TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' PREPAREDNESS TO SUPPORT VIRTUAL LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the abrupt closing of schools all over the world. As a result, virtual learning became an alternative to classroom teaching. Administering virtual learning has become a challenge for both parents and teachers who must ensure their children's education continuity. This study aimed to look into the experiences of virtual learning during COVID-19. A descriptive qualitative study was designed to investigate teachers' and parents' preparedness to support remote learning to gain insight into real-life experiences. A purposeful sampling technique was used to obtain data from target respondents. The findings indicate their sentiments were on virtual learning. The results show that both teachers and parents were not well prepared to support virtual learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. This issue affects all schools: public 8-4-4 schools, private 8-4-4 schools, international schools, and private schools. The results point to a weak support system for virtual education in Kenyan schools during COVID-19 outbreak affecting virtual learning delivery in the country. There is thus a need to enhance the capacity of teachers to offer virtual learning. It is also recommended that the teacher's college curriculum encompasses virtual learning courses for upcoming teachers. Parents should also be encouraged to support virtual learning by procuring computers and other communication devices for their children. Parents without the requisite skills in virtual learning should be encouraged to seek training to offer direct support and supervision of their children as they study at home. Development actors such as not-for-profit organizations should be encouraged to implement projects to strengthen access to virtual learning in schools.

Keywords: Teachers' and Parents' preparedness; Virtual learning; Schools in Kenya; COVID-19 Pandemic

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many countries worldwide closed schools, colleges, and universities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid the virus from spreading. Because of this abrupt closing, education officials, school principals, and teachers had to find alternatives to face-to-face instruction to ensure that children's right to education was preserved (Hanushek, & Woessmann, 2020). As a result, many countries implemented virtual learning, often as a standalone or combined with distance learning through TV and Radio. In Latvia, for example, the Tava Klase, an educational TV channel, was employed in the delivery of educational content to different age groups during school closure. It also helped parents connect with schools (Van der Vlies, 2020).

Many countries utilized online networking applications such as Zoom, Facebook and WhatsApp to facilitate education continuity remotely (Mishra, Gupta, & Shree, 2020). As appropriate as these measures were for addressing the needs of the moment, they also created a challenge for parents, teachers, and governments to ensure that children's learning process continued uninterrupted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents were less likely to offer learning services at home when managing health and job crises (Eurofound, 2020). As a result, this study aimed to learn about teachers' and parents' preparedness to support virtual learning in Kenya during COVID-19.

1.1 Problem Statement

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many countries to seek virtual learning as an alternative. Although virtual learning offers an easy route to continuing learning and pedagogic processes, it needs constant support from both teachers and parents. On July 7 2020, the Cabinet Secretary of Education, Prof George Magoha, announced that primary and secondary schools in Kenya would remain closed until January 2021. Like the rest of the world, Kenya has to roll out virtual learning urgently, and this was done without assessing the preparedness of teachers and parents to implement and support it. In addition, the Ministry of Education put in place Radio Educations Program that provided daily content to primary and secondary school curricula in core academic subjects. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), radio ownership stands at 58.5% and 54.4% of rural and urban households, respectively. Therefore access to education content through the radio is likely to be a barrier. Besides, it is a daunting task for the

Ministry of Education to develop radio programming on the full curriculum for all classes within a short period as the closure was unplanned. Therefore, the success of virtual learning in the country was not be necessarily guaranteed. It is also untenable to make informed recommendations on strengthening virtual learning in Kenya without a systematic study. This underlines the importance of studies such as this current one that examines teachers' and parents' preparedness to support virtual learning in Kenya.

1.2 Objective
The study sought to examine teachers' and parents' preparedness to support virtual learning in Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Everybody has been affected in one way or another since the outbreak of COVID-19. Lockdowns have had a significant effect on the lives of people around the world. The resultant impact on education systems and many students' lives is more likely to be long-term. The lockdowns have provided an unprecedented challenge to governments to ensure that learning continues (Chang & Yano, 2020). To resolve the educational problem, a range of countries have taken various approaches. Educational leaders have taken a stand at the national level to reduce the effects of lockdowns on students. Through the internet and online platforms, virtual learning modalities have been followed by both developed and developing countries since the dawn of the 21st Century. This learning mode became more acceptable as students' needs became more apparent, faculty recognized its effectiveness, and institutions became more proficient in distance education design and delivery (Vitoria, Mislinawati, & Nurmasyitah, 2018).

One of the main benefits of virtual learning is its ease, allowing students to log in anytime they want. Students can log in from anywhere due to the widespread availability of internet connections. Virtual opportunities enable students to spend more time on subjects that require more effort to learn, in addition to saving money (Vord & Pogue, 2012). As a result, students are more likely to enjoy learning subjects typically considered challenging.

Many students are saving money on travel expenses since they can attend school from home. The opportunity to study remotely is another benefit of virtual learning, which positions many students to be ideally equipped for a skilled marketplace where remote choices are commonplace (Mukhtar, Javed, Arooj, & Sethi, 2020). As the coronavirus pandemic causes students to explore alternative education choices, online learning offers the advantage of reducing conventional schooling's financial burden. However, the most crucial flaw in virtual learning is time management and technology. Virtual learning can be challenging to organize for students who are prone to procrastination, and encouragement can be a challenge (Cerezo, Esteban, Sánchez-Santillán, & Núñez, 2017). Since most virtual learning is focused on a student's ability to complete self-directed work, students who thrive on structure and routine will find learning lacking.

Even if students have the commitment and encouragement to adapt to virtual learning, access may be a challenge in Africa. According to UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), two-thirds of the world's school-aged children (1.3 billion) between the ages of 3-17 do not have access to the internet at home (UNICEF & ITU, 2020). Young people aged 15 to 24 years old have a similar lack of connectivity, with 759 million (63 per cent) unconnected at home (UNICEF & ITU, 2020). According to the 2019 census report, only 22.6 per cent of the Kenyan population uses the internet and 10.4 per cent use a computer at home.   Even in urban areas, internet usage and access to a computer at home stands at 42.5 percent and 21.6 percent, respectively. (KNBS, 2019). Lack of connectivity does not just limit children and young people's ability to connect online, and in the case of school closures, such as those triggered by COVID-19, they miss out on their education.

Consequently, virtual learning in response to coronavirus outbreak and school closures has not been successful in Kenya. Although private international schools embraced online learning right away, public and private schools chose to delegate homework to students. However, owing to the unpredictability of COVID-19 progression, it was discontinued. Despite the fact that virtual learning remains increasingly important even post COVID-19 pandemic, most parents and teachers are unable to encourage it in the current situation. As a result, this study will share the personal perspectives of teachers and parents about virtual learning.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a quantitative approach. It was a rapid assessment survey conducted with stakeholders in the education sector. A group of 1,532 teachers and 378 parents from urban areas were selected to participate in this research study. The sampling was purposive as an online link was sent through various teacher and education networks through SMS, WhatsApp and email. The link was distributed through the Kenya Private School Association, Kenya Secondary
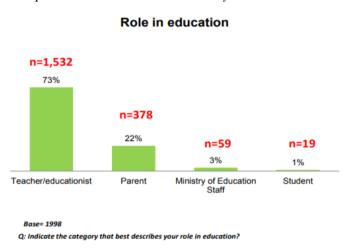
Schools Association and Kenya International Schools Association Network. However, it is worth noting that due to the purposive sampling, the sample is not fully representative of the parents and teaching population in the whole of Kenya. However, the findings are indicative of the sentiments on education and COVID-19.
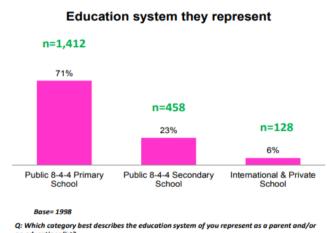
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondents' Role and Education System

The respondents were probed on their role in education and if the education system they represent. The majority of the poll participants were teachers/educationalists (73%), while 22% were parents. In terms of the education system they represent, 71% of the respondents represented 8-4-4 primary school education, and 23% represented 8-4-4 secondary school system.

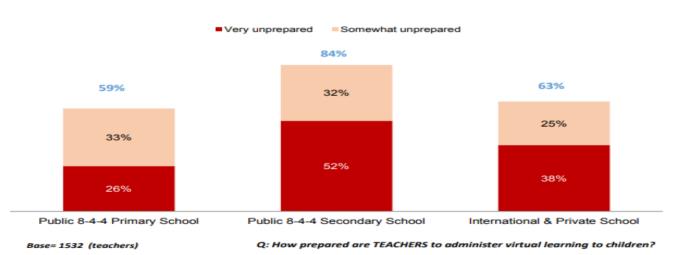**Figure 1**
Respondents' Role and Education System

4.2 Teachers' Perception: Preparedness to Administer Virtual Learning (By Education System Represented)

The study sought to find out the percentage of teachers who were prepared to administer virtual learning. While 59% of teachers in Public 8-4-4 primary schools consider themselves unprepared, 84% of teachers in Public 8-4-4 secondary schools say they are also unprepared. Conversely, 63% of International schools teachers are unprepared. These findings show that teachers representing Public 8-4-4 secondary schools feel least prepared to administer virtual learning (compared to 8-4-4 secondary schools and private schools).

Figure 2
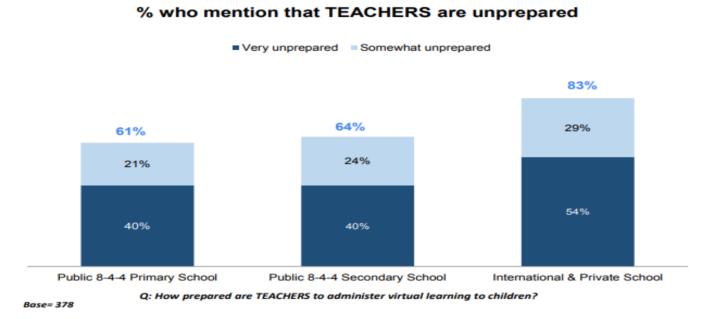*Teachers' perception of Teachers' Preparedness*

4.3 Parents' Perception: Teachers' Preparedness to Administer Virtual Learning (By Education System Represented)

The study sought to establish parents' perceptions regarding teachers' preparedness to administer virtual learning. Whereas 61% of Public 8-4-4 primary schools parents consider teachers to be unprepared, 64% of parents representing Public 8-4-4 secondary schools consider their teachers unprepared. Furthermore, 83% of parents in International schools consider teachers unprepared. These findings show that parents representing international and private schools believe that their teachers to be least prepared to administer virtual learning.
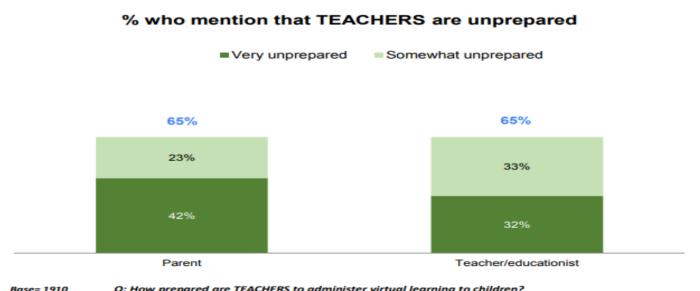
Figure 3

Parents' perception of Teachers' Preparedness (by Education System)

4.4 Teachers versus parents' perceptions of Teachers' preparedness to administer virtual learning

An equal proportion of participating teachers and parents consider teachers to be unprepared to administer virtual learning. Interestingly, teachers also rate themselves as not prepared to administer virtual learning. This means that just like parents, teachers have less confidence in their ability to deliver virtual learning.

Figure 4

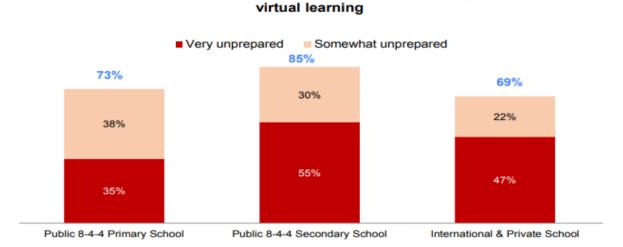*Parents vs Teachers perceptions of Teachers' preparedness to administer virtual learning*

4.5 Parent's Ability to Support their Children's Virtual Learning

The teachers' perception of parents' preparedness to support a child's virtual learning was also sought from parents. Most teachers (73%) and (85%) in Public 8-4-4 primary schools and Public 8-4-4 secondary schools consider parents to be unprepared. This sentiment is echoed by 69% of teachers in International schools who consider parents to be unprepared. Teachers representing public 8-4-4 secondary schools consider their parents to be least prepared to administer virtual learning.

Figure 5

Teachers Rating of Parent's Ability to Support their Children's Virtual Learning

% who mention that PARENTS are unprepared to support child's virtual learning

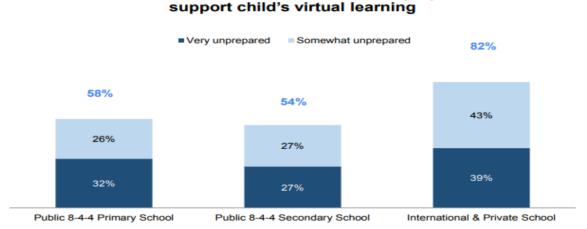■ Very unprepared ■ Somewhat unprepared

Q: How prepared are PARENTS to support teachers and supervise children during virtual learning to children a parent and/or an educationalist?

Base= 1532

4.6 Parents' Perception of Their Preparedness to Support Child's Virtual Learning (By Education System Represented)

Slightly above half of the parents in public 8-4-4 primary and secondary schools consider themselves unprepared to offer virtual learning. Further, 82% of international schools parents say teachers are unprepared. These findings show that parents representing international and private schools consider themselves to be the least prepared to administer virtual learning.

Figure 6

Parents' Perception of Own Preparedness to Support Child's Virtual Learning (By Education System Represented)

% who mention that PARENTS are unprepared to support child's virtual learning

■ Very unprepared ■ Somewhat unprepared

Q: How prepared are PARENTS to support teachers and supervise children during virtual learning to children a parent and/or an educationalist?
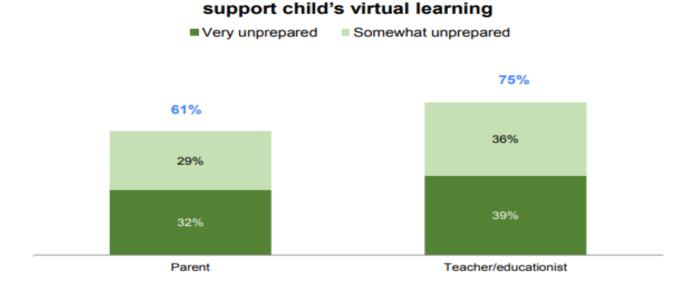
Base= 378

4.7 Teachers' versus Parents' Perceptions of Parent's Preparedness of Support during Virtual Learning

Most parents (61%) say that parents are unprepared to support teachers and supervise children. Furthermore, 75% of teachers indicate that parents are unprepared to support teachers and supervise children's' virtual learning. These findings show that teachers have less confidence in the preparedness of parents to support virtual learning.

Figure 7
Teachers' versus Parents' Perceptions of Parent's Preparedness of Support during Virtual Learning

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study shows that there is dismal preparedness among parents and teachers to offer or support virtual learning, affecting all types of schools: public, private and international schools. These dismal results show that the support system for virtual education in Kenyan schools during COVID-19 is weak and affects virtual learning delivery in the country.

5.2 Recommendations

There is a need to enhance the capacity of teachers to offer virtual learning. Capacity building programmes should focus on from lesson planning to delivery of the teaching. It is also recommended that the curriculum in teachers' college encompasses modules on how to delivery virtual for future teachers. Parents should also be encouraged to support virtual learning by procuring computers and other communication devices for their children. In addition, they should also seek training on the basics of virtual learning to be able to offer direct support and supervision of their children as they study at home. Development actors such as not-for-profit organizations should be encouraged to implement projects to strengthen access to virtual learning in schools.

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