

What can research evidence tell us about:

Effects of COVID-19 on Education and potential solutions: Buikwe District, Uganda

Key messages

→ In assessing the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system, you need to consider the effects at these five levels:

1. The learners, e.g. physical and sexual abuse, loss of learning gains
2. The parents, e.g. lost sources of finances
3. The teachers, e.g. Job insecurity, lost teaching skills
4. The schools, e.g. reduced income, lost staff
5. The education Sector, e.g. budget cuts, investment in remote learning

→ The measures to ensure continuity of education should seek to reform and improve the education sector.

→ There is need for fundraising and engaging development partners to support the implementation of measures that create a hybrid system of education that integrates classroom and remote learning.

Where did this Rapid Response come from?

This document was created in response to a specific question from a policymaker in Uganda in 2021.

It was prepared by the Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES), at the Uganda country node of the Regional East African Community Health (REACH) Policy Initiative.

Included:

- **Key findings** from research
- **Considerations about the relevance** of this research for health system decisions in Uganda

Not included:

- Recommendations
- Detailed descriptions



Summary

Background:

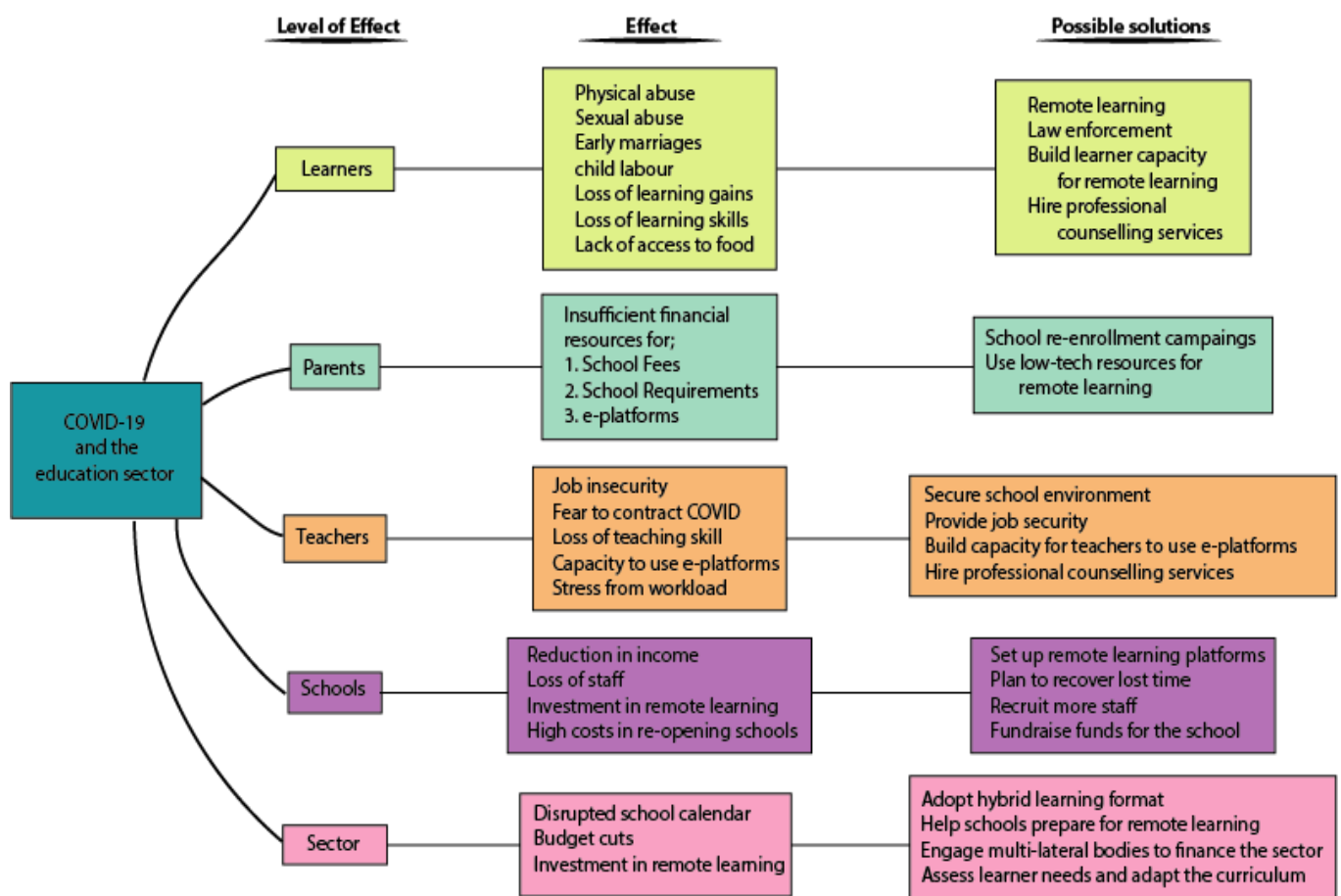
In March 2020, the Government of Uganda implemented several measures to control the transmission of COVID-19 in the country. The closing of all schools in the country has specifically had far-reaching effects on the education sector. Some districts are seeking approaches of what they can do to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 that are applicable to their local context. As a result, a decision-maker from Buikwe district has requested for evidence on the impact that COVID-19 has had on the education sector in the district and potential measures to address the resulting challenges. The evidence will be used in discussions with partners to identify the best way forward for the district to protect the education gains received before the pandemic, but as well improve going forward.

Rapid Response Question:

What are the effects of COVID-19 on the education sector in Buikwe district and the possible measures to overcome these effects?

Findings:

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a major disruption of education in all countries globally. A decision-maker seeking to understand the effects of the pandemic and their solutions can look at them at five different levels i.e. the learners, parents, teachers, schools and the sector. The schematic illustration below summarises the effects of COVID-19 and the possible solutions.



Conclusions:

The pandemic has had far-reaching effects at different levels of the education sector. The schools and sector should devise ways to achieve a “better” normal on re-opening of schools despite the several challenges that lay ahead. These will include multifaceted approaches targeting different levels and fundraising for the sector. The Sector should also potentially adopt a hybrid system that encompasses both remote- and classroom learning.

Background

COVID-19 has had far-reaching impacts across all sectors globally. Among the measures instituted to control the transmission of the disease, the Uganda government, instituted a nation-wide lockdown. The lockdown in Uganda started in March 2020 with gradual easing over the subsequent months starting in July 2020. In addition, all academic institutions with school resuming in phases that started in January 2021.

How this Rapid Response was prepared

After clarifying the question being asked, we searched for systematic reviews, local or national evidence from Uganda, and other relevant research. The methods used by the SURE Rapid Response Service to find, select and assess research evidence are described here:

www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/methods

Buikwe district in Uganda are concerned about the potential effects that the pandemic has had on the education sector within the district. The district was already facing several challenges within the Education Sector that might have been exacerbated by the pandemic and potentially new challenges. This would have over-reaching effects on the education of learners in the district and affecting the district education targets.

Buikwe district has initiated discussions with several development partners who are willing to support interventions to improve the education sector. A decision-maker requested for evidence to inform the ongoing discussions between the district and the development partners on the impact of COVID-19 on the sector in Buikwe district and as well as the possible measures that can be instituted to address the challenges.

Rapid Response Question:

What are the effects of COVID-19 on the education sector in Buikwe district and the possible measures to overcome these effects?

Summary of findings

In this rapid response brief, we summarise evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on the education sector and possible solutions drawn from Uganda at large and settings similar to Buikwe in terms of the education system. However, the interventions have only been piloted in different settings, and not extensively studied to assess their impact. It is however important to note that much as the education system was grossly affected by the pandemic, the sector should plan for a “better” normal, not just returning to previous normal.

The table below shows the impact that COVID-19 has had on the education sector and possible measures that can be considered to overcome these effects.

Effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system stakeholders in Uganda	Possible measures to overcome the effects of COVID-19
<p>Learners</p> <p>Many learners, especially girls, are likely not return to school. Families with very low income are likely to have lost their sources of income, which will increase the rate of child marriages, teenage pregnancies, and children forced in labour such as herding animals, working on farms for long periods and selling fruits, among others to supplement family income.</p> <p>Children, especially girls, have suffered higher rates of sexual violence like rape and defilement. The closure of schools led children to stay away from school for very long periods, increasing their chances of abuse such as physical and sexual violence cases and child labour [1].</p> <p>The limited contact with teachers is reported to have led to a loss in learning gained and an erosion of the learning skills due to the long period of absence from school [2].</p> <p>Learners will likely experience increased levels of stress for the learners, because the teachers will overload learners with work on their return to school to make up the lost period during school closure.</p> <p>Some learners, especially in low-income settings lost access to regular meals such as free or subsidised school lunch, which will affect their nutrition, overall health status and academic achievements.</p> <p>Finally, learners might have challenges coping with the several changes that schools will put in place to re-open, and these new norms which will eventually affect their learning and ultimately academic performance [3].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The schools have reverted to the use of virtual learning platforms including radio, TV, and different online and offline platforms, e.g. Kolibri to provide for access to contact with teachers during this period. The sector can also consider distributing printed reading materials to learners. This can help learners continue learning in safe spaces and enhance their learning upon resumption of school. These platforms should be considered for integration into the education system even when schools re-open as they allow for additional access to learning beyond the teacher’s physical presence. The biggest challenge with these platforms is access to devices to access the platform, ability of the learners to navigate the platforms and ability of teachers to effectively use the platform. Radios are the most widely spread and accessible in the communities [4] and should be given priority in planning for remote learning. - There is need to build the capacity of teachers and learners to use the platform as well as motivate the teachers to incorporate Open Educational Resources (OER) into their teaching [3, 5, 6]. - Upon the re-opening of schools, the schools should consider hiring professional counselling services for both the learners and the teachers. This is because COVID-19 was a socio disease much as it was health, and individuals will most likely need counselling services to maintain the expected levels of teaching and learning.
<p>Parents</p> <p>Parents might not have sufficient resources to send the learners back to school when schools re-open due to financial constraints brought by COVID-19 such as loss of jobs,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There should be re-enrolment campaigns to get learners back into school. The campaigns should involve schools and local leaders [3]. These campaigns might consider incentives for re-enrolment such as waiving school fees, providing free uniforms or lunch [3, 9]. However, with budget constraints, targeting the most vulnerable groups including girls might provide the most benefits.

<p>reduction in business transactions and restricted movement, [7]. These parents will also have challenges of supporting all the learning needs of their children.</p> <p>Parents with limited financial resources are unable to purchase devices, internet access, and electricity. will result in inequitable access to education for the learners from these families affecting education gains for the children [8].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low-technology (Low-Tech) interventions (including learning via SMS and targeted phone calls) are suggested to boost learning for learners from financially disadvantaged families as they have exhibited great potential in Botswana [10].
<p>Teachers</p> <p>Teachers have lost jobs and salaries. Some have been put on leave without pay, especially in the private sector [2]. The sudden closure of schools left many teachers uncertain about their future role in the education sector.</p> <p>As schools reopen, some teachers might feel they are at risk of contracting COVID-19 from the school environment.</p> <p>Some teachers as well fear they might have lost the teaching skill since many have not participated in routine teaching activities over an extended period [2].</p> <p>Teachers are likely to experience stress due to an increased workload as they strive to finish syllabi of different subjects within a short time.</p> <p>Some teachers might also face challenges to adopt to the new settings due to lack of knowledge and skills to blend the two forms of teaching further increasing the stress levels of teachers [3, 7, 11].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools need to recruit new teachers to fill the gap created by teachers who have since moved into other lines of work. This should be coupled with adequate planning and offering guarantees of salary in the event that another strong wave of the pandemic is to happen requiring schools to close again. - Build capacity of teachers in using e-platforms for teaching. There should be a program that continuously builds capacity for teachers in online pedagogy [6, 7]. This should be coupled with the capacity building for teachers to deliver a hybrid that allows for classroom based and remote learning. - Upon the re-opening of schools, the schools should consider hiring professional counselling services for the teachers. This is because COVID-19 was a socio disease much as it was health, and teachers will most likely need counselling services to maintain the expected levels of teaching.
<p>Schools</p> <p>COVID-19 severely affected private institutions at both academic and business levels as compared to the public counterparts. The pandemic depleted their income source, reduced employees' productivity, and constrained the capacity of institutions to cater to crucial costs like rent and salaries of staff. Some schools were converted into lodging or health facilities, and some were sold off to repay bank loans [12].</p> <p>Schools will require structures and finances to implement a hybrid arrangement of teaching if it is to be adopted in Uganda that combines online and physical learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up the necessary amenities that allow for online studies [11] - Find solutions to power black-outs such as acquisition of generators to prevent interruptions in e-learning when schools resume for students to use the e-learning facilities [11] - Develop social and emotional support for learners and teachers when schools reopen such as counselling services to help them adjust to the new conditions [3, 7] - Plan for fundraisers to raise money to enable schools set up for reopening and invest in I.T - Train teachers to offer safe emotional and social environment for learners [7]

<p>These structures include internet connection, devices like computers, servers and tablets, a reliable power source that might combine hydroelectric power and a standby generator and software subscriptions with appropriate security measures. Schools also need to invest in a professional development program that continuously improves the online pedagogy of teachers. Putting in place all these requirements requires a lot of money which most schools might not have [13]. Public schools as well might not fulfil these requirements due to financial challenges the government has experienced at the hands of COVID-19, which have necessitated diversion of funds from other sectors to the health sector.</p> <p>For schools that had not invested in ICT, e-platforms will attract additional expenses for acquiring the necessary technology, including devices (Computer, smartphone, etc.), internet subscription, and a reliable power sources. These are made even more pricey going by the prevailing financial constraints from the school closures and general business environment [13]. In places with limited bandwidth, teachers will find a challenge accessing and using e-platforms due to network challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan for learners to recover lost learning and time by using strategies such as remedial learning, compressed/ alternative academic calendars and any other form of support [9]. - Schools should work with the central government to ensure that teachers access equipment like mobile tablets, computers and internet to facilitate their use of the e-platforms for teaching [7]
<p>Education sector</p> <p>COVID-19 disrupted the school calendar as many if not all learning institutions were closed. Over 1.5 Billion learners were locked out of schools [2].</p> <p>The economic shock at the hands of COVID-19 is only compared in recent history to the credit crunch of 2008. The fiscal challenges COVID-19 has brought upon jurisdictions worldwide have been felt in almost every sector, including the education sector. Investment in education was already low before the pandemic. With borrowing to offset the impacts of the pandemic, government expenditure in education is projected to drop by at least 10%. Budget cuts for the education sector might have serious detrimental effects on both the quality and quantity of education provided to learners [14, 15].</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopt e-learning platforms that are both online and offline such as Kolibri [5] to allow for remote learning by the students - Consider exploring a combination of both in person and distance learning [3] - Purchase and distribution of computers, iPads and electronic tablets to learners and teachers to facilitate the smooth integration of e-learning into the traditional learning system [7, 11] - Work with internet providers to provide subsidised internet for education related services and platforms [6, 7] - Advocate for tax cuts on internet connectivity for academic institutions [6] - Aid schools (both public and private) to prepare to reopen following COVID-19 in terms of COVID prevention measures and setting up I.T. platforms [7] - Provide social and emotional support to teachers [7] - Adapt curriculum to account for materials not taught during school closure [3] - With projections of budget cuts to the education sector, it is crucial to engage international multi-sectoral organisations for funding in the education sector [9] - There is need to strengthen mechanisms for collection and use of sector data, both operational and financial to guide future interventions [9] - Assess learning needs of learners when schools reopen and tailor training programs towards the needs [9]

Conclusion

COVID-19 has affected most aspects of life. The full extent of this effect has not been fully understood as the pandemic continues to ravage the world. It is an evolving situation that should be continuously studied. Closure of schools has had disastrous effects on every stakeholder in the education system.

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What is a Rapid Response?

Rapid Responses address the needs of policymakers and managers for research evidence that has been appraised and contextualised in a matter of hours or days, if it is going to be of value to them. The Responses address questions about arrangements for organising, financing and governing health systems, and strategies for implementing changes.

What is ACRES?

ACRES – The Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES) is a center of excellence at Makerere University- in delivering timely evidence, building capacity and improving the understanding the effective, efficient and sustainable use of the rapid evidence syntheses for policy making in Africa. ACRES builds on and supports the Evidence-Informed Policy Network (**EVIPNet**) in Africa and the Regional East African Community Health (**REACH**) Policy Initiative (see back page). ACRES is funded by the Hewlett and Flora foundation. <http://bit.do/eNQG6>

ACRES' collaborators:



Regional East African Community Health Policy Initiative



EVIPNet

Glossary

of terms used in this report:
www.evipnet.org/sure/rr/glossary

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Conflicts of interest

None known.

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