

THE COVID-19. AN ANALYTICAL VIEW ON SCHOOL RE-OPENING IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19, also known as coronavirus is a viral disease caused by a sub microscopic infection agent that replicate only inside the living cell of an organism. The term “Covid-19” was derived from the year of occurrence namely “2019”. Its occurrence dealt a devastating damage to the day to day global socio- economic activities. Among the most affected activity was education or schooling. The shutting down of institutions of learning had been cited as crucial measure to contain the rapid spread of the pandemic and was deemed as the best measure to enhance social-distancing. Though, the closing down of educational institutions

was necessary, it was worth to mention that it came with costs. Lack of schooling had far reaching effects on socio-economic fabrics of the society. Thus these studies aimed at examining the re-opening of schools amid Covid-19, and suggested possible ways and means through which to contain covid-19 pandemic while teaching and learning took precedence. The proposed measures included policy guideline on covid-19 containment, online teaching, abolition of boarding schools, student teacher ratio, class student ratio, makeshift classes and vaccination among others.

Keywords: Covid–19, Pandemic, Virus, Contact hour, Vaccination, Ratio

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19, also referred to as coronavirus is an invincible enemy that has caught the global operation unaware. Emerged in the year 2019 in China, the pandemic is severe acute, prolonged and lethal, and has caused colossal damage to the global socio-economics fabrics. The disease which is peculiar in nature is not a respecter of personages, age, race, colour, country, profession, gender or socio-economic status. Covid-19 has ravaged every corner world over and its effect is felt in every aspect of life.

The virus has mutated from period to period and from variant to variant thus posing challenges on containment. To date, the world is experiencing the third wave and new variants which are severe and fatal than the previously experienced. The new variants have halted global socio-economic activities and are predicted to exist for considerable period of time before being contained. At global level, a number of countries are attempting various measures to curb the menace.

In east Africa, Kenya stands out as the most affected country, its infections are higher and the number of fatalities is disheartening. The disease has claimed over 2000 lives, and over 140,000 infections. As way to halt the spread of infection, the Governments of Kenya has put in place various measures to contain the spread. These measures include:-

- Closing down of institutions of learning
- Social distancing
- Washing hands using sanitizers
- Wearing of facial masks, among others

Implementation of the aforementioned measures is challenging, due to socio-educational and geo-cultural set-up. Shutting down of institution of learning in order to contain the virus has its own merits, however, the closing down of learning, institution have far-reaching adverse effects on the nations socio-economic development. This is because education is an important ingredient in economic development and has spiral effects on day to day operations in all sectors of economy. Arising from the aforesaid, it is critically prudent to examine how the schooling can take place while controlling the spread of the virus. Thus, this study will attempt to achieve the following:

- To examine the re-opening of institution of learning amid covid-19
- To suggest ways and means to curb the spread of covid-19 in the institution of learning
- To formulate policies capable of containing the covid-19 infection

Methodology and Theory

The study used descriptive research method and based the study on social demand approach. According to this theory, education is beneficial to socio-economic set-up of a society and additional expenditure of education may not create a burden too heavy to bear. Thus Covid-19 containment measures in schools may not be too heavy for the government and households to bear, since the direct and indirect social benefits outweigh the costs. Though the critics of this theory argue that, the approach can only be implemented in a society that is pessimistic and one that abhors traditional central values, the theory is worthy in planning on re-opening of schools a mid Covid-19 pandemic.

Policies and Measurers to ensure Re-opening of schools amid Covid-19 pandemic.

Re-Opening of Institutions of Learning

Education and economic development are intertwined, Schools and education centres acts as agents of change. Education activities have far reaching effects on other agents of development, this means that the day to day Socio-Economic operations depend on education. Closing down of institutions of learning may spell doom to other sectors hence the need to reopen institutions of learning.

Re-Opening of Economy

Schooling or education and economic growth are directly proportional. The two factors are interrelated in that an increase in the level and amount of education of a country leads to an increase in the country`s level of production and subsequent economic growth, since education is an essential factor in the process of production. Thus, re-opening of schools or economy will have a reciprocal benefit to each sector respectively. This therefore implies that re-opening of institutions of learning must go hand in hand with the re-opening of the economy and vice-versa.

Political Support

During crisis, Political good will is an important variable in combat any challenge. The political administration must formulate, develop and support policies that will enable the re-opening of schools and economy. The afore-mentioned, calls for sober minds among the political class and planners in the two tiers of Governments (County and National Government).

Measures at Institutions of Learning

The daily briefs from department health indicate that social-distancing is among the best preventive measures of Covid-19. This is due to the nature of the Virus. However, considering the nature of our Economy and socio-cultural setup, social distancing may be an uphill task to implement. For proper social distancing to be implemented, certain variables must be put into consideration;

- The student teacher ratio
- The student class ratio
- The contact hours
- Civic education to stakeholders.
- Online Teaching / Learning
- Abolition of Physical Education (CPE)
- Vaccination
- Public Private Partnership

Student Teacher Ratio.

Considering that Kenya education enrolment rate is largely based on Gross enrolment rate (GER) against net intake rate, (NER) un thoughtful formulation and implementation of re-opening schools policies, may have a toll on the struggling Economy. According to health experts, the student teacher ratio should be 1:20, meaning that a teacher can only serve 20 students at any contact time. The student teacher ratio in most schools in Kenya is about 1:(40-60). Working on the Lower Limit of, 1:40 it will imply the doubling of man-power (Teachers), say from one teacher to two teachers in order to cater for 40 students. Thus, the Teachers services service commission need to double teachers from 300,000 to 600,000. This is actually a tall order to the country state of economy. Improvisation and creative measures need to be developed. One such measure is the introduction of shift learning in our education system. Where some student will report in the morning session while others will report afternoon session and exit at evening. This mode of learning will not only decongest classes but will offer social-distancing from both within and outside the school. For the above to happen, an in-depth analysis of resources personnel is needed in order to linear programme the teaching force. The aforesaid measures will enable the Government to implement the social distancing while holding other factors constant.

Student class ratio

Holding other factor content, the student teacher ratio of 20:1 will demand more classes. It is difficult to drastically increase the number of classes. Overnight. Since the state of the Economy may not allow, beside the short term and long term planning of school enrolment and the duration of the Covid-19 Pandemic may pose some challenges. Thus in order to curb this problem, the following measures should be implemented.

Abolition of Boarding Schools

The abolition of Boarding school will have spiral effects on Covid-19 containment once the boarding facilities are abolished. The said dormitory blocks may be converted into classes. This will save parents and government resources previously meant to construct more classes, thus reducing expenditure on the issue of additional classes hence social distancing.

Abolition of Boarding will lead to low infection rate at institutional level. Since It is easier to control student at day time while in class or outside class than controlling them at night in their respective dormitories. Besides any attempt to control them at dormitory level, may risk the life of the teacher on matters infection.

The eradication of boarding school will act as a “cost saving measure”; in that parent will be able to save boarding fees and upkeep money. The saved fees may be invested in other areas which may act as income generating project. In addition the policy will relieve the teaching force, the hustles and the burden of working both on day and night time in the name of controlling and protecting the students.

The conversion of boarding school will enable the Government to offer and achieve free basic education. This will enable the state to meet the demands of the Education for all and millennium development goals of education. The aforementioned will increase the literacy levels leading to quality population, equipped with the much needed skills man-power and overall economic development in all sectors of our Economy.

The “saved income” can be invested in the Economy, subsequently increasing the Gross domestic product (GNP) and essentially increase house hold income. Increased production will result to more Government revenues through taxes and levies. The aforementioned will raise the standard of living both at household and community level thus reducing poverty rate which is among the national goals of education.

Make shift classes

The school has the responsibility to ensure learning take place. Make –shift classes, developed either by way of putting tents or learning under a shade or open air learning could be of great help. The makeshift classes are easy to develop and requires little financing and time. Makeshift classes can be developed as an emergency measure to offer a temporary relief on curbing Covid-19 menace. This measure will decongest the classes thus offering the much needed student class ratio and teacher student ratio.

In addition the open-air learning will offer fresh air and environment. Efficient flow of air and sunshine are some of the factors that prevent rapid spread of Covid-19 infections, since the virus is not friendly to certain degrees of temperatures and not airborne. Thus, this environment will offer natural healing or preventive remedy on Covid-19. This measure imply, that the state and the household will cost save or use less expenditure on matter preventive and curative on Covid-19.

Online teaching process

The policy on online teaching should be re-examined, formulated and developed to a concrete programme devoid of any alteration. It should be uniform across all institutions of learning but differentiated at levels of education system while taking into consideration the nation level of digital technology.

At basic education, the state should endeavour to do national broadcasting, with a well-defined timetable. The students and teachers a well as institution administration and management should be aware and own it. The advantage of this method is that it will reach a large target group and its impact felt in far flung is areas of Kenya.

At tertiary institution, various models or mode of instruction delivery should be formulated, developed and utilized. On–the-job-training should be done to lecturers. The programme should be developed while taking into consideration the various challenges that the universities or colleges could be having within their teaching force for instance, universities or colleges could create lecturing room other than lecturer halls. In the lecture room only two personnel should be availed. The lecturer to teach and ICT personnel to do ICT procedure, i.e. to bring the programme online and connect the lecturer to students. This way creates division of labour, such that the lecturer offers teaching and the ICT offers technical work. This kind of teaching will be highly efficient and effective. Online teaching will have the following advantage;

- It will keep the students indoors or with in homes, actively and involved within the princits of their homesteads, and therefore less interaction leading to slow rate of infection outside the school environment.

- Parent will be able to observe and control the child academic well-being at close-range. It will increase the “parental-children contact hours” which is essential for the child physiological, cognitive and psychological growth.

Abolition of physical education (PE)

The PE session should be abolished at basic education timetable. At basic education level, the child cognitive development is not fully developed this implies that as much you keep instructing the child to observe covid-19 preventive measures, the child may not comprehend and at times he/she may not heed, Thus interactions involved in PE may offer a fertile ground for Corona Virus infection. Students should only be allowed to play within their homestead; this will reduce infection at school significantly.

Vaccination

The Government should search and roll out vaccination process. This should be done taking into consideration the state of the economy and the covid-19 variation in our country. Special consideration should be offered to teachers aged above 50 years and those living with other body conditions e.g. hypertension cardio-vascular, diabetes and others. This cohort of teachers are vulnerable and consist of senior teachers, HODS, deputy headmasters, principals and institutional managers, their skills, knowledge and experience is highly needed in schools. In so doing the government will save on recruitment of human capital.

Civic Education

Civic education on Covid-19 should be undertaken. This should involve the stakeholders, where they should be educated on the causes and effect of Covid-19. This should be done either through online, social media, face to face or where need arises or through written communication. This will go a long way in preventing the spread of Covid-19 pandemic.

Public private partnership (PPP)

The government should engage the private players in education. Owners of private institutions should be engaged through an arrangement where the government supplies students to their institutions while they offer teaching and learning facilities just like the manner the PPP works at universities. The private schools should admit the students and the Government remit the capitation just as it's done in public school especially at secondary level. This arrangement will have the following benefits;

- It will de-congest public schools thus attaining the student-teacher ratio and class-student ratio.
- It will keep the private school economically attractive during these hard economic times. The PPP will offer the much need cash- flow to private schools thus offering business continuity.

- This will save the government from recruiting more teachers hence spending less on education budget.

Other measures necessary include, requesting parent undertake remedial teachings at household level, developed the “Nyumba Kumi” teaching model and also micro group of ten students teaching at village level.

CONCLUSION

The aforementioned measures if properly formulated, programmed and implemented will go a long way in ensuring continuous teaching instruction in our Education system. This is due to the fact that, education is essential good and a crucial factor in the production processes. In addition Education is an Economic enabler and has both direct and indirect social benefits. Besides education and schooling centres act as the agent of change, many urban centres in Kenya are products of exiting education institution for Instant Juja (JKUAT), Maseno (Maseno University) Githurai, Kenyatta University, Thogoto, University of Nairobi, Kikuyu Campus Thorojo College and Presbyterian University of east African, Njoro Town (Egerton University) among other. In these urban centres, the death of any institution implies the death of the aforesaid Towns and subsequent adverse effects of the Economies of those Towns and the suffering of the populace. Thus the Government should do all at its disposal to contain and maintain school to save the Economy and enhance the continuous way of life accustomed by the citizens.

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