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Deconstructing the Relationship between COVID-19 Lock-down and Primary Education among Pupils in Lira City, Uganda

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between COVID-19 lockdown and formal education system of primary school pupils in Lira city west division.

Methodology: The study was guided by a case study research design in which a qualitative approach was employed using key-informant interviews. While the target population was 449, data was collected from 125 study participants with the use of an interview guide. Data was analysed using the recursive abstraction method.

Findings: Results revealed that COVID-19 lockdown posed numerous changes in the behaviour of pupils such as moral behavioural changes, substance abuse, indiscipline, mental behavioural changes, etc. Also, few pupils benefited from alternative teaching methods during the COVID-19 lockdown. Since most learners were unable to ask questions, there was lack of commitment among pupils as well as limited knowledge and skills on how to use electronic learning gadgets. Further, the pupils in private schools and pupils from financially stable families utilized alternative teaching methods more than the pupils from public schools or from poor families. Also, COVID-19 policies have led to introduction of new *modus operand* in schools. These include maintaining the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), inadequate space to accommodate pupils because of spacing requirements, incompleteness of the teaching syllabus, and automatic promotion which have all affected the performance of pupils.

Conclusion: A number of pupils experienced behavioural change during the lockdown, new policies were introduced in schools and the alternative teaching methods were introduced although it benefitted the pupils in private schools more than the public schools.

Recommendation: The government of Uganda should increase funding opportunities for primary education.

Keywords: *COVID-19, lockdown, primary education, alternative teaching, behaviour*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of corona virus disease in 2019 led to the imposition of lockdowns worldwide which caused social economic crisis, psychological distress and the weakening of economic systems including educational sectors (Kumar et al., 2020). COVID-19 is a virus that causes a respiratory illness in people and animals and can spread from person-to person through sneezing and coughing droplets. This virus has signs and symptoms similar to the common cold but is dangerous and if not reported early and managed by health workers, it can cause severe illnesses in humans and can lead to death. The virus is also known as corona virus or SARS-CoV-2 (UNICEF, 2021) and it emerged in 2019, Hubei Province of China. After emergence, the virus was spreading very fast globally with many fatalities, making the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it as a pandemic on 11th March, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Different protective measures like staying in well ventilated rooms, wearing masks, regular cleaning of hands, covering one's mouth when coughing and sneezing and avoiding unnecessary travels were some of the measures that were suggested by WHO. According to UNICEF (2021a), lockdowns and protective measures continued to be implemented in many countries from 2020 to 2022. More than 168 million children globally were completely closed out of school for almost an entire year due to COVID-19 lockdowns. Additionally, 1 in 7 children worldwide, or around 214 million kids, missed more than three-quarters of their in-person education.

In the United States of America, the first case of COVID-19 was registered on 21st January 2022 after a resident of Washington who had returned from Wuhan tested positive for COVID-19 (Dinh, 2020). When the number of infections in the USA drastically increased, California imposed the first lockdown on all public places including schools on 19th March 2020. Other states later imposed the lockdown. In the United Kingdom, as the rate of COVID-19 cases kept on increasing, there was a debate about the closure of schools. Other people believed that the children are 'super spreaders' and 'carriers' of the coronavirus and therefore schools should be closed. However, the government delayed the closure of schools by a couple of days, a mechanism that the UK government's chief scientific advisor Sir Vallance defended that the government was experimenting on "herd immunity". Davis and Lohm (2020) argued that numerical narratives on mathematical models shaped the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic as these models required monitoring performance through analysing data on transmission, mortality, effectiveness of treatment, vaccine and containment. However, it was becoming apparent that schools were struggling to keep up children's attendance as parents took their children out of school for fear of catching the coronavirus. In his daily COVID-19 address on March 8, 2020, Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that all schools and nurseries in England would be closed indefinitely. However, guidance was issued on social-distancing and schools were asked to remain open as a service for 'keyworkers', with a list of who would qualify as a keyworker being published by the government (Department for Education, 2020a). This announcement brought both relief and apprehension for parents, students sitting milestone exams (GSCE and A-Levels) and educational providers.

Since the first cases of COVID-19 in Africa in February 2020, the disease spread throughout the continent, and different governments put in place various measures to fight the pandemic. Most governments' responses included a widespread closure of schools at an early stage to reduce the spread of the virus. The impact on formal education was felt across all countries globally but felt acutely on the African continent (Ashinga Foundation, 2020). A number of students on the

continent received no formal education during the various lockdowns. Since schools were closed, many students did not have the opportunity to receive instruction, feedback, or interact with their teachers. In Eastern and Southern Africa alone, UNICEF (2021b) estimates that 40 per cent which constitutes 69 million school-aged children did not attend school due to COVID19 lockdown and closure of schools. Kenya first closed its schools in mid-March 2020 to contain the onslaught of the coronavirus disease (Kiyonga, 2021). After nine months, in January 2021, it reopened its school gates to 16 million Kenyan students despite the coronavirus concerns. Kenya continued to reopen schools for crash academic programme for third term on May 10 to July 16 after seven weeks of break.

In Rwanda, learning institutions were closed for 10 months from March 2020 and reopened in November 2020 (Kiyonga, 2021). Over 3.5 million students were locked out of school. Learners in nursery and lower primary schools were allowed back mid-January and February 2021. Rwanda again closed its schools on June 29 following a spike in coronavirus infections. But the government reopened the schools in August for the third term after it lifted its two weeks of lockdown on the capital Kigali and eight other districts across the country. In Tanzania, the government did not implement a lockdown because that would have restricted public access to health services, especially for patients with chronic conditions like tuberculosis and HIV infection (Mfinga et al, 2021). The government also defended this decision justifying that the lockdown might also prevent citizens from working, affecting households' ability to afford food or health care, pushing more people into poverty. The schools in Tanzania remained open and their curriculum was not affected.

The formal education system in Uganda has a structure of 7 years of primary education. After the 7 years, the pupils are accessed in the Primary Leaving Examinations (P.L.E) before they are promoted into secondary school. Formal education refers to the structured education system that runs from primary school (and in some countries from nursery) to university, and includes specialized programs for vocational, technical and professional training (Rauner & Maclean, 2008). The schools were closed on 18th March, 2020 by the President of the Republic of Uganda following the spread of the virus became vibrant throughout the world. The nation-wide lockdown left approximately 15 million children out of school in the country (Global Livingstone, 2020). In Lira city, all the public and private schools were closed too and the children were at home for over two years without classroom education. This left numerous children at home without attending class until 2022 when schools were officially opened in January 2022. The schools were opened on 15th October, 2020 for only candidate and semi candidate classes of primary seven, senior four, senior five and senior three that led to the return of over 1.5 million learners to school.

There are different theories that explains the effects of COVID-19 on learning and they include connectivism theory and cognitive theory. Connectivism theory focuses on a learner's ability to frequently source and update accurate information using the different information channels (Tomic, 1993). The use of online teaching by the different schools can be highly explained by this theory. The cognitivism theory states that learning relies on both external factors and the internal thought process. The external factors to the learning environment like the presence of a pandemic, the peers and exposure to different lifestyle outside school during the lockdown also affects the children. Additionally, behaviourism theory is concerned with observable stimulus-response behaviours, as they can be studied in a systematic and observable manner (Zhou & Brown, 2015). Therefore, the behaviours that the children were exposed to during the lockdown also affected

their lifestyle. Therefore, these theories are important in explaining the effects of the lockdown on the children.

1.1 Research Gap

In Uganda, formal education system used to run according to the set Ministry of Education and Sports work plan and curriculum from first term to third term (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2019). The first term used to run for three months every term. Pupils in primary schools were taught and assessed through mid-term and end of term examinations and successful pupils were promoted to the next class following the ministry of education guideline. However, the emergency of COVID-19 disrupted the education curriculum in different primary schools. In Uganda, the schools were closed for over two years making it the longest school closure (Mwesigwa, 2020). Following the presidential directive on the COVID-19, the first lockdown was imposed on 18th March, 2020 leading to the closure of different institutions including primary schools in Lira City. The lockdown of schools in Uganda was the longest lockdown in the world that lasted for 22 months. This therefore led to the adaptation of other alternative teaching methods like online classes, radio and TV lessons and printing of study materials by the government. This became the new normal in the education sector during the lockdown which affected the education of primary pupils differently. Limited research has been conducted on the effect of COVID 19 Lockdown on the education system of school going pupils especially in Lira City. It is against this background that this study explored the effects of COVID 19 Lockdown on the formal education of primary school pupils in Lira City West.

Specifically, the study sought to: (a) investigate the influence of COVID-19 lockdown on the behaviour of pupils in primary schools in Lira City West; (b) analyse the effect of alternative teaching methods on the formal education system of primary school pupils during the COVID-19 lockdown; (c) assess the contribution of COVID-19 policies on the formal education of primary school pupils in Lira City West; and (d) examine the challenges faced by primary school pupils after the lockdown in Lira City West.

1.2 Focus of the Study

The study focused mainly on the effect of COVID-19 lockdown on the formal education system of primary school pupils in Lira City West Division. The study focused on the effect of COVID 19 on the behaviours of pupils and the adoption of alternative learning methods on the education of pupils in primary schools. The study was conducted in selected public and private primary schools in Lira City West Division. Lira City West Division has a total of eight wards that includes; Adyel, Ojwina A, Barapwo, Amuca, Lira, Adyel A, Adyel B, and Adyel C. The study was conducted focusing on the events that transpired during the COVID-19 lockdown and after the lockdown. That was from the year 2020 to 2022. This was the time when the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed by the government of Uganda. Although the lockdown was officially lifted in January 2022 in Uganda, the effects of the lockdown on the pupils still continued to feature to date. There appears to be a relationship between the independent variables, the moderating variables and the dependent variables. The independent variable is COVID-19 lockdown that is associated with behavioural change among pupils and adaptation of alternative teaching methods in schools and the moderating variable is COVID-19 policies. These have effects on the dependent variable that is the formal education system of the primary pupils. These independent variables include performance, their disciple at school, reading and learning.

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2.0 MATERIALS AND MATERIALS

2.1 Research Design

The study was qualitative in nature. According to Busetto et al. (2020), qualitative research can be defined as the study of the nature of phenomena and is especially appropriate for answering questions of why something is (not) observed, assessing complex multi-component interventions, and focusing on intervention improvement. This study used a case study research design. A case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon (Starman, 2013). The merits of using this method includes the ability to see a relationship between phenomena, context, and people, the flexibility of the method, the ability to capture the context and lived reality of participants, the ability to explore deeper causes of phenomena and the ease of explaining results to a non-specialist audience (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). This method was used by the researchers to investigate the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on the formal education system of pupils in selected schools in Lira City. This method was used to make meaning out of the research by giving deeper analysis about the meanings, interpretations and perceptions that the participants give about the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on the education of primary school pupils. The researcher used Key-informant interview and In-depth interview to explore more on the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on primary education. The study adopted this method because of its ability get deeper understanding on the situation and subject under investigation.

2.2 Area of Study

The study was conducted in Lira City West Division. Lira City west is located in Lira City, Northern Uganda. Lira city is geographically located at latitude 20' 17′ north of the equator and longitude 32' 56′ east of the principal meridian (UBOS, 2012). The division is having a total of 8 wards that comprises of Adyel, Ojwina A, Barapwo, Amuca, Lira, Adyel A, Adyel B, and Adyel C. Lira City West is boarded by Lira City East from the eastern direction, Kole district in the west, Lira district in the north, east and south. The research was conducted in Amuca Primary School which is a public school and Saving Grace Nursery and Primary School which is a private school.

2.3 Study Population

The participants for the study were different stakeholders in the education sector like the parents, Parents Teacher's Association (PTA), School Management Committee (SMC), Board of Governors and the technocrats in the education sector. A comparative study was done in Amuca Primary School which is a public school and Saving Grace Nursery and Primary School which is a private school. This provided the researcher with data that was used to juxtapose the significance of the lockdown in private schools and private schools.

2.4 Sample Size

The study interviewed a total of 55 participants. These included 29 teachers, 2 Head teachers, 2 Directors of Studies (DOS), 1 City Inspector of Schools, 10 parents, 4 members of the PTA, 4 members of the SMC and 3 members of the board of governors. The researcher interviewed these categories of people because they had enough information about COVID-19 lockdown and the formal education system of the primary pupils because they interacted with the children on the daily basis.

Table 1: Categories of participants studied

Category of participants	Population size	Number participants	Sampling Methods
Teachers	62	29	Purposive sampling
Head teachers	02	02	Purposive sampling
Director of studies (DOS)	02	02	Purposive sampling
City Inspector of schools	01	01	Purposive sampling
Parents Teachers Association (PTA)	12	4	Convenience sampling
Parents	800	10	Convenience sampling
Board of Governors	09	03	Convenience sampling
School Management Committee (SMC)	09	04	Convenient sampling
Total		**55**	

Table 1 presents the population and sampling techniques adopted for the study. The researchers used purposive sampling and convenience sampling to select study participants. The convenience sampling involves using participants who are "convenient" to the researcher (Galloway, 2005). The researchers drew the participants who he felt were convenient for the research. Convenience sampling was used to select parents, the members of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), School Management Committee and the Board of Governors.

2.5 Data Collection Instruments

An interview is recommended in a qualitative study, in order to collect sufficient and meaningful data from the participants (Johnson 2010). For this matter, the participants were informed two weeks in advance about the time and place in which the interview was going to take place, and it was conducted in private places in order to ensure privacy. The key informant interview was used to collect data from Principal City Education Officer, City Inspector of Schools, Head teachers, Directors of studies and teachers. An in-depth interview was used to conduct detailed interviews with a small number of participants (Berry, 1999). The key advantage of this method was that interviewers have greater opportunity to ask follow-up questions, probe for additional information, and circle back to key questions later on in the interview to generate a rich understanding of attitudes, perceptions, and motivations. These were used to interview the parents, Parents Teachers Association (PTA), Board of Governors and SMC.

2.6 Data Processing and Analysis

The researchers used the thematic data analysis technique (Joffe, 2012). The transcripts from the in-depth interviews, key informants' interview and documents were translated, transcribed, coded and grouped into sub-themes and themes to explain the effects of COVID-19 lockdown on the education of primary pupils in Lira City. Six steps were followed; step one, every phrase and sentence of interest was highlighted and grouped according to the research question to make sure

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that each individual point is separated. In step two, the data was grouped in accordance with the questions and responses in the second phase. In step three, the material was coded in the third phase to help the researcher create sub-themes. In step four, the sub-themes were developed using the most frequent responses, which represented the responses from all the participants. The last step was the generation of main themes and lastly incorporating the generated themes into the quantitative data.

2.7 Quality Control

The validity of the tool was evaluated by the researcher using face and content validity. The structured interview guide was sent to the supervisor, who is an expert on the topic under study, for editing and evaluation in order to verify face validity and that all items might contribute to the study's objectives. To ensure content validity, two experts reviewed all the items for readability, clarity, and comprehensiveness and come to some level of agreement as to which items.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics is defined as the practice of applying fundamental ethical guidelines to a range of scientific research topics (Gopicandran et al., 2016). The researcher observed the following ethical considerations; seeking the consent of the participants and assuring them that the information that they will give will be used for academic purpose only. The researcher also ensured that the confidentiality of the participants was maintained by coding their names while presenting the data. While conducting the data collection, all the Standard Operating Procedures for COVID-19 was also observed.

3.0 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

3.1 Response Rate

Overall, out of 86 participants for in-depth interviews and key informants, 55 participated in the study representing a 65.6%. As argued by Mugenda (2003), any response rate of more than 50% is sufficient to meet the study's goals. The age of the participants was categorized as 18-25 years, 26-30 years, 31-35 years, 41-45 years, 46-50 years and 51 and above. Majority of the participants 27.3% were in the age bracket between 26-30 followed by those in the age brackets of 31- 35 and 36-40 with 18.2%. The participants in the age brackets 41-45 and 46-50 were moderately few (10.9% and 14.5%) respectively. Few participants were in the age bracket of 50 and above (7.3%) while those in the age bracket 18-25 were very few (3.6%). This implies that the highest number of people who participated in the study were between 26-30 years. This portrays that majority of the stakeholders in the education sector including teachers are youth and they were the categories of participants who were accessible and willing to take part in the interview. The sex of the participants was categorized as male and female. Majority of the participants were males (76.4%) and few participants were females (23.6%). This implies that most of the stakeholders in the formal education sector are male and there are more male teachers than the female teachers in the schools selected. Majority of the participants were married (94.5%) while few participants were single (5.5%). This implies that they have more experience on the subject investigated since majority of them may have children who have been affected by COVID -19 lockdown. The education level attained by the study participants was categorized as primary, secondary, certificate, diploma and degree. Majority of the participants (38.2%) had reached certificate level in education, followed by 36.4% of the participants who had attained a diploma. Few participants (12.7%) had a degree,

followed by 7.3% had completed secondary school. At least 5.5% of the participants had stopped in primary school.

3.2 Influence of COVID-19 Lockdown on the Behaviour of Pupils in Primary Schools

This was the first objective of the study. It was set to investigate the influence of COVID-19 lockdown on the behaviour of primary school pupils in Lira City West Division. Majority of the participants believed that COVID-19 lockdown had a broader definition and it varied from one individual to another and from place to place. The general opinion of the participants was that COVID-19 lockdown was a period of time when movement and social gathering were banned or suspended, except for the movement of health workers, security, and trackers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants believed that the COVID-19 lockdown affected the economy, but that the educational sector was severely affected. Majority of the study participants mentioned that the level of substance abuse increased among the pupils especially boys during lockdown. Most of the study participants cited that pupils became immoral and the rate of indiscipline significantly increased. Bad dressing, especially wearing short skirts among girls was mentioned by the study participants. The majority of the participants during both the in-depth and key-informant interviews also mentioned sexual behaviour changes. This manifested through increase in the level of teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and the high level of sexual affairs between pupils even after the reopening of schools.

Besides, the participants revealed that most of the pupils started disrespecting and undermining their teachers. There were also psychological changes due to a lack of counselling practices among primary school pupils. The above findings imply that there were a lot of behavioural changes in pupils during COVID-19 lockdown, as noted below in the response of some of the participants:

Some pupils began abusing substances as a result of the lockdown, which made them idle without schooling and resorting to abusing substances in order to fit into groups to pass time easily" (KII, 34-year-old male, September 2022).

There was an increase in immoral behaviours and indiscipline cases among the pupils, for example the use of vulgar language. It is now so challenging for us teachers and even parents to control the discipline of the children that we used to discipline easily (IIs, 46-year-old female teacher, Saving Grace Nursery and Primary, September 2022).

During the COVID-19 lockdown, pupils had started engaging in love affairs amongst themselves and some with the school dropouts and this led to increased sexual immorality in the community" (KIIs, 32-years old male teacher, Amuca primary school, 2022).

"Pupils became so rude to the teachers and parents since they had stayed for so long without schooling hence, the need for a step-by-step rehabilitation of their minds so that they can resume to school mode (IIs, 40 years old male teacher, Amuca primary, September 2022).

The above testimonies are in line with a report from Human Rights (2022), which revealed that the learners' mental health needs are usually addressed through school-based guidance and counselling programs. During school closures, such services were mainly moved to online or other distance learning platforms, or were not offered at all. School closure occurred even as COVID-19 has had severe psychological impacts on children and their families. Psychological impacts could be linked to the fear of losing loved ones, or not being able to find help within overloaded

health care systems, and the economic and social consequences of lockdowns, quarantines, and other measures designed to reduce infection. The study findings support the behaviourism theory coined by Zhou and Brown (2015). It assumes that there is no mind/body dualism because everything we do is related to behaviour, not the mind, and reactions are observable and measurable in the environment. This could best explain the behavioural changes such as immorality, anti-social behaviour, teenage pregnancies, and hostilities that occurred among primary school pupils during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Cognitive theory by Jean Piaget (1956, 1950) states that learning does not only respond to the internal structure but both external factors and the internal thought process. The theory assumes that children construct their own knowledge in response to their experiences; they learn many things on their own without the intervention of older children or adults; and they are intrinsically motivated to learn and do not need rewards from adults to motivate learning. This is evident where many of the children learnt bad traits and immoral behaviours during the lockdown.

3.3 The Effect of Alternative Teaching Methods on the Formal Education of Primary School Pupils during the COVID-19 Lockdown

As manifested by the study, the majority of the study participants mentioned that radio learning methods were highly employed by the government and the school administrators during COVID-19 lockdown. Some of them were online learning using smartphones and computers during the lockdown. This is evident by the distribution of home study materials by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to facilitate learning under the guidance of parents or relatives. Door-to-door teaching and learning methods were also reported during both the key-informant and in-depth interviews. This was described as the situation where a teacher moves from door-to-door teaching children. Finally, television teaching was also mentioned by minority of the study participants. The majority of the participants mentioned that learners were unable to ask questions, especially during online learning. Dodging of lessons was also mentioned by the study participants since some pupils were not completing lessons. Most of the participants cited that few pupils were attending class. Lack of commitment among pupils was also very common during the online study. Inaccessibility and how to use the electronic learning journals were mentioned during both the key-informant and in-depth interviews. Lastly, the majority of the study participants mentioned that there was completely no learning taking place during COVID-19 lockdown despite the learning methods. The above findings show that alternative teaching methods had a negative effect on teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Participants noted that;

The Pandemic brought a lot of teaching approaches. Radio lessons were the most common teaching method during the COVID-19 lockdown whereby learners would scheme for the schedule times for lessons being conducted through radios and they would listen from their radio receivers from their homes. (IIs, 29 years old female, September 2022).

In some alternative teaching methods employed such as e-learning, radio learning, and TV, they were so challenging since learners were unable to ask questions. (KII, 33-year-old male, September 2022).

Pupils in rural settings had difficulties since they could not access some learning materials. This implies that learning was taking place in some areas. Because of the new normal during COVID-19 lockdown, some learners who were unable to adjust to the learning methods dropped out of schools. (IIs, 44 years old female, September 2022).

The findings are consistent with a study done by Toquero (2020) in China on the educational system and COVID-19 policy. The study revealed that shifting from physical learning to remote learning, such as online learning, posed many challenges to parents, teachers, and even learners because students were unable to interact during class hours. Tumwesige (2020) revealed that online education in Uganda during the COVID-19 lockdown resulted in many pupils dropping out of school. The unforeseen situation of the COVID-19 pandemic is another turn of the screw in the education situation of its school-going age population, making it difficult for many countries to conduct e-learning due to the vast majority's lack of basic needs for livelihood and access to the internet is a problem. Another study conducted by Bardoloi et al. (2021) showed that the COVID-19 emergency created remote education, which was different from the planned educational policies such as distance education, online learning, or other derivatives. The study pointed out that social justice, inequity, and digital division during the COVID-19 pandemic affected learning among children in poor resource settings or disadvantaged families (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

3.4 The Contribution of COVID-19 Policies on the Formal Education of Primary School Pupils

This study established that social distancing policy remained even after the lifting of the COVID-19 lockdown. Policy on regular wearing of facemasks was also cited by the study participants during both key informant and in-depth interviews. In addition to that, the majority of respondents reported automatic promotion policies, frequent hand washing, and lockdown policies. Based on the contribution of COVID-19 policies on formal education in primary education. The majority of the study participants mentioned rising indiscipline cases among pupils after lockdown. Most of the participants mentioned that the syllabi were not complete for almost all classes due to dodging of lessons by pupils. Some of the participants cited inadequate space to accommodate pupils after the re-opening of schools since the number of pupils has increased drastically. Finally, financial constraints were also reported by the study participants. The participants revealed that;

COVID-19 control policies have made education very difficult and so challenging since accommodating pupils in the classroom was not easy. This has resulted in the closure of schools with inadequate accommodation. (KII, 33 years old male, September 2022).

I appreciate the policies since we are now employing new technology to teach pupils, such as online, TV, and radio. (IIs, 26 years old male, September 2022).

Most of the pupils dropped out of schools, especially those in low socio-economic families since they were not able to afford hand sanitizer and facemasks. (KII, 43 years old male, September 2022).

The findings are coherent with a study done by Tarkar (2020) in China which revealed that the shifting of the education system from offline to online based on government policy during the COVID-19 pandemic has affected educational systems across the world (Tarkar, 2020). A study on an international perspective on human rights conducted in Spain cited that COVID-19 policies and measures were against human rights. Social distancing, quarantine, mandatory facemask wear, movement restrictions, closure of public places such as warships, bars, educational institutions, and lockdown all had an impact on the psychological well-being of all individuals (Lorente et al., 2020). Ubaedillah and Pratiwi (2021), found out that the government and other international agencies passed different policies as conditions for the re-opening of educational institutions, such

as social distancing, vaccination of students, frequent hand washing, automatic promotion of pupils from one class to another, and the wearing of facemasks (Ubaedillah & Pratiwi, 2021).

3.5 The Challenges Faced by Primary School Pupils after the Lockdown

A good number of participants mentioned the high level of school dropouts, which has affected the population of pupils in schools. The majority of study participants mentioned adolescent pregnancy. Stress and depression were also mentioned among the challenges faced by students after Lockdown. In addition to that, the majority of the study participants mentioned that early marriage was very common during COVID-19 lockdown. Most of the participants also mentioned the lack of scholastic materials after the re-opening of schools, since some parents were unable to afford the payment of school requirements and even fees. Furthermore, other challenges faced by primary school pupils after lockdown mentioned by the study participants were child abuse, defilements, lack of counselling and career guidance by both parents and teachers. The above qualitative findings imply that pupils faced a lot of challenges after the re-opening of schools, and this could be one of the reasons why some children failed to return to schools. The following were noted during interviews:

Even after they realized they could make money, some parents stopped their children from attending school (KII, 25 years old male, September 2022).

I think that automatic promotion of pupils is also another challenge faced by pupils. The majority of them drop out of schools because of not understanding the contents in the next class. (IIs, 33-years old male, September 2022).

"Some parents denied their children from going to the next class and forced them to repeat the classes although their colleagues were already in the next class. This made some children to lose interest in education as some of them even dropped out because they could not bear seeing their colleagues promoted to the next class.

"Pupils become matured during the COVID-19 lockdown and upon the reopening of schools, they have a lot of difficulties sitting in the class, even on desks." (KIIs, 46-year-old male reported, September-2022)

These findings are consistent with the study done by Bonal & González (2020) which pointed out that primary school pupils were facing a lot of challenges in their education as the result of learning gaps. During the pandemic, some pupils took long time at home, others were able to acquire learning materials during the lockdown, whereas those in poor resource settings were unable to obtain the relevant materials to facilitate their home learning. According to Maqableh and Alia (2021), the dissatisfaction with online study during the COVID-19 lockdown had created many challenges for most learners after schools reopened. Some states announced automatic promotion of learners from one class to another with the assumption that all of them have learnt during lockdown, hence affecting the coping ability of some learners. Another study by Bonal & Gonzalez (2020) on the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on learning gaps, especially on families and educational institutions, revealed that children are obtaining poor quality education based on the fact that educational institutions were already weakened by the pandemic and all countries are trying to reform the sectors with the aim of returning to normal setting.

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4.0 CONCLUSION

On the influence of Covid-19, the study concludes that the COVID-19 lockdown posed numerous changes in the behaviour of primary school pupils in the Lira City West division. The behavioural changes highly mentioned were immoral behaviour changes, substance abuse, indiscipline among pupils, mental behavioural changes, and others. The study while investigating the effects of alternative teaching methods concludes that most of the pupils did not enjoy teaching and learning during COVID-19. This is because learners were unable to ask questions, some pupils were not completing lessons, there was a lack of commitment among pupils, and inability to use the electronic learning gazettes. Furthermore, children in private schools and those from financially stable families benefitted from alternative teaching methods more than the children from public schools and children from the poor families. In investigating the contribution of COVID-19 policies on formal education system, the study concludes that COVID-19 policies have led to the introduction of standard operating procedures in schools. These new standards were inadequate space to accommodate pupils because of the new policy on the number of pupils per classroom, incompleteness of teaching syllabus, automatic promotion have affected the performance of pupils and the number of pupils has increased drastically. Also, pupils encountered a lot of challenges after the COVID-19 lockdown. These include school dropouts, teenage pregnancies, defilement, especially among girls, stress and depression, forced marriage, lack of scholastic materials, child abuse, and lack of counselling services.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made the following recommendations based on the problem investigated by the researcher.

  a) The government should increase funding to support primary education. This is the major barrier to quick recovery from the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown.

  b) There is need for prior preparation by the government for any other pandemic or eventuality that might hit the education by the different stakeholders in the education sector.

  c) Providing academic support to young girls who got pregnant during the COVID-19 lockdown so that they can resume their academic studies.

  d) City authorities should increase supervision of teachers and pupils since work without tight supervision is usually accompanied by a lot of errors.

  e) There is a high need for community empowerment and sensitization.

  f) Guidance and counselling should be strengthened in schools.

6.0 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Not everything could be covered in this study, a number of limitations arise, namely;

  a) There were different challenges that the researcher experienced while in the field and they include some of the respondent's concealing information from the researcher. This was solved through proper probing during data collection process.

  b) While collecting data, the researcher found that some of the teachers were busy in class teaching. Therefore, this was solved by scheduling a time after their classes and during their break time to conduct interview.

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c) The study was limited because not all schools were selected for the study. Therefore, the researcher solved this by sampling schools that were representative of the rest, and the investigations was in depth.

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