

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research

Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 544-558, March 2023

<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.3.32>

Received Oct 31, 2022; Revised Mar 12, 2023; Accepted Apr 6, 2023

Leadership, Teaching and Learning in Times of Crisis in Southern Tanzania

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Abstract. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education provision worldwide. School leaders, teachers and parents found themselves in uncharted circumstances, which hugely impacted their roles in promoting children's learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles played by leaders, teachers, and parents during the COVID-19 crisis. This paper discusses teaching and learning in this time of crisis. The study sampled 10 head teachers, 60 schoolteachers and 57 parents representing 10 primary schools in five districts in the Lindi region of Tanzania. A postmodernism lens was applied to respond to questions about the strengths and weaknesses of support structures, such as parents, teachers, and local and central government, in the era of COVID-19. Data indicate that teachers, parents, and even the government, had to try various approaches to shift between different roles involved in addressing learning demands in the era of COVID-19 in Tanzania. Generally, the study identifies complex tensions between the support structures, that had been brought on by the pandemic. It is through understanding the complex tensions and balancing various roles that we can begin to understand the teaching and learning landscape in times of crisis.

Keywords: crisis leadership; distance teaching and learning; COVID-19; Tanzania

1. Introduction

In March 2020, the world was in a state of panic following the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic – then commonly referred to as Corona. Globally, schooling was seriously affected (Kouroupa et al., 2022). Mazza et al. (2020) posit that the imposition of quarantine due to the COVID-19 outbreak significantly impacted schooling. Tanzania as a country was not excluded, and the metaphorical panic button had been hit for many in Tanzania. The reaction of Tanzanians to the news about the COVID-19 epidemic varied. Some started buying food supplies to stock their homes in anticipation of a nation-wide lockdown, while others wishfully chose to believe that COVID-19 was a disease of the West, and that it, hence, had nothing to do with them. Either way, life continued almost as usual; children went to school, and adults went on with their income-generating activities. In mid-

March 2020, the health minister at the time, Ummy Mwalimu, publicly announced the first COVID-19 case. The minister explained that a 46-year-old woman who had entered Tanzania at Kilimanjaro International Airport on March 14, 2020 from Belgium, had tested positive for COVID-19. Immediately after this announcement, the price of sanitizers and masks skyrocketed.

People were not only concerned about protective gear, but also about the well-being of children in crowded classrooms. The teacher-student ratio in Tanzania is officially 1:40, though, in many public schools, the actual teacher-student ratio is 1:80, and even 1: 120. It is also worth noting that there are several public schools in Tanzania that lack a stable water supply, which raised questions about how children would observe COVID-19 protocols, such as frequent handwashing/sanitizing, social distancing and wearing masks. Tanzanians anxiously waited for guidance from the responsible government authorities; gradually it became evident that COVID-19 would widen the gap between "the haves" and "the have nots".

On March 17, 2020, the Tanzanian prime minister, Kassim Majaliwa, announced that all nursery, primary and secondary schools in Tanzania would close for 30 days. He also suspended all sports events and all types of gatherings, including political rallies, to contain the spread of the deadly virus. Following this announcement, the Education Sector Taskforce, led by the education ministry, rolled out distance learning programs. Radio and TV would be used to target preschool, primary and secondary school learners from April 20, 2020, a month after school had closed. At this juncture, it is worth noting that, when schools closed and children resorted to homeschooling while parents and guardians still reported for work daily, just as they were accustomed to doing before the COVID-19 pandemic, children were largely in charge of their learning.

According to the World Bank (2020), more than 80% of the population in Tanzania lives in rural areas. This fact cast doubt on the likely efficacy of the distance learning initiative via radio and TV, because of the reality on the ground regarding the availability of radios and TV sets in most rural households. Zaipuna (2017) notes further that, internet connectivity was yet another hurdle for distance learning. Özüdoğru (2021) asserts that parents were unable to provide guidance to children for online learning. Likewise, teachers were reported to lack internet connectivity and cooperation from parents, and failed to plan and implement online learning successfully (Fauzi & Sastra Khusuma, 2020). Moreover, the abrupt school closure took the population at large by surprise; consequently, people were unprepared to undertake homeschooling, especially because the Tanzanian government did not implement a total lockdown, under which parents would work from home and, thus, be better positioned to support their children's learning. This was the context relating to the topic of this study.

2. Purpose and research questions

This study was designed to examine the challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 in the education sector. More specifically, the study aimed to highlight the lessons learnt in terms of challenges and opportunities in the education sector in

this time of crisis. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How was pupils' learning at home achieved during the COVID-19 school closure?
2. How were teachers and parents involved in pupils' learning during the COVID-19 school closure?
3. What were the challenges and opportunities related to learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What arrangements were put in place in the school environment and beyond when schools reopened?

3. Literature review

3.1 Crisis management

Crisis management can be defined as the decisions and actions taken by those in leadership positions when they prepare for, react to and recover from a crisis (Dayton & Bernhardsdóttir, 2009). Sahin et al. (2015), using the construction industry as an example, define crisis management as the process of identifying and evaluating crisis signals and taking measures to overcome the crisis without causing major damage. Similarly, Coombs (2007) defines crisis management as a process intended to minimize or prevent the impact of a crisis on a business and its stakeholders. This study used the definitions of crisis of these scholars and defines crisis management to mean decisions and actions by people in leadership positions to react to and overcome a crisis without causing major damage.

3.2 Teaching and learning during the crisis

The outbreak of COVID-19 caused fear and resulted in unprecedented school closures all over the world. In response, education institutions switched to online teaching and learning (Al Lily et al., 2020). Scholars posit that remote education was not a new phenomenon. However, during the pandemic, online learning was handled differently (Al Lily et al., 2020, Fadhilah & Hamzah, 2022). They report that the shift from face-to-face to distance learning was sudden, without prior preparation – a decision that was made to save teaching and learning. Distance learning was not a new practice for higher learning institutions, but for primary schools it was a new practice. Scholars report, furthermore, that COVID-19 led to the use of online teaching and learning, as a tool of dealing with or addressing the effects of the medical tragedy.

Auma and Achieng (2020) posit that schools had to be prepared to make use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and to integrate digital technologies into teaching and learning, ICT facilities had to be in place, and teachers had to have sufficient skills to implement this type of learning. It is inconvenient to conduct online lessons without adequate access to digital facilities that are furnished with internet access capabilities and connectivity. Ferri et al. (2020) report that technology-related challenges, methodological approaches to conducting online teaching and learning, and limited social interaction between students and teachers were all factors that constricted functional online teaching and learning. Furthermore, many pupils lacked access to personal digital devices and did not have the digital literacy abilities that are required to successfully access online lessons.

According to Shagiakhmetova et al. (2022), technological advancement and stable internet connectivity are very important for successful online teaching and learning. These authors report that, at the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, many teachers in Russia relied on digital devices and internet subscriptions, and had access to varying internet speeds and strengths, depending on the service provider and region. This situation stood in the way of successful teaching for most teachers. Based on these drawbacks, there was a need to come up with a learning system that provided teachers with opportunities to provide learning activities that relied less on good internet speed.

Mutongoza et al. (2021) report that, when COVID-19 broke out, school administrators in Kenya were compelled to be proactive in mobilizing resources, building a culture of using technology, maintaining communication with parents to support students, and monitoring the progress of online learning at schools. These measures had implications for administrators' responsibilities in terms of managing schools, and required focused efforts regarding resource mobilization by head teachers (Mutongoza et al., 2021).

A study on Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in Kenya, a country neighboring Tanzania, reveals that this online learning platform was adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although head teachers are responsible for offering support at schools through the distribution of resources, they faced challenges with internet connection, high data costs, and inadequate ICT infrastructure installation and technical support, which hampered the implementation of online learning (Mackatiani & Likoko, 2022).

4. Research methods

This study used a mixed methods design. Rossman and Wilson (cited in Johnson et al., 2007, p. 115) argue that there could be three reasons for bringing together quantitative and qualitative research:

"First, combinations are used to enable confirmation or corroboration of each other through triangulation. Second, combinations are used to enable or to develop analysis to provide richer data. Third, combinations are used to initiate new modes of thinking by attending to paradoxes that emerge from the two data sources."

In addition to a survey, interviews and observations were used to establish how teaching and learning were carried out during school closure, that is, the period of March 18 to June 29, 2020, and immediately after school reopened. The aim was to examine how teachers, head teachers and parents supported teaching and learning during school closure and when the schools reopened.

4.1 Sampling technique

The research sample comprised 10 schools in southern Tanzania; two schools per district were sampled in Lindi region. We collected data from parents of children in Grades 1, 2 and 3, head teachers, teachers of Grades 1, 2 and 3, teachers in

charge of discipline, and teachers in charge of gender.¹ The study involved 10 head teachers, 60 class teachers and 57 parents.

4.2 Data collection and analysis

The instruments used for data collection included a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide, and an observation checklist. Data analysis involved extracting useful information through data evaluation. Survey data was validated and coded for easy grouping and values were assigned and analyzed using NVivo software. Data from interviews were transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed with the aid of NVivo. This software enables researchers to see patterns and relationships in the data and, hence, to generate themes, which brings meaningful insight.

5. Findings

This paper is based on the data collected from an exploratory study using a mixed method approach, and it discusses teaching and learning in times of crisis. The paper brings to the fore the strengths and weaknesses of the support structures that were available in the era of COVID-19. Data indicate that teachers, parents, and even the government, had to try various alternative approaches to juggling various roles and responsibilities, while addressing learning demands in the era of COVID-19 in Tanzania. Generally, the study found complex tensions within the support structures of education, and it is by understanding the complex tensions and balancing various roles that we can begin to understand the leadership terrain needed to support teaching and learning in times of crisis.

5.1 Pupils' learning achievement at home during the COVID-19 school closure

The data from the study seem to suggest that learning was facilitated in several ways, including by parents themselves taking the initiative to instruct their children, by allowing children to take responsibility for their studies at home, by hiring teachers to facilitate pupils' learning at home, and using the usual schoolteachers to assist with home learning. The data also indicates that distance learning (using radio, TV, and mobile phones) was used for home learning during school closure due to the pandemic.

Although these teaching and learning schemes seem to have been used by pupils of all the sampled schools in the region, they were not all employed to the same extent in all households. For instance, in so far as parents' take-up of facilitation of learning was concerned, only slightly more than 54% of parents who were interviewed accepted the challenge to teach their children, while slightly less than 46% of parents did not attempt it. Regarding using the usual teachers for home learning, more than 75% of the sampled parents stated that this arrangement was not used, while the usual teachers were available to facilitate home learning for 25% of households. Furthermore, only about 21% of sampled parents hired teachers to offer tuition sessions to their children, while 79% of the sampled households did not hire teachers as tutors. Although distance learning (using

¹ These are teachers who oversee and address issues to do with abuse, whether at school or home, and issues related to puberty.

mobile phones, TV, and radio) was an option for facilitating homeschooling, more than 87% of the sampled parents did not view or adopt mobile phones as a medium of distance learning; a mere 12% or so accepted mobile phones as a means of implementing homeschooling. Regarding TV and radio as media respectively for facilitating distance learning during COVID-19 school closure, more than 68% and 63% of the parents sampled said that they did not use these two media for distance learning.

It may, therefore, be concluded that the strategies applied for home learning during the COVID-19 school closure (in descending order of popularity) were the parents themselves taking up pupils' home learning facilitation, using radio broadcasts for distance learning, pupils engaging in self-directed learning, using TV broadcasts for distance learning, hiring teachers as tutors to facilitate pupils' learning at home, using the usual teachers to teach pupils at home and, lastly, using mobile phones for learning.

5.2 Teacher and parent involvement in pupils' home learning during COVID-19 school closure

That parents were involved in pupils' learning at home is quite evident from the data, although it is difficult to determine the exact nature of their involvement from the available data, especially regarding academics. As pointed out in Section 5.1, about 54% of the parents in the sampled households took up the responsibility of facilitating their children's academic learning at home. The data also seem to indicate that most parents were also deeply involved in providing moral, social, and behavioral education while the children were not attending school. Parents encouraged children to attend to their studies. The following are excerpts from responses by parents in different districts of Lindi that demonstrate how involved parents were in the moral, social, and behavioral teaching of their daughters when they were asked to describe the measures that they had put in place when schools closed between March and June to ensure that girl children did not get pregnant:

P1 in District 1: I protected my child by reprimanding her and not allowing her to engage and roam about with peer groups during the night without any apparent good reason.

P1 in District 2: She was not harassed because ... she was obedient to the educational instructions I provided her; I held a family meeting and told them not to wander around aimlessly; they should not attend night discotheques or local dances; to know where she plays and asked her to come back home earlier; I made sure that all the time they were doing personal studies to avoid its effects and that I gave them strategies that by 6 pm they should be at home; I took initiative talking to my children by counsellelling them not wandering around; I told them about the closing of schools due to COIVID-19 pandemic, so don't roam around loosely; My child performed domestic related activities and perused academic materials and made sure that all the time my child was at home.

P5 in District 3: I educated them about pregnancy.

P10 in District 3: I told them to spend more time studying on their own, at home.

Likewise, parents were asked about measures they had taken to ensure their boy children did not misbehave due to peer pressure when schools closed between March and June. The following excerpts demonstrate further how some parents were involved in their children's moral, social and behavioral education.

P3 in District 3: I prohibited my child from interacting with misleading peer groups.

P1 in District 4: I tried to educate my boys on good morals.

P2 in District 5: I reduced the play time for my children, where they would visit their friends in the neighborhood to play, I did this to ensure that they stay home most of the time.

Data demonstrate that some of the measures that were implemented by parents to protect their children were guiding, directing, advising, supervising, warning, restricting, counselling, reprimanding, and educating them. These were not always the best strategies to achieve success, as they mostly relied on the parents' authority and threats, instead of providing the children with sexual health education or education in life management skills development. It is likely that other measures were needed to educate parents themselves about how to give their children life skills education to protect them against undesirable behaviors. Data indicate, furthermore, the assumption that it is at night, in the dark, that children could be abused or would face danger if they were left without adult supervision, and not in the daytime. Consequently, children were permitted to visit and play with their friends in the neighborhood during the day, as long as they returned home before dark. Although schools were closed, this study ascertained that children were not always home; they had the agency to manage their learning, as well as their health and well-being.

5.3 Challenges of and opportunities for learning from home during COVID-19

Although learning continued at home even though schools were closed for three months, learning at home was accompanied by certain challenges. For instance, it was reported that teaching and learning materials were inadequate for home study, to the extent that more than 77% of the parents who were interviewed acknowledged the inadequacy of learning materials at home. Teaching and learning materials are an integral part of the teaching and learning process and, hence, inadequacies could compromise the quality of learning.

Furthermore, the failure of school administration to provide guidelines for teaching and learning to all households was a challenge that jeopardized the quality of the teaching and learning scheme. The need for guidelines was reported by more than 53% of the parents who were interviewed, who said that the schools had not provided adequate information on how to help children learn at home. Parents confirmed this shortcoming when more than 61% of those who were interviewed did not concur with a statement that the usual schoolteachers provided enough instructions on how to manage pupils' learning at home.

Considering the plans to use mobile phones, TV and radio to assist with offering educational programs during the COVID-19 school closure, it was clear that mobile phones were not widely taken up as a viable medium. However, although

the uptake of radio and TV as means of distance learning was better than that of mobile phones, about 79% of the parents who were interviewed reported that there were insufficient teaching and learning materials available on TV, and more than 65% of sampled parents reported this about radio.

Another challenge was closely linked to using mobile phones, TV and radio for distance learning. More than 87% of the interviewed parents believed they had not succeeded in helping their children to use mobile phones (thereby making this means the least used), while more than 67% and 62% failed to help their children use TV and radio respectively. These reports could be taken to confirm that few parents had not been formally prepared to assist with distance learning at home using these devices (see Table 1). About 79% of parents confessed that they had not been trained to manage homeschooling to assist their children. A further explanation for parents' failure to assist their children could be that about 77% of the parents did not have post-primary school formal education (see Table 2), with about 4% of parents having had no formal education.

Table 1. Parents' responses to the statement, I have been trained on how to help my child to learn at home

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Yes	12	21.1	21.1	21.1
No	45	78.9	78.9	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Parents' level of education

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
No education	2	3.5	3.5	3.5
Grade 4	3	5.3	5.3	8.8
Grade 7	41	71.9	71.9	80.7
Secondary	9	15.8	15.8	96.5
Certificate/Diploma	2	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	57	100.0	100.0	

5.4 The outlined structure in the school environment (and beyond) after schools reopened in June 2020

Schools reopened on June 29, 2020 – three months after they had closed. The Tanzanian government was convinced that it was safe for children to return to school. Following the school reopening order by President Magufuli, the Ministry of Education drafted and issued guidance for teachers and pupils at schools. The guidance involved directives on what schools should do to apply COVID-19 protocols. Schools were directed to have hand washing stations in various areas of the school compound, and to adhere to social distancing protocols. This meant that schools with no reliable water supply had to find alternatives, such as asking children bring containers of water to school from home. To avoid crowds at public schools, teachers, school administration and parents were tasked with finding solutions specific to their contexts, such as asking children to attend school in shifts (morning and evening shifts). Some schools had introduced the shift

schedule even before the COVID-19 pandemic, as a way of addressing a general classroom and teacher shortage. In addition, teachers had to find ways to compensate for the learning time that had been lost during the three months the schools had been closed.

This section will report on the efforts that were taken by school administration when schools reopened to ensure that lost learning time would be compensated for, and that quality learning would be provided for all pupils, irrespective of gender. The provision of quality learning would inevitably depend on the school environment in terms of classroom infrastructure, safety/protection against the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' professional learning in the 'new normal' environment, and the learning environment at pupils' homes.

Regarding teachers' professional learning related to addressing needs that resulted from COVID-19 school closures, it was evident that few teachers had received specific professional education to provide them with tools that could have helped them to ensure pupils underwent quality learning after having lost three months of learning time, as indicated in Figure 1. Of the 10 schools in five districts, teachers of only one school reported receiving professional education on accelerated learning, and only two teachers in another district reported having received professional education on how to manage accelerated learning – the rest of the teachers did not receive any professional education on teaching in these new circumstances.

Although most of the teachers interviewed (about 86%, see Figure 1, 39 of 45 respondents) expressed being ready to effectively compensate for the lost learning time, this belief sharply contradicts the reality, namely that few of them had received specific education to deliver quality education after schools reopened in June 2020. Moreover, about 55% (see Figure 1, 25 of 45 respondents) of sampled teachers, when asked whether they had been adequately prepared to manage learning challenges accompanying the reopening of schools, acknowledged that they had not received adequate training to do so. This scenario must be viewed against the observation that 98% of the sampled teachers underscored their conviction that their method of teaching would have to change if they were to deliver effective lessons. Without teachers undergoing proper professional education, changes that the teachers implemented would be unlikely to succeed, and they would, therefore, fail to impact pupils' learning significantly.

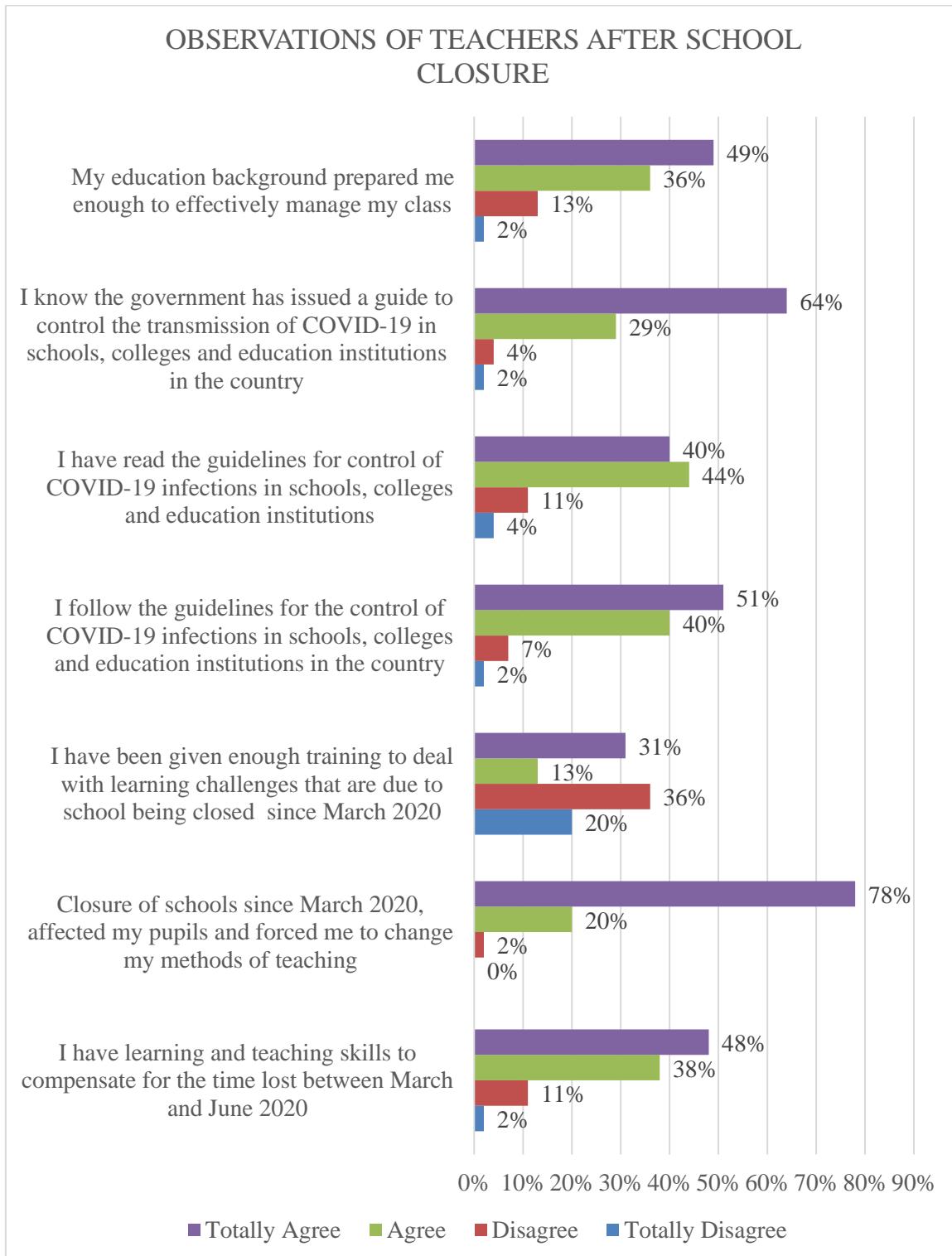


Figure 1. Observations after school closure (each bar represents the number of respondents interviewed)

There was general agreement that the school communities of the schools studied had a high level of COVID-19 awareness and that they knew the steps that had to be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Almost all schools in the target districts had received education on how to protect school communities against the

transmission of COVID-19. About 84% (see Figure 1) of the teachers across the districts who were interviewed admitted that they had read the government guidelines; they also reported that they were implementing it in their day-to-day professional duties. Similarly, data collected from interviewing headteachers indicated that about 90% of head teachers who were interviewed acknowledged having read the government guidelines on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19. Nevertheless, the efforts exerted to control the spread of COVID-19, as reported in Figure 1, may have been threatened by the fact that most pupils had to share textbooks and other teaching and learning resources. This situation had a direct bearing on pupils' ability to apply social distancing, which is a crucial aspect of preventing the spread of COVID-19. Data collected from all the districts indicates that textbook sharing was widespread. In Grade 1, for the subject of numeracy, there was a pupil-to-book ratio of 7:1: on average – seven pupils had to share a numeracy textbook. This scenario was also observed for reading textbooks, where on average three pupils shared one reading book. The situation was also observed in Grade 2 (seven pupils to a numeracy textbook and four pupils to a reading book) and Grade 3 (on average three children sharing a numeracy book and six sharing a reading book). It could be concluded from this data that, although guidelines to control the spread of COVID-19 were widely distributed, these guidelines were unlikely to be implemented, due to shortages of textbooks, which forced pupils into close proximity to share books. Sharing textbooks makes social distancing as a measure to curb person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 difficult.

While this was the situation in the education sector after schools reopened, the health ministry focused on educating communities on the importance of boosting one's immunity and calling upon medical practitioners to research and develop local solutions to end the pandemic. The National Institute for Medical Research (NIMRI) responded to the call and developed a concoction/medicine called MIMRICAf to help boost people's immunity and cure colds and flu-related ailments. The University of Dar es Salaam responded by manufacturing masks and sanitizers and creating a machine to support COVID patients with breathing challenges. Alternative therapies that were encouraged by the Ministry of Education included steaming the whole body over a pot of boiling water and local herbs, while the person was covered with a cloth such as a bedsheet. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health used education campaigns to educate people about the importance of healthy eating, physical exercise and managing stress for boosting immunity.

6. Discussion

Based on findings of this study, children and parents applied distance learning using radio, TV and mobile phones. However, as Shagiakhmetova et al. (2022) point out, there are challenges involved, which arise from insufficient resources during crises and disasters, which affect effective delivery of services. Mackatiani and Likoko (2022) report that head teachers in Kenya were faced with challenges related to internet connection, high data costs, inadequate ICT infrastructure installations and little technical support for the implementation of online learning. In this study, limited infrastructure, ranging from ICT to textbooks, hampered the

delivery of teaching and learning when schools were closed, and even when schools reopened.

Findings also indicate that most of the teachers had not received any specific professional education to provide them with tools that would have helped them to provide quality distance learning. This finding concurs with a study done in Kenya by Auma and Achieng (2020), which points out that schools ought to be prepared to make use of ICT. Similarly, a study conducted in Turkey by Özüdoğru (2021) asserts that distance learning was impacted negatively by shortages of technological infrastructure to support teaching and learning. In Italy, Ferri et al. (2020) found that, to integrate digital technology into teaching and learning, there must be ICT facilities in place, and teachers must have sufficient skills. Webb et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of equipping teachers with ICT skills and competences, as a tool for the facilitation of quality teaching and learning.

Novianti and Garzia (2020) conducted a study in the Riau province of Indonesia on parent engagement in students' online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that most parents were involved in their children's learning activities that involved online platforms. A study conducted in Greece by Nikolopoulou (2022), which focused on teacher practices and experiences of implementing online teaching during the pandemic period, reports that it is important to maintain a digital culture, which enhances high quality teaching and parent engagement in children's learning activities at home. A study conducted in France by Sari and Maningtyas (2020) on parents' involvement in their children's learning during the pandemic, reports that parents supported their children's learning; this finding corresponds with the findings reported in this paper. Parents in this study were also involved in their children's learning. They mostly played a supervisory role, guided children on the do's and don'ts of behavior, and allowed the children to take the lead in their learning. The use of gadgets, such as smart phones and TV sets to support children's learning during school closure, was not common, for several reasons. One reason was that few parents owned mobile phones, and even those who did, regarded their phones as valuable possessions that their children were not permitted to use.

Some of the decisions made by the government, head teachers, teachers and parents in Tanzania might not fit within the ambit of the 'universal' ideal. Many other factors, such as economic strength and infrastructure, shaped the landscape of teaching and learning. For instance, if parents are not at home and able to support their children's learning, then, perhaps, children would be better off in school, where they would be under an adult's care and supervision. If parents/caregivers have to work, and the kind work they do cannot be accomplished from home, then, maybe, the ideal is not to have a lockdown, but rather to provide a space for children to use their agency to learn in the absence of adult supervision. Sibling caretaking, whereby older siblings care and support younger siblings, which is a common practice in Tanzania, could be considered. Thus, in the context of this study, children played a major role in ensuring that

teaching and learning continued. They were not mere recipients of care and support, but rather active providers of care and support.

The findings on structures put in place after schools reopened reveal that leaders at both national and school levels issued guidance on ways to compensate for the time lost during school closure, and on how to ensure that teachers and pupils remained safe from COVID-19. At the sampled schools it was noted that there was a high level of COVID-19 awareness. However, scarcity of resources and lack of teacher professional learning to equip teachers with competences and skills necessary for the delivery of quality accelerated teaching, posed a major challenge to learning. In addition, lack of or limited infrastructure at schools, such as few classrooms, large numbers of pupils per class, lack of ICT infrastructure and other shortages, shaped teaching and learning after schools reopened.

Generally, these findings of the study, which had been conducted in Lindi region in the south of Tanzania, indicate that they confirmed findings of studies conducted in other contexts. The findings are not unique to Tanzania but have been replicated in several other parts of the world. This phenomenon could be explained by the many socio-economic, cultural, and political similarities that exist between Tanzania and these other contexts.

7. Conclusion

This paper set out to report on a study that was carried out in five districts of Lindi region in southern Tanzania. The focus of the study was to explore the roles that national and local government leaders, teachers, school leaders, and parents played in children's home schooling after an abrupt closure of schools due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and, thereafter, when schools reopened after being closed for three months. Given the lack preparation by stakeholders for this sudden closure of schools, the study sought to provide answers to a number of questions, including how pupils learned at home during the school closure; how teachers and parents were involved in pupils' learning during the school closure; what challenges and opportunities were involved in learning from home, and, lastly, what structures were outlined in the school environment and beyond to make up lost time when schools reopened.

The study found that there had been inadequate preparation at all levels, which include leaders and teachers, on the one hand, and parents on the other hand. This inadequacy in terms of resources, skills and readiness negatively impacted the provision of teaching and learning during school closure, and even after the schools reopened. However, efforts by leaders, teachers, and parents to give guidance to assist children to learn at home were noted and appreciated.

Multiple decisions were made by various actors in a short period, from the family to the government level. In Tanzania, like in many other countries, decisions were made in the context of uncertainty and urgency. Urgency pushed leaders at all levels to make quick decisions that, in some cases, overlooked critical aspects. Thus, it is argued that, instead of focusing only on the quality of the decisions made by the leaders during the crisis, we should balance our criticism, by also

considering and attempting to understand why certain decisions were made. One way of doing so is to consider the context in which decisions were reached. Thus, in this article, we withhold judgment and provide space for readers to make their own judgment. We also provide space for debate, where the ideal and the universal standards can be problematized and, perhaps, deconstructed and reconstructed.

Nevertheless, we might need to interrogate the world's preparedness for crises in the future: how well prepared is humanity for a crisis in days to come, given what we have learned from the COVID-19 experience? It may be difficult to provide a definitive answer to this question, and it may suffice to say that the COVID-19 emergency, along with many emergencies that humanity has experienced in the past, served, once again, to remind us that emergencies are part and parcel of human life on this planet and, therefore, many more emergencies should be expected in the future. However, ensuring preparedness to handle these future emergencies may not be straightforward, as different emergencies each come with their unique characteristics and features. The most critical idea for enhancing our preparedness for future emergencies would be for humanity to broaden its knowledge base of how, why, and when different elements in our entire environment interact, and what the results of such interactions are. In doing so, humanity would be better positioned to draw from past knowledge, which is continually being enriched to confront different emergencies on a case-by-case basis.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a product of the Foundations for Learning(F4L) interventions under the Foundations for Education and Empowerment (F4EE) project, funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Aga Khan Foundation, Canada.

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