

# **BASIC EDUCATION IN AFRICA: ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS**



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## Abstract

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closure of schools and their associated restrictions and shifts in learning paradigms. This exacerbated challenges across the educational systems of the world, especially in Africa with its rippling effects on school drop-outs, school finances and management, disruption in curriculum and learning periods and its apparent impact on widening inequalities in access to quality basic education in Africa. Systematic and scoping review was used in gathering, analysing and synthesising evidence from peer-reviewed papers, global and national level reports and related documents on the impact of Covid-19 on basic education in Africa.

The review of various papers showed that the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impact on the operations of educational systems in Africa. These effects comprised disruption in curriculum and learning across most basic education institutions, reduction in educational financing which has derailed the gains in expanding access to quality education in Africa; heightened inequalities in access to education in Africa, and consequent financial challenges to teachers and households. The findings also revealed the need for collaborative and conscious efforts by African Governments to ensure the impact of Covid-19 on basic education is minimized especially for the vulnerable in society who are badly hit and risk losing access to basic education with worsening poverty.

**Key words:** Basic Education; Education Systems; Covid-19; Africa, Pandemic

## 1.0 Introduction

The provision of equal educational opportunities for all school-age children across the world is a fundamental human right and the primary building block for development (Casely-Hayford et al.,2017; UNESCO, 2011). Over the past decades, considerable efforts have gone into making education, especially basic education accessible and to create opportunities for schooling for all children and youth. Approaches to bringing as many children as possible and young people into school have taken many forms, including enrollment drive, political declarations for universal access to education, introduction of school fees abolition initiatives, and/or pro-poor educational financing frameworks and so forth (World Development Report, 2018; Llamas & Tuazon, 2016). As a result of the concerted international effort to ensure Education for All, more children than ever before are going to school all over the world. However, a number of challenges persist. There are however, millions of children, adolescents and youth who remain out-of-school and a greater number who though are enrolled in school, learn so little that they will not do much better than children who never went to school. Studies show that these children are mostly in rural areas in developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (UNESCO, 2020; World Development Report, 2018<sup>1</sup>). In the context of most developing countries of Africa, the challenges

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO (2020). Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all. UNESCO, Paris, France.

to equitable access and learning in schools therefore still remain endemic. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) has noted that three years after the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the promise to provide universal quality primary and secondary education, not much progress has been made towards reducing the global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth (UIS 2019). Globally, it is estimated that there are about 258.4 million out-of-school children, adolescents, and youth (UIS, 2019; Robinson et al., 2017). This figure represents one-sixth of the global population. More than one-third of the figure (98 million out-of-school children) live in sub-Saharan Africa with majority (53%) of them being girls. UIS estimates that one out of five children between the ages of 6 and 11 in sub-Saharan African are out of school. The worse of it is that one out of three youth aged about 12 to 14 is out of school. More alarming--about 60% of youth aged about 15 to 17 are not in school.

With these prevailing challenges, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation since one of the key measures adopted by almost all countries including African countries to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic was the abrupt school closure across all levels (Basic, Secondary and tertiary). The school closures have had rippling effects on school drop-outs, school finances and management, learning periods etc (Nantwi & Boateng, 2020; Thelma & Adedeji, 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020), Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in a temporal total closure of schools in about 192 countries all over the world with 91.4% of the total number of enrolled learners in these countries temporarily out of school. Report shows that lockdown of schools has been more prominent in some continents such as Africa, South America and in some parts of Europe (UNESCO, 2020; Lindzon, 2020; Karp & McGowan, 2020; Jamerson, Josh, & Joshua, 2020). Evidence shows that the educational systems in Africa and South America are the mostly affected by the pandemic as more than 98% of teaching and learning was temporarily halted due to country-wide lockdown in these continents. According to the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC, 2020), about 297 million learners have been affected in Africa.

The outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has also affected all countries and impacted the socio-economic contexts of households especially the most vulnerable and low-income households, 'wiping off educational progress made in the pre-COVID-19 period' (Brookings Institute, May 2020 <sup>2</sup>). Studies on women and girls have highlighted the increased risks to out of school girls, who are now more vulnerable due to increased labor demands in households--where violence and abuse occur--not to mention early marriage and teenage pregnancy (McGill University, 2020 <sup>3</sup>).

## 1.1 Objectives

The main objective of this review was to survey, analysis and synthesize literature from the pool of knowledge in the African space on basic education and how the novel covid-19 has and is impacting on educational systems and structures over the period and how this will shape educational planning in the coming years.

Specifically, the review focused on the following:

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- 1 World Development Report. (2018). World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise [Text/HTML]. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>
  - 2 Brookings Institute on the Impact of COVID 19 on the Education Systems, Washington.
  - 3 McGill University study on the Impact of COVID on Gender equality and vulnerable groups.

1. Identify academic (published articles), research works and related documents on basic education in Africa and the impact of Covid-19 on educational systems;
2. Analyse and synthesise the relevant identified documents;
3. Discuss the findings of the review;
4. Make recommendations based on findings and identified gaps in literature.

## **1.2 Materials and Methods**

### **1.2.1 Theories underpinning this space**

With the limited literature in the area of review, published works and reports rarely use theories to underpin their studies because of the urgency of the period. However, the in-depth review identified 2-key theories used in situating two different studies in assessing the impact of covid-19 on basic education. These comprised the 'Connectivism Learning Theory' and the 'Viral Modernity Theory'.

#### **Connectivism learning theory**

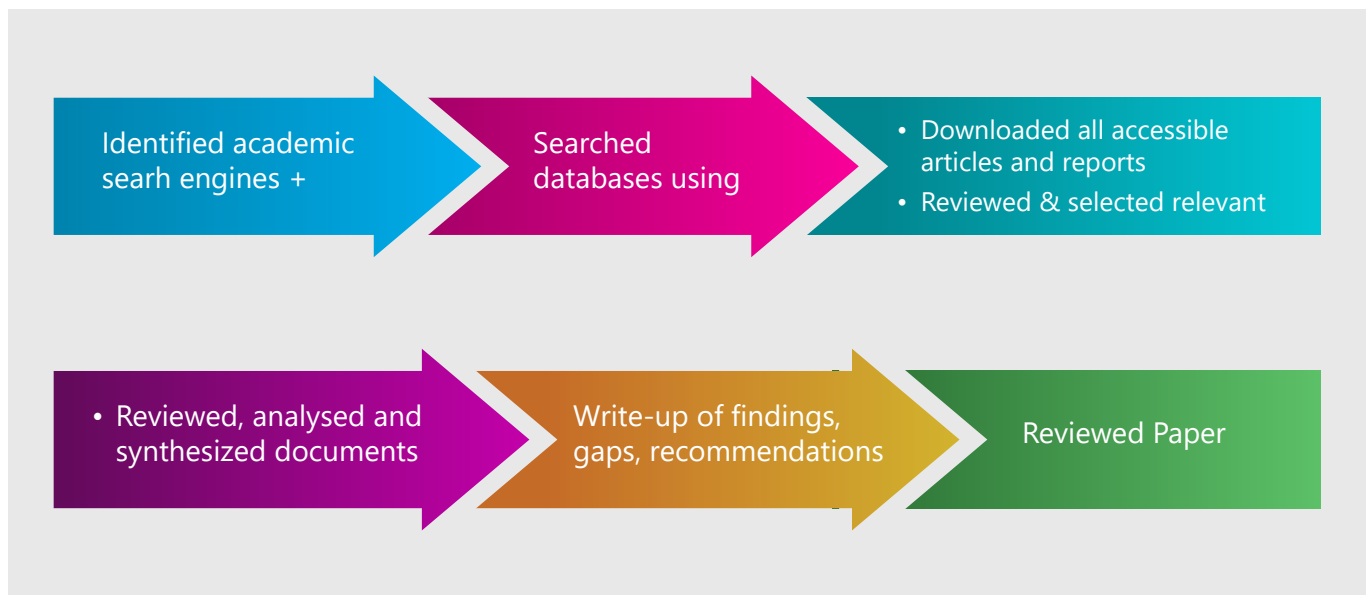
Connectivism is a theoretical framework developed by George Siemens (2005) used for understanding learning in a digital age. The theory postulates and focuses on the idea that learning can happen from outside. A key principle of this theory is that learning may reside in non-human appliances and the popularity of this pedagogical method has emerged in the form of massive open online courses. This theory is more critical under the current e-learning regime – where teachers are using this theory through the use of digital technologies to make positive connections to learning, creating connections and relationships with students and their peer groups for students to feel motivated. Kizito (2016) used this model to examine the possible characteristics and the value of designing learning activities grounded in connectivism. The study explored the prevailing technology adoption archetypes used in African contexts with the aim of extracting influences that could shape pedagogical technology adoption in African basic education contexts using the connectivism theory.

#### **Viral modernity theory**

The 'viral modernity theory was propounded by Peters et al., (2020). This theory discusses the impact of information on infectious diseases and their consequential effects on social issues, including education and socio-cultural activities of people (Peters, Jandri, & McLaren, 2020). Peters explains that the media play part in the fight against pandemics and identifies some journalists and bloggers as messengers of inaccurate information on social media and described it as a way of helping to fuel panic, hysteria and stigma that are associated with infectious diseases outbreak (Peters et al., 2020). A study by Nantwi and Boateng (2020) used the modernity theory to discuss the Covid-19 in the context of Ghana as 'a tale of chaos and calm'

In conducting the in-depth review, both the systematic and scoping review methods in identifying peer-reviewed papers, global and national level reports and related documents were adopted (Figure 1). This review assessed documents on subjects relating to impacts of COVID-19 on basic education systems in Africa

Figure 1: Flow of review



The search was done by searching academic and scholarly sites/databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, International Journal of Educational Research, PubMed, Taylor and Francis, JStor, BMC, Science Direct, ResearchGate and African Education Journal using the following key terms: "Africa" "Covid-19," "Basic Education," Education Systems", and "Impact,". Papers in the social sciences and the public health and epidemiology spaces were selected by reviewing their abstracts and title and also using accompanying references gotten from the list of references on the paper. The review focused on only studies and reports published in English. The study designs used in most of the studies and documents reviewed were in-depth document reviews, quick online surveys - mostly quantitative and in some instances, mixed methods comprising both quantitative and qualitative methods.

#### 1.2.2.2 Exclusion criteria

With reference to online resources and databases, a repetitive process was used to surf all the identified sources - this allowed for the repetition of all the key words. In addition, citations identified in journals relevant to the review were also followed up and later searched for inclusion. The search was conducted over a 2-month period between the 1st January through to 26th February, 2021 and was limited to the period from 1990 through 2021. The year 1990 was the peak of most structural basic education systems and 2019 to date marked the beginning of the Covid-19 season. Most papers that were not focused on basic education and in different and unrelated contexts were excluded.

#### 1.2.2.3 Inclusion criteria

In all, about 224 articles were generated from the search using the above-mentioned key words and databases. The number of identified articles were further screened down by removing duplicate articles using Mendeley referencing software. The titles of the articles were screened and publications not related to the objectives of the review were dropped.

## 2.0 Results

The in-depth screening produced nineteen (19) relevant papers and reports based on the search criteria and the objectives of the review. The majority of the studies were found in Ghana and Nigeria with a few from Tunisia, Morocco, and South Africa. Eight (8) of the papers were mostly country specific with the other papers being either cross-country or sub-regions. All blocks of Africa (West, Central, East and South Africa) were represented by a review of at least one country.

### 2.1 Emerging Themes (Organising Themes)

A number of key themes emerged from the review of the journals and reports. These comprised the various impacts the emergence of Covid-19 has had on basic educational systems. The following section synthesizes the key findings from the reviews and these have been organised according to the following themes as presented in Figure 3

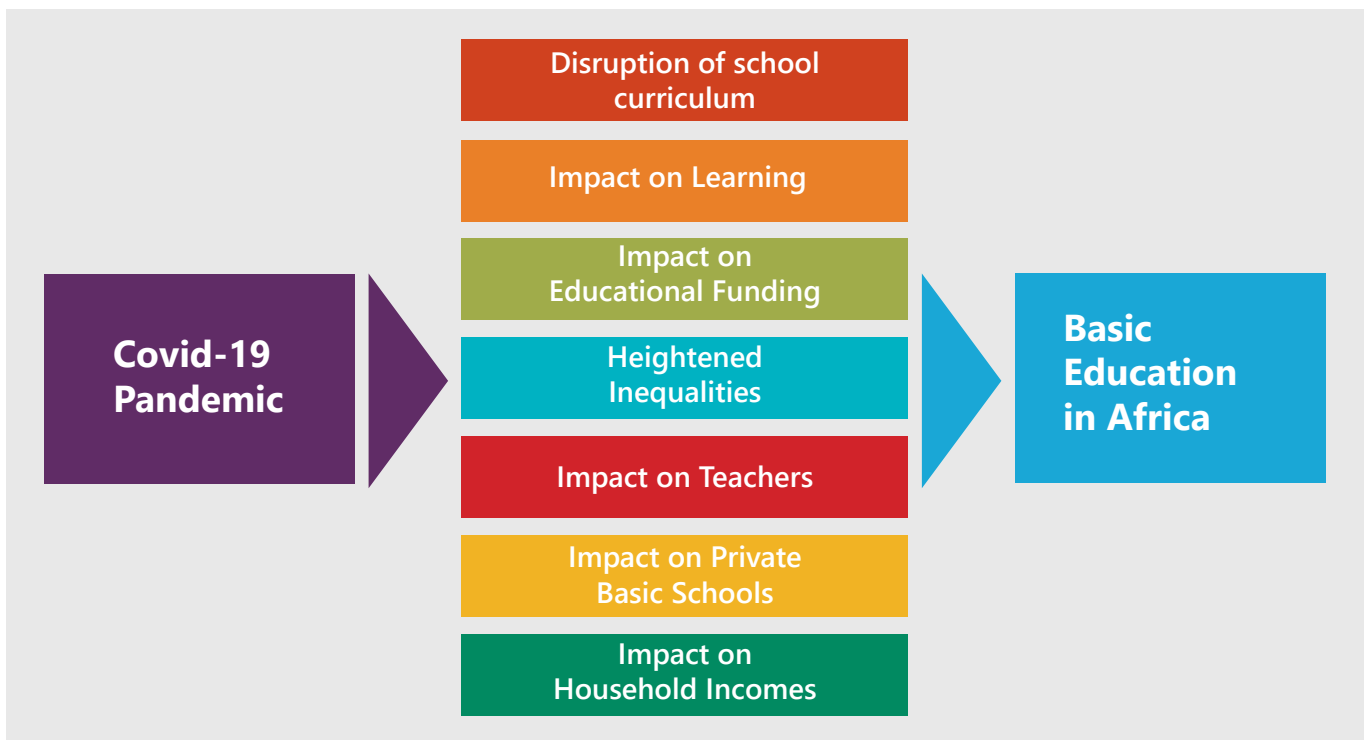


Figure 3: Organising themes from the review of papers  
Source: Author's construct based on review of Literature (2021)

#### 2.2.1 Disruption of Curriculum

The implementation of curriculum within any jurisdiction is time bound and disruption of any form (pandemics, wars, natural disasters etc.) have temporal and permanent academic and social repercussions (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020; Azevedo, et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted curriculum implementation all over the world since December 2019 until now and is leading to the loss of significant contact/learning hours especially in most African countries where high inequalities exist in access to e-learning platforms (Quartey, 2020; Schleicher, 2020; SEED, 2020). Kekić et al. (2016) found that schools losing long periods of learning due to disease outbreak can result in both temporal and permanent damage to curriculum flow and ultimately affect the entirety of educational systems. According to their study, the disruption of curriculum takes a long time to be recovered and sometimes results in irredeemable content loss (UNESCO, 2020; Kekić et al., 2016). Two of the reviewed articles projected that on the average, basic education in

most African countries, especially, sub-Saharan Africa are likely to lose between 14% and 18% of curriculum content albeit the use of e-learning platforms (Mahaye, 2020; Kizito, 2016) and would be worse for countries that are not able to roll out proper online and television/radio-based learning. In a recent study in South Africa (Mahaye, 2020), it was projected that schools had lost up to about 14% of contact hours and was further projected that if the nationwide lockdown lasted beyond, April 2020 and schools were allowed to reopen immediately, schools would have lost 23 school-days, 6 weeks of curriculum coverage and 161 hours of teaching and learning (Mahaye, 2020; Onwusuru and Ogwo, 2019; Kizito, 2016). The implication is that about 14% of annual school curriculum coverage for 2020 would be lost as result of the Covid-19 induced school closures.

## 2.2.2 Impact on Learning

To mitigate the spread of Covid-19, almost all governments in Africa and across the world-imposed lockdowns as a preliminary measure in curbing/reducing the spread of covid-19 and to allow for the health systems to understand the mutations of the virus (Schleicher, 2020). This has impacted both public and private educational institutions, especially those at the basic level and particularly for youth and children living in rural areas where access to teaching/learning and access/affordability to online or distance education alternatives is already a challenge particularly for the most vulnerable—girls (Di Pietro et al, 2020). Three of the reviewed articles point to three key areas of major disruptions in students' learning; this comprises absence of teacher interaction, connectivism-learning (learning in teams) and education assessments including the cancellation of assessments for qualifications that lead to the transition of learners to higher educational levels (Burgees and Sievertsen, 2020). Psacharopoulos et al. (2020) find that school closures are likely to reduce learning outcomes and result in future losses in earnings.

In Africa, schooling has been largely disrupted because it has made learning inaccessible especially among the rural poor and those in the low-income areas due to the shutdown of schools and lack of access to digital technology (Adotey, 2020; Khan et al., 2012). Most schools in Africa had not yet integrated open distance learning and e-learning technologies into their teaching methodology prior to the pandemic (Owusu-Fordjour, 2020; COL, 2020<sup>4</sup>). The adoption of e-learning platforms has remained low in Africa due to poor infrastructure, lack of training and capacity-building within key institutions including teacher training institutions. A recent report by the International Telecommunication Union (2019) shows that Africa has the lowest internet access globally, with only 17.8% of households accessing the internet. A survey by e-Learning Africa (2020) also reveals that primary (basic) school students have the weakest ability to deal with the disruption of schooling activities. This survey stressed that many of the primary level students had little or no out-of-classroom learning experience, lacked adequate access to home learning or internet-enabled devices, and had parents that are unable to provide the required learning support. According to UNESCO (2019), the situation is quite serious in sub-Saharan Africa where about 89% of students do not have right to use home computers and 82% do not have internet access; this means that these online classes cannot accommodate all students. In spite of these, the challenges with access have seen some innovation in circumventing the bandwidth challenges; these include pre-recorded lessons on these zero-rated e-learning platforms, among others (Agormedah et al., 2020; Tamrat, 2021).

4 Associates for Change /Project Support Services International (2020) Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Final Strategic Evaluation report; COL: Vancouver, Canada.

A recent study on the Covid-19 impact on the Complementary Basic Education <sup>5</sup> programme in Ghana (Robinson et al., 2017) found that, despite the emphasis by Government on providing radio and television access to the rural poor in Ghana, several communities were unable to connect due to lack of electricity and lack of parental awareness that would enable children to access radio and television.

Ngogi and Mahaye (2020) found in a study in Nigeria that long periods of learning would be lost for as long as the school closures lasted and this is evident as different cases are recorded daily. Kekić et al. (2016) reported that schools losing long periods of learning because of the disease outbreak can upshot to both chronological and stable smash up on educational system.

Digital Global Overview Report (2020) describe that about 60% of people from Nigeria are not associated to the internet. According to the report, about 169.2 million people, 83% of Nigerians have right of entry to mobile phone connections; however, of these, 50%, about 84.5 million people, live in municipal areas. For the populace with access, there is a heavy leaning towards elevated socio-economic households and urban households; a large number of whom are private school students who already have a learning benefit over their school peers. For children from poorer backgrounds who tend to have less access to internet connectivity, computers, and other devices, and reside in rural areas where local languages take dominance over English, ICT-learning uptake will be limited.

Individual learning at home has been proven to be very ineffective as the learner may have many distractors at their disposal which may impede learning and understanding (Onyema et al., 2020). Many homes in Africa do not even provide adequate learning environment hence students are therefore obliged to learn either in the living room or their bedrooms which is very ineffective (Adotey, 2020; Azzi-Huck, 2020). Again, it is an established fact that teaching occurs when a more knowledgeable person passes on knowledge to a less knowledgeable individual in order to induce knowledge uptake (Lantolf, 2008; Bateman & Waters, 2013; Greenberg, 2005). The aspect of the more knowledgeable person is missing when one is learning alone in the house especially with concepts, they are not familiar with and may need explanation from the teacher or other colleagues to enhance their understanding. The e-learning lacks the contact with the teacher in a classroom with the classroom system having support including modelling a skill, providing hints or cues, and adapting material or activity (Thelma and Adeniran, 2020). These aspects are missing in the time of school closures--although students will learn but getting the right explanation will be a challenge to them especially with new concepts. A number of studies have shown that parental support to student learning has always been minimal especially with working parents (Casely-Hayford et al., 2017; Owusu-Fordjour, 2020). Some of the studies identified poor parental support to learning at home as a major challenge to concentration and knowledge uptake. Key points found showed that with respect to e-learning platforms, most of parents/guardians have little or no knowledge about the use of the internet in learning and even those that do, do not supervise their children learning.

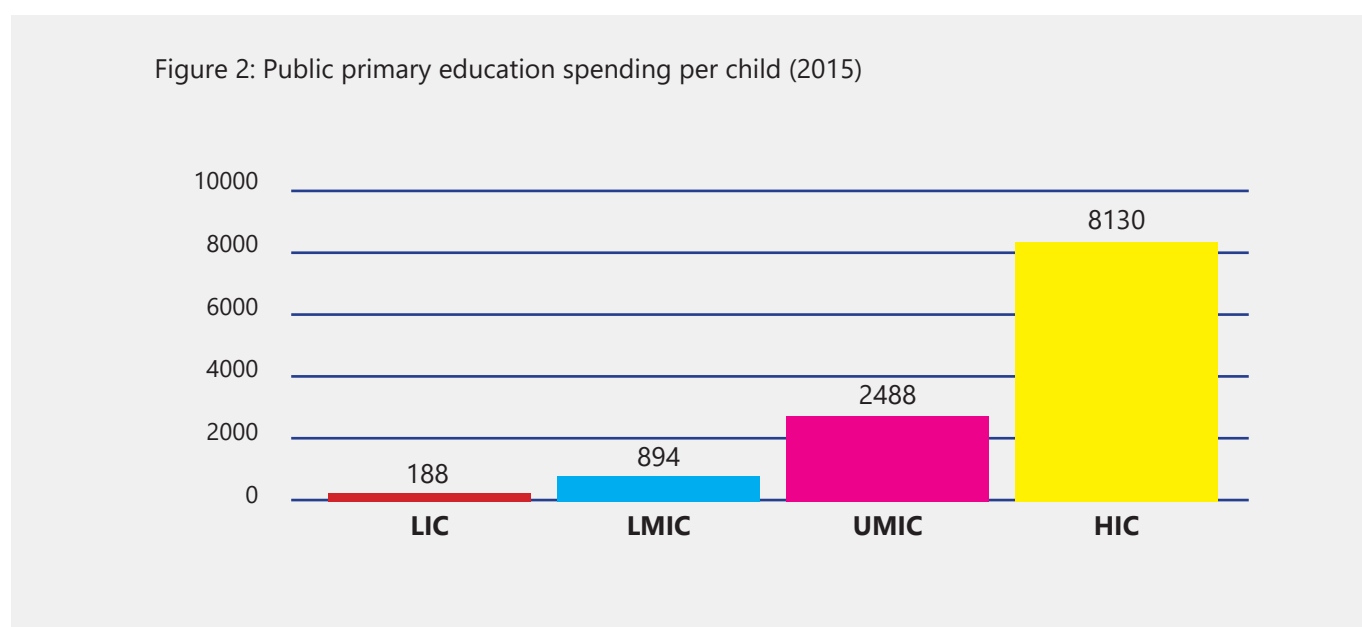
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<sup>5</sup> Complementary Basic Education is an alternative 9-month intensive afternoon session lessons for students who have dropped out of school. This allows such students to be integrated into the mainline educational system after the programme



### 2.2.3 Impacts on Educational Finance

The associated economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are likely to have significant effects on educational funding. Generally, education at all levels is funded by Governments, households, and development partners with domestic governments being the largest funders of education in all countries (Al-Samarrai, 2019). In the phase of the rampaging effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, all these key players have been affected in different ways with a potential rippling effect on educational financing at all levels (World Bank, 2020). Prior to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, different governments were spending vastly different amounts on education. High-income countries, according to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on average were spending 43 times as much on the education of primary-school-aged children as the average low-income country (Figure 2).



Source: Al-Samarrai et al., (2019)

The disparities in spending were even larger when measured over a student's entire education career. Overall, the average low-income country government will have invested about US\$1,300 on the average child's education, while the average high-income country would have vast spending inequalities, substantial progress had been made in increasing education investments in low and lower-middle-income countries including most African countries and improving access to educational opportunities. The challenge the impact of Covid-19 presents is the difficulty most African Governments will face in sustaining educational. This is likely to have an impact in stalling the progress made in narrowing educational gaps.

According to the World Bank (2020), the expected impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education budgets has some similarities with past crises. During the Ebola pandemic in Sierra Leone, public education spending fell sharply both in real terms and as a share of the education budget, falling from 15 to 12% of total government spending between 2014 and 2017. An assessment of the effect of the Ebola crisis on education budgets in Sub-Saharan Africa and other developing regions showed that few countries cut their education budgets because of the financial crisis, but it was expected to reduce their planned spending increases (Martin and Kyrili, 2009, and UNESCO,

2009). A review of the public expenditure for Zambia in recent times showed that public education spending as a share of the education budget declined from 20.5% in 2009 to 17 percent in 2010 and only returned to pre-crisis levels by 2014.

A review of Adelakun's paper on the 'impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian education systems' (2020) indicates there is evidence that some countries are already cutting their education budgets to make space for the required spending on health and social protection. The discussions indicate suggestions in Nigeria towards revisions to the federal budget, with budgetary cuts projected to be approximately 45% (US\$130 million) off the budget for the Universal Basic Education Commission. In Kenya, there are vivid indications of policy makers identifying both development spending on tertiary education and basic education curriculum reform as necessary cuts to support the country's Covid-19 response (Rahman and Matin, 2020). The interruption of the education system in Nigeria as a result of the pandemic has led to the governance system at various levels proposing shifts in financing of the education system at large. Parents as key financiers of education have also been impacted by the effects of the covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdown some parents were forced to procure laptops, android phones, television cables and other ICT gadgets to ensure their wards were able to participate in e-learning platforms.

#### **2.2.4 Heightened Inequalities**

Over the years, there have been marked inequalities in access to education especially, in Africa. Though much has been achieved as a result of concerted efforts to ensure Education for All, more children than ever before are going to school all over the world. However, there are still millions of children, adolescents and youth who remain out-of-school and an even greater number who though enrolled in school, are not accessing quality education (Casely-Hayford et al., 2017). Studies show that these children are mostly in rural zones developing in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (UNESCO, 2020; World Development Report, 2018) <sup>6</sup>. Equitable access to learning in school therefore remains endemic challenges in most African country contexts.

The Human Rights Watch (2020) finds that school closures resulting from the crisis has heightened the previously existing education-related inequalities in Africa. The implication is that, children who were already most at risk of being excluded from quality education have been the most affected. The review found that most parents are faced with economic hardship, loss of work due to the informal nature of their work and /or their inability to go to work due to the pandemic; hence their income has fallen (Thelma and Adedeji, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020). In a recent study conducted by the Human Rights Watch (2020) and based on fifty-seven interviews with students, parents, teachers and educational officials, it was found that the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the rise of existing income inequalities; the less-privileged children who are already at risk of not getting quality education, are the most affected. Thus, the learning opportunities for children attending low-fee private schools (LFPS) tend to suffer most due to their inability to transition from regular classroom learning to remote learning via e-learning platforms.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO. (2020). Global education monitoring report 2020: Inclusion and education: all means all. UNESCO, Paris, France.

World Development Report. (2018). World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise [Text/HTML]. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>

A review of a study in Ethiopia (Tamrat, 2021) indicates that though it may be too early to fully understand how the Covid-19 induced school closures are affecting particularly disadvantaged children in low-income countries such as Ethiopia, there are signs suggesting that it could have a lasting impact on increasing inequality. There were already pre-Covid-19 inequalities in access to quality education between boys and girls, children in urban and rural localities, and children from parents with higher and lower socio-economic status. The projection is that Covid-19 school closures could further increase the inequalities between the advantaged and disadvantaged children (Nantwi & Boateng, 2020; Agormedah et al., 2020).

The inequality stretch is evidenced in the type of school attended by students. Students from more advantaged backgrounds may be more likely to attend schools with better digital infrastructure and where teachers have higher levels of digital skills (Hatsu and Asamoah, 2020). The lack of adoption of alternative learning opportunities (such as e-learning) by private schools, especially Low Fee Private Schools (LFPS<sup>7</sup>), coupled with the inability of parents to afford and access these alternatives, make it impossible for students attending 'low level schools' to continue learning while schools are not open. Privileged students are able to remain engaged with schooling activities because they are able to use alternative learning opportunities through parents' support (Schleicher, 2020). The adoption of e-learning as a result of school closures will likely result in an increase in the learning gap between children from poor and rich backgrounds (Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

### 2.2.5 Impact on teachers in private schools (Low-Fee Private Schools)

In the face of Covid-19 induced school closures, teachers in public schools continued to draw their salaries, however, most of their colleagues in private schools, especially those in Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS) either received reduced salaries or no salaries at all (IDP, 2020). This is resulting from the fact that these LFPS finance their operation costs, which include teachers' salaries and wages, with funds accrued from school fees and levy payments (e.g., transportation and feeding). Due to school closures, the majority of LFPS have their cash inflows seriously reduced or halted resulting to most of their teachers been out of work. LFPS teachers are low-income earners, with the majority having little to save from their income. In their study on the economic impact of COVID-19 lockdowns in sub-Saharan Africa including Ghana, Teachout and Zipfel (2020) stipulate that, about 15% of teachers working in private schools are suffering from a drop in household income of about 50% on average. This decrease in income as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic may further push them into poverty and/or force them to find alternative work.

Another key impact from the review on teachers was the quick shift in mode of instruction. The sudden shift from face-to-face to long-distance online learning forced teachers to adapt to the new way of teaching (Putri1 et al., 2020). Many teachers had to acquire the required technology in a short time to respond to the need for online home learning. A study in Nigeria (Ngogi, 2020). revealed that more senior teachers struggled with the use of technology than their fellow younger teachers. The study revealed that though schools provided training and technical support to teachers, nevertheless, it took time for teachers to adapt to the new mode of learning and teaching, resulting in the possibility for an adverse impact on the quality of learning and teaching

7 "Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPSs) – sometimes referred to as low-cost private schools – include any market-oriented (nominally for-profit) schools that are dependent on user fees for some or all of their running and development costs. All LFPSs are characterized by a degree of financial independence from the state, and therefore need to attract and retain pupils in order to operate a viable business model. Distinct from elite private schools, they charge fees that low-income families consider relatively affordable. (Low-Cost private schools– C. McLoughlin. 2013)

(Agormedah, 2020). Chakraborty (2014) revealed several factors that can create exciting learning experiences for online learners. The main factors include: creating and maintaining a positive learning environment, building learning communities, providing consistent feedback in a timely manner, and using the right technology to deliver the right content. All respondents of the study who are teachers showed an understanding of the factors mentioned by Chakraborty.

## 2.2.6 Impact of COVID-19 on Private Basic Schools

Global evidence from the World Bank (2015) suggests that there is a growing surge of Low Fee Private Schools (LFPS) particularly in low-income countries in Africa. The percentage of students in low-income countries attending private primary schools has doubled from 11% to 22% which is directly connected to the increased access in overall public primary school enrolment (World Bank 2015). LFPS are emerging as a viable option (alternative) in countries where governments are unable to meet growing demand for school infrastructure for quality primary education and are positioning themselves at a competitive advantage over public schools due to their potential to drive learning outcomes and transformative change in the way schools operate—often demanding higher levels of teacher commitment and performance, using innovative approaches to deliver education (Casely-Hayford et al., 2018).

These private institutions usually operate along business models heavily hinged on students' fees to cover staff salaries and operational costs. While public institutions may eventually receive assistance from the state to overcome the consequences of Covid-19, the private ones may be forced to stop their operations for lack of funds. Closure of these institutions would have a clear impact on enrollment levels in public schools (Quartey, 2020). Private schools, especially Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPS) have been the most hard-hit in the education sector as a result of the closure of schools caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Empirical studies have shown that LFPS cater for more than 70% of primary school education in some parts of Africa, albeit no accurate record exists to indicate the population of LFPS (Quartey, 2020; Mcloughlin, 2013). For instance, LFPS constitute 60% of schools (12,000) in Nigeria and educate millions of children in Lagos state—Africa's largest city (SEED, 2020). The latest SEED 2020 report focuses on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted LFPS in Africa, particularly in relation to incomes, teachers, and children's learning. Key findings from the study suggest the following:

- ◆ The LFPS typically survive from “hand to mouth” as they depend on the limited fees, they received from low income earning parents either on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.
- ◆ There is poor digital literacy among school owners/leaders and teachers.
- ◆ They are in a poor financial state (little or no cash reserves) and thus are challenged to meet the funding requirements for salaries, fixed costs, infrastructure (data, etc.), communications and other expenses associated with remote teaching.

The United Nations estimates that, 23.8 million additional children and youth (from pre-primary to tertiary) may drop out or not have access to school next year (2021) due to the pandemic's economic impact alone (UN, 2020). Private schools rely heavily on fee payments as their source of income and the potential drop in the enrolment rates are predicted to decrease the available income of schools (IDP Foundation, 2020). Undoubtedly, the closure of schools in light of the COVID-19 pandemic will have an adverse impact on the earnings of the schools and will likely lead to permanent closure of some schools. This is particularly the case for schools with high levels of

debt, schools renting their structures, and those which rely on tuition fees, transport and school feeding fees in mobilizing their internal revenue. The lockdown and school closure will impact their revenue generation, which in turn will affect school maintenance and teacher remuneration during the period (Al-Samarrai et al., 2019).

A study in Nigeria (Thelma and Adedeji, 2020), most of the developing private schools in Nigeria could not afford the payment of their staffs during the period of lockdown because students are not in school, some have not paid the school levies before the emergence of the pandemic leading to school proprietors not having access to inflow of income to welfare their staffs working in their respective schools, in fact there is fear of whether some private schools in Nigeria will be able to survive and keep existing after the pandemic lockdown.

### 2.2.7 Impact on Household Incomes

Report by the World Bank (2020) suggests that, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant income shock for most households. The household income has declined for families as the rate of unemployment and underemployment rises, particularly in developing countries. Given the global nature of the economic crisis, people who rely on remittances from abroad are experiencing a fall in income as a result of the pandemic. Ratha et al., (2011) surveyed five African countries including Ghana and found that, education was one of the top four uses of such remittances. In many households, particularly the poor rural households, these declines in household income will reduce their ability to finance education, hence affecting their participation in schooling (World Bank, 2020). Households in Kenya and Uganda devoted 15 percent of their domestic and interregional remittances to fund the education of their members. And these investments tend to be associated with better education outcomes in many countries. These findings suggest that the forecast drop in remittances due to Covid-19 will seriously reduce education investments by remittance-receiving households (Al-Samarrai et al., 2019; Antara, 2020).

## 3.0 Discussions

The review of various papers and reports have brought to the fore the severity of the impact of Covid-19 on educational systems in Africa. The disruption in curriculum across most basic education establishments in Africa emerged as a key impact attributable to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many basic schools across Africa have lost significant amount of contact hours as a result of the Covid-19 induced school closures with its possible rippling effect on learning outcomes (Kekić et al. 2016). Despite the introduction of stop-gap measures including online learning through technology (including television/radio learning platforms), evident gaps still remain in the form of disparities in access to online platforms.

Learning in most African homes were mostly disrupted as a result of the limited or the absence of access to online learning platforms. The adoption of e-learning platforms remains very low in Africa due to poor infrastructure, lack of training and capacity-building within key institutions including teacher training institutions and so forth. The results of the review show primary basic school students are the most affected by the disruptions as a result of inadequate/absence in access to home learning or internet-enabled devices, especially those with parents that are unable to provide the required learning support. A typical scenario plays out in Ghana where several communities were unable to connect to the Government initiative of broadcasting lessons through

national television and radio channels due to lack of electricity and lack of parental awareness that would propel children to access these platforms (DFID, 2020).

The emergence of Covid-19 has also shown that the most powerful and positive impact on education is the digital transformation of the educational sector. The agility of many institutions and governments, especially to quickly move learning modules online and to dedicated mass media channels is venerable, albeit the numerous challenges. A key lesson required to be discussed is the fact that there are still challenges with access to internet and connectivity in most African countries with sharp contrast between urban and rural schooling. These challenges have been around prior to Covid-19 and obviously cannot be completely resolved within the short to medium term, however, there is the need for a conscious effort in revamping and expanding the ICT infrastructure of educational institutions in Africa. After Covid-19, one thing is certain: School systems that are best prepared to use educational technology effectively will be best positioned to continue offering quality education in the face of school closures.

One of the key long-term challenges brought about by the emergence of Covid-19 is its impact on education financing. The associated economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have had significant effects on the general finances of countries in Africa with its ripple effect on educational funding (Al-Samarrai et al., 2019). Prior to Covid-19, most Governments in Africa already had challenges in meeting up with the budgetary requirements of the education sector. This is likely to be exacerbated as a result of the effects of the pandemic and presents a huge challenge for almost all African Governments to continue to support and sustain their educational sectors so as to avoid the risk of stalling the progress made in narrowing educational gaps (Adelakun, 2020; Rahman and Matin, 2020)

The marked inequalities in access to education especially in Africa has been heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated school closures and other restrictions. Despite the substantial efforts in some African countries in closing the educational gap at the basic level, there are still millions of children, adolescents and youth who remain out-of-school (Casely-Hayford et al., 2018). Studies show that these children are mostly in rural zones of developing in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (UNESCO, 2020; World Development Report, 2018). Equitable access to learning in school therefore remains endemic challenges in most African country contexts. The implication is that, children who were already most at risk of being excluded from quality education have been the most affected with some never returning to school.

The pandemic has also brought to light the impeccable role played by teachers as possibly the most important element in the whole education process. Despite the key role teachers play in the education process, they comprise a key group that has been heavily impacted by the closure of schools as part of the Covid-19 restrictions, especially, those in private schools. During the school closures, teachers in public schools continued to receive their salaries as compared to teachers in private schools who either received reduced salaries or no salaries at all (IDP, 2020). The sudden shift from face-to-face to long-distance online learning also affected teachers by forcing them to adjust their mode of teaching from face-to-face to online (Putri1 et al., 2020). Many teachers had to acquire the required technology in a short time to respond to the need for online home learning.

## 4.0 Gaps in Literature and Implications for Further Research

A key observation throughout the review process was the absence of any literature linking the impact of the school closures and e-learning on children with special needs – persons with intellectual disability, persons with physical disability, children with specific learning disability, persons with autism, persons with attention deficit and so forth. Despite the limited literature on assessing the impact of Covid-19 on basic education in Africa, it was expected that at least one of the available literatures would have touched on the learning challenges of children with special learning needs in the face of the new learning paradigm.

Students with Special Educational Needs and /or Disabilities (SEND) are among those who are more likely to suffer from physical school closure. This therefore requires further in-depth research to unearth how children with special learning needs are coping with the new learning process, especially within the African space where there is limited personalized tutoring and the needed technology to assist learning for children with learning needs.

### 4.1 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The provision of equal education opportunities for all school-age children across the world is a fundamental human right and the primary building block for development. Over the past few decades, considerable effort has gone into making education, especially basic education accessible and to create opportunities for schooling for all children and youth. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation because of the school closures and the rippling effects on school drop-outs, school finances and management, loss of learning periods etc. The Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in the closure of schools in about 215 countries all over the world with 91.4% of the total number of enrolled learners in these countries momentarily out of school (UNESCO, 2020).

The review of various papers and reports identified and discussed the impacts Covid-19 has had on educational systems in Africa. It was observed from the review that the disruption in curriculum across most basic education institutions was eminent and could result in greater challenges in learning outcomes in the long term. This requires conscious efforts in identifying alternative approaches to make up for the lost time. Learning in most African homes has also been largely disrupted as a result of the limited or the absence of access to online learning platforms. The emergence of Covid-19 has also shown that the most powerful and positive impact on education is the digital transformation of the educational sector which requires conscious efforts at addressing across basic schools in Africa. African Governments and stakeholders in the education space should make conscious efforts to work at investing in expanding the technology infrastructure of schools and literacy of teachers to be able to better adapt in the face new pandemics.

Educational financing is emerged from the reviews as a key challenge brought about by the emergence of Covid-19 and is likely to lead to substantial reduction in funding for the education sector across most African basic institutions. African Governments should therefore make conscious efforts at reducing leakages and expenditure in areas that are not so central in development and channel such funds into the education space so as to ensure the gains in basic education do not stall.

The marked inequalities in access to education especially in Africa has been heightened by the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated school closures and other restrictions. Despite the substantial efforts in some African countries in closing the educational gap at the basic level, there are still millions of children, adolescents and youth who remain out-of-school (Casely-Hayford et al., 2018). The pandemic has also brought to light the key role played by teachers and the challenges that confronts them, especially those working within the private education space and the need for support in improving the technological capacity of teachers to be able to adapt to the new brand of teaching.

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