a Afrika context. From February, 2020 to September, 2020, students in Afrika did not take any traditional classes at school. Instead, the government took a novel measure to move all the courses online so that the students and the teachers did not need to go to the school but they could still have their normal lessons continued. However, primary school teachers were not required to give any online lessons for children due to the children's lack of the ability to study independently and infrastructure. The study using interviews from Human Right Watch. The main findings of the study were: 1) Students did not receive lesson. 2) Students don't have facilitate for learning. 3) Education need cost and some parent cannot provide it. The findings also suggest that the government in Afrika should make more policies and regulations to prepare for the future.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, primary school teaching, semi-structured interview, online learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus has caused terrible damage for the world since 2020, and many people have had a negative experience of the virus on a global level during view years (1). At first, the pandemic broke out in Afrika, however, after about two months, the horrible virus was spread to all over the world and led to millions of deaths.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was widespread, leading to the closure of numerous businesses and an unprecedented number of schools unable to conduct traditional in-person classes. This disruption significantly affected students worldwide, making it impossible for them to continue their regular school routines (2). To ensure that students could continue their education, teachers were compelled to explore new teaching methods, while nations embarked

on a quest for effective measures to mitigate the pandemic's impact on education. The Afrika government took early steps in this direction by implementing various measures. One of these measures involved the adoption of distance education, which has since emerged as a pivotal strategy for certain schools to continue providing lessons during the period of school suspension.

In this research, impact COVID-19 in primary school education in Afrika, how students, teachers and family survive their education whose computers and other technologies such as Zoom or Google Meet to deliver different sorts of classes for different grade students in order to avoid them from dropping behind due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All students, except primary school children, accepted online education. Children aged between 8 to 11 years old did not have any formal online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown because the policy "Class is on" did not apply to primary school students. Therefore, exploring what the younger generation learned

during the quarantine was significant to the present research, i.e. the aim of the research is to explore the effects of the COVID-19 on primary school teaching in the African context.

However, there were still some places worth thinking about. Even though teachers did not deliver 10 to 25 minutes classes like they did in the primary schools, they provided simple activities for children to do at home. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic was new to everyone at the beginning, which suggested that teachers did not have any online teaching protocols, related teaching experiences, teaching materials, or special training during the lockdown teaching. Given the shortage of preparations, it is possible that teachers might not have had great amounts of teaching experience, and accordingly, their job achievements may not have been satisfied either. However, there were some good points for teachers as well. Some teachers might value the special online teaching experiences and explore the differences between traditional classes and online teaching.

A. Education

At the beginning of 2020, a serious pandemic called Coronavirus, i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic, broke out in Afrika. At first, all the medical staff did not know how this virus was spread and there was no information about how to cure people. Millions of deaths made the whole city of Wuhan stagnant. More and more people got affected and had nowhere to go. The hospitals could not provide any more medical treatment and then more doctors lost their lives because of this pandemic.

With the continuous advancement of the pandemic, Coronavirus became the broadest worldwide pandemic, which represented a genuine emergency and an extreme test for the world with a significant danger to human existence and well-being (2).

Education suffered from this a lot, and therefore it was one of the fields that was affected most seriously in the world. In order to not have students fall behind their studies, the Afrika government took measures to let students keep on learning online. All the students from elementary schools to universities had their courses continued, however, primary school children did not have online lessons accordingly. Therefore,

in this study, the reason why this situation happened and the effects of COVID-19 on primary school teaching will be especially investigated.

1. Teaching

Distance learning

Distance learning, also known as remote learning or online learning, is a method of education where students and instructors are not physically present in the same location. Instead, they interact with each other through various forms of technology, such as the internet, video conferencing, email, and other digital communication tools (3).

Distance learning can take various forms, including fully online degree programs, hybrid courses that combine online and in-person instruction, and massive open online courses (MOOCs) that are open to a large number of participants worldwide (4). It has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially with the growth of the internet and digital technologies, as it offers access to education for individuals who may not have the opportunity to attend traditional in-person classes.

Online teaching

Online teaching, also known as e-teaching or virtual teaching, refers to the practice of instructing and educating students through digital technologies and the internet, without the need for physical, in-person classroom settings. Online teaching can take various forms, from K-12 education to higher education and professional training. (5) Online teaching can vary widely in terms of the degree of interaction, technology used, and instructional strategies employed. It has become increasingly prevalent, especially in response to the evolving digital landscape and the need for remote education options, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective online teaching requires educators to adapt their pedagogical approaches to the digital environment, design engaging and accessible online courses, and provide ongoing support to students in virtual settings.

Online learning

Online learning, also known as e-learning, refers to a mode of education where students use

the internet and digital technologies to access educational content, interact with instructors and peers, and complete coursework (6). Online learning can take various forms, from formal online degree programs offered by educational institutions to informal self-paced courses and resources available on the internet.

Primary School teaching

Primary school teaching in Africa, as in many parts of the world, is a crucial stage of early childhood education that lays the foundation for a child's future learning and development. However, the approach to Primary School education can vary widely across the diverse countries and regions of Africa due to differences in cultural, economic, and educational contexts (7). Here are some key points to consider regarding primary school teaching in Africa:

1. **Diversity of Systems:** Africa is a vast and diverse continent with numerous countries, each having its own education system and policies. As a result, the structure and curriculum of primary school programs can vary significantly from one country to another.
2. **Early Childhood Education Goals:** Primary school programs in Africa typically focus on preparing children for primary school by fostering early literacy and numeracy skills, social development, and critical thinking. The specific goals may vary depending on the country's educational objectives.
3. **Language Diversity:** Africa is linguistically diverse, with hundreds of languages spoken across the continent. Primary school programs often consider the linguistic diversity and may use local languages alongside or in preparation for the official language(s) used in formal education.
4. **Community Involvement:** In many African countries, community involvement and engagement are essential components of early childhood education. Parents, caregivers, and local communities may play a significant role in supporting primary school programs.
5. **Resource Challenges:** Some regions in Africa face resource challenges, including a lack of adequate facilities, materials, and

well-trained educators. Efforts are being made to address these issues through government initiatives and international aid programs.

6. **Innovative Approaches:** In some African countries, there are innovative approaches to early childhood education, such as community-based early childhood centers and mobile schools that bring education to remote areas.
7. **Cultural Relevance:** Primary school teachers often incorporate culturally relevant content and teaching methods to make learning meaningful and relatable to the local context.
8. **Challenges:** Challenges facing primary school education in Africa can include limited access to quality education, teacher training, and funding. Additionally, issues such as child nutrition and health may impact children's readiness to learn.

Efforts are ongoing to improve early childhood education in Africa, recognizing its crucial role in shaping the future of children on the continent. International organizations, governments, and NGOs are collaborating to expand access to quality primary school education, provide teacher training, and develop curricula that are culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate. The goal is to ensure that all children in Africa have a strong start in their educational journey.

Afrika normal primary school courses

The primary school curriculum in Afrika is divided into five areas: Mathematics, Language Arts, Foreign Language, Computer Science, Social Science, Music and Art, and Health Education distributed to all primary schools for implementation (8).

B. COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a profound transformation to education worldwide, ushering in an era of unprecedented reliance on online learning. As schools and universities temporarily closed their physical campuses to mitigate the spread of the virus, educators and students quickly adapted to virtual classrooms, where learning took place via the internet. Online learning during the pandemic encompassed

a diverse range of approaches, from live video lectures to asynchronous course materials, and it became a lifeline for continuity in education. (9) While it offered flexibility and accessibility, it also presented challenges related to internet access, digital literacy, and social isolation. Ultimately, the pandemic accelerated the adoption of online learning and underscored its importance in providing educational resilience during times of crisis.

1. The Education Background During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the far-reaching effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, countless students worldwide found themselves unable to continue their usual school routines, prompting a worldwide quest for proactive solutions aimed at mitigating the pandemic's impact on education (10). Among these solutions, online teaching emerged as a pivotal strategy adopted by several nations during school closures. These countries embarked on the journey of delivering remote instruction and endeavored to navigate its complexities, all in the pursuit of sustaining the education is on (11).

2. Challenges and difficulties

Given the severe situation, education was one of the fields that suffered a lot. The Afrika Education Department demanded that all the schools should be closed and students could not go back to school unless the conditions became better. Therefore, all the courses were required to move online. At first, there were a variety of challenges and difficulties.

3. School systems in Afrika

In Afrika, the education that students get from elementary school to middle school is called quality education, which means that the nine-year-education is compulsory for everyone. High school has a great relationship with the university, and this means only if students work very hard, can they be admitted into an excellent college. Everything that teachers have taught students make up the preparations for the university entrance exam. Therefore, quality education means the education should be for all-round development.

In the usual course of affairs, primary schools adhere to guidelines that emphasize the impor-

tance of incorporating play-based learning into children's education. Within this context, the term 'play' encompasses two distinct yet interconnected definitions: one centered on fostering social development through play, and the other on facilitating academic and social growth within the context of play.(12)

In contemporary education, teachers typically impart instruction in five primary domains, encompassing Mathematics, Language Arts, Foreign Language, Computer Science, Social Science, Music and Art, and Health Education. Children's learning and developmental progress are assessed within these eight domains, setting forth achievable expectations regarding what children should comprehend, accomplish, and the developmental milestones they should reach at each stage of their educational journey. Consequently, the majority of courses associated with these eight fields are conveyed through a diverse range of educational games, ensuring that children have the opportunity to learn through play.

4. School systems in Afrika during the COVID-19 pandemic

Between April and August 2020, Human Rights Watch conducted 57 remote interviews with students, parents, teachers, and education officials spanning Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zambia. The interviews were conducted to gain insights into the impact of the pandemic on children's education in these regions. (13)

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Aims of the Study and Research Questions

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this research intends to study the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on primary school teaching in Afrika, which was composed of two periods. The first period is the online teaching during the pandemic lockdown and the second is the offline teaching when students returned to school.

The research first seeks to explore primary school teachers' personal experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the different modes of teaching, teachers in primary school

had to adjust their normal teaching skills so as to have the children master some knowledge accordingly. What is more, teachers' own mental and physical health also need to be taken into consideration since they were the important role models for the young children they taught.

The second aim is to understand what were the major activities that teachers delivered to the younger generation. Moreover, whether these activities also followed five activity areas of Afrika primary school.

Thirdly, this research proposes to investigate whether teachers were satisfied with their jobs during the pandemic, given the situation that they could not give direct assessment and feedback to the children.

Lastly, this research intends to explore what characteristics teachers should consider when they deliver teaching to keep children concentrating, as children normally cannot focus on one thing for too much time.

All these questions asked were meant to answer these research questions, which were:

- 1) What were primary school teachers' experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2) Whether teachers were satisfied with their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 3) What characteristics should teachers have to keep children learned?
- 4) What kind of infrastructure did teachers have facilitated during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Survey interview questions were obtained from Human Right Warth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study showed that teachers' workload increased a lot and education could help students' learning to some extent. Consequently, questions took on for the semi-structured interviews depended on the discoveries from the pilot survey and the structure to the previous literature review. Moreover, the questions were constructed to understand some additional factors and considerations that were special to an individual's experiences and perceptions which had not been discussed or raised during the surveys.

B. Method

The questions were divided into five parts. The first part focused on online activities teach-

ers delivered for the youngsters, including information about the sorts of activities, technologies used and the challenges of online teaching. The second element of the question was mainly about the preparations teachers had for online teaching and the methods teachers could use to assess children's learning performances. Then, the third phase of the question concentrated on teachers' mental and physical health. Whether or not they obtained any physical and mental health care from the government and whether their necessities were taken good care of deserved some investigations. The fourth part was about offline teaching when all the teachers and students went back to schools, which meant that they had already embraced their normal school life. Then, there were some regulations and requirements made for the COVID-19 pandemic and this study investigated whether there had been any Coronavirus - related courses designed by teachers. In the end, some suggestions will be made by educators applicable to similar conditions, future pandemic, for example. Besides, more researches needed to investigate possible approaches for teachers due to the small sample size in this research.

C. Participants and Methodology

1. Participants

This current study focuses on investigating what kinds of effects that the COVID-19 pandemic caused primary school teaching in Afrika. Teachers played the most important role in preparing lessons, adjusting the mode of class, communicating with children's parents, as well as helping parents understand how to keep children's mental and physical health during the pandemic both in lockdown and offline teaching.

The sample for this research was composed of primary school teachers in selected public primary schools in Afrika.

In order to collect in-depth information, and due to the small sample size, semi-structured interviews were utilized in this research. Therefore, qualitative data were collected during this study. Five teachers from different school levels in Afrika, Afrika took part in this research. They taught first year students, second year students and third year students respectively. The teachers were asked to answer some basic questions

such as their gender, age, place of work and the years they had worked. Then, they were required to offer opinions about what normal modes of primary school teaching were like and the different methods of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their teaching experiences especially mattered in this research. Moreover, the challenges or difficulties they encountered also deserved to be explored.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter details the findings on the topic of 'Effects of COVID-19 on primary school teaching in Afrika.' The interview questions were divided into two parts. The first section was primary school teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown and the other phase was primary school teaching in offline class after teachers and students went back to school.

Thematic analysis was used in this part. The first step involved transcribing audio, and taking initial notes, and then generally looking through the data to get familiar with it. The second step was coding the data, which meant that the important findings could be highlighted with phrases or sentences. Then the third step was to generate the themes.

1. Children Receiving No Education

Many children across the continent received no education after schools closed in March 2020. The director of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Madagascar, which offers education and alternative care services to previously homeless children who were either orphaned or unable to live with their parents, mentioned that children accommodated with host families, "did not have any education during the closure." (14)

2 Children Receiving No Teaching

Numerous children received no instruction, feedback, or interaction with their teachers. In Zambia, this was the situation right before 15-year-old Natalie L.'s school closed, "The headmistress came through the classes and told us to study on our own." Natalie uses books she already had. "Most topics are difficult to understand without the help of a teacher." She said, "It's been a little bit nerve-racking. Next year I have my [school leaving] examination and I think I will have to work harder for that." (15)

Parents and teachers in the Central African Republic reported in June that there had been no teaching since schools closed.[10] A mother of a 6-year-old girl in Bangui mentioned that she makes efforts to have her daughter engage in revision exercises, and they listen to radio classes three times a week. "But it is a program which is not specific for each level of class. It's too complex... Our children have not had any support during this time of pandemic. I fear a drop in children's level after all this time lost." (16)

3. Children Learning Less through Distance Education

Students frequently studied fewer topics or less content through distance learning. Many students echoed 17-year-old South African Lwandle M. who said she struggled with online learning: "I do not think I have the discipline to sit down and have no one teach me." [13]

Although Nawal L.'s school in Morocco offered online classes, some teachers faced difficulties, she said: "Sometimes we don't hear from a teacher for the whole day, then he'd show up at 6 saying he didn't have enough internet credit." She added, "The physics teacher... just disappeared... She just didn't give any class." [15] Nawal estimated that about half of the students attended online classes.[16]

4. Mental Health Consequences

Many students shared feelings of stress, anxiety, isolation, and depression, which they linked to the lack of contact with their school community. "It's stressful when I have to study all alone," said Makena M., 17, in Kenya.[17] "I tend to think a lot about school and my friends," said 15-year-old Kioko Y. from Kenya. "It makes me sad. I know my school has a counsellor, but we were never given contacts after we closed and before this, I had never gone to him." [18]

A 16-year-old South African boy said, "That time to think about stuff and being alone kind of sucks, I guess. Especially as a teenager... I was completely struggling for a whole two weeks, like crying every day. Um, yeah, so that was like a big thing for me, starting to think life was meaningless." [20]

5. Education Not Free

Many parents are burdened by costs associated with trying to continue educating their children during school closures. A father of four in Cameroon said, "Primary school is supposed to be free in Cameroon, but it is not. There are always contributions." He said his younger children's school was already demanding payment for the year's final quarter, when it was closed. "Are schools going to blackmail? That if you don't pay for your [previous] year, we won't re-enroll your child for the next year?" [21] The father of a 17-year-old in Lubumbashi, Congo, said that his daughter's school sold them a syllabus to help her study at home for 15,000 CDF (US\$8). [22]

6. Girls Disproportionately Negatively Affected

Girls encounter distinctive obstacles when it comes to pursuing formal education remotely. Taisha S., a 16-year-old in Kenya, expressed that her school provided no materials or guidance during the period of closures, prompting her to reach out to her science teacher. "He said he would not be able to go to anyone's home, but they could come to his house. As girls we feared going to his house, but I hear the boys have been going." (17) A teacher in Nairobi, Kenya, urged "With the lockdown, all family members are staying in the house morning to evening. I have had some of the girls call to inform me that they are harassed by their fathers or uncles." (18)

Girls are frequently expected to assume responsibilities related to childcare and household chores. Taisha also said, "My chores have increased of course because schools have closed." She mentioned that at times, she had to miss distance learning classes on television due to her household chores. Zawadi N., aged 16 in Nairobi, shared that she dedicates nearly five hours a day to caring for her younger siblings: "There's much more to do with siblings because I am also acting as a teacher to the younger ones." (19)

7. Digital Divide: Limited Access to Technologies

The absence of access to radios, television, computers, the internet, and data has left numerous students unable to participate in remote learning. "There were lessons offered on Warsan

Radio," said a 16-year-old in Garissa, Kenya, "But I never tuned in because we don't have a radio." (20) A teacher in the Boucle du Mouhoun region Burkina Faso expressed that many students he knew, "don't have electricity—not even a lamp to study." (21) A teacher from Centre-Nord region said of remote learning: "Many [students] don't even have access to radios, let alone TVs. A teacher in Congo's Kasai region said the education ministry had organized television courses, but the city where he lived is not fully electrified. "How can students follow these courses?" (22)

A significant number of children face a lack of access to the internet, a resource that is becoming increasingly indispensable for education. A teacher working in the Mathare informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya, emphasized this concern, "None of the students have access to internet-enabled smartphones. Only a handful have access to mobile phones that can support calling and texting functionalities. Digital learning is not an option." (18) Fifteen-year-old Kioko Y. in Kenya revealed that he relies on his mother's phone for internet access. Although his school does not provide online classes, he utilizes platforms like YouTube and Google for research purposes. "I tend to pick and choose which subjects to research because I cannot stay with my mother's phone for too long because she runs a business." (23)

8. Digital Literacy Education Needed

The importance of digital literacy, both for students and teachers, is now widely acknowledged as an essential component of children's right to education. In the case of Nawal L., whose school in Marrakesh, Morocco, was closed due to the pandemic, her mathematics teacher took the initiative to collect students' WhatsApp contacts and distribute login credentials for online learning. "I tried them many times, but it didn't work," said Nawal. "Pretty much all other students were in the same situation... One of my classmates is a 'geek,' she's very high tech. She did her thing, not sure what, but finally sent us new passwords. This time, it worked." (24)

9. Children Living in Rural Areas

Children residing in rural areas face greater challenges in acquiring the resources necessary to adapt and implement measures essential

for ongoing education during school closures. This includes limited access to the internet and reduced flexibility to adjust school calendars, which are often aligned with seasonal harvests. A teacher in Burkina Faso voiced apprehension that any modifications to the school term aimed at compensating for lost time might inadvertently exclude children if it coincided with crucial crop cultivation periods. "Some children will no longer return to school, because they'll prefer to ... help their parents cultivate so they can eat. So, many students won't even come." (21)

In a rural farming community in Zambia, the headteacher of a public school mentioned that teachers were sending lessons through social media platforms. However, "not every child is linked on a social platform," and rural children, in particular, have limited access to mobile phones compared to their urban peers. (25)

During interviews conducted in Burkina Faso, participants expressed their concerns regarding the absence of boreholes or water points in many schools. "For handwashing, water is needed permanently," said one teacher in Est region. (26)

10. Children with Disabilities

The challenges impacting children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic are notably amplified for children with disabilities. A teacher working at a school in Bangui, Central African Republic, catering to girls, including those with disabilities, shared that he had lost contact with all his students since the closure of schools on March 27, 2020. "Most children will lose knowledge acquired beforehand" (27)

11. Children Living in Extreme Poverty

In an informal settlement nestled within Nairobi, Kenya, a dedicated teacher elucidated how the pandemic worsened the already precarious living conditions experienced by a substantial portion of her students: "They live with siblings and extended family relatives in small houses and lack basic items like food. Most of the parents to these children have lost their sources of livelihoods due to the pandemic making their already strained living conditions much worse." (18) Elsewhere in Nairobi, in early May, authorities evicted more than 8,000 people in two informal settlements. They brought in excavators to demolish homes, churches, shops, and schools.

12. Children Living in Countries Affected by Armed Conflict and Insecurity

Armed conflicts have long been a significant force driving numerous children away from schools, a situation further exacerbated by the pandemic-induced closures. One such individual is Taisha S., a 16-year-old residing in Garissa, Kenya. "We have no access to learning," she said, adding "This situation did not start with Covid-19. Prior to this we had no lessons for three weeks because a lot of teachers were running away from North Eastern [Province] due to a rise in terrorist incidents." (17)

IV. CONCLUSION

From This section has provided a brief review about how the online teaching and learning under the COVID-19 pandemic are different from physical teaching and learning during the normal days.

Based on the interviews, the main findings of the study were: 1) Students did not receive lesson. Moreover, some of them are away from school. 2) Students don't have facilitate for learning, especially in rural area. 3) Learning Less through Distance Education. Students frequently studied fewer topics or less content through distance learning. 4) Digital Divide: Limited Access to Technologies. The absence of access to radios, television, computers, the internet, and data has left numerous students unable to participate in remote learning. 5) The pandemic worsened the already precarious living conditions experienced by a substantial portion of her students. 6) Mental Health Consequences. Many students shared feelings of stress, anxiety, isolation, and depression, which they linked to the lack of contact with their school community. 7) Education need cost and some parent cannot provide it.

The findings also suggest that the government in Afrika should make more policies and regulations to prepare for the future.

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