



## ***THE ADVERSE IMPACT OF COVID -19 PANDEMIC ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ZAMBIA***

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The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) had hit the country and the world at large in the years 2020 and 2021. This prompted many sectors in the county to panic on how to deal with the pandemic. [1] Since COVID- 19 was confirmed in Zambia on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020, a total of 202,078 cases, 195,370 (97 %) recoveries, and 3521 deaths have been recorded as of 13<sup>th</sup> august 2021. It's gratifying that the COVID- 19 situations in the country have continued to improve with a further 21% reduction in positivity recorded. This caused the country to suffer socially, economically, health, education, etc. the country came to a semi-lock down which saw schools closed, no social activities seeing the country's economy deteriorated. Zambia as it is a third-world country leads to the increase of poverty levels. [2] The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) also urged that even before the COVID – 19, the social situation in the region was deteriorating, owing to rising rates of poverty and extreme poverty, persistent inequalities, and growing discontent. This has been also a case for Zambia. Due to COVID – 19 pandemic, the education system has been disturbed letting learners missing a lot in the teaching and learning time which eventually disturbed the learners especially those in examination classes.

Much as it is known that COVID-19 has impacted negatively on the education sector in Zambia, school administrators need to put the lives of teaching staff, pupils, and supporting staff at the center of the decision made. It has been observed that during the cold season the number of COVID – 19 cases keep on exacerbating and escalating. No one has been left out everyone has been a victim either infected or affected. The Zambian government through the Ministry of General Education has resorted to keeping learners and teachers in schools as it continues trying to respond to COVID -19 pandemic.

The examination learners of the year 2021 have suffered a lot as they never learned for a term in 2020 and in 2021 they have lost some hence having a backlog of content to cover before writing their final national examination. The government gave a directive to close schools for the second time in June 2021 barely six (6) weeks in the second term due to COVID – 19. This had put teachers and educators in a very big predicament as they wanted to prepare their learners well for the final national examinations.

The major adverse effects of COVID – 19 on the education sectors among them are as follows;

### *PHYSICAL TEACHING*

In the Zambian education system, the curriculum is tailored in a way such that the teaching and learning process takes place in the presence of a teacher. Now since the outbreak of the COVID -19 pandemics in the year 2020 the education system had suffered numerous in both teaching staffs and learners having contracted the COVID -19. This led to the closure of schools in 2020 and 2021 which made learners hardly having access to physical teaching as the country underwent semi- lockdown. The Zambian type of curriculum used is the traditional or content-based curriculum which exposes learners to physical teaching for them to acquire knowledge and memorizes it. This simply means the physical presence of a teacher is demanded as learners cannot do anything on their own unless there is someone to push them. Learners are indoctrinated from early childhood education through primary and secondary education levels. Because of this type of curriculum, it made the National Science Centre (NSC) in Zambia trying to shift from a content-based curriculum to a Concept-based curriculum by creating Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) schools which failed. This prompted the government through the ministry of general education to rivet back to the usual curriculum which promotes memorization type of learning as learner mostly depends on physical teaching. Most learners during the lockdown did not have access to education as there was no physical teaching.

### *TEACHING ON MEDIA*

In the year 2020 before the COVID- 19 pandemic, [3] ahead of the department (HOD) at one of the schools in Kabwe of the central province of Zambia introduced WhatsApp groups for teaching and learning with all the classes he was teaching. Learners could interact with and sharing information on the platform outside school times on school works. One day this teacher was castigated by the headteacher that parents were complaining that why should a teacher be sending notes, quiz questions, content tasks, and assignments to pupils on WhatsApp forcing parents to buy phones for learners? The HOD explained to the headteacher that he did not force parents to buy smartphones for learners or rather encouraging learners to be coming with smartphones at school as this was one of the serious school rules in Zambian schools. The school headteacher was somehow understanding and he agreed with the HOD. Barely one (1) month, there was an outbreak of COVID-19 and schools were closed. This prompted the school management to have a meeting with an agenda on how to keep children busy during the semi-lock down. This is when they realized that and adopted the WhatsApp method. This method was very vital as teachers could send school work on different grade platforms and learners could work out and submitted work to be marked. This worked for only a small number who could afford to have smartphones.

Kabwe District Education Board Secretary (DEBs) organized a group of teachers who could teach using the Radio Broadcasting at Power FM and KNC radio stations in Kabwe. The Zambia National Broadcasting Co-operation (ZNBC) also created a T.V channel to televise different teachers teaching different subjects across all grades through the television in trying to carry the E- learning-teaching process to children during the closures of schools. All these worked for certain types of well-to-do families. Most of the families in Zambia are from low-income levels. This is evident as most of the pupils could not submit the worked tasks.

As much as the use of technology came into effect as a substitute for physical contact with learners, most of the learners

- i. couldn't have access to the internet for those who live where there is no network
- ii. Others couldn't be using smartphones as they lack the financial muscle to afford one.
- iii. Some couldn't afford to buy internet bundles to download or have access to the sent information.
- iv. Some families do not finances to buy radios and television sets for E-learning teaching
- v. Other students could miss the timings of watching and listening to E-learning due to some activities given to them by their parents and guardians.
- vi. Some areas could experience load shedding hence having electricity to use their gadgets for E-learning.

### ***LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS (SEN)***

Learners with special education needs were not spared out. As it is known these learners require special treatment during the teaching and learning process. They require a teacher to be present physically for learning to take place smoothly. It's a fact that all the COVID- 19 factors affecting learners also affects learners with Special Education Needs.

### ***CHILD HEADED FAMILIES***

Some institutions have many children who head their families through being in the streets doing some small businesses selling some commodities or selling items on behalf of businessmen and women to earn a living. By doing the piece works or small business they manage to buy the most basic needs especially food for their families. These learners during the closure of schools become so happy to have time to work for their families. They forget that time for learning and acquire the required knowledge keeps ongoing.

### ***GIRL CHILD***

Educating a girl child has been a challenge especially for low-income families. Even before COVID-19 girls have been married off for survival by some uneducated parents. Girls nowadays have become so vulnerable in our society. Due to the closure of schools, our girls are now maids in-home hence not even given chance to rest or study. Most of the girls are now in prostitution to earn a living and others are now pregnant just wanting to leave their homes to escape abuse from their guardians.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS.**

The COVID – 19 pandemic has come to stay with us and we have to live with it. People just have to acclimatize with the pandemic and live in a new normal. The adverse impact of covid – 19 has affected the education system in Zambia. These factors can be dealt with, with the following recommendation.

#### **USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

The government has to make it a policy to make E-learning the priority in the education sector. Technology has to be enhanced to achieve the E-learning because the COVID -19 will be improving each time it comes like the way we had 1<sup>st</sup> wave, 2<sup>nd</sup> wave, and the silent killer in the name of 3<sup>rd</sup> wave. There have been rumors that we may have a deadly type in the future. To escape from indefinite closures of schools, the Zambian government has to deliberately make it a mandate for all parents to procure smartphones for their school-going children for the teaching

and learning process once schools close. The smartphone contains a lot of applications that can be used i.e. Radio, WhatsApp, Zoom, Google learning, Emails, etc. The Non-Government Organizations have been there supporting the vulnerable and they can just increase the package to the support which they give to them.

### SHIFT OF CURRICULUM

it is imperative to shift from content-based to concept-based curriculum with the fact that concept-based comes with aspects of developing a student into a critical thinker, problem solver, creative thinker, collaborative thinker, etc. A concept-based curriculum provides a way to reduce the thick or overloaded content curriculum. Learners take a center stage in the learning process and they become independent in the way they learn. Unlike the content-based curriculum where learners' dependability of learning is limited in the four walls of the classroom.

### SCHOOL CALENDAR

The ministry of general education has to revise the school calendar in a way that the cold season is avoided. If this is done there will no abrupt closure of schools. The M.O.E with other stakeholders can sit and evaluate how best schools should open and close. There is a need to shift from three terms to two terms with at least four (4) months each term. This may be as follows;

Term	Opening	Close	Duration
1	January	May	5 Months
2	August	November	4 Months

Recess ( Holiday)	Starts	Ends	Duration
1 <sup>st</sup> term (cold season)	June	July	2 Months
2 <sup>nd</sup> term( rain season)	December	December	1 Months

### VACCINES

A lot of pandemics have been dealt with with the help of vaccines and it is with this notion of making it a global declaration of people to be vaccinated. Since vaccines have proved to be the lasting solution to most of the outbreaks, there is a need for the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health in conjunction with the Zambian government to look at which is the most effective vaccine among those pronounced worldwide suitable for school-going children below the age of 18 since the vaccines that are being used are of 18 years and above.

### REFERENCE

1. Miti S (Dr) (14<sup>th</sup> august 2021) Statement on the Directives to Curb COVID – 19 in Zambia. Lusaka
2. <http://hdl.handle.net/11362/45905>
3. Interview with head of department(HOD) Zambia May 10, 2021