

Impacts of COVID – 19 on Kenya’s Education Sector

By Dr. Kut Ochogo

One of the chief impacts of COVID-19 on learners was the absence of physical contact with teachers for content delivery and mentorship guidance during the height of COVID-19 infection in Kenya. Closure of public libraries and other educational learning centres also negatively impacted on the education sector. As a result, learning outcomes were greatly affected as the learners were dispossessed continuous growth and development. These factors may have later contributed to the despondency among learners thereby leading to sporadic delinquency and arsonist behavior among students when schools resumed in the second term ending December 2021.

As schools re-open this January, all stakeholders must appreciate that schools play a significant part in the protection of learners, especially girls in poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities. With the closure of schools, the learners were exposed to the risks from which the schools they reside in protect them from. The prolonged closure of schools compounded with restricted movements intensified cases of exposure to pornographic materials, drug and substance abuse, increased rape, and Gender Based Violence.

For learners who were about to sit for their national examinations, the interruption of learning processes increased anxiety and uncertainty among them. This, consequently, led to increased psychological trauma among learners, teachers, and parents. The situation was worsened by inequity in the online programs as majority of learners did not have access to digital platforms due to lack of devices and internet connectivity at home.

The government, in a bid to curb these challenges and ensure continuous learning as schools remained closed, introduced virtual learning. However, inaccessibility to technology or quick, dependable internet access barred learners in rural regions and those from underprivileged families from attending virtual classes. This further widened the challenge of unequal access to educational resources by learners that the country had been grappling with even before COVID - 19.

To further mitigate on the above challenges, the government issued an order that saw students in their final years and the CBC pioneer class resume classes. There was a lot of criticism and objection to this action as parents felt their children were being exposed to the disease. This was despite the guidelines that had been put in place to ensure both the learners and teachers were protected.

As a result of the challenges presented by the coronavirus and the likely impact of future pandemics, the government’s ability to ensure continuation of learning will depend on the ability

to swiftly harness available technology, provide adequate infrastructure, and mobilize stakeholders to prepare alternative learning programmes. The COVID -19 pandemic negatively affected the teaching and learning activities in all learning institutions in Kenya, just like other parts of the world were severely disrupted. This paper further concludes that some of the major effects of COVID-19 on the education sector in Kenya include learning disruption, limited access to learning facilities such as laboratories, job losses in the education sector especially those teaching in private schools, increase in pregnancy among female students as indicated by some parents, reduced funding for education, research constraints, and loss of learning interests among learners. This study underscores the damaging effects of COVID-19 on the education sector in Kenya and the need for all educational institutions, educators, and learners to adopt technology and improve their digital skills in line with the emerging global trends and realities in education.

It is generally agreed that there is need for the government through the Ministry of Education together with all the stakeholders in education sector in Kenya to navigate through challenges presented by COVID-19 to ensure continued access to provision of quality, equitable and inclusive education during and after the pandemic. Effective implementation of the proposed interventions by education managers and stakeholders will ensure uninterrupted learning in educational institutions in future.

The Ministry of Education, parents and teachers should also support vulnerable students to ensure they are not exploited, and that no learning loss occurs even as schools delay re-full opening until January 2023 despite grades 4, class 8 and form 4s being back in schools already.

The opportunities for students to learn at home for some students is limited due to lack of conducive learning environment as many come from households that live in single rooms, and in which there is limited literacy and capacity to hire private tutors. Moreover, while the school closures are necessary to prevent the spread of the virus, the vast majority of students will lose momentum and direction as schools are employing a reactive approach to learning. The paper hence recommends that the government should ensure every Kenyan school going child is given equal opportunity to access learning online.

Finally, it is important for learners, teachers, and parents to be cognizant of the prescience and types of cyber threats that pupils may fall prey to when studying online. So that learners do not fall prey to online predators, the following should be observed; proper sensitization about their existence, setting up of strong and unique passwords in accessing devices and changing them regularly, installing of appropriate anti-virus software and firewall protection and ensure that they are regularly updated, ensure backing up of important documents regularly and use of parental controls to filter the search content on internet enabled devices when students are participating in online learning.

The Writer is a lecturer at The University of Nairobi, Kisumu Campus and an Aspirant for The Position of Member of National Assembly, Alego Usonga Constituency