

STATUS OF LEARNING AMID COVID -19 FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE ACCOMPANYING SCHOOL CLOSURES: A CASE OF SELECTED COUNTIES IN KENYA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7512173>

Published Date: 07-January-2023

Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic brought changes to the scenario of teaching and learning in institutions of education. The shift from face-to-face traditional mode to online platforms brought many challenges along with it. This 'new norm' of pedagogy also posed challenges to learners with disabilities in learning institutions across Kenya especially when using online platforms to study. This study presents preliminary results obtained from the study conducted in selected Counties to map out the learning experiences of learners with disabilities during the learn-from-home time related to the COVID-19 lock down in Kenya. The objective of the study was to gather information about the situation in the community, how children continued with their learning, and what challenges there. The study was conducted in selected Counties to learners, teachers and parents that were purposively selected for this exercise. Qualitative data collection methods were used by the researcher to collect primary data. The researcher's aim was to use the data collected to examine the consistencies, contradictions, milestones, achievements among other important issues relevant to the effects of COVID-19 in education. Semi-structured interviews were employed to interview the participants and the collected data was analysed qualitatively using the self-determination theory. The findings showed that most of the learners with disabilities students faced mental stress challenges as they were leveraging in poverty and hunger due to low economies as a result of lack of sells hence affecting learning at home, sexual harassment for learners with disabilities and no learning was going on due to lack of electricity and lack of gadgets to enable e-learning, lack of materials, lacked of parental responsibility, they were idling and roaming around at home, anxiety was affecting especially class eight candidates and that both parents and learners had different attitudes towards learning. The findings further revealed that learners with disabilities were not ignorant in their learning and their disabilities were not obstacles to excel in education.

Keywords: Effects of COVID-19, Kenya, Learners with Disabilities, School closure, Learn-from-home, Pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The effects of coronavirus have been felt by everyone ever since it was declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) in January 2020. At the arrival of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the world quickly experienced a crisis within a crisis, a global public health emergency that exacerbated educational inequalities within a 'learning crisis' that was already occurring for hundreds of millions of young people who were attending school without

acquiring basic skills in literacy and numeracy (World Bank 2019). Specifically, COVID-19 intensified this learning crisis through two global shocks to education: massive school closures and a subsequent economic recession (World Bank 2020b). In the spring of 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, 180 countries experienced temporary school closures, Kenya inclusive, affecting 1.5 billion young people (World Bank, n.d.). Governments, Kenya inclusive, tried to respond to these unprecedented times by employing remote learning initiatives using both digital and nondigital formats. However, inadequate infrastructure or the absence of trained teachers who could quickly transition to online models of teaching often limited the effectiveness of such responses. This study came up from a deep need to understand the experiences of learners with disabilities during COVID-19 and the accompanying school closures. The study was conducted in June 2020 in four counties (Kiambu, Meru, Mombasa and Siaya) to inform the ‘just in time’ issues paper, *Revolving to Inclusion: Using Lessons from the COVID-19 Crisis for Learners with Disabilities* (World Bank 2020a).

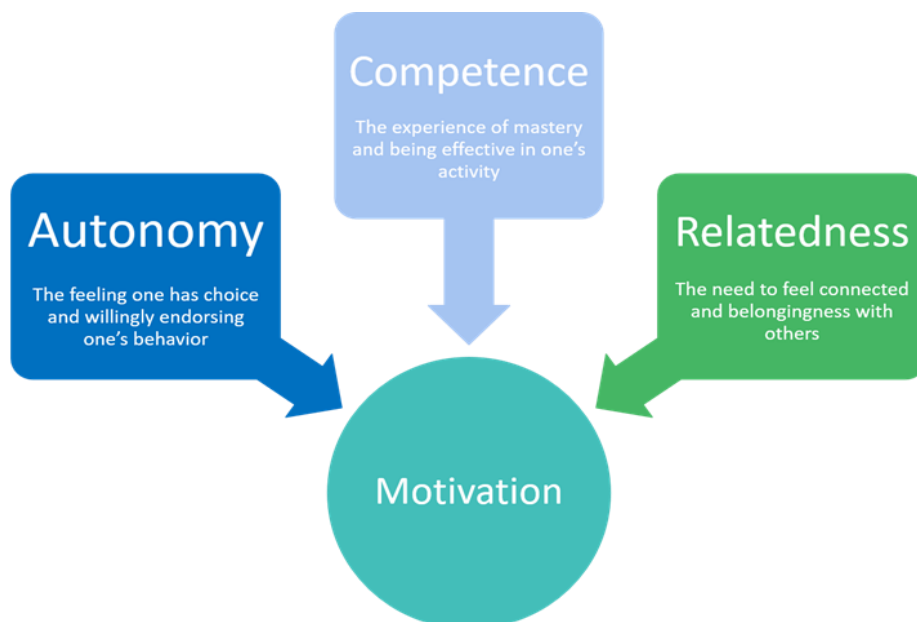
At the time, there was limited evidence available in Kenya on the impact and effectiveness of remote teaching initiatives on learning, especially for learners with disabilities. What was known was that the digital divide resulted in an estimated 40 percent of disadvantaged learners in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) being unsupported in their education (World Bank 2020a). Lacking in the accounts of global learning barriers, however, was evidence examining the impact of COVID-19 on the education of learners with disabilities. Research from prior pandemics, such as the Ebola crisis, suggest that lockdown measures can be particularly harsh on persons with disabilities because of reduced economic activity, reduced social cohesion, lack of support during quarantines, and the added risk of stigmatization (UNICEF 2017). Further, even under pre-pandemic circumstances, persons with disabilities face inequalities in accessing public services. For example, persons with disabilities are more than three times as likely to be unable to get health care when they need it, and in some countries more than half of the population of persons with disabilities cannot access rehabilitation services (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019). Persons with disabilities are less likely to access education, health care, and employment opportunities and they are more likely to live in poverty and experience higher rates of violence, neglect, and abuse (UNICEF 2020). COVID-19 further compounded these conditions, disproportionately affecting learners with disabilities both directly and indirectly.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to gather information about the situation in the community, how children continued with their learning, and what challenges there.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the self-determination theory by Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017) which makes two key assumptions: that there is the need for growth drives behavior and that autonomous motivation is important.



2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The study used an interview guide as the main instrument for qualitative data collection. The interview guide consisted questions, some of which were directed to all informants and others that were directed to the specific type of informant (parent/caregiver, teacher, or learner with disability). The survey questions examined the demographic characteristics of survey informants, their views on access to technology and learn-from-home learning modes or methods, and their perceptions of challenges and concerns or promising practices relating to the education of learners with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey informants also represented a variety of types of disabilities, from hearing and visual disabilities, to learning disabilities and those affecting mobility, and regular learners.

3. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Global school closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic present an unprecedented risk to children's education, protection and wellbeing. While we do not yet have enough evidence to measure the effect of school closures on the risk of disease transmission, the adverse effects of school closures on children's safety, wellbeing and learning are well documented. Interrupting education services also has serious, long-term consequences for economies and societies such as increased inequality, poorer health outcomes, and reduced social cohesion. The study was carried out a research in selected Counties on the learning experiences of learners with disabilities during the learn-from-home time related to COVID-19 lock down. Majority of informants had various views on the effects of COVID-19 on psychosocial issues, physiological issues, perceptions and perspectives, status of e-learning, communities and Households, challenges and emerging issues. The findings obtained in the study have been organized and presented in this section under 7 main themes, namely:

1. Psychosocial issues
2. Physiological issues
3. Perceptions and Perspectives
4. Status of e-learning
5. Communities and Households
6. Lessons Learnt in the Study
7. Emerging issues

3.1 Summary Findings

In response to COVID-19, schools were closed in all countries across the world. In many countries, there is no definitive date for when they will reopen. The carried out a research in selected Counties on the learning experiences of learners with disabilities during the learn-from-home time related to COVID-19 lock down and established that psychologically school closure had led to social distancing and loss of familiar environments due to restriction on movement, disruption of routines, limitation of social interactions and deprivation of traditional learning methods had led to increased pressure, stress and anxiety especially for candidate learners/ students, their families and communities. Teachers had to rapidly adapt to new and untested teaching methods and parents and guardians were struggling to meet the challenges of home schooling and there was no ample time for parental supervision at home thus leading to indiscipline.

Physiologically, the pandemic impact had affected teachers, parents and students/learners' lives in different ways negatively in that there was no community collaboration for activities, learners with disabilities needed more attention than regular learners which wasn't there in home as there was no teacher support, there was poverty and hunger due to low economies as a result of lack of sells hence affecting learning at home, sexual harassment for learners with disabilities and no learning was going on due to lack of electricity and lack of gadgets.

Further, majority of respondents had various perceptions and perspectives especially on e-learning. Students/learners found school to be more home so children wanted to be in school because they were doing nothing at home and it was unsafe for

them at home, there was community discrimination of students/learners with disabilities in all forks of life, lack materials and machines whereas some were bulky to carry, student/learners lacked of gadgets for digital learning, hence there was no communication as they lacked teacher support.

The status of learning has not been left behind. COVID-19 pandemic interruption had affected learning in different ways and has had different perceptions to teachers, parents and learners. Regular learners pointed out that no e-learning was going on at home due to lack of gadgets which was attributed this to poverty and family status, lack of parental responsibility at home, there was there was anxiety especially for candidate learners/students, most learners were not listening to parents, there was a lot of idling and roaming of these students/learners and both parents and learners have different attitudes towards learning. The hearing impaired pointed out that the environment was not conducive for learning and there was lack of electricity, lack of internet connectivity and lack of communication due to lack of understanding of the sign language hence no proper learning was going on at home, lack of gadgets and a teacher to explain concepts, lack of materials and chores at home. The visually challenged pointed out that they that the visual impairment were comfortable in school than home, lacked of materials for the totally blind whereas some materials were bulky for blind students/learners to carry and lack of equipment which were very expensive and parents could not afford. Learners with learning difficulty even those with mild learning difficulties, such as attention deficit disorders, it was established that they lacked following advice and forgetiveness of what was learnt, lost the daily routine that school provided added a significant layer of difficulty for learners with learning difficulty who were sensitive to change, there was no help at home as most parents were illiterate and lacked parental responsibility, there was no learning going on at home as these cadre of learners need teachers support and did chores at home Physically challenged learners were affected by lack of gadgets to enable e-learning at home and poverty which affected their learning at home.

In Communities and Households, school closures carry high social and economic costs for people across communities. Their effects however were particularly severe for the most vulnerable and their families. The resulting disruptions exacerbate already existing disparities within the education system but also in other aspects of their lives. There was lack of business thus affecting the livelihood in families leading to poor, financial constraints, poverty which was hindering learning, there was limited learning taking place at homes due to lack of gadgets, lack of materials for VI and large prints for learners with partial visual impairment thus no learning was taking place in homes and a that visual impairment students were psychologically affected due to lack of equipment, lacked assistance at home, lack of students had group discussion while at school which now lack at home that learners were stressed at home and that school was better than home. The regular learners were gaining from online programs compared to visually impaired learners who lacked materials, they couldn't draw and needed teacher and the teachers had a challenge of communication when trying to reach out to learners

Different categories experienced various challenges with the effects of COVID-19. The general ones included their parents might have been newly unemployed leading to poverty in households, some had illiterate parents who didn't help thus making learners/students to fall behind academically, they couldn't see their friends, or they might have been trapped at home in an abusive family situation and so students/learners are stressed. Some learners lacked food at home. There could be loneliness or disconnection from colleagues and friends caused by learn from -home orders and school closures. Or the frustration with the lack of gadgets and electricity to online learning and the uncertainty of what was ahead was just too much to handle. Some learners /students might end up having early pregnancies and early. The reality was that student and teacher morale was suffering. Parental involvement is minimal and the lack of accessibility features exclude students/learners with disabilities from these possibility programs. Regular Learners were engaged in doing chores at home more than learning. Some students/learners were idling and roaming in the villages and were not ready to learn home. This idling may lead to early pregnancies 'Others were engaged in trafficking illicit brews just to mention a few. Hearing Impairment learners /Students were separated from their sign language interpreters and lacked assistive devices like hearing aids and lacked teacher support and sign language interpreters at home. Visually challenged learners/Students were separated from their sighted friends who usually assist them. There was a challenge of bulky materials whereas others lacked of materials for the totally blind and others lack of equipment and a software at home to aid learning which were very expensive which their parents could not afford. Learners with Learning Difficulties lacked following advice and forgetiveness of what was learnt and they also lacked parental support. Physically Challenged Learners lacked wheelchairs and crutches to enable mobility while at home. Teachers lacked communication in a mid to reach out for learners/students so they were not able to give assignments. Some teachers are not aware of KICD programs and also no proper learning was

going on as online teachers handled one topic and moved. They also lacked electricity and internet. The study established that parents were unprepared for home schooling when schools closed, yet they were often asked to facilitate the learning of children at home and struggled to perform this task. This was especially true for parents with limited education and resources so there was no help at home as most parents were illiterate. They also lacked food and lacked parental responsibility as they felt burdened having children at home and were unemployed leading to poverty in households.

From the study several emerging issues came up which were not part of the study but which impacted negatively on learning. It emerged that learners/ students were engaged in doing chores at home hence they didn't have adequate time for study whereas some were engaged in trafficking illicit brews. Some learners/students lacked food at home due to lack of business thus affecting the livelihood in families leading to poor nutrition. The community also experienced low economies as majority of the people in selected Counties in Kenya were peasant farmers thus not earning much now from selling them due to restricted movement due to COVID-19. Some learners /students may end up having early pregnancies and early marriages due to idling and roaming in their communities.

3.2 Effects of Covid-19 on Psychosocial Issues

From the findings, majority of the informants reported that the COVID19 pandemic had necessitated lockdowns, school closures, social distancing and loss of familiar environments. Majority of respondents pointed out this. A parent of regular learners pointed out that "... *Life has changed and they are not living well like their parents used to do boda and not now and sometimes there is food problem so the associations are not well the environment is bad even the neighbors like if you have avocados one could sell in Isiolo but it's hard now [PRL_FEMALE]*, similar sentiments were echoed by a teacher of regular learners observed " *And now like in this period and with interaction only when there is a social distancing learning materials and protection from this virus so that you can have interaction or small gathering [DPRL_MALE]*."

3.2.1 Restricted movement and Routines

The restriction on movement, disruption of routines, and limitation of social interaction due to COVID- 19 affected families and communities. The disruption brought about stress and anxiety on students/learners especially candidates. Majority of respondents observed this; "a teacher of regular learners pointed out that "*The lockdown has many setbacks on the way of life especially in the community, because within the area that I have come around within the school some of them have not been able to feed well as they have been feeding. Interaction has been very impossible to interact with others because it's been restricted by the government. The way of life especially on how to feed or earn has become very hard and it has affected them negatively because some of them have not been able to get and do their business as usual so getting daily income is very low [DPRL_MALE]*"; A principal of regulars students narrated that " *Psychologically let me start with the candidates, some of them are desperate, some of the are feeling like it is no longer viable to revise for what exam is coming next year [ASS_PRL_MALE]*. Similar sentiments were echoed by a head teacher of regular learners pointed out that " *For example I have a child in class 8 and what I hear from him he is concerned about when he is going to do his exams and also be circumcised he is so much in that. I think that troubles him because you are waiting for a national exam and you don't know when it's going to be, you are to go to form one but you even don't know [IP_HTRL_MALE]* whereas a parent of physically challenged a learner noted..." *now they added the curfew to 9pm. But I go lone the children do not go there I do not allow them to go to the market. There is no church at all and no gathering" [SS_PHI_FEMALE]*".

3.2.2 Psychosocial effects on parents

Further due to closure of schools, parents and guardians were struggling to meet the challenges of home schooling; lack of food and poverty in poor households where income was a first priority. This was because they could not go out to get jobs or work as casual laborers. Most parents were juggling work and community obligations and caring for family members and maintaining individual well-being hence not supporting learning at home. He further noted that there were restricted movements was affecting them negatively" *This sides like hotels were closed, no work and without maize its difficult like maize is drying now another thing if people can be given sanitizers and masks and be told how to use and that corona is dangerous, but there is no one to tell them we have not church and also no school no meetings" [IP_PLD_MALE]*

A parent of a learner with learning difficulty pointed out that:" *In parents like this sides we dependent on farming like now you see like a suck of cassava would normally go for 5000 kes but now it goes for 2500 kes, there is no one to buy so people are eating their produce with children, even the bananas, so the business is really down. Like some have like five children*

in school and there work is just to eat every time and its stressing for the parents so because they just have normal jobs so there is a lot of problems[IP_PLD_MALE] whereas a learner with learning difficulty pointed out that; ‘‘We are doing fine but we do not have food, I am just from finding food my uncle had send me so that I get I come back we cook ‘‘[PR_LD_MALE] a teacher of regular learners narrated that’’ So basically what you're saying is the parents are having a hard time in controlling their children on learning matters[IP_DPRL_MALE] and similar sentiments were echoed by a head teacher noted’’ You know the problem we have now is hunger, like in our area we did not receive last rainfall and the harvest is so down. I don't know because we were thinking of a feeding program at school where parents would contribute few kilos of maize and beans, and now that rains failed and the parents are not much doing economic activities one can predict hunger and even when education resumes education will be negatively affected [IP_HTRL_MALE].

3.2.3 Psychosocial effects of COVID-19 on Teachers

Teachers have to rapidly adapt to new and untested teaching methods. Teachers and students miss seeing each other every day. There was limited communication between learners/students with their teachers leading to lack of teacher support, lack of gadgets and lack of sign language interpreters hence no learning was going on at home which was an uphill challenge for teachers to cope with. Majority of respondents reported loss of morale on students/learners, for instance, a principal of regular students narrated that ‘‘ So when we talk to them you hear that general discouragement, even for those in secondary they don't know what the future holds for them and I am a professional counsellor my brother and I know when I tell you that and what it takes when they tell you we have no future’’[ASS_PRL_MALE]. Similar sentiments were alluded by a teacher of regular learners that ‘‘... we were stranded because there was no preparation that was done to prepare the parents or guardians on how to care for young Ones. So for me the ones I can see around they almost do nothing especially the children which are mental illnesses and the handicapped cannot be guided on homework or assignment at home. They need to be guided on daily basis and in a few hours you need to change to another and parents they're not able to handle that because they seem to have a problem of wellbeing. So you find they don't take care of their children very well [IP_DPRL_MALE].

Lack of proper communication and sign language

A teacher of hearing impairment pointed out that there was lack of proper communication ‘‘ [KP_THI_FEMALE]; the teacher further narrated that there was a problem on sign language interpretation’’ Yes and another thing with the sign language we normally say it's somehow regional we have different signs meaning the same thing. For example when I say those in Muranga school of the deaf sign something this way those in Isiolo sign it the other way and those in Meru sign in another way now harmonizing for the kids becomes a challenge [KP_THI_FEMALE];

School was more home than school

A teacher of learners with learning difficulty observed that school was more home than home ‘‘Great changes, like now the children are not coming to school you know they do not understand what is corona like the other day a parent of a mental child told me that her girl rushed from home and went to the school compound’’[MP_TLD_FEMALE].

Lack of gadgets

A teacher of physically challenged learners pointed out that lack of gadgets hence no learning taking place’’ Ok now the biggest challenge is that of learners not having the required facilities, so no learning will take place. Facilities like the smart phones and we have TV teaching some can't afford that and so if they lack these there is no learning but if we have them we can have learning, that's my reasoning.’’[StJ_TPH_FEMALE]. Similar sentiments were alluded by a head teacher of visually impaired learners narrated that no learning was taking place due to lack of gadgets for online learning’’ The few I have talked to, because most of them I cannot reach them not because they do not want me to reach to them but the situations they are in. I must ring the areas chief so that the chief tell me I am not there and I will tell them you rang when I get back. So I have to go through other channels to know where children are, they don't have phones and all that and if they have it's the ‘‘mulika mwizi’’ and also if they have they have no electricity they have to go charge somewhere like shopping Centre so that they come back again. Like you call and you are told the owner of the phone is not around, it's at a charging place. So in short what I am saying is our children are not benefitting from the programs’’ [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE].

3.2.4 Psychosocial effects on Learners

Deprivation of traditional learning methods

Regular learners are concerned about their education as national examinations and are grappling with the insecurity of isolation and uncertainty. Deprivation of traditional learning methods has led to increased pressure stress and anxiety for learners and students. Some learners are left on their own, some idling and loitering which created a fertile ground for early pregnancies. A teacher of regular learners pointed out that *'' according to my observation so many children have been left to loiter around and seems their parents are not careful about the disease where in the morning you meet some in the field pretending that they are exercising. This makes me feel bad like in the media we hear many girls are getting pregnant and so when I look at the adolescent children at this time outside their houses I really mind about it [NP_TRL_FEMALE].* A principal of regular learners pointed out that *'' I have been talking to a number to encourage them, but when you talk to them we listen to the spirit and it's like they have given up but we have to encourage them and talk to the parents so that they can encourage them but this is also on phone you can only get a few who we can encourage because some homes cannot afford phones. So when we talk to them you hear that general discouragement, even for those in secondary they don't know what the future holds for them and I am a professional counsellor my brother [ASS_PRL_MALE].* A teacher of learners with learning difficulty pointed out that *'' Like assisting the children who are candidates it's so hard we feel bad for them but it's a situation we cannot avoid. so our candidates have no deadlines and you know we work with deadlines and they learn better with deadlines and we are not meeting, so we have those who are able and those willing to follow lessons there will be a difference between the rich and the poor, there will be a very high difference [MP_TLD_FEMALE].*

Increase in worries about economic and physical health and increased isolation

The impact of COVID-19 on students/learners had been enormous especially for learners with disabilities; with an increase in worries about economic and physical health, a rapid shift to online learning, and increased isolation, a teacher of hearing impairment pointed out that *'' I may not really tell because after seeing the program and then figuring my kids and thinking of the challenges they are undergoing I have not been very keen. You see our children did not even go home with books we visited one with a friend of mine and she told us she did not carry any book at home. So the time is there but they cannot concentrate, the parents can just tell them to go and read but cannot follow up on them'' [KP_THI_FEMALE].*

Lack of accessibility

In addition to these changes, students/learners with disabilities/health concerns were facing accessibility problems with online learning or communication tool. A parent of a learner with visual impairment narrated that; *'' From home unless the government sacrifices and buys for every child a machine for the blind and then they are distributed like if there is a channel they can use like pick braille paper from a certain place. You know even the GOK does not provide braille paper, we buy and a rim of braille paper costa 800 KES'' [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].*

Stress

Their stress may be compounded by additional risks such as financial stress or pre-existing conditions; a head teacher of visual impairment pointed out that *'' You know even carrying books if you give them, their situation I can tell you they are not benefiting from home, our parents we talk to them from time to time, every time but on one or two will take on what we say especially those with two parents, biological ones some would even come and ask for material to help their children at home [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE];* whereas a teacher of visual impairment observed that *'' Most people are home, the community is feeling that it is taking too long for the schools to open and you find that most parents are feeling burdened because of the staying home for long with children now most times they have to stay home and not to go to their normal activities. But others are taking life normally but taking precaution as advised by the ministry of health'' [_StLS_TVI_FEMALE]*

In conclusion, students/learners with disabilities face specific barriers in carrying out their daily lives in the community due to COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, staying at home, restrictions that did not consider their needs created disruptions and new risks to their autonomy, health and lives. Those with disabilities who relied on others for daily living (through formal support by service providers or informal support by relatives/friends) found themselves without support due to movement restrictions and social distancing measures. This left them at high risk without access to food, lack of gadgets, essential

goods and medicine, and prevented them from carrying out basic daily activities such as bathing, cooking, or eating. In addition, daily update information on COVID-19 measures was not systematically communicated nor disseminated in accessible formats and means to reach all students/learners with disabilities such as sign language interpretation, captioning, Easy to Read format, among others. Further, some students/learners with disabilities, such as those with psychosocial disabilities and learning difficulties were not able to cope with strict confinement at home. They were also at higher risk of violence, particularly when isolated.

3.3 Physiological Issues

This pandemic as well as its impact had affected teachers, parents and learners' lives in different ways.

3.3.1 Effects of restricted Movements

Restrictions on movement affected families and the community in general negatively. It led to lack of sales as there was no movement from one place to another to sell their products, lack of community collaboration in carrying out activities and low economies thus leading to poverty, and hunger. A parent with a learning difficulty learner pointed out that there were no sales for farm produce *"... parents like this side we dependent on farming like now you see like a sack of cassava would normally go for 5000 kes but now it goes for 2500 kes, there is no one to buy so people are eating their produce with children, even the bananas, so the business is really down. Like some have like five children in school and their work is just to eat every time and it's stressing for the parents so because they just have normal jobs so there is a lot of problems"* [IP_PLD_MALE] whereas a principal of regular students pointed out that there was no community collaboration for activities to be done as before *"...the way communal work was done before it's no longer been done because people would help each other in communal farming and activities but now the activities are no longer there. Let me mention something on water like the county Government dug a borehole which we share with the community and the school, so remember the social distancing. So the things have changed and people have not been doing things like the way they have always done and therefore it has affected the economic life* [ASS_PRL_MALE]. A head teacher of regular learners noted that there was poverty and hunger, *You know, these children with disability need more attention than the regular kids, and of course parents with such kids go through a hard time because they have to be with them every time now that they are not even going to school. Some have mental problems they can just get out of home and go places without knowledge of their parents. These other physically challenged they need someone all the time around them and if someone around them is a parent where will they get the time to look for food to feed them? So there is a challenge of hunger and poverty continues, and if the parent has to go and the kid is left behind there is sexual harassment that may come around especially those who have mental challenges people can exploit them sexually* [IP_HTRL_MALE].

3.3.2 Lack of attention at home

Learners/students with disabilities need more attention at home attention than regular learners. However, this was lack as there was no teacher support and parental attention to help these learners/ students. A head teacher of regular learners noted this out *" You know, these children with disability need more attention than the regular kids, and of course parents with such kids go through a hard time because they have to be with them every time now that they are not even going to school. Some have mental problems they can just get out of home and go places without knowledge of their parents. These other physically challenged they need someone all the time around them and if someone around them is a parent where will they get the time to look for food to feed them?..."* [IP_HTRL_MALE]. A principal of regular students alluded that there was no ample time for parental supervision at home thus leading to indiscipline *" they have the ample time but the parents do not spend the time with them, they go for casual labor to hustle. So they are left behind, the disciplined will do small home chores and read but some sneak out you know in rule of the you know "paka akitoka panya hutawala"-When the cat is away, the rat assumes authority.*[ASS_PRL_MALE]. On contrary opinion, he noted that this affected economies and no-learning going on *" So the things have changed and people have not been doing things like the way they have always done and therefore it has affected the economic life, like e-learning I mentioned here it's not a key thing because if it were possible to have the students in a common pool they would learn easily even by getting a television from a neighbor and it's not possible because people are in their home and that's what is happening"* [ASS_PRL_MALE].

3.3.3 Sexual harassment

Students/ learners with disability were vulnerable to sexual harassment when at home. The concerns about personal safety might be stronger than those of students/learners without disabilities and they might have been more vulnerable to stressors during the pandemic (such as disruption of critical health care). For these reasons they were at greater risk of psychological and physiological distress. A head teacher of regular learners pointed out that “...if the parent has to go and the kid is left behind there is sexual harassment that may come around especially those who have mental challenges. People can exploit them sexually [IP_HTRL_MALE]. A teacher of learners with hearing impairment pointed out that there is not only increases insecurity but also acts as fertile ground for the spread of intolerance and hate crimes, “ They are unsafe, very much imagine somebody in an environment where it's just utopia that is ...understand why things are going the way they are, especially the kids those who cannot communicate at all better those in high school who can write a message or even follow the TV” [KP_THI_FEMALE].

3.3.4 Lack of electricity and lack of gadgets

From the findings of the study, it emanated that majority of the learners/students had limited online learning due to lack of electricity in most parts of the county and lack of gadgets to enable learning. A principal of regular students narrated that “ Meru county not even Tigania west have difficulty in connectivity in electricity and have difficulty when it comes to e-learning. But specifically for Tigania west there is that challenge of power, affordability of gadgets for the technology and then you can imagine the general apathy of the community because of the economic challenge that they go through so getting e-learning for special learners for me it's not easy, it's not a walk in the path” [ASS_PRL_MALE]. This impacted negatively both regular and learners/students with disability, the principal further observed “Even the regular learners as I come to them you see they belong to the same parents and locality and connectivity of power is an issue and affordability of gadgets it's a farfetched dream and without exaggeration I would wish to say apart from learners who are from well-endowed few families in the area it is not easy. And then again connecting with such is not easy either because of the covid19 issue like getting in touch with learners is not easy because there is no freedom of moving from one home to another. So you can imagine both the regular learners and the other groups cannot get information through e-learning and to be sincere though we are talking about e-learning this is an area where people have not embraced it because of the challenges. Of course we have the imagination that we may get in touch with that through friends but how do we get these friends where do people converge. So it's a challenge” [ASS_PRL_MALE]. On contrary opinion, a teacher of regular learners pointed out that regular learners were learning. He said “ the regular children are being taught and they went home with textbooks that were being issued by the school to use at home. They carry them daily from school to home and from home to school so most of them the assignment they were given for that weekend because they were supposed to be in school on Monday they finished but then they continue to use the books and revise the notes because parents are being advised or how to help them read at home but that is for the regular students” [IP_DPRL_MALE].

In conclusion, there were no government guidelines on how students/learners with disabilities to respond to physiological issues and how the government ensured that they were not going to be among the groups of people who would be severely affected by the virus. The effect of the restricted movement policy affected the way learners/ students with disabilities live as their lives depended on the support of guides. Like fellow citizens who have no disabilities, the pandemic also had its effect on the social economic and livelihoods of students/learners with disabilities.

In addition to the effects of COVID-19, and educational accessibility, emergency response plans did not always include planning for students/learners with disabilities to deal with inaccessible communications. These threats put students/learners with disabilities at greater possibility of experiencing distress associated with the pandemic.

3.4 Perceptions and perspectives

From findings of the study, majority of informants had various perceptions and perspectives especially on e-learning. For instance, there was a perception and perspective that:

3.4.1 Learners/students were safe in school

Schools perform many functions outside of education. They provide a safe haven, a social arena, and, for families with students/ learners with disabilities, they offer vital one-to-one support. A teacher of visually impaired students was of the

opinion that the visual impairment students find school to be more home 'you find that the community does not accept you so you are not able to get out your problems or challenges. And also you find the books we use and where we write the machines are very bulky and so we cannot carry at home and also they are school property and very expensive that is the braille machine and you can't give them to go with them because once they are destroyed it will be difficult to get more [StLS_TVI_FEMALE]. She further narrated that there was community discrimination, lack materials and machines'' Even you find that the even the braille books are bulky those that carry, carry very few of them. So you find at home actually to our students I don't think there is any kind of learning [StLS_TVI_FEMALE]. Their materials were also bulky and most of them came from poor homes'' And also in the community as well most of the live in a very poor kind of poor background to an extend that even there are some I housed during the half term because they cannot go home, it is far some come from Turkana, a very humble background it's difficult to go and come back some satay even for two weeks even a moth before they come back to school because of transport. So with our students at this particular moment they are affected ''[StLS_TVI_FEMALE]whereas a regular teacher pointed out that children want to be in school because they are doing nothing at home'' We have children who like running and want to go back to school because they have nothing to do at home'' [NP_TRL_FEMALE (2)]. She opined that learners lack of gadgets for digital learning especially the visually challenged and hence there was no communication'' Things that have changed you know learners with special needs cannot access digital learning unlike the regular. Like the visual impaired are disadvantaged in a way in digital learning [NP_TRL_FEMALE (2)].

3.4.2 Lack of parental support and safety

A head teacher of regular learners narrated that there was lack of parental supervision of learners at home ''like other parents don't even have the time to follow up on them, they are not concerned and very few kids have that self-motivation and when one has a parent who does not push then they will do nothing. By the way many times kids do not know that they have a life ahead of them very few understand that ''[IP_HTRL_MALE]whereas a teacher of hearing impairment learner opined that learners were unsafe at home'' They are unsafe, very much imagine somebody in an environment where it's just utopia that is ...understand why things are going the way they are, especially the kids those who cannot communicate at all better those in high school who can write[KP_THI_FEMALE]. Lack of parental support can be attributed to the fact that some parents were illiterate so they were not helping learners at home'' There is a challenge because we just advice, telling them don't sleep remember what we have read and there is no follow up there is no way to get to all the students, we can't even call a meeting we can't visit them it's a great challenge'' [MP_TLD_FEMALE].

3.4.3 Lack of accessibility to online platforms and comprehension

A principal of regular students opined that some group of students/learners are not accessing online due to lack of electricity '' So this particular group is not able to access the e-learning because the connectivity of Kenya power or rather electricity is not good, number 2, Tigania west is a vast sub-county which borders Isiolo, Tharaka Nithi and in the two extreme ends the terrain is terrible and rains are erratic, so people rely on rainfall for agriculture and most of the activities I will call it peasant I mean cultivation that is not easy''[ASS_PRL_MALE].He further alluded that there was no online learning going on due to underlying conditions at home'' that's what I can attest and say those children have challenges as others are getting online their e-learning is not as easy''[ASS_PRL_MALE]. The same is echoed by a learner with learning difficulty'' I use a lamp and even getting to but the kerosene is a problem, so I use it for few minutes'' [PR_LD_MALE]. a teacher of hearing impairment pointed out that there was no conducive environment for learning at home as TV programs were hard to follow'' The learning environment has really changed especially when we talked to our deaf children they are really challenged especially on the TV programs it's difficult for them to follow the program due to communication. The interpreter can be there of is there but following is a challenge''. In addition a teacher of visually impaired students pointed out that different topics taught so visually impaired learners were disadvantaged'' Unless now we identify, like we have been in touch with some parents. You know most of these children's stay with their relatives, some who have just decided to assist them so sometimes you call and getting them is a problem, like we have a program that you guys are assisting to identify them, it is so difficult. You call and they say I am not there, not near and yet that's the number they gave so some are total orphans and there is no consistence use of the same phone number and we have even tried with the form fours to call them just to keep the fire burning and it's a problem'' [StLS_TVI_FEMALE]. On contrary opinion, a parent of learner with learning difficulty was of the opinion that learning was on'' You know even my children I really take care of them I don't want them to mingle, other go even to the forest to collect firewood, I heard kids even can be transferring the disease a lot so me I

make mine stay at home and it's hard to separate children. So they want to play with one another but we are separating them some even do not know what's going on and don't see the dangers'' [IP_PLD_MALE]

3.4.4 Lack of teacher support

This was supported by a teacher of learner with learning difficulty who pointed out that there was no help for learners'' *No not all, let's say 40% use electricity most people use the kerosene lamps'' [MP_TLD_FEMALE]*. A teacher of regular learners pointed out that learners cannot take learning at home seriously as they lacked teacher support'' *Children at home cannot work like they do in school, they are not effective unless class 8 and form four because they know exams are going to sit for exams but these others they are never serious'' [NP_TRL_FEMALE (2)]*. She further pointed out that no proper learning was taking place due to lack of enabling devices'' *The challenge that I am facing is how to meet them, contact them because I know of those that have mobile phones even if I try to tell the parents they are not able to buy the smart phone they can afford that of one thousand. So imagine you have three kids and you have to get a smart phone for each, they can't afford that's a challenge'' [NP_TRL_FEMALE (2)]*. A teacher of hearing impaired alluded that learners lacked teacher support and sign language interpreters'' *Teachers support. Provide learning materials eg. Text books, revision materials /papers. Provide a sign language interpreter'', gadgets and internet connectivity ' Lack of devices eg T.V, internet-enabled phone Lack of support from our teachers, eg. Where I don't understand, there is no one to explain'' [SS_HI_FEMALE]*

3.4.5 Chores at home

From the study it was evident that no much learning was going on at home due to majority of students/learners being tasked with chores at home thus the environment was not conducive for learning. A teacher of hearing impaired alluded learners are not learning due to doing chores at home and the environment was not conducive for learning'' *The environment is not conducive for learning. No enough time to study due to house chores. Lack of power/electricity'' [SS_HI_FEMALE]*. A parent of a learner with learning difficulty pointed out that there was no learning at home as learners were carrying out chores at home including trafficking illicit brews'' *to the posho mill the children are the ones being sent here and there they are being used. Like this area we have a lot of illicit brew and the children are being used to traffic them like you can tie a child on the back of another child but it has alcohol, it's happening a lot, because no one stops them on the way and take the brew to someone'' [IP_PLD_MALE]*. Students/learners were left on their own to home school or are pulled into other tasks, for instance, a teacher of learners with hearing impairment observed that'' *They are just at home, when you ask them they say they are helping parents, they are watching TV but for those who have. Those who do not have are just there idling, they are at risk we tell them not to move but for how long would they stay at home, and they really do not understand anything about the disease [KP_THI_FEMALE]*.

3.4.6 Poverty

From the study majority of learners came from poor households and therefore not able to fully support learners/student at home to learn because they could not afford gadgets to enable online learning. A teacher of physically challenged had experiences and came from families with looming poverty'' *So you see eve if we talk of the e-learning I can say most of them cannot afford, because the parents themselves don't even afford the smart phone because even to some even'' [StJ_TPH_FEMALE]*, she further pointed out that they cannot afford online devices '' *Yes I have heard, I have heard in the media that there is some kind of learning taking place but to me I cannot consent to that because what I have seen in the village and the people we are dealing with most of them cannot afford'' [StJ_TPH_FEMALE]*. Similar sentiments were echoed by a head teacher of visual impairment learners '' *Ok now the biggest challenge is that of learners not having the required facilities, so no learning will take place. Facilities like the smart phones and we have TV teaching some can't afford that and so if they lack these there is no learning but if we have them we can have learning, that's my reasoning'' [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE]*.

In conclusion, the perceptions and perspective of teachers, parents and students/learners was that students/learners with disabilities showed that online learning was not fully accessible depending on the disability. In addition, the move to increased asynchronous learning left students with disabilities behind, as, for example, videos were often not captioned. Inaccessible information and communication meant that students/learners with hearing, visual, learning difficulty and physical disabilities didn't receive key information about prevention and assistance. Students/learners with disabilities were

at threat of exclusion from education if remote/ distance learning programmes were not accessible or they did not have assistive devices to allow participation and accommodate their learning needs. Further, these students/learners with disabilities compared to the regular learners were extremely impacted by interrupted home, community and social services and supports, including personal assistance.

3.5 Status of Learning

Based on the findings of the study, going to school was the best public policy means available to raise skills. While school time can be fun and can raise social skills and social awareness, it also increases a child's ability. Even a relatively short time in school does this; a relatively short period of missed school will have consequences for skill growth. COVID-19 pandemic interruption had affected learning in different ways and had had different perceptions to teachers, parents and learners respectively as follows

3.5.1 Regular Learners

Interrupting or starting the school year late completely disrupts the lives of many students/learners, their parents and teachers. At home learners lacked of gadgets to enable e-learning and lack of materials, lacked of parental responsibility, they were idling and roaming around at home, anxiety was affecting especially class eight candidates and that both parents and learners had different attitudes towards learning. A principal of regular students pointed out that there was no e-learning taking place at home'' *That's what I can attest and say those children have challenges as others are getting online their e-learning is not as easy'' [ASS_PRL_MALE]*. He attributed this to poverty and family status''...*you find that for learners that are actually challenged with such parents who cannot afford and with minimal mobility, those who use the "koroboi" the "mkebe type of lamp" the lantern you can imagine now e-learning for them. Buying smart phones is not easy, laptop or tablet all those technological gadgets for e-learning and its almost second to impossible and I can say without missing words that 80-90 % in Meru county not even Tigania west have difficulty in connectivity in electricity and have difficulty when it comes to e-learning[ASS_PRL_MALE]*.

Lack of gadgets to enable e-learning and lack of materials

A head teacher of regular learners pointed out lack of gadgets to enable e-learning and lack of materials '' *Very few of cause who have TV sets can access education through, there is a channel bringing some lessons, Edu TV, KBC but now parents have been commenting and saying the children have no time for books even those in secondary they are saying they are not reading just a few have time for books. Like we were discussing today and some parents are saying we don't know what will happen with our kids because they have forgot about books [IP_HTRL_MALE]*.

Lack of parental responsibility at home

A teacher of regular learners opined lacked of parental responsibility at home' *'feeding ad parents taking the two school. But now it has changed every day they stay at home most of the days they don't feed even dressing is a problem, like today in met two or three of them on the road so you see they cannot be contained at home because some of them are roaming on the highway loitering just looking for something to feed on'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]*.

Anxiety

A teacher of regular learners further pointed out that there was anxiety '' *when they're not in school some of them and very much worried because they haven't ever seen such pandemic because they have been used to the daily routine of the school'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]*. Similar sentiments were echoed by a head teacher of regular learners who also alluded anxiety affecting especially class eight candidates ''*for example I have a child in class 8 and what I hear from him he is concerned about when he is going to do his exam s and also be circumcised he is so much in that. I think that troubles him because you are waiting for a national exam and you don't know when it's going to be, you are to go to form one but you even don't know'' [IP_HTRL_MALE]*. A teacher of regular learners pointed out that learners were idling and roaming around at home'' *Officially I don't have the numbers but the way I see them moving around mingling with other boys and those who are not learners I suspect there's something going on and it may crop up to be true because like on Sunday afternoon when you move around you meet them moving in groups going up and down'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]*. On contrary opinion, the teacher of regular learners pointed out that learners didn't listen to parents'' *So you find the students are doing very little so you find teachers do a lot of work that's why students fear them so when it comes to the parent it becomes hard for them to supervise the children unlearning issues'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]*.

Poor attitudes of both parents and learners towards learning

The study further established that both parents and learners had different attitudes towards learning *''I was asking them why and you are the parent and the teacher will not have two or three children like you are at home but we'll have like 40 children in class they said it's the respect the learners give to the teachers more and to the parents so the children don't have the same attitude for learning when they are with their parents'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]*. In addition, he noted that some regular learners were learning *'' The regular children are being taught and they went home with textbooks that were being issued by the school to use at home. They carry them daily from school to home and from home to school so most of them the assignment they were given for that weekend because they were supposed to be in school on Monday they finished but then they continue to use the books and revise the notes because parents are being advised or how to help them read at home but that is for the regular students'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]*.

Moral Decay

Further on contrary opinion, a teacher of regular learned opined that the presence of internet had led to moral decay among learners *'' May be I can say a very small number, because the children the internet has spoilt their brains instead of learning you see them carrying their phones to go to places where Wi-Fi is available. So instead of learning may be they are using the internet to do other things'' [NP_TRL_FEMALE]*.

Chores at home, lack of electricity and lack of gadgets

Moreover, findings of the study showed that they were engaged in doing chores at home which affected learning at home, a parent of regular learner pointed out chores at home, they lacked electricity and gadgets to enable them learn at home *'' She has siblings, they have been doing nothing like 12 year old will do what kind of job just washing utensils and staying in the compound. Even when we go to the market you know we cannot go with them we just leave them in the house. So the most work that the children have now is to eat and stay in the house'' [IP_PRL_FEMALE]*. She further alluded lack of gadgets and lack of electricity *''Yes sometimes muuga fm brings those lessons like at 9 am that's what she listens and writes and answers next day as home work. Like for us parents we don't have big phones or tv, we do not even have electricity. Even when you get tv there is no gain, so that's what they listen to'' [IP_PRL_FEMALE]*. The same sentiments were echoed by a regular learner *'' here at home we do not have TV we can't read online'' [IP_RL_FEMALE]*. Regular learners also pointed out that learning was affected by chores at home and lack of gadgets *'' I wash utensils and fetch water and sometimes I study'' [IP_RL_FEMALE]*.

3.5.2 Learners with Hearing Impairment

From the finding of the study, when COVID-19 pandemic hit, Hearing-impaired students shifted their learning to online but they are faced with several technical, economic, and social challenges. A teacher of hearing pointed out that:

Chores at home

The learners were involved in chores at home *'' Like the deaf any work done by hearing person they could do any manual work'' [KP_THI_FEMALE]*.

Government negligence

Negligence by the government and parents at home making them disadvantaged *''The HI children are, in fact all children with special children all of them have been highly disadvantaged especially the mentally challenged they don't understand them and some are even misused so they are very disadvantaged'' [KP_THI_FEMALE]*.

Lack of internet connectivity and lack of communication

In addition, the teacher narrated that there was lack of internet connectivity and lack of communication hence no proper learning was going on at home *'' I don't know now because we have no network, no communication with them and we also have to communicate to the parents to get to the children and even the parents are complaining no communication at all we cannot access them so I do not know how the government can help us communicate to them'' [KP_THI_FEMALE]*. In her opinion, hearing impaired learners were very safe in school *'' Yes very safe in school'' [KP_THI_FEMALE]*.

Lack of a conducive environment for learning

Moreover, the environment was not conducive for learning and there was lack of electricity and lack of adequate time for study at home so no e-learning was going on *'' The environment is not conducive for learning. No enough time to study due to house chores. Lack of power/electricity'' [KP_THI_FEMALE]; '' Lack of devices eg T.V, internet-enabled phone Lack of support from our teachers, eg. Where I don't understand, there is no one to explain'' [KP_THI_FEMALE].* A hearing impairment student pointed out that there was no adequate time to study at home *'' No, there is no enough time. Mostly in the afternoon or in the evening (for all the children)'' [SS_HI_FEMALE]. '' The environment is not conducive for learning. No enough time to study due to house chores. Lack of power/electricity'' [SS_HI_FEMALE].*

Lack of materials

From findings of the study, a parent of hearing impairment pointed out that there was lack of materials *'' We just sit at home with them, there is nothing to read may be they can read sometimes and look for cow feeds. Casty does not do a lot like our farm is not big so after looking for cow feeds we come back and she reads a little. She does some house chores '' [SS_PHI_FEMALE].* On contrary opinion, she alluded that students had accessibility to online learning *'' Yes, radio Casty and another child here they use the phone radio to study with'' [SS_PHI_FEMALE].*

Lack of gadgets and a teacher to explain concepts

Based on the findings of the study, hearing impairment students/learners expressed various challenges in the learn from home due to COVID-19. A teacher of learners with hearing impairment pointed out *'' Lack of devices eg T.V, internet-enabled phone Lack of support from our teachers, eg. Where I don't understand, there is no one to explain'' [SS_HI_FEMALE].*

Lack of communication due to lack of understanding of the sign language

Moreover, she pointed out lack of communication due to lack of understanding of the sign language *'' The lack of power around the local area makes it difficult to access and participate in any e-learning whatsoever. Due to low standards of living it is difficult to access devices such as a t.v or an internet-enabled phone. It is also quite difficult for a learner with hearing impairment to learn without supervision from someone that understands sign language. For this learner, communication is also a challenge since no one understands sign language in the family and also around the community'' [SS_HI_FEMALE].* She opined the need for teachers support, provision of materials and a sign language interpreter *'' Teachers support. Provide learning materials eg. Text books, revision materials /papers. Provide a sign language interpret'' [SS_HI_FEMALE].*

3.5.3 Learners with Visual impairment

One of the characteristics of students/learners with visual impairment is that they use of the sense of touch to recognize the environment. Blind and visually impaired use their hands to touch objects for identification. The learn from home due to COVID-19 had affected them in various ways *'' a head teacher of visual impairment learners pointed out that compared to regular learners, there was no learning going on at home for visual impairment ''No, regulars are well kept they are benefiting from the programs, they even take notes. People who are not benefiting are the special needs, for example the totally blind, okay like they have the TV they don't have style, frame or braille paper, they can't see but listen do practices like drawing they don't benefit at all. They can't take notes, asking a question was hard. Unless the teacher was there to help them'' [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE].*

Lack of materials and bulky materials

In addition she alluded lack of materials for the totally blind learners *'' Totally blind need braille papers styles braille, if not braille then the styles and frame, text books needed too even school here we have not received any text books for the blind'' [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE].* She also alluded lack of a conducive environment at home for learning and bulky materials for blind students being a challenge to carry *'' Even you find that the even the braille books are bulky those that carry, carry very few of them. So you find at home actually to our students I don't think there is any kind of learning'' [StLS_TV1_FEMALE].*

Lack of equipment which were expensive for parents to afford

A principal of visual impairment students pointed out that visual impairment students were the most affected cadre due to lack of equipment which were very expensive and parents could not afford *''Psychologically I can say my children as far as education is concerned, they are the most affected, almost to 90%. To begin with like the total blind, first I will appreciate the government, they are doing it good and they are using the social media but as much as they are listening they can see so they need a guide and equipment's, equipment's like braille machine which are very expensive and the cheapest can even go for 80,000 KES''* [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].

School was comfortable than home

The principal of visual impairment students pointed out that the visual impairment were comfortable in school than home *'' They are more comfortable at school than at home as far as education is concern because of the way, the assistance is more in school than home because of even equipment's and assistance you know the availability of teachers you have to go one to one with them. Like form fours if you want them to be smart at the end of it, we don't do a lot of theory exam we do orals, the visuals apart from the cats we put them on practice, but for revision for KCSE we put them in groups and together with teachers we do it make questions and discuss so that it's in their mind''* [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].

Online programs not of any help

In addition, she narrated that the online programs were helping regular students and not visual impairment students *'' It helps a little not to a higher percentage you know a child it will be okay for the ordinary students like you listen and you write notes down they always give assignments but here is a situation you listen and if you do not have someone to help you in the discussion because now we have the part of writing it out''* [StLS_PVI_FEMALE]. Further, there was no learning at home due to lack of specific materials for the blind and partially blind *'' No, for the total blind they must type in the braille paper, and they must use the braille machine because they do not write ordinarily like us, and then for the low vision and the Albinos they use enlarged for them I know they are straining because we usually have enlarged prints for them, even for the national exams they bring the enlarged papers''* [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].

Poor perception by the community

A teacher of visual impairment pointed out that these students were not perceived well in the community *'' you find that the community does not accept you so you are not able to get out your problems or challenges. And also you find the books we use and where we write the machines are very bulky and so we cannot carry at home and also they are school property and very expensive that is the braille machine and you can't give them to go with them because once they are destroyed it will be difficult to get more''* [StLS_TVI_FEMALE].

Lack of communication for teacher support

The teacher further noted that she had a challenge reaching out to the students due to lack of communication *'' Actually I am facing a lot of difficulty because I am not able to meet my students in any way like I have learning materials that I want to pass to them I don't have another way, I don't know of how to do it in another way so I am feeling bad, like I can't do what I want to do''*. She attributed to poverty or family status *'' They cannot in our school only two can afford and these ones have sponsors. We do not have enough braille in school so we are forced to teach orally sometimes and expensive for the school. And then also they break when they fall down and spare parts can be an issue''* [StLS_TVI_FEMALE].

3.5.4 Learners with Learning Difficulty

School closures were intended to keep students safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, but for many, it's ushered in a different set of dangers. For learners with even mild learning difficulties, such as attention deficit disorders.

Lack of following advice and forgetiveness of what was learnt

A teacher of learners with learning difficulty pointed out lack of following advice and forgetiveness of what was learnt *'' There is a challenge because we just advice, telling them don't sleep remember what we have read and there is no follow up there is no way to get to all the students, we can't even call a meeting we can't visit them it's a great challenge''* [MP_TLD_FEMALE].

Sensitive to change

Learning aside, losing the daily routine that school provides adds a significant layer of difficulty for learners with learning difficulty who are sensitive to change.

Illiterate parents and lacked parental responsibility

A teacher of learners with difficulty alluded further that there was no help at home as most parents were illiterate and lacked parental responsibility “ *For the parents who understand of cause but remember I told you most parents are not learned* ” “ *Parents, parents if any counted few, majority cannot guide the children like for me I am here in this village and I know those who are learned go to look for work in the south so it's away from home, so those who are left are not really able to guide on education. Practically there is no learning in the villages* ” [MP_TLD_FEMALE].

Lack of teacher support

A teacher of learners with learning disability noted that there was no learning going on at home as these cadre of learners needed teachers support “ *We have said much id like the government to assist teachers so that they can be able to assist children because I am looking to a situation where children cannot help themselves, they need to be guided and they may misunderstand the contends* ” [MP_TLD_FEMALE].

Chores at home

A parent of learner with learning difficulty observed that the learner was home helping with chores at home “ *No to say the truth we have those who have never touched food in fact for some parents they are happy because the children are the ones now going to the market, to the posho mill the children are the ones being send here and there they are being used* ” [IP_PLD_MALE]. He further alluded that they were helping in trafficking illicit brews hence there was no conducive environment at home for learning “ *to the posho mill the children are the ones being send here and there they are being used. Like this area we have a lot of illicit brew and the children are being used to traffic them like you can tie a child on the back of another child but it has alcohol, it's happening a lot, because no one stops them on the way and take the brew to someone* ” [IP_PLD_MALE].

3.5.5 Physically Challenged Learners

The immediate challenge was to educate students/learners from where they were, within the infrastructure and setting they were in. This required innovation and creativity to enhance distant learning tools, services and education. All this has been attributed to school closure due to COVID-19 pandemic. From the findings of the study, physically challenged students/learners were faced with numerous challenges in the learn from home due to COVID-19 pandemic

Lack of gadgets

A teacher of physically challenged learners pointed out lack of gadgets to enable e-learning at home “ *Ok now the biggest challenge is that of learners not having the required facilities, so no learning will take place. Facilities like the smart phones and we have TV teaching some can't afford that and so if they lack these there is no learning but if we have them we can have learning, that's my reasoning* ” [StJ_TPH_FEMALE].

Poverty

She further alluded poverty so there was no learning at home “ *So you see even if we talk of the e-learning I can say most of them cannot afford, because the parents themselves don't even afford the smart phone because even to some even ...* ” [StJ_TPH_FEMALE].

3.5.6 Teachers**Lack of communication and lack of gadgets**

From the finding of the study, teachers also had a challenge on reaching out for students/learners. A teacher of regular learners pointed out that there was lack of communication and lack of gadgets leading to lack of contact between the teacher and the learner “ *The challenge that I am facing is how to meet them, contact them because I know of those that have mobile phones even if I try to tell the parents they are not able to buy the smart phone they can afford that of one thousand. So* ”

imagine you have three kids and you have to get a smart phone for each, they can't afford that's a challenge''
[NP_TRL_FEMALE (2)]

In conclusion, Schooling provides essential learning and when schools close, students and learners are deprived opportunities for growth and development. The disadvantages are disproportionate for under-privileged students/learners who tend to have fewer educational opportunities beyond school.

3.6 Communities and Households

School closures carry high social and economic costs for people across communities. Their effects however were particularly severe for the most vulnerable and their families. The resulting disruptions exacerbate already existing disparities within the education system but also in other aspects of their lives.

3.6.1 Parents

The effects of COVID-19 affected communities especially parents economically as there was lack of business leading to financial constraints and poverty which hindered learning in homes as parents couldn't afford gadgets to enable online learning.

Lack of business

A parent of a student with hearing impairment pointed out lack of business thus affecting the livelihood in families leading to poor nutrition'' *''Me I used to go in peoples farms and work, sometimes buy bananas and sell but now all is not there''* [MU_SS_KII_PHI_FEMALE].she further narrated of low economies'' *Yes it's like there is no money like the way people are working here, there is no money''* [SS _PHI_FEMALE].

Financial constraints

A teacher of physically challenged learners pointed out financial constraints'' *Of cause there is the idea of lacking what is required due to financial constraints''* [StJ TPH_FEMALE].

Poverty

She further narrated of poverty which was hindering learning '' *The economy here like the people rely on agriculture, we have bananas, vegetables but you find that the people who come for those things cannot reach here to get these things so you find that the parents are straining a lot because of the finances now ''* [StJ _TPH_FEMALE].

Lack of gadgets

The teachers also opined that there was limited learning taking place at homes due to lack of gadgets ''*Ok now the biggest challenge is that of learners not having the required facilities, so no learning will take place. Facilities like the smart phones and we have TV teaching some can't afford that and so if they lack these there is no learning but if we have them we can have learning, that's my reasoning''* [StJ _TPH_FEMALE].

3.6.2 Learners

The impact of COVID-19 in communities and household affected learners in different ways. The visually impaired lacked materials for the totally blind and equipment and the partially impaired lacked materials with large prints. This affected them psychologically as no learning was taking place at home. They also lacked learners lacked assistance at home and group discussions which they had in school. They were stressed at home and that school was better than home A head teacher of visually impaired learners pointed out lack of materials for VI and large prints for learners with partial visual impairment thus no learning was taking place in homes ''*Now I have that challenge of learning materials like braille papers, braille machines, and style and slake all the writing materials I am not in a position to give each and every child at home. Other challenge is the large prints material I don't have I am completely handicapped I don't mind when they destroy something's they are children at least they will benefit like I may not feel so sad if spoilt but now they are not benefiting in any form because of the short of learning material the school does not have''* [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE] and a principal of students with visual impairment pointed that visual impairment students were psychologically affected due to lack of equipment '' *Psychologically I can say my children as far as education is concerned, they are the most affected, almost to*

90%. To begin with like the total blind, first I will appreciate the government, they are doing it good and they are using the social media but as much as they are listening they can see so they need a guide and equipment's, equipment's like braille machine which are very expensive and the cheapest can even go for 80,000 KES [StLS_PVI_FEMALE]. She further alluded that learners lacked assistance at home " They are affected I can say they are affected, because may be those home cannot be able to assist them in terms of education because they don't understand, even for television they are not able to see and do the homework given the words given in the radio they will listen but now they need a friend or someone who will be patient with them after they learn and discuss so that you can see if they understand" [StLS_PVI_FEMALE]. In addition, students had group discussion while at school which now lack at home " Yes they do, now like in school we have group discussions and we are together with them and give them time to type those papers and sometimes we type for them" [StLS_PVI_FEMALE]. A head teacher of visual impairment learners further pointed out that learners were stressed at home and that school was better than home " yes they are they call me and say sister you could just let them stay in school, they are really disturbing us, I cannot even search for food because I have to stay back at home take care of them. so they are stressed they long for opening because when children are in school they can move around and even sleep somewhere else because they have gone to look for what other children will eat, school fees and all that. Children at home they are stressed" [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE]. He opined that regular learners were gaining from online programs compared to visually impaired learners who lacked materials, they can't draw and need teacher's help" No, regulars are well kept they are benefiting from the programs, they even take notes. People who are not benefiting are the special needs, for example the totally blind, okay like they have the TV they don't have style, frame or braille paper, they can't see but listen do practices like drawing they don't benefit at all. They can't take notes, asking a question is hard. Unless the teacher is there to help them". [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE]. He further pointed out that the teachers had a challenge of communication when trying to reach out to learners " Yes the biggest problem we have is communication sometimes we call we don't find them two or three days we don't find them and we can't call every time we have other duties to attend to. So like we forget to call again and so on its challenging a lot we have a big problem. And the now you see when it comes to food for children will this parent concentrate on the learning of the children? No they will not, like they come from very poor backgrounds like I have 9 living with me now like in their places pathetic, I have distributed them to my staff like we can let them go home" [StLP_HTVI_FEMALE].

Hearing impairment students/learners expressed various challenges in the learn from home due to COVID-19. There was lack of a conducive environment for learning at home and lack of electricity, lack of gadgets, a teacher to explain concepts and lack of communication due to lack of understanding of the sign language. A teacher of learners with hearing impairment pointed out that "The environment is not conducive for learning. No enough time to study due to house chores. Lack of power/electricity" [SS_HI_FEMALE]. She further pointed out lack of gadgets and a teacher to explain concepts" Lack of devices eg T.V, internet-enabled phone Lack of support from our teachers, eg. Where I don't understand, there is no one to explain" [SS_HI_FEMALE]. Moreover, she pointed out lack of communication due to lack of understanding of the sign language.

Generally from the study the perception was that perhaps to the disappointment of some, students/learners were not generally been sent home to play. The idea was that they continue their education at home through online learning in the hope of not missing out too much. However, it seems very unlikely that it will on average replace the learning lost from school. But the bigger point established was that: there were substantial disparities between families in the extent to which they can help their children learn. Key differences in the amount of time available to devote to teaching; the non-cognitive skills of the parents, resources such as not everyone will have the gadgets to access the online material and also the amount of knowledge. Teachers have challenges reaching out to learners/students and for parents; it is hard to help their children learn something that they do not understand themselves. Consequently, this experience will lead to an increase in the inequality not only in education but also of human capital growth for the affected cohorts.

3.7 Lessons learnt in the Study

3.7.1 General Challenges for learners

Majority of students/learners with or without disability said they felt overwhelmed, and not just about the health of their family and friends due to the coronavirus.

3.7.2 Parents

3.7.2.1 Lack of employment and poverty

Learning was affected at home due to unemployment with lead to poverty, some parents were illiterate and could not provide help to learners at home. A principal of regular learners pointed out that parents might be newly unemployed leading to poverty in households *''you find that for learners that are actually challenged with such parents who cannot afford and with minimal mobility, those who use the "koroboi" the "mkebe type of lamp" the lantern you can imagine now e-learning for them. Buying smart phones is not easy, laptop or tablet all those technological gadgets for e-learning and its almost second to impossible and I can say without missing words that 80-90 % I'' [ASS _PRL_MALE]*, Some have illiterate parents *'' There is a challenge because we just advice, telling them don't sleep remember what we have read and there is no follow up there is no way to get to all the students, we can't even call a meeting we can't visit them it's a great challenge'' [MP _TLD_FEMALE''* who don't help thus they might be falling behind academically, they can't see their friends, or they might be trapped at home in an abusive family situation and so students/learners are stressed *'' So psychological the students are depressed because the way they talk and ask when they see a teacher asking what is happening and what's going on and there's nothing at home to eat, can we come to school '' [IP _DPRL_MALE].*

3.7.2.2 Learners

Lack of food

Some learners lacked food at home *'' feeding ad parents taking the two school. But now it has changed every day they stay at home most of the days they don't feed even dressing is a problem, like today in met two or three of them on the road so you see they cannot be contained at home because some of them are roaming on the highway loitering just looking for something to feed on'' [IP _DPRL_MALE].*

Loneliness and frustrations of learners

It can be loneliness or disconnection from colleagues and friends caused by learn from -home orders and school closures. Or the frustration with the lack of gadgets and electricity to online learning as pointed out by a principal of regular students *But specifically for Tigania west there is that challenge of power, affordability of gadgets for the technology and then you can imagine the general apathy of the community because of the economic challenge that they go through so getting e-learning for special learners for me it's not easy, it's not a walk in the path'' [ASS _PRL_MALE].*

Uncertainty of the learners' future

The uncertainty of what's ahead is just too much to handle. Some learners /students may end up having early pregnancies and early marriages'' *well I have not done much research per say but as it has been we have heard the challenge of early marriages and pregnancies. So far I have not heard anything in my school yet but I would not allude and they there is none, we have had few cases before even in the locality in other schools too'' [ASS _PRL_MALE].*

Loss of morale

The reality is that student and teacher morale was *suffering'' for my children I give them time, but when I just go they stop even this one of class 8 he goes to swing, like these children no longer know the importance of education, me I pray that if possible schools to open so that even if they study on the field it's okay they just have social distancing like class 8 are losing hope they think they will repeat in fact me I want them to repeat ''[IP _PLD_MALE].*

Lack of parental involvement

Parental involvement is minimal *'' like other parents don't even have the time to follow up on them, they are not concerned and very few kids have that self-motivation and when one has a parent who does not push then they will do nothing. By the way many times kids do not know that they have a life ahead of them very few understand that'' [IP _HTRL_MALE]* and the lack of accessibility features exclude students/learners with disabilities from these possibility programs. *It was also unsafe for learners/students at home'' They are unsafe, very much imagine somebody in an environment where it's just utopia that is ...understand why things are going the way they are, especially the kids those who cannot communicate at all better those in high school who can write a message or even follow the TV'' [KP _THI_FEMALE]*

3.7.3 Regular Learners

The effects COVID-19 pandemic on closure of schools resulted to which disruptions exacerbated already existing disparities within the education sector but also in other aspects of their lives.

Chores at home

Regular learners/students were engaged in doing chores at home more than learning '' *She has siblings, they have been doing nothing like 12 year old will do what kind of job just washing utensils and staying in the compound. Even when we go to the market you know we cannot go with them we just leave them in the house. So the most work that the children have now is to eat and stay in the house*'' [IP_PRL_FEMALE]'' *They are just at home, when you ask them they say they are helping parents, they are watching TV but for those who have. Those who do not have are just there idling, they are at risk we tell them not to move but for how long would they stay at home, and they really do not understand anything about the disease*'' [KP_THI_FEMALE].

Idling and roaming

Some students/learners were idling and roaming in the villages and not ready to learn'' home'' *Officially I don't have the numbers but the way I see them moving around mingling with other boys and those who are not learners I suspect there's something going on and it may crop up to be true because like on Sunday afternoon when you move around you meet them moving in groups going up and down*'' [IP_DPRL_MALE]. This idling may lead to early pregnancies '' *Around we are hearing some children who are pregnant because the holidays is a little bit too long, because nowadays I really do not know what is wrong with parents because they are not really with their children they are too busy with their economic activities and other things, they do not have time to sit with their children, and the young ones are not so scared about this thing and they are looking for each other like even when the curfew had been taken extended*'' [IP_HTRL_MALE].

Trafficking of illicit brews

Others were engaged in trafficking illicit brews '' *Like this area we have a lot of illicit brew and the children are being used to traffic them like you can tie a child on the back of another child but it has alcohol, it's happening a lot, because no one stops them on the way and take the brew to someone*'' [IP_PLD_MALE] just to mention a few.

3.7.4 Hearing Impairment Learners /Students

Separated from their sign language interpreters and lack of hearing aids

Majority of the hearing-impaired students/learners were separated from their sign language interpreters and lacked assistive devices like hearing aids'' *You know not all of them can benefit from the hearing aid, that's why we use signs those who can use hearing aids they go to the main stream. They use them to hear environmental sounds like a car, airplane to be aware of environment*'' [KP_THI_FEMALE]. This especially impacted hearing-impaired students/learners with limited knowledge of sign language'' *You know if they were people who could learn without the teachers it would be great but now it's challenging because someone has to be there*'' [KP_THI_FEMALE].

Lack of teacher support

These category lacked teacher support and sign language interpreters at home'' *The lack of power around the local area makes it difficult to access and participate in any e-learning whatsoever. Due to low standards of living it is difficult to access devices such as a t.v or an internet-enabled phone. It is also quite difficult for a learner with hearing impairment to learn without supervision from someone that understands sign language. For this learner, communication is also a challenge since no one understands sign language in the family and also around the community*'' [SS_HI_FEMALE].

3.7.5 Visually challenged learners/Students

Bulky materials and lack of materials

Visually-impaired students/learners were separated from their sighted friends who usually assisted them. There was a challenge of bulky materials'' *And also in the community as well most of the live in a very poor kind of poor background to an extend that even there are some I housed during the half term because they cannot go home, it is far some come from Turkana, a very humble background it's difficult to go and come back some satay even for two weeks even a moth before*

they come back to school because of transport. So with our students at this particular moment they are affected [StLS_TVIFEMALE] whereas others lacked of materials for the totally blind'' They cannot in our school only two can afford and this ones have sponsors. We do not have enough braille in school so we are forced to teach orally sometimes and expensive for the school. And then also they break when they fall down and spare parts can be an issue'' [StLS_TVIFEMALE]

Lack of equipment and software at home

Others lacked of equipment and a software at home to aid learning which were very expensive and their parents could not afford ''Psychologically I can say my children as far as education is concerned, they are the most affected, almost to 90%. To begin with like the total blind, first I will appreciate the government, they are doing it good and they are using the social media but as much as they are listening they can see so they need a guide and equipment's, equipment's like braille machine which are very expensive and the cheapest can even go for 80,000 KES'' [StLS_PVIFEMALE].

The researchers' perspective opines that what was also important to be understood was that lacking access to information led the blind to be less sensitive to what was happening in their surroundings. As a result, knowledge and understanding of what a coronavirus was, the effect it had to people's health, and prevention protocols were then ignored. Furthermore, limited information led to a lack of awareness of the need to maintain hygiene such as the necessity to wash hands, to cough on their shoulder and to maintain a 1.5m distance.

3.7.6 Learners with Learning Difficulties

Limited attention

This was for learners with even mild learning difficulties, such as attention deficit disorders. A teacher of learners with learning difficulty pointed out lack of following advice and forgetiveness of what was learnt '' There is a challenge because we just advice, telling them don't sleep remember what we have read and there is no follow up there is no way to get to all the students, we can't even call a meeting we can't visit them it's a great challenge'' [MP_TLDFEMALE].

Lack of parental support

They also lacked parental support '' For the parents who understand of cause but remember I told you most parents are not learned'' '' Parents, parents if any counted few, majority cannot guide the children like for me I am here in this village and I know those who are learned go to look for work in the south so it's away from home, so those who are left are not really able to guide on education. Practically there is no learning in the villages'' [MP_TLDFEMALE].

3.7.7 Physically Challenged Learners

While most students and learners were resilient, they experienced increased stress and anxiety during times of uncertainty. Existing mental health concerns exacerbated when lacking the structure, support and interaction with peers at school.

Lack of wheelchairs and crutches

From the findings of the study, physically challenged students/learners were faced with numerous challenges in the learn from home due to COVID-19 pandemic and the worst being lack of wheelchairs and crutches to enable mobility while at home'' the same because of even movement because in some cases some use wheel chairs and crutches yes'' [StJ_TPHFEMALE].

From the researchers' perspective, the government had ignored the fact that many students/learners with disability have low literacy skills. They required information just like regular students/learners. In addition to the above mentioned challenges, there were other issues, such as limited internet connection, the absence of a companion to explain to students/learners if there are pictures or videos during online learning/ normal learning, as well as the behavior of the blind students/learners themselves, such as falling asleep and difficulty concentrating for younger learners. Digital platforms that were neither built for virtual learning nor for learners /students with visual and hearing disabilities were not leading to equity in education.

3.7.8 Teachers

The COVID-19 pandemic had, with alarming speed, dealt a heavy blow to the teachers handling various categories of learners and students. There was Confusion and stress for teachers when schools closed, especially unexpectedly and for

unknown durations, teachers were often unsure of their obligations and how to maintain connections with students to support learning. Transitions to online learning platforms tended to be messy and frustrating, even in the best circumstances. In many contexts, school closures led to absences or separations for teachers. For instance;

Lack of communication

Lack of communication in a mid to reach out for learners/students'' *You know we have partially who use brains and also partial blindness that use the large prints, you know with that we have those who have gone on operation and may be the eye cannot do everything, so we train them to do brail and those who are partially blind whom when eyes are corrected they can actually use the enlarged. But when trained to use braille they have no problem even the totally blind '' [StL _PVI_FEMALE]* so teachers were not able to give assignments'' *there no assignment that was given out because we don't have the program for giving out assignment during the covid-19 holiday. So we have no meetings or any arrangements only supervision and guidance to the parents to learn those books'' [IP _DPRL_MALE].*

Teachers not aware of KICD programs

Some teachers were not aware of KICD programs and also no proper learning was going on as online teachers handled one topic and moved on'' *So this ones on TV you do one topic and next day it's another topic and they have not written anywhere, the regular can go back and check. If they would have a parallel program where my wish is to include the visually impaired teachers to do the same not the regular teachers, they identify special teachers for visually impaired even when interchanged then make a program then give them a longer time like even one hour. So that you talk about it for sometimes and next time you recap because they don't have notes. The regular are benefiting more'' [StLS _PVI_FEMALE].*

Lack of electricity and internet connectivity

They also lacked electricity and internet' *So this particular group is not able to access the e-learning because the connectivity of Kenya power or rather electricity is not good, number 2, Tigania west is a vast sub-county which borders Isiolo, Tharaka Nithi and in the two extreme ends the terrain is terrible and rains are erratic, so people rely on rainfall for agriculture and most of the activities I will call it peasant I mean cultivation that is not easy'' [ASS _PRL_MALE]''.*

From the researchers' view, generally teachers had the challenge of measuring and validating the ongoing learning online, they couldn't administer calendared assessments, examinations that determine admission or advancement to new education levels and institutions. All these were thrown into confusion when schools closed due to COVID-19. Speculations of postponing, or skip examinations raised serious concerns about fairness, especially when access to learning became variable. Disruptions to assessments resulted in stress for students, teachers and parents and could trigger disengagement.

3.7.9 Parents

Parents were unprepared for home schooling when schools closed, parents were often asked to facilitate the learning of children at home and struggled to perform this task. This was especially true for parents with limited education and resources.

Illiterate parents

A teacher of learner with learning difficulty who pointed out that there was no help at home as most parents were illiterate so they were not helping learners at home' *There is a challenge because we just advice, telling them don't sleep remember what we have read and there is no follow up there is no way to get to all the students, we can't even call a meeting we can't visit them it's a great challenge'' [MP _TLD_FEMALE].*

Low economies due to COVID-19

Parents experienced low economies with this COVID-19'' *The businesses are low you find that actually like the shops and market people are not going to the market just a few going but keeping the instances'' [StLS _TVI_FEMALE].*

Lack of food and parental responsibility

Lack of food and lack of parental responsibility as they felt burdened having children at home'' *You know this covid19is a silent walker we are not even sure about it. Everybody desires for things to come back to normalcy and it's even a problem to the parents'' [StLS _PVI_FEMALE]''. Most people are home, the community is feeling that it is taking too long for the*

schools to open and you find that most parents are feeling burdened because of the staying home for long with children now most times they have to stay home and not to go to their normal activities. But others are taking life normally but taking precaution as advised by the ministry of health'' [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].

Unemployment of parents

Parents were unemployed leading to poverty in households *''you find that for learners that are actually challenged with such parents who cannot afford and with minimal mobility, those who use the "koroboi" the "mkebe type of lamp" the lantern you can imagine now e-learning for them. Buying smart phones is not easy, laptop or tablet all those technological gadgets for e-learning and its almost second to impossible and I can say without missing words that 80-90 % I'' [ASS_PRL_MALE],*

3.8 Emerging Issues

From the findings of the study, several emerging issues came up which were not part of the study but which impacted negatively on learning.

3.8.1 Chores at home

It emerged that learners/ students were engaged in doing chores at home hence they didn't have adequate time for study *'' She has siblings, they have been doing nothing like 12 year old will do what kind of job just washing utensils and staying in the compound. Even when we go to the market you know we cannot go with them we just leave them in the house. So the most work that the children have now is to eat and stay in the house'' [IP_PRL_FEMALE]* whereas some were engaged in trafficking illicit brews *'' to the posho mill the children are the ones being sent here and there they are being used. Like this area we have a lot of illicit brew and the children are being used to traffic them like you can tie a child on the back of another child but it has alcohol, it's happening a lot, because no one stops them on the way and take the brew to someone'' [IP_PLD_MALE].*

3.8.2 Lack of food in homes

Some learners/students lacked food at home *'' feeding and parents taking the two school. But now it has changed every day they stay at home most of the days they don't feed even dressing is a problem, like today in met two or three of them on the road so you see they cannot be contained at home because some of them are roaming on the highway loitering just looking for something to feed on'' [IP_DPRL_MALE].*

3.8.3 Lack of business and low economies

Lack of business thus affecting the livelihood in families leading to poor nutrition *'' Me I used to go in peoples farms and work, sometimes buy bananas and sell but now all is not there'' [SS_PHI_FEMALE]* and low economies as majority of the people in the counties were peasant farmers thus not earning much now from selling them due to restricted movement due to COVID-19 *'' Yes it's like there is no money like the way people are working here, there is no money'' [SS_PHI_FEMALE]* *'' for that matter let me say peasant farming, they grow maize and beans few have miraa trees... So the main activity is peasant farming and its hand to mouth affair and rarely get produce to sell because their pieces of land have been subdivided to very small portions actual some are divided to point one of an acre and this are parents we are to rely on to support school you can imagine'' [ASS_PRL_MALE]* *'' The problems that have come since corona like me I do farming there is no much sales on our produce' [IP_PRL_FEMALE].*

3.8.4 Early pregnancies and early marriages

Some learners /students ended up having early pregnancies and early marriages *'' well I have not done much research per say but as it has been we have heard the challenge of early marriages and pregnancies. So far I have not heard anything in my school yet but I would not allude and they there is none, we have had few cases before even in the locality in other schools too'' [ASS_PRL_MALE].*

4. CONCLUSION

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic which led to closure of schools had caused major (and likely unequal) interruption in student/learners' learning; disruptions in internal assessments; and the cancellation of public assessments for qualifications or their replacement by an inferior alternative with major challenges which has caused disparities in learning as evidenced in the above discussions.

What could be done to mitigate these negative effects? Schools needed resources to rebuild the loss in learning, once they re-opened. How these resources were used, and how to target the students/learners who were especially hard hit, was an open question. Given the evidence of the importance of assessments for learning, schools should also consider postponing rather than skipping internal assessments.

Further, online learning conducted in learn-from-home learning during this Covid-19 pandemic should have benefited all learners. However, findings from this study reveal that the learners with disabilities faced many challenges which gave an impact on their mental and emotional health as they were unable to perform as well as their other counterparts in their learning process. Being a minority group, it should be deemed necessary that their needs were also considered when online learning was conducted. The results obtained from this study indicate that there is a need for the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to develop committees that can devote attention to learners with disabilities. These committees can come up with specific guidelines for these learners and make the necessary recommendations to the educators to be prepared in times of pandemics and epidemics when conducting online classes, record lectures and various tests to consider these learners with disabilities in the teaching-learning and assessment process.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the study, the following recommendations came up for various categories of education stakeholders.

5.1 Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST)

5.1.1 MOEST to make follow ups

A teacher of regular learners recommended that the MOEST should make a follow up on the ground to see if all learners accessed online learning *"The news can be there which is being viewed by the Ministry of Education but to make sure it has being effective how can you access it because you're not at home with them to know that they have access what you have delivered"* [IP_DPRL_MALE].

5.2 Government of Kenya

From the findings of the study, various respondents made various recommendations to the government such as:

5.2.1 GoK CDF kitty improve e-learning

A principal of regular students recommended that the government Constituency Development Fund (CDF) kitty should be used to improve e-learning *"I would say the GOK through CDF kitty to set up e-learning centers in the constituencies, through the county governments they can improve in e-learning like we get to understand that we have some money being disbursed so at least if they can get some gadgets for a few homes which could be identified by chiefs if corruption could be fought, they can I identify and get them and at least we would get somewhere. But now e-learning is not taking root as we think in the rural areas"* [ASS_PRL_MALE].

5.2.2 GoK install electricity in rural areas

Further, a principal of regular students recommended that the government should install electricity in the rural areas in all Counties to make e-learning to all learners a reality *"Let us think more of the special need children, more has to be done, the government needs to make sure electricity to be connected in all rural areas, I also think covid19 is here to stay and we need to think about e-learning we should think about. Also the parents should take responsibility of their children"* [ASS_PRL_MALE].

5.2.3 For learners

GoK protect learners not to deviate from norms

A teacher of regular learners recommended that the government should protect learners from deviating from norms by enforcing guidelines which protected the children *"I think the government should protect them so that they don't deviate from the norms. Like now the girls can be fooled around and get pregnant only behave like their women and for the boys they can interact with the boda guys and you find them drinking or smoking. So the government can try through the machinery and enforce guideline strongly to guard this children"* [IP_DPRL_MALE].

Government of Kenya to provide learning materials and improve infrastructure

For hearing impaired learners/students

A teacher of hearing impairment learners recommended that the government should provide learners with materials to help them learn at home *“Provide learning materials. Improve infrastructure around the area eg. Proper lighting programmes”* [SS_HI_FEMALE].

Provide e-learning devices

She further recommended that the government should provide e-learning devices to learners/ students with hearing impairment *“Provide learning materials. Provide devices for e-learning. Find a solution /cure to corona virus so that we can go back to school so...”* [SS_HI_FEMALE].

Government of Kenya & Ministry of Education Science and Technology delocalize learning

He also recommended that the government should delocalize learning *“So you find the children and parents get encouraged because they own that language. So the Ministry of Education and the government if they if they knew the period of which children will stay at home we could try to the delocalized it”* [IP_DPRL_MALE].

5.2.4 For schools

Government of Kenya to provide schools with ICT Equipment

A head teacher of regular learners recommended that the governments should provide ICT equipment to schools to help in communication *“Another thing is may be if we had someone help the school with ICT equipment's, because I hear like we have a way to send SMS at ones, if we could have that it could be good I don't know how it's done. So it would help in communication”* [IP_HTRL_MALE].

Government of Kenya provide food to schools

A parent of a learning difficulty learner recommended that the government should provide food to schools. School feeding programme should be implemented in all schools in the country *“Me what I can ask the government is on food, they can help food provision even in schools. The government says education is free but we are still spending”* [IP_PLD_MALE]

Open schools for candidates

A parent of a learning difficulty learner recommended that the government should open schools for candidates *“The school head teacher should just take class 8 only and observe social distancing they can even sit on a hall or the field where we have space and shade and masks and sanitizers and be taught. The school also the others should be fully equipped and teachers from far should be tested also the children before coming back to school”* [IP_PLD_MALE].

Government of Kenya provide sanitizers and masks

A teacher of learners with hearing impairment recommended that the government should provide learners and teachers with sanitizers and masks *“They can support by providing masks and sanitizers for class 8 to come to school, teachers are ready to help them in there exams, so we should have safety support”* [KP_THI_FEMALE].

5.2.5 For Teachers

Government of Kenya provide teachers and learners gadgets

A principal of students with visual impairment recommended that teachers and learners should be provided with gadgets for communication *“the major problem is communication if they could support the teachers and learners with gadgets for communication even if its airtime just promote”* [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].

Special Needs Education teachers have own channel

She also recommended that special Needs Education teachers should have their own channel so that they could cater for students/learners with disabilities *“Like the GOK is doing well but now we have special situations. So they should engage us with communication like special teachers are not on board they should have their own channel and have their program”*

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and have more time for them and teachers can link up. So we can communicate and even alert them your program is coming'' [StLS_PVI_FEMALE].

5.2.6 For parents

Government of Kenya supply electricity

A head teacher of regular learners recommended that the government should supply electricity to the parents so as to enable access to TV and other channels learning *''poor but we have places that have no electricity. So even the lessons in the TV, they cannot access them, so the GOK can ensure electricity is supplied to many areas. Second about radio lessons, I am happy here we have Muuga FM, they bring lessons so if the GOK can partner with counties or sub-county local teachers to bring lessons everyday both in primary and secondary. Like I'm sorry to say KBC English service signals are very bad compared to the recent local FMs that have come up. So they can bring programs in local language also'' [IP_HTRL_MALE].*

Government of Kenya to provide water and construct roads

A principal of regular students recommended that the government should provide parents with water and construct roads for them *'' What I can say to finalise like I said the government to remember parents like us who do not have any other means of earning, like there is no electricity, no water ad we have bad roads and no work yet we have children. Life is hard and the children are suffering like now the learning topic you are back from work and so tired and you can't even remember to ask the kids if the learned or not because of stress so confused. So they should remember us'' [IP_PRL_FEMALE].*

Parents and Special Needs Children to go through Counseling

A principal of students with visual impairment recommended that parents for regular learners and Special Needs(SN) learners to go for counseling on how to handle learners/students when at home, be responsible and cooperate with teachers *'' Also let the parents and those near children with special needs they should be taken through counseling when they came back, I have been with them and they are traumatized, they are confused and get disturbed quickly because of trauma from child hood especially by not accepted by community and other people so they need counseling'' [StLS_TVI_FEMALE].*

5.3 Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs help locally

A teacher of regular learners recommended that the NGOs should help people locally by organizing learning to go on in communities *'' Like those NGO can organize things locally and not from a national level or District level because we come from different community end we attract differently. Like now nomadic people like the way I have been previously teaching in Madera they cannot grasp like the ones that are here in this County they have different social activities on how they interact and the community behaves differently. So the NGO can go deeper in the Communities and organize learning and how it can be delivered to the children when they are at home in small groups.*

5.4 Parents

Parents should be responsible

A principal of regular students recommended that parents should take responsibility of what students are doing at home with the pandemic or without a pandemic *'' One parents should be more responsible, and quality time means being with them however busy we are out there, we need to know like what the students are doing out there, now I am talking as a parent we need to know whether they are learning or pretending to be learning'' [ASS_PRL_MALE]*

6. RESEARCHERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

MOEST

From the research's perspective, it is very critical to consider developing a model of the distance learning system, which is accessible for students/learners with disabilities in the future, to provide reasonable accommodation for students with mobility difficulties and which can be used during the time of a crisis/ pandemic instead of stalling education through closure of schools and other learning institutions in the country.

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Schools: Provide text books and other learning materials; follow up on learning to see what is happening on the ground, provide food for schools when schools reopen, support SNE learning institutions and other institutions by installing electricity and making internet bundles affordable.

Teachers: The MOEST together with the government of Kenya to do capacity building for teachers on teaching online and provide enabling platforms which can accommodate all learners. They can also provide an alternative channel for SNE learners/students to take care and accommodate the Special Needs Education (SNE) learners/students who are disadvantaged by the current online platforms and also provide gadgets for both teachers and learners.

Communities: it is urgent and necessary that families and communities build vital coping skills and emotional resilience to help in bringing up children in communities.

For visually impaired: The MOEST together with the government of Kenya to provide materials for totally blind and partially blind, software and equipment and lower prices for internet bundles.

For Hearing Impairment: The MOEST together with the government of Kenya standardize sign language, employ sign language interpreters, provide hearing Aid and also give basic sign language skills to parents so as to enable easy communication.

For Physically Challenged: The MOEST together with the government of Kenya to provide wheelchairs and crutches.

N/B for Learners with difficulty, there were no specifications about them apart from those that lack attention.

NGOs help locals in the provision of food, Internet connectivity in schools and help in the employment of teachers.

The government daily updates on COVID-19 to be put in formats SNE can comprehend.

Emergency plans on COVID-19 should include SNE learners' especially on communication so that all can comprehend.

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