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Research Article

Effects of COVID-19 on Secondary Education in Uganda

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Abstract: The study aimed to examine the impact of COVID-19 on secondary education. It utilized a cross-sectional survey design, incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods. The research targeted 2 head teachers, 10 teachers, 36 students, and 7 parents, totaling 55 participants. The sample size of 80 respondents was determined using the solvens formula, comprising 4 head teachers, 24 teachers, 30 students, and 22 parents. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data, with results presented through frequency counts and percentages. According to the study's findings, respondents noted that students received educational materials for home use, signifying that learning persisted through the home packages disseminated by schools during the COVID-19 period. The study ultimately concluded that delegating classroom operations and curriculum decisions to the community is a strategy to enhance the education system, improve teacher standards, and promote a school community for all students. Based on the findings, it was advised that adjustments be made at all education levels to adopt new strategies ensuring a continuous education process that is accessible, affordable, and flexible. Steps should be taken to prevent and address any disruptions in the education system, guaranteeing an uninterrupted flow of education.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemics, Secondary Education, Student, Teacher.

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1. Introduction

Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the most significant disruption of education in history, affecting learners and educators across various educational sectors, from pre-primary to secondary schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, universities, adult learning, and skills development centers [1]. By mid-April 2020, the pandemic had impacted 94 percent of learners worldwide, totaling 1.58 billion children and youth from pre-primary to higher education across 200 countries. In response to mitigating the spread of COVID-19, educational institutions in the vast majority of countries globally have temporarily halted in-person instruction and shifted to remote learning. According to UNESCO, by the end of April 2020, educational institutions had shut down in 186 countries, affecting about 74% of the total enrolled learners worldwide. Many countries began closing schools in March 2020, while in others (such as China and South Korea), in-person classes were canceled as early as January 2020. Several countries, such as Portugal, Ireland, and Malta, have announced the closure of specific sectors within their official education systems for the remainder of the academic year. Conversely, other nations, such as Denmark, Germany, France, Greece, and Poland, have complied with medical recommendations for phased reopening and have gradually resumed activities within their formal education systems during April and May, primarily for certification and evaluation purposes. The study's concluding section delves into the impacts and repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education. While higher education was briefly discussed in earlier segments, this section provides a synopsis of original research focusing on the pandemic's distinct implications at this educational tier [2].

The researcher in [3], assessed the effects of the crisis on university students using a survey conducted at Arizona State University. Regarding academic repercussions, the study found that over 50% of students expected a drop in their grades, 13% postponed graduation, and 11% withdrew from a class in the second semester of 2020. In terms of labor market outcomes, 29% of students lost their jobs, 13% had internships or job offers retracted, and 61% had a close family member who suffered a decrease in income or job loss. Furthermore, the crisis notably reduced labor market prospects among higher education students, with 44% expressing concerns about securing employment post-graduation. Students reported a 2% decrease in reservation wages compared to pre-pandemic levels and a 2.3% decline in expected earnings at age 35. These findings indicate that students perceive the COVID-19 crisis as a challenge that will impact them not only in the short term but also in the long term. The scholar in [4], conducted a study on the impact of the pandemic on higher education students' experiences in 62 countries. The research revealed that while most students adapted well to online learning, students in Oceanian and European higher education institutions reported the highest levels of satisfaction. The analysis identified access to recorded videos, availability of exam information, and satisfaction with teaching staff as key factors contributing to students' satisfaction with online learning during the pandemic. Sociodemographic variables like gender or nationality were not found to be predictors of satisfaction; however, students studying social sciences or those receiving scholarships were more likely to express satisfaction with online learning.

In a study conducted across five higher education institutions in the US and one in Hong Kong China [5], examined the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite efforts to maintain academic continuity, the crisis disproportionately affected students and staff. Minorities, women, and students from low-income backgrounds faced more disruptions in their academic activities due to the health and economic ramifications of the pandemic. Regarding the situation in Africa, the continent reported its first case of COVID-19 on February 14, 2020, in Egypt. As of mid-June, over 200,000 cases and 5,600 deaths had been confirmed, with the virus spreading rapidly. Notably, 80% of cases are concentrated in ten countries, with five countries (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan) accounting for over 70% of deaths. South Africa, particularly the Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces, is severely affected, representing 25% of the total cases on the continent, with a high daily number of cases and deaths reported. Nationally, as of April 15, 2020, Uganda had 55 cases but no deaths, with the first case reported on March 15th. Like many other countries, Uganda enacted a lockdown on March 18, 2020, as part of the emergency management plan to contain the spread of the virus, initially extended up to April 13th but further up to May 5th, 2020. This COVID-19 lockdown included the closure of institutions of higher learning, schools, places of worship, shopping centers, daily markets, among others. Additionally, all incoming and outgoing flights were halted, public transport and private vehicles were banned from operating. Public mobility was restricted from 6 am to 7 pm, and individuals suspected of having the virus were placed under isolation for monitoring or treatment. The only operational spaces were health facilities and food markets. The closure of schools

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and COVID-19 lockdown measures are among the control methods to contain COVID-19 infection, which has significantly disrupted the lives of children, parents, and teachers. Remote learning strategies could mitigate the impact, with e-learning playing a key role in achieving educational objectives.

The researcher in [6], suggested that higher education institutions must adopt online teaching and learning to maintain their educational mission during the pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis has profoundly affected higher education, with the closure of universities and borders leading to online teaching and learning as an alternative to face-to-face lectures. These closures have impacted learning, examinations, and the safety and legal status of international students. The value of a university education, encompassing networking, social opportunities, and educational content, is challenged in this crisis. Universities should innovate their learning environments to ensure digitalization complements student-teacher relationships and other interactions to remain relevant.

Nationally in Uganda, as of April 15, 2020, there were 55 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with no reported deaths. The first case was reported on March 15. Like many other countries, Uganda responded on March 18, 2020, by implementing a countrywide lockdown as an emergency measure to contain the virus. Initially scheduled to end on April 13, the lockdown was extended until May 5, 2020. This COVID-19 lockdown included the closure of schools, higher education institutions, places of worship, shopping centers, daily markets, and a suspension of inbound and outbound flights, as well as a ban on public and private transportation during restricted hours from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Individuals suspected of having the virus were isolated for monitoring or treatment.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the only remaining operational spaces were healthcare facilities and food markets. The closure of schools and lockdowns are some measures employed to control the spread of COVID-19. The pandemic has greatly impacted the lives of children, parents, and teachers, disrupting daily routines. Implementing remote learning strategies could help mitigate the effects of this disruption. Higher education institutions have shifted towards e-learning to ensure continuity in education. The closure of university premises and the implementation of travel restrictions due to the pandemic have posed challenges to universities and their students, particularly affecting international students. Universities must adapt to the changing educational landscape by enhancing digitalization and redefining student-teacher relationships.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted educational systems worldwide, affecting over 1.5 billion students. Schools have transitioned to online learning, presenting challenges related to policies, pedagogy, logistics, socioeconomic factors, technology, and psychosocial aspects. Policymakers have had to establish governance structures and support systems to facilitate online learning. Teachers, often accustomed to traditional teaching methods, have faced challenges adopting new technologies. Students have struggled with online learning due to economic, psychological, and academic difficulties. The swift transition to remote learning has raised concerns about the quality of education, especially in subjects that require hands-on instruction. The educational sector in Uganda has also faced significant disruptions, leading to the widespread adoption of remote learning methods.

The financial implications of COVID-19 on educational institutions are substantial, with increased operational costs, pressure from parents to reduce fees, potential declines in student enrollment, and the necessity to support faculty and staff livelihoods. Given these challenges, there is a need to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on secondary education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Challenges of Covid19 Among the Students

Institutions may encounter obstacles and problems when integrating technology. The scholar in [7], identified first-order (external) and second-order (internal) barriers to technological integration. First-order barriers relate to equipment, education, access, time, and technical support, while second-order barriers (specific to teachers) are linked to pedagogy, beliefs, and personal preferences. Furthermore, student barriers to online learning could include misinterpretation of expectations, time management, and interpersonal communication [8]. Instructors may face barriers related to identifying expectations, providing feedback, and managing interpersonal relations.

The scholar in [9], suggested that barriers to online learning in medical training might include time constraints, limited technical skills, inadequate infrastructure, lack of institutional strategies and support, and negative attitudes from stakeholders. There are three outlined obstacles in implementing web-based distance education in teacher training namely: lack of high-speed internet and durable technology, insufficient trainer and student skills, and absence of support services [10]. However,

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there is a shortage of comprehensive studies in the literature concerning challenges encountered in various learning environments, such as distance education, online learning, and electronic learning. Existing research has primarily focused on administrators and managers [11]. Broadly identified challenges within e-learning include accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, lifelong learning, and educational policy. Many countries are facing issues related to reliable Internet connection and access to digital devices. In numerous developing countries, economically disadvantaged children may lack access to online learning devices, and online education could result in increased screen time for learners. Therefore, it is crucial for students to balance online activities with offline engagement in self-exploratory learning. The lack of parental guidance, especially for young learners, poses an additional challenge due to both parents working. Practical concerns also exist regarding physical workspaces that support diverse learning methods. Studies span from kindergarten to higher education, covering health education, social sciences, and teacher education. However, there is limited literature focusing on the challenges faced by students, parents, teachers, and administrators in distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are many challenges faced by parents of kindergarten and primary school children during the Covid-19 pandemic in their research. These challenges encompassed difficulties in guiding children's learning, children's lack of concentration and motivation to learn, their desire to attend school, struggles with online learning, and limited understanding of educational materials [12]. In a study by [13], opined that teachers encountered various challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, including limited opportunities, restricted network and internet access, and difficulties in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning, as well as in collaborating with parents. The researfcher in [14], concluded that teachers faced a range of issues during the Covid-19 period concerning themselves, the school, the curriculum, and the students. Additionally, [15] highlighted obstacles faced by teachers in implementing distance education during the Covid-19 pandemic. These obstacles included technical barriers, student engagement, participation in education, and familiarity with online learning.

Recently, there has been a notable increase in academic research focusing on the paradigm shift in education known as the "new normal." While many of these studies have centered on national educational policies, professional development, and curriculum adaptations, others have delved into the specific learning experiences of students during the ongoing pandemic. Notably, authors in [16][17], conducted research on the impact of COVID-19 on college students' mental health and coping mechanisms. The researcher in [16] found that the pandemic adversely affected students' behavioral and emotional well-being, particularly in terms of attention and mood-related externalizing issues due to isolation, economic challenges, health concerns, and uncertainties. The researcher in [17] identified student apprehensions regarding learning methods, assessment procedures, heavy workloads, technical difficulties, and feelings of confinement. To address these challenges, students sought support from educators, family members, and engaged in leisure activities.

In a separate study, [18] explored the efficacy of various online teaching strategies among engineering students. Findings from a survey indicated student dissatisfaction with online learning, especially in communication and interactive question-and-answer sessions. However, the combination of online teaching with flipped classrooms proved advantageous, enhancing students' engagement, academic achievements, and overall course ratings.

Likewise, the researcher in [19], transitioned traditional flipped classrooms to fully online settings using a cloud-based video conferencing platform. Their research revealed the comparable effectiveness of both approaches, offering valuable insights into successfully shifting to video conferencing-supported online instruction. Conversely, [20] delved into the challenges of at-home learning during the pandemic, citing obstacles such as technological issues, high internet expenses, and limited social interactions. In a related study, [21], examined the impact of lockdown measures on academic performance, emphasizing disruptions caused by anxiety, depression, connectivity issues, and unfavorable learning environments, particularly affecting disadvantaged and remote learners.

On the other hand, [22] highlighted the positive outcomes of student isolation during the pandemic, associating enhanced performance with the consistent application of effective learning techniques. The researcher in [23], scrutinized the overall online learning experience amid the COVID-19 crisis, noting students' acknowledgment of online learning benefits while expressing a preference for traditional classroom settings. A qualitative evaluation of synchronized online learning in a Saudi Arabian medical school, emphasizing positive feedback on time management and effectiveness, while recognizing challenges like technical glitches and content delivery shortcomings

was conducted by [24]. They also acknowledged the limitations in meeting hands-on learning requirements in a virtual educational environment.

2.2. Modes of Teaching and Learning During Lock Down

To ensure the continuity of education for school-age children worldwide during the pandemic, distance education processes have been implemented utilizing a variety of technological tools and Internet-based systems [25]. However, within this framework, online face-to-face lessons accommodating multiple participants and offline lessons on websites have been provided by leveraging modern educational technology [26][27]. The success of distance education significantly depends on teachers' infrastructure and technological proficiency in effectively using distance learning tools. For example, China, with its strong technological infrastructure, has excelled in delivering distance education, while countries like Vietnam and Mongolia face challenges due to limited Internet connectivity, smartphone access, or televisions [27].

Even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, it was apparent that not all students globally had equal access to devices such as computers, tablets, and the Internet [28]. Many school districts serving children from low-income families or rural areas lack the necessary resources for a seamless transition to distance education [29][30]. Hastening the transition without considering crucial factors for the success of distance education could worsen existing inequalities [26][27]

The quality of education worldwide has been impacted by school closures during the pandemic. Unequal access to distance education exacerbates disparities and inequities in education [31][32][33][34][26]. Additionally, the pandemic has significantly reduced support services for students with special needs provided by specialists such as special education teachers, speech and language therapists, and psychologists [35]. The main aim of educating students with special needs is to promote their integration into society by providing equitable and effective educational services, both in special education schools and through inclusive education. Ensuring that students with special needs continue to receive support and general education services alongside their peers in accordance with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in the least restrictive educational setting, such as general education classes, is the most effective approach to facilitate their integration [36][37][38][39][40][41]. However, literature underscores that students with special needs or disadvantages are at significant risk, as distance education often represents the sole means to meet their educational needs [42].

2.3. Ways of Promoting Education System

In an effort to increase the number of secondary schools nationwide, the government of Uganda committed to establishing at least one seed secondary school in each sub-county lacking one or facing significant need, as per the Education Strategy Investment Plan (ESIP) (2015). However, according to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) report on Primary, Post-Primary Education and Training (PPET) (2012), out of the 450 sub-counties, 236 did not have any secondary schools. The researcher in [43], highlighted that 41 seed secondary schools were under construction in sub-counties without any existing secondary schools to alleviate overcrowding, though challenges persist.

According to [44], the Ministry of Education's standard class size for S1 and S4 is 45 based on the PPET report, focusing on increased access, equity, and efficiency. Proposed staffing levels (STR) were set at 30:1, but the actual number of students far exceeds the available teachers. Teachers should be well-prepared professionals. The National Commission on Education (2015) stressed the importance of teachers being knowledgeable, skilled in various teaching methods, adept at managing large classes, and understanding appropriate organization and management styles.

The researcher in [45], summarized effective classroom teaching as characterized by warmth, understanding, organization, stimulation, imagination, engaging students emotionally, providing clarity when presenting content, and being supportive. Achieving all this demands a significant investment of time and effort in students' lives, necessitating adequate remuneration to promote teacher commitment. Students should have their own materials and take notes themselves which helps students develop stronger arguments and perspectives. As education moves towards a student-centered approach, teachers should motivate students to discover their strengths and weaknesses, transitioning them from passive to active learners. The scholar in [46] highlighted that since students' learning needs differ, effective teaching involves addressing individual needs as students express them. Teachers should support students in developing critical thinking skills. With the increase in student enrollment in most secondary schools, there is a demand for diverse teaching

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methodologies.the Author in [47] argued that rather than class size, it is the variety of teaching strategies that has the greatest impact on learning. The researcher in [48], favored group work discussions to enhance students' communicative skills, confidence in participation, and creativity. The teacher's demeanor in large classes affects students' learning experiences. The researchers in [49][50][51]observed that a teacher's personality significantly contributes to creating a conducive learning environment, where teachers must earn students' respect and appear approachable. Just as digital learning materials enhance students' self-efficacy, stories from adolescent literature can help students challenge fixed mindsets and foster resilience.

From the review above, it is clear that during the pandemic, there has been a significant shift towards using technology and internet-based platforms for distance learning to ensure continuous education for school-age children worldwide. This shift involved online synchronous classes for multiple participants and asynchronous lessons delivered through digital platforms with the help of advanced educational technology. Despite the widespread use of these tools, there is a lack of research in Uganda on how lockdowns have affected students' academic performance, especially in secondary education. This research gap highlights the need for further investigation into the impact of COVID-19 on secondary education in Uganda to better understand the challenges and opportunities faced by both students and educators.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methods [52]. Qualitative research techniques involve data presented in words rather than numbers, and often categorized. Quantitative research, on the other hand, presents data in statistical results. The cross-sectional correlation survey design included a diverse sample of individuals across different ages, genders, and educational levels.

3.2. Target Population

This represents the complete group of individuals or objects from which the sample could potentially be selected. Alternatively, the target population for a survey refers to the complete set of units for which the survey data will be utilized to derive conclusions. The target population specifies those units for which the survey results are intended to be applied broadly [53]. Thus, the study focused on 2 head teachers, 10 teachers, 36 students, and 7 parents, comprising a total population of 55 individuals.

3.3. Sample

- Sampling Size
  The study considered a sample size of 49 respondents, calculated using the solvens formula. The sample size comprised 2 head teachers, 10 teachers, 30 students, and 7 parents.

Table1. Sample Selection and Categories of Respondent Involved

Categories	Sampling Technique	Target Population	Sample
Students	Random sampling	36	30
Head teachers	Purposive sampling	2	2
Teachers	Random sampling	10	10
Parents	Purposive sampling	7	7
	Total	**55**	**49**

- Sampling techniques
  During the course of this study, the researcher employed simple random sampling to select students with special needs and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to choose head teachers and parents of children with special needs.

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- Data collection method
  During the research process, primary data was collected through the distribution of questionnaires and interview guides to participants. The gathered information was meticulously documented. Furthermore, secondary data obtained from reputable sources including textbooks, journals, newspapers, and websites was compiled to complement the study. Insights from a variety of scholars and authors were also referenced to authenticate the study variables.
- Research instruments
  The researcher employed questionnaires to gather data from students and educators. Questionnaires were selected for their appropriateness for a considerable number of participants, as they demand minimal time for both respondents and researchers for both administration and analysis. Furthermore, an interview guide was utilized to collect data from school principals and parents of the chosen institutions.
- Validity of instruments
  The researcher ensured that the research questions were aligned with the study objectives to ensure the content validity of the instruments. In this study, the researcher sought the assistance of research experts, experienced graduates, professors, and highly skilled supervisors to evaluate the instruments. They offered valuable feedback, and their recommendations were integrated to improve the instruments.
- Data Analysis
  The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. Subsequently, the findings were presented in tables that were aligned with the research objectives of the study.

4. Finding and Discussion

Table 2 apparent that female respondents (59%) outnumbered male respondents (41%) in this study, suggesting that the majority of participants were women. This research revealed that 37% of the participants were between 16 and 35 years old, the highest percentage, followed by 31% aged 36 to 50 years. The smallest proportion of the group comprises individuals over 50 years old (12%) and those under 15 years old (20%). This indicates that the majority of participants were young, with a significant number being students. As shown in Table 2, most respondents were single (49%), indicating that young individuals, who are typically full of energy and have multiple goals to achieve, were the most common.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	20	41
Female	29	59
Total	**49**	**100**
Age		
Below 15 years	10	20
16-35 years	18	37
36-50 years	15	31
50 above	6	12
Total	**49**	**100**
Marital Status		
Single	24	49
Married	12	25
Widowed	5	10
Divorced	8	16
Total	**49**	**100**

Table 4 shows challenges related to technology integration were identified as significant issues affecting schools during the COVID-19 period. This was reinforced by 12 respondents (24.5%) who strongly agreed, 17 (34.7%) who agreed, 9 (18.4%) who strongly disagreed, and 11 (22.4%) who disagreed with the statement. None of the respondents expressed uncertainty regarding these findings.

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Table 3. Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Business	22	45
Student	13	27
Farmer	8	16
Government Officials	6	12
Total	**49**	**100**

Table 4. The Challenges of COVID-19 among Secondary School Students

	Data Presentation				
Cause/Grading	1	2	3	4	5
Problems in technology integration.	9 (18.4%)	11 (22.4%)	0	12 (24.5%)	17 (34.7%)
Misinterpretation of expectations, time management and interpersonal communication.	7 (14.3%)	03 (6.1%)	0	17 (34.7%)	21 (42.9%)
Distance education, online learning, electronic learning, are not adequate in number.	18 (36.7%)	16 (16.3%)	2 (4%)	6 (12.2%)	8 (16.3%)
Lack of parental guidance and support, especially for young learners, is another challenge.	0	0	0	21 (42.8%)	28 (57.1%)
High costs of online classes.	6 (12.2%)	7 (14.3%)	1 (2%)	11 (22.4%)	24 (48.9%)

The study revealed that areas where 21 respondents (42.9%) agreed included misinterpretation of expectations, time management, and interpersonal communication; followed by 17 (34.7%) strongly agreeing, 7 (14.3%) strongly disagreeing, and 3 (6.1%) disagreeing with the statement. Respondents highlighted their awareness of the temporary nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted school planning and management. Consequently, many schools incurred losses, and students missed their final year examinations. The availability of distance education, online learning, and electronic resources was deemed inadequate, with 18 respondents (36.7%) strongly disagreeing, 16 (16.3%) disagreeing, 2 (4%) strongly agreeing, and 8 (16.3%) agreeing with the statement.

The study findings indicated that while distance learning materials were accessible, a majority of students and teachers lacked the necessary skills to utilize them effectively. This lack of proficiency had a detrimental effect on the educational process. Concerning the high costs associated with online classes, 6 respondents (12.2%) strongly disagreed, 7 (14.3%) strongly agreed, 1 (2%) were unsure, and 11 (22.4%) strongly agreed, while 24 (48.9%) agreed with the statement.

Students and teachers were found to lack essential resources such as smartphones, televisions, and radios, as promised by the government. Several students mentioned difficulties in accessing the internet, citing unstable connectivity and occasional unavailability in their localities. Most students expressed concerns over the high cost of computers, which were financially out of reach. Interviews with some lecturers confirmed that the absence of e-learning facilities posed a significant academic challenge for higher education students during COVID-19. The provision of e-learning resources like computers, internet connectivity, and consistent power supply is crucial for the effective implementation of e-learning, given its computer-based nature.

Table 5, illustrates that 4 (8.2%) respondents strongly disagreed, 7 (14.3%) disagreed, 6 (12.2%) were uncertain, 12 (24.5%) agreed, while 20 (40.8%) strongly agreed regarding projects/activities supervised by parents. The results suggest parental involvement in facilitating their children's learning. Nevertheless, respondents noted that online discussions on platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and email were utilized as teaching methods. Specifically, 12 (24.5%) strongly disagreed, 6 (12.2%) disagreed, 10 (20.4%) were uncertain, and 15 (30.6%) strongly agreed with this approach.

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Table 5. Modes of Teaching and Learning used during COVID-19 lockdown

Cause	Tick your choice				
	1	2	3	4	5
Projects / activity supervised by parents	4 (8.2%)	7 (14.3%)	6 (12.2%)	12 (24.5%)	20 (40.8%)
Students are given package materials to use them while at home	14 (28.6%)	8 (16.3%)	10 (20.4%)	6 (12.2%)	11 (22.4%)
Online discussion while on zoom, what sup and email	12 (24.5%)	6 (12.2%)	10 (20.4%)	15 (30.6%)	6 (12.2%)
Teachers taught students on radios and televisions	4 (8.2%)	7 (14.3%)	6 (12.2%)	12 (24.5%)	20 (40.8%)

Respondents highlighted that student were provided with educational materials to use at home. While 14 (28.6%) disagreed and 8 (16.3%) strongly disagreed, 10 (20.4%) were uncertain, 15 (30.6%) strongly agreed, and 11 (22.4%) agreed with this provision. This suggests that despite school closures during the COVID-19 period, students continued learning through the home study packages distributed by the school. In an interview with a student, it was mentioned that educational materials were received through various channels, including WhatsApp, email, and downloaded from Google, with some distributed by teachers via WhatsApp and email. As indicated in Table 5, 4 (8.2%) strongly disagreed, 7 (14.3%) disagreed, 6 (12.2%) were uncertain, 12 (24.5%) agreed, while 20 (40.8%) strongly agreed that students were instructed by teachers through radio and television broadcasts. These findings suggest that students were able to access educational content from diverse teachers nationwide, exposing them to new knowledge and perspectives.

Table 6. Ways of Promoting the Education System

Cause	Tick Your Choice					N=49/100
	1	2	3	4	5	
Put classroom-running and curriculum-building decisions in the hands of the community	4 (8.2%)	7 (14.3%)	6 (12.2%)	12 (24.5%)	20 (40.8%)	49
Make funding schools a priority	14 (28.6%)	8 (16.3%)	10 (20.4%)	6 (12.2%)	11 (22.4%)	
Build a school community for all students	12 (24.5%)	6 (12.2%)	10 (20.4%)	15 (30.6%)	6 (12.2%)	
Raise standards for teachers	4 (8.2%)	7 (14.3%)	6 (12.2%)	12 (24.5%)	20 (40.8%)	

Table 6 demonstrates that decisions concerning classroom management and curriculum development should be entrusted to the community. Among the total respondents, 4 individuals (8.2%) strongly disagree, 7 (14.3%) disagree, 6 (12.2%) are uncertain, 12 (24.5%) agree, and 20 (40.8%) strongly agree with this viewpoint. Survey participants also highlighted the critical importance of establishing schools, with 4 (8.2%) strongly disagreeing, 7 (14.3%) disagreeing, 6 (12.2%) being unsure, 12 (24.5%) agreeing, and 20 (40.8%) strongly agreeing. Further discussions with the participants revealed that 12 (24.5%) disagreed that fostering a school community for all students is a method to enhance the education system, 6 (12.2%) disagreed, 10 (20.4%) were uncertain, 15 (30.6%) strongly agreed, and 6 (12.2%) agreed with this statement.

- The Challenges of COVID-19 among Secondary School Students

The study findings indicate that secondary students encountered various challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as issues with technology integration, misunderstandings of expectations, time management, and interpersonal communication. The effectiveness of distance education, online learning, and electronic learning was compromised due to the absence of necessary resources like

smartphones, televisions, and radios, which were promised by the government but never provided. These results are consistent with Almaiah et al [8] observations, which highlighted students' potential struggles with online learning stemming from misunderstandings of expectations, time management problems, and difficulties in interpersonal communication. Instructors, on the other hand, may encounter hurdles in establishing expectations, delivering feedback, and managing interpersonal relationships. The researcher in [11] emphasized on the barriers to online learning within medical training, including time limitations, insufficient technical skills, inadequate infrastructure, absence of institutional strategies and support, as well as negative attitudes from stakeholders. The researcher in [10] identified three challenges in implementing web-based distance education for teacher training: inadequate high-speed internet and reliable technology, deficient skills among trainers and students, and insufficiency in support services.

- Modes of Teaching and Learning used during COVID -19 Lockdown.

Based on the study's findings regarding the teaching and learning methods employed during the lockdown period, it was revealed that online discussions via platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and email were extensively utilized. Students were provided with educational resources for home use, while educators delivered lessons through radio broadcasts and television programs. These findings align with the argument by [25], who opined that to ensure the continuity of education for students globally during the pandemic, remote learning strategies have been implemented using various technological resources and internet-based platforms. Online interactive classes, enabling the participation of numerous students, and offline educational materials accessible on websites have been incorporated through modern educational technology.

- Ways of Promoting Education System

The study findings have identified several key strategies for improving the educational system. These strategies include entrusting decisions on classroom management and curriculum development to the community, setting higher standards for teachers, and fostering a school environment that celebrates the diversity of all students. Furthermore, narratives about teenagers and young adults, as suggested by [54], can be valuable tools for exploring diverse perspectives, situations, and emotions. Biographical accounts, in particular, provide valuable insights into individuals who have surmounted challenges and achieved success. Biographies of individuals who have overcome significant hurdles can profoundly influence young adolescents, particularly those who share similar backgrounds or situations.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, challenges such as technology integration, misinterpretation of expectations, time management, and interpersonal communication, in addition to the obstacles posed by distance education and online learning, have emerged as significant obstacles for both students and educators. Furthermore, the unmet commitments of the government to provide essential resources such as smartphones, televisions, and radios have further compounded these challenges. Throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, educational activities predominantly shifted to online platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and email, necessitating students to rely on provided materials at home, while teachers resorted to radios and televisions. Looking ahead, the research proposes that empowering communities to participate in educational decisions, enhancing teacher qualifications, and cultivating a strong sense of school community are crucial strategies for enhancing the education system.

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