

Home-schooling During the Two-year COVID-19 Lockdown in Uganda: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In writing this paper, we have used secondary review methodology to critically analyse home-schooling in Uganda during the two-year COVID-19 school lockdown. This paper has used data from articles, newspapers, government documents and Non-Governmental Organizations reports. The paper begins with a discussion of the history of home-schooling and how countries resorted to home-schooling to curb the spread of corona virus. This is followed by a section that discusses Uganda's COVID-19 response and home-schooling in Uganda during the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, is the discussion about the limitations of home-schooling in Uganda. This section shows that much as the government of Uganda implemented a well-intentioned home-schooling program during the two-year school lockdown, most of the children, especially, those from poor families did not benefit because of factors such as lack of access to electronic gadgets, lack of internet, failure to receive self-study materials and lack of parental guidance among other factors. The paper ends with the conclusion that emphasises the view that much as all primary and secondary school-going children received an automatic promotion to the next class when the schools were re-opened in January 2022, the educational inequality between the children of the poor and the rich that was widened during the two-year COVID-19 lockdown will have a long-lasting negative implication on the learning outcomes of, especially, the children from the poor backgrounds.

Key words: Corona virus, COVID-19 pandemic, home-schooling, critical analysis, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic together with the political development of countries is founded on education. According to the World Bank, for any country to achieve sustainable economic growth, social development, increase productivity and promote social equality and equity, it should invest in education [1]. To UNESCO, one of the key indicators of any country's development is its educational levels [2]. The World Bank looks at education as a way of imparting skills, knowledge and attitudes for the purpose of not only changing the values and norms of society but also for integrating individuals into societies [1]. Kunzman notes that children may obtain learning in different ways and settings. Accordingly, the learners could

acquire knowledge through lectures, activities and experiments inside the classroom [3]. In the same manner, students may attain education through the learning experience with their parents, friends and other members of the community. Home-schooling is considered an alternative form of educating children [3]. It is seen as a way of relieving learners from the pressures of schools as they achieve their interests while enjoying different learning experiences as they spend quality time with their parents and guardians [4]. Though home-learning emerged in the United States (US) in the 1970s, it is said to have been implemented by different cultures throughout history. At the beginning of the 1970s, home-schooling started to emerge and became popular where most of the families, for example, in the US resorted to this alternative schooling method [4]. With the massive increase of parents who opted to have home-learning for their children, this action was dominated by the home-schooling movement [4].

Despite the fact that learning through home-schooling is not a new phenomenon, African countries have not paid attention to it. However, home-schooling is slowly gaining prominence in some African countries. A case in point is Zambia which has already established an academy for home-schooling in the capital city and Rwanda which has a law that provides for home-schooling [5]. Whereas other countries such as Uganda, Tanzania and Egypt among others are yet to develop a legal framework for home-schooling, it remains an educational option [5]. However, when the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that Corona Virus had emerged as a public global emergency, countries instituted measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, which included national lockdowns of sectors like schools and businesses. According to Ewing and Vu, by April 2020, 189 countries had closed schools and this affected 98 percent of learners [6]. In order to ensure that learners continued schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the countries embraced home-schooling. Studies have shown that with the school closures at short notice, most of the countries started home-schooling with little or no preparation [7]. The need to use, mostly, home and virtual learning negatively affected countries. According to Patel, the shift from face-to-face learning to home schooling mostly affected schools in the countries that had before made little use of digital technology and where learners lacked necessary gadgets and internet services [8]. It is noted that remote learning requires three aspects that include (1) effective teachers with knowledge of the subject and technical knowledge in using technology (2), technology and (3) a motivated learner whose engagement relies on intrinsic motivation, teachers, technology effectiveness, and contextual factors such as the home environment [9]. One study shows that schools in countries that had before the pandemic established online learning succeeded in implementing home-schooling during COVID-pandemic crisis more than those that had not [10].

SUMMARY OF THE PAPER

The paper begins with an introduction that discusses the history of home-schooling and how countries across the globe resorted to home-schooling as a response to COVID-19 pandemic threat. This is followed by different parts that include; Uganda's COVID-19 response, home schooling in Uganda during COVID-19 lockdown, limitations of home-schooling in Uganda and the conclusion.

The aim of the Paper

The overall aim of this paper is to critically analyse the effectiveness of home-schooling in Uganda during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. This has been achieved by analysing how home-

schooling was implemented and the challenges that Uganda faced in its implementation of home-schooling.

METHODOLOGY

Secondary review methodology has been used in this paper. The paper has utilised data from journal articles, textbooks, government documents and media.

Uganda's Repose to COVID -19 Pandemic

In March 2020, Uganda joined other countries in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. On 18th March 2020, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda addressed the nation and, in his speech, he urged that even when Uganda had not registered any single COVID-19 case, the volatility of Corona virus required that Uganda took preventive measures to avoid it [11]. In this case, the president announced the closure of all schools and educational institutions, hence, affecting 15 million learners in the country [12]. Uganda reported the first case of COVID-19 on 21st March 2020. In addition to the closure of all educational institutions, the government of Uganda took other specific preventive measures that included social distancing, hand-washing, closure of religious institutions, business centres, sports and entertainment centres, a ban on all private and public transport, night curfew from 7:00 p.m. to 5a.m among others [13]. The schools which closed in March 2020 were again re-opened in a phased manner in October 2020 with a focus on candidate classes (form 4 and 6) [13]. However, the second wave of Delta variant brought another abrupt closure of schools in June 2021 only to be re-opened in January 2022. This means that Ugandan schools were closed for, almost, two years, the longest COVID-19-induced school closure globally [14]. When the schools were re-opened in 2022, all children in primary and secondary schools whether they were studying from home or not, received an automatic promotion to the next class, which ideally means that children lost one year of study. However, during the two-year school lockdown, the government of Uganda resorted to home-schooling to enable children continue learning. The next section discusses the home-schooling program in Uganda.

How Home-schooling was Implemented in Uganda

In order to help Ugandan children, continue learning after the closure of learning institutions, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in collaboration with different stakeholders under the guidance of the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) designed a response and preparedness plan to COVID-19 pandemic. This plan included the development of standardised study lesson packages in the core subjects for primary and secondary levels that were to be distributed to all learners in primary and secondary schools [13]. The plan also included model teachers who were meant to prepare lessons that were to be aired on radio and television stations across the country in addition to pre-recorded lessons that were to be accessed online [13]. On the other hand, through the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), the government tasked institutions of higher learning to resort to open and distance learning.

According to the MoES report of 2020, the framework that was developed was meant to include all learners from various socio-economic statuses, geographical locations and those with special needs. The framework outlined the objectives of the intervention, how learning would occur, the lesson delivery, the roles responsibilities of difference stakeholders that included parents / guardians/siblings, learners, teachers, District Municipal Education Officers (DMEOS), District Municipal Inspectors of Schools (DMIS) among others [13]. The framework

aimed at: (1) ensuring continued learning at home using the different models for all learners when schools closed due to the pandemic; (2) highlighting the different models of lesson delivery to be used for continued learning (3) guiding teachers on how to develop and deliver radio and television lessons for learners at primary and secondary levels during the COVID- 19 lockdown and (4), providing learning opportunities through different mediums of communication. i.e., Televisions (TVs), radio and internet.

According to the MoES report, successful home-schooling necessitated that different stakeholders play different roles. For example, parents and guardians had to support learners in different ways that included providing materials for learning, monitoring and guiding children at home and providing a favourable learning environment. They were meant to make sure that children study from home in a very safe and secure environment, encourage their children to tune in and listen to presentations on the televisions and radios on daily basis. Children were supposed to be ready to learn from home, adapt to this change in learning, acquire skills and knowledge and apply them and define their learning goals. The headteachers, teachers and DMIS were also supposed to play their roles. For example, headteachers and teachers were to contact the DMIS on a daily basis and give feedback on lessons taught on radios and TVs through sending messages on phones or on WhatsApp groups, email or by writing a report while DMIS would analyse the comment and give feedback in order to help teachers improve the mode of delivering lessons [13]. The report [13] outlines two specific modes of delivery described below:

Distribution of print and self- study materials

These materials were supposed to be interactive and to assist children study on their own at home in order for them to acquire knowledge and competence and most, importantly, for children to be able to learn at their own pace and at different times depending on their contexts. According to the report, the printed materials aimed at empowering children to be in charge of their learning but monitored and supported by the parents/guardians or siblings. These materials covered a wider range of topics and activities than the TVs and radio lessons. For example, it is documented that The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) worked quickly to produce the first set of learning packs by early May 2020 covering core subjects in all primary and secondary grades [13].

The radios, TVs and online lessons

These lessons were supposed to be aired by model teachers which the government was to select from different districts across the country. The lessons were to be delivered on different media platforms across the country. These teacher lessons were to be supplemented by pre-recorded lessons by the MoES. The time allocated for each day was two hours on either radio or televisions for six days a week. In this case, the government encouraged parents; guardians and siblings to support children either listen or watch as the lessons were being aired [13]. To facilitate online lessons, the government of Uganda announced in June 2020 that it was going to distribute radios to Ugandans, which never materialised, in part, for cost implications related to radio procurements.

Though well-intentioned as stipulated in MoES report 2020, it has been shown that home-schooling in Uganda during COVID-19 lockdown was faced with many challenges. Reports indicate that families, especially, the poor ones, experienced many challenges. Problems such

as lack of electricity, televisions, internet, radios and the general expensiveness of home-schooling among others have been reported. The next section discusses the limitations of home-schooling in Uganda.

LIMITATIONS OF HOME-SCHOOLING IN UGANDA DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

Much as the government tried to promote continued studying during the two-year school COVID- 19 lockdown, the program was limited by different factors. In fact, reports show that most children actually did not study while at home due to different factors discussed here under:

Challenges of self-study materials

Under the COVID-19 response framework to support continued learning during the lockdown, the government of Uganda was supposed to provide all primary and secondary school learners with self-study materials. For example, it is reported that the ministry of education and sports contracted three different publishers to print and distribute 5.43 million copies of study materials to benefit children in upper primary and lower secondary [15]. Much as some children received the study materials; it is documented that this method was characterised by limitations. First, some parents did not receive the study materials while others who accessed them were asked to pay for them much as they were expected to be for free of charge. For example, in a study by Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) in Busia district of Uganda, it is reported that majority of parents interviewed confirmed that their children did not receive any study material [16]. It is reported that parents were instead told to go to the office of Local Council Chairperson to make a photocopy, an option which some could not afford because they had no money for photocopying the bulky study materials. Second, reports show that instead of reaching the final beneficiaries (children/learners), some self-study materials were distributed to schools, which were not able to give them to learners [16]. In 2021, the Independent Reporter documented that billion worth of self-study materials remained unused and sealed in school stores. In one school, the headteacher that was interviewed in April 2021 said that he was waiting for the guidelines from authorities on how to handle the process of distributing study materials [15]. Other school authorities are said to have been waiting for the schools to open to distribute materials while others claimed that the number of materials given to them was less than the number of children in their schools [15]. Third, it is documented that the Ministry of Education and Sports was not able to distribute materials in some districts. The monitor reports that copies for 2,000 schools in Agago and Kaabong districts could not be distributed due to insecurity and bad roads [17]. Forth, it is reported that apart from failing to cover the necessary content, some schools received the materials when it was too late and when schools were almost opening [17]. Moreover, it is reported that, at least, 56 percent of learners did not understand the self-study learning materials distributed by the Ministry [18]. According to ISER report, parents in Kabong district of Uganda complained of the fact that printed materials were only available in English yet most primary school learners have not mastered English language and could not read and comprehend on their own [16].

LIMITED ACCESSIBILITY AND AFFORDABILITY OF STUDY GADGETS

For children to attend virtual lessons, they needed gadgets such as radios, televisions, phones and laptops. In Uganda, it is noted that using radio broadcasts is one of the effective means of supporting home-schooling given the fact that 87% of Ugandan households have a working radio compared to only 35% with a Television, 10.8% with a phone and only 2.5% with a

computer [12]. However, The Uganda National Household survey found great variations in television ownership across Ugandan regions. For example, in Kampala capital city, 42% of the households own a television; in Kigezi only 3% own a television, in Teso, Bukedi and Acholi 2% own a television while only 1% of the households in West Nile own a television [19]. The promise to distribute ten million radio sets to all the Ugandan households by the government of Uganda was based on the fact that radios do not require electricity and would, therefore, cater for all the children in Uganda [20]. However, it should be noted that the Ministry of Education and Sports did not succeed in securing approval of Ugandan Shs.336.8 billion in Parliament meant for procuring the radios on grounds that it was an unnecessary expenditure and that the firm that was fronted to provide radios was incompetent [17]. This means that children from households that did not own radios did not benefit from radio lessons. It is also noted that though radios are widespread in Uganda, there are regional inequalities to the extent that some regions such as in rural Northern Uganda, 80% of families do not own radios [21]. This implies that in such a region, most of children could not attend lessons on radios.

INTERNET ACCESS IS LARGELY URBAN-DOMINATED AND COSTLY

Successful implementation of home-schooling required children to have reliable internet access. However, reports show that Uganda is characterised by poor and unequal distribution of internet services, a situation that made it difficult for some students to attend virtual lessons, most especially, those from rural Uganda. For example, reports show that in addition to having a big urban-rural gap in internet use of 70%, Uganda has the lowest internet penetration of 14% in the region. Findings of the survey that was conducted by the National IT report indicates that internet access to Ugandan homes was at 10.8% [20]. Moreover, Uganda Communication Commission report shows that the price of internet in Uganda is the highest in East Africa [22]. Such a situation indicates that virtual learning only benefited children few from urban and rich homes leaving behind the rural poor. A report by Daily Monitor Publications shows that poor children in Uganda were ejected from online learning due to many factors that included lack of internet access among others [18].

LIMITED ACCESS AND UNRELIABLE ELECTRICITY

Access to reliable electricity was critical to the successful implementation of home-schooling since learning aids like Televisions, phones, laptops and radios needed to be powered. However, it is reported that only 8% of rural households in Uganda have access to national electricity grid. On the other hand, 71.2% in urban households have access to electricity [20]. Such a low access to electricity is said to have contributed to widening educational inequality during COVID-19 lockdown. In addition to this rural-urban divide, it is reported that not all urban households who have access to electricity can afford the cost of high electricity tariffs. Moreover, it is shown that even those who can afford to pay were limited by unreliable electricity services [23]. A study by Mbazzi et al. with 39 parents shows that most of the parents reported that their children faced difficulties in learning because of electricity outages [24].

PARENTS' INABILITY TO GUIDE LEARNERS

The involvement of parents in ensuring that learners continued studying during COVID-19 lockdown was critical not only in facilitating children with necessary resources and favourable home environment but also in guiding them study and do assignments. However, this was bound to face challenges given the fact that some parents are illiterate. A report shows that one of the reasons why home-schooling was not working in Uganda was the inability of parents to

guide learners [25]. In the report, it is stated that since literacy rate in Uganda is at 70%, the ministry of Education and Sports should have taken into consideration the parents who are not able to guide children before proposing home-schooling [25]. A study by Initiative for Social and Economic Rights in Uganda reports that some parents confessed how they were unable to facilitate home-schooling because they did not have the knowledge required to guide their children [16]. In Uganda, the situation was worsened by the change in curriculum of lower-secondary school, which even literate parents did not understand. In the same study, educated parents said that the recent change in curriculum hindered their ability to guide their children effectively [16]. Such findings are not unique to Uganda. In one American study with 122 parents, nine parents reported that they lacked knowledge of the content and pedagogy of online teaching materials [26]. Respondents reported struggling to understand content and methods of helping their children because they were not trained teachers. Of the nine parents, three parents reported that they were poor at mathematics and could not understand the mathematical content in order to help their children in assignments that involved mathematics. The worst came with the children with special learning needs. Their parents reported stress and frustration with the lack of special skills to help their children continue learning online [26].

QUALITY OF ONLINE LESSONS

The low quality of home-schooling has been documented in the literature. For example, a study by Initiative for Social and Economic Rights in Kumi district of Uganda reports that children did not understand virtual lessons because teachers were very fast and their explanations were not clear [16]. Other children reported that radio lessons were confusing because they were interrupted by adverts while others found it difficult to follow and understand lessons without seeing the teachers. In the same study, parents revealed that their children, especially, those who were not following lessons got discouraged and stopped attending [16]. The low quality of online studying has also been documented in studies outside Uganda. In one study that involved seven (7) European countries, it is reported that in all the countries, parents complained of poor quality of online studying with limited support from teachers. In all the countries, parents reported that teachers provided limited time to parents. This left parents with the responsibility to manage home-schooling, which resulted in increased worry, isolation and stress [27].

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a critical analysis of home-schooling during the two-year COVID-19 lockdown in Uganda. By utilising secondary review methodology, the paper has shown that though home-schooling was already embraced in other countries such as United States of America in 1970s, it had not been utilised in most African countries, including, Uganda before COVID-19 pandemic. How Covid-19 pandemic forced countries to resort to home-schooling at a time they were not prepared has been described in this paper. A critical analysis of home-schooling in Uganda during COVID-19 school lockdown has shown that children from poor backgrounds did not benefit from home-schooling program due to different factors such as lack of access to electronic gadgets like radios, phones, computers and televisions, lack of internet, parents' inability to guide them, lack of access to electricity among other factors. This situation means that much as all the children received an automatic promotion to the next class when schools opened in January 2022, the inequality in education between children from rich and poor families that was widened during the two-year lockdown could be reflected in the poor learning outcomes of children from poor backgrounds, at least, at a future date.

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