

From Classrooms to Confinement: Academic Challenges Faced by Secondary School Children in Kyamuhunga Sub-County During COVID-19

Agaba Albert

Mbarara University of Science and Technology

Abstract:- The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to students' academic performance worldwide. This study explores the effects of COVID-19 on the academic performance of secondary school children in Kyamuhunga Sub-County, Uganda, and proposes measures to mitigate these effects. The transition from traditional in-person classes to online learning disrupted education, exacerbating issues such as limited access to technology, internet connectivity, and the loss of face-to-face interaction. Additionally, increased stress and mental health issues further hindered academic performance. Various measures, including technology provision, adapted teaching methods, and mental health support, were implemented to address these challenges. These measures have shown potential in enhancing academic performance by promoting equal opportunities and fostering innovative learning approaches. Ultimately, the pandemic significantly impacted academic performance and overall well-being, necessitating continued efforts to support affected students.

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically transformed educational experiences for students around the globe, with Kyamuhunga sub-county in Uganda experiencing substantial academic challenges during the transition from traditional classrooms to remote learning. Despite an initial lack of reported cases, the Ugandan government swiftly closed all primary and secondary schools in March 2020, affecting millions of learners and disrupting their educational trajectories (Ministry of Education, Uganda). This abrupt shift to distance education placed considerable strain on both educators and students, as the latter had to adapt to a new learning environment with minimal preparation and resources.

In Uganda, the rapid transition to online learning revealed significant gaps in infrastructure and resources. Many students in Kyamuhunga faced barriers such as limited access to the internet and electronic devices, which hindered their ability to engage fully in remote education (Burgess and Sievertsen 2020). Similarly, varying levels of parental supervision and support further exacerbated the difficulties

students encountered during this period. The shift mandated that teachers develop their skills in digital pedagogy with little to no professional development, limiting the effectiveness of the online learning experiences for many students (Clinton, 2020; Norman, 2020).

Empirical evidence suggests that the sudden transition to remote learning led to notable learning losses among students. Reports indicated that learners in Kyamuhunga sub-county, like their peers in other parts of the world, struggled academically during this confinement period. For instance, data from similar contexts globally illustrated significant declines in reading and mathematics skills, with students falling behind their expected progression by several months (Dorn et al. 2020; NSW Department of Education 2020). Such findings indicate that secondary school students in Kyamuhunga were at risk of experiencing a long-term impact on their educational outcomes due to the pandemic's disruptions.

Furthermore, the economic repercussions of COVID-19 heightened the challenges faced by students in the sub-county. The pandemic affected not only the education sector but also the larger economy, leading to job losses and declining household incomes (UNECA). As families struggled to cope with reduced financial resources, the ability of many students to access educational materials or support for learning was compromised (UNECA). This situation created a cycle of disadvantage, where students already at risk found themselves further entrenched in educational inequity.

In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, the Ugandan Ministry of Health and the National COVID-19 Task Force implemented strategies aimed at mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on educational access and quality. Their COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan focused on ensuring that educational systems could eventually adapt to the new realities of health-conscious learning environments, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and public awareness (Ministry of Health, Uganda). However, as schools begin to reopen, addressing the educational gaps that emerged during this crisis in Kyamuhunga will require comprehensive strategies, targeted support for disadvantaged

students, and a commitment to rebuilding a resilient educational framework.

➤ *Problem Statement*

International Center for Research (2020) stated that despite government efforts to initiate prevention and response strategy to mitigate corona virus, it is sounding in both health and social programming to the extent that the survivors of corona virus experience the worst moments of morbidity and mortality. Poverty levels have gradually increased as families manifesting this kind of pandemic can hardly contribute and get engaged in income generating activities. Corona virus reduces their capacity to continuously practice their agricultural activities due to injuries, and psychological torture inflicted on them in the course of sickness, as agriculture is the predominant source of their livelihood.

The Ugandan government put forward a strict lockdown which consisted closure of schools for over 2 years, this posed a lot of challenges on the academic performance of the school going children, despite the government's effort to put some solutions to the closure of schools, like online studies, students in the rural setting like Kyamuhunga continued to face challenges related to academic performance.

II. LITERATURE ON THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN IN KYAMUHUNGA DUE TO COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted educational experiences and social dynamics worldwide, presenting particular challenges for secondary school learners in Kyamuhunga sub-county, Uganda. As the government enforced strict lockdown measures, including the closure of educational institutions, the psychological and social repercussions of quarantine and isolation became increasingly evident.

Research conducted by Baumeister and Leary (2020) underscores the potential for increased incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) in households with suspected COVID-19 positive individuals. Partners quarantined at home, particularly those experiencing stress related to their health status, may resort to verbal abuse against their spouses, often women who assume caregiving responsibilities. The stigma associated with being suspected of having COVID-19 parallels historical stigmas experienced by individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Uganda. This climate of fear and suspicion can lead to heightened tensions within households, further exacerbating the challenges faced by both caregivers and children.

Community expectations also play a significant role in shaping the experiences of women during the pandemic. Ben-Porath (2019) highlights that women are often placed under immense social pressure to uphold family health by ensuring cleanliness and hygiene within the home. This expectation can

contribute to elevated stress levels, particularly if family members contract COVID-19, as the blame may be inaccurately attributed to the perceived inadequacies of the woman managing the household. In the context of Kyamuhunga, such pressures not only affect the mental well-being of caregivers but also complicate household dynamics, especially amidst the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic.

Additionally, Bhagat (2016) observed that both male and female participants expressed a fear of social disgrace associated with women contracting COVID-19, viewing such infections as indicative of unsafe behaviors or environments. The societal repercussions for women, such as social exclusion and bullying, can be severe, often leading to family rejection in extreme cases. Such stigma can further isolate families, creating an environment in which students may experience additional emotional distress and a sense of uncertainty regarding their social standing within the community.

Moreover, Bhawe and Dalal (2020) noted that men reported significant hesitations to self-identify when experiencing COVID-19 symptoms due to feelings of shame and the pressure to provide for their families. The responsibility men feel toward the safety of their families often leads them to prioritize staying with their households over seeking necessary healthcare or entering quarantine, particularly in internally displaced persons (IDP) sites perceived as insecure. This decision-making dynamically affects family health, as women may be left to shoulder additional caregiving burdens in the absence of male partners seeking medical assistance.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a descriptive survey design, as defined by Saunders (2015), to systematically collect and analyze data relevant to the research purpose while ensuring an economical procedure. According to Kothari (2020), this design allows for detailed descriptions and comparisons of the research area over a specified timeframe. The study population consisted of 70 respondents, including secondary school students, teachers, head teachers, education officers, and parents, selected based on their knowledge and experience regarding the topic. A sample of 55 respondents was drawn using purposive sampling for specific roles and simple random sampling for students, resulting in an unbiased representation of various perspectives.

Data collection methods included self-administered questionnaires and interviews, enabling the researcher to gather both qualitative and quantitative information efficiently. Primary data was obtained primarily from secondary school students, supplemented by qualitative insights from purposively sampled educators and parents. The data presentation and analysis employed the Statistical

Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for quantitative data, while qualitative data underwent content analysis to identify recurring themes. Rigorous measures were taken to ensure the study's reliability and validity, including supervisor reviews of

the research instruments and a pilot study. Ethical considerations were prioritized, guaranteeing respondents' confidentiality and respectful treatment throughout the research process.

IV. FINDINGS BY THE STUDY

Table 1: Challenges on Academic Performance as a Result of Covid-19

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Increasing the risk of child maltreatment	16	15.6
Affected child's academic performance	30	29.5
Serious mental health burden	10	9.8
Social isolation	05	4.9
Exposure to Domestic violence	18	17.6
Increased risk of family violence and child abuse	23	22.6
Total	102	100

Source: field data 2023

From the table above, it was found out that responses (23) showed that increased risk of family violence and child abuse is the major issue facing secondary school students during the pandemic, 18 responses, exposure to domestic violence, (16) responses indicated that COVID-19 has increased the risk of child maltreatment then (30) responses showed that it affected the children's academic performance, (10) responses showed that the pandemic has increased serious mental health burden, lastly (16) of the responses said that social isolation was another issue. All the above responses are related to how Covid-19 affected secondary school students leading to poor academic performance.

The above responses show the reasons as to why the academic performance of students detreated when they were still at home due to the different challenges like child mistreatment, social isolation and domestic violence.

I saw my child's performance declining when she went back to school and at first I didn't know what the cause was, when I interacted with the school counsellor, she told me that my daughter was facing stress related to the challenges at home during the Covid-19 lockdown. (a parent commented)

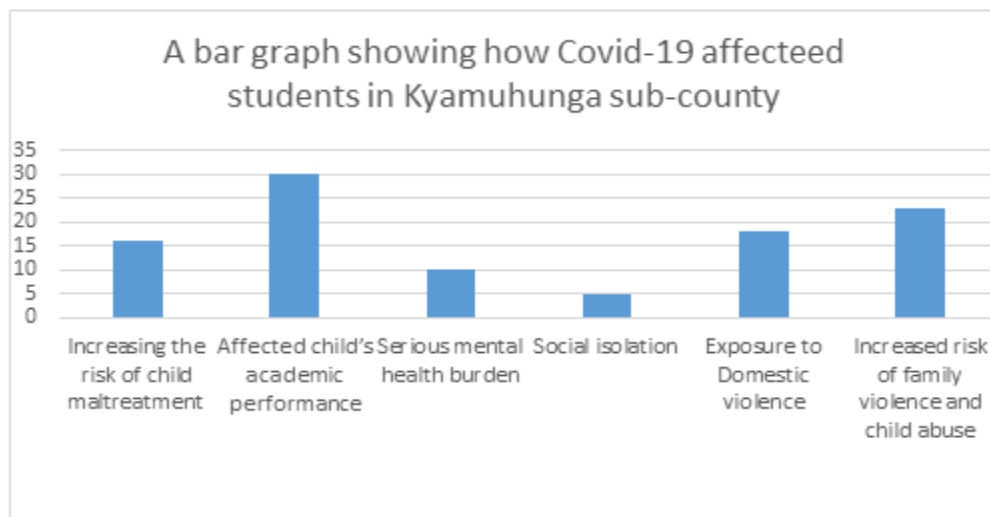


Fig 1: A Graph Showing How Covid-19 Affected School going Children in Kyamuhunga Sub-county

From the graph, it is evident that Covid-19 affected the academic performance of secondary school going children in Kyamuhunga sub-county while social isolation was the least issue affecting school going children in Kyamuhunga sub-county.

The data in relation to this theme explains how students managed to cope up with challenges related to Covid-19 to enhance their academic performance when they went back to school by the help of their parents and teachers.

➤ Addressing the Challenges on Academic Performance as a Result of Covid-19

Table 2: Addressing the Challenges on Academic Performance as a Result of Covid-19

Response	Frequency
Remedial lessons	35
Coaching	11
Extra reading material	08
Home work	15
Holiday packages	33
Parental support	03

Source: field data 2023

The responses in table 2 show different ways that were adopted as resilient measures to enhance the academic performance of students that had been affected by Covid-19 pandemic and the lock down.

All the respondents (35) responded to have access to remedial lessons organized by their schools, (33) access holiday packages as their parents could afford, (11) attended

private coaching, 15 always go back home with homework, (8) use extra reading materials in form of newspapers and pamphlets while (3) are supported by their parents while revising at home.

Students came from the pandemic with poor grades which have improved because of remedial lesssons. (Head teacher of kyamuhunga secondary school)

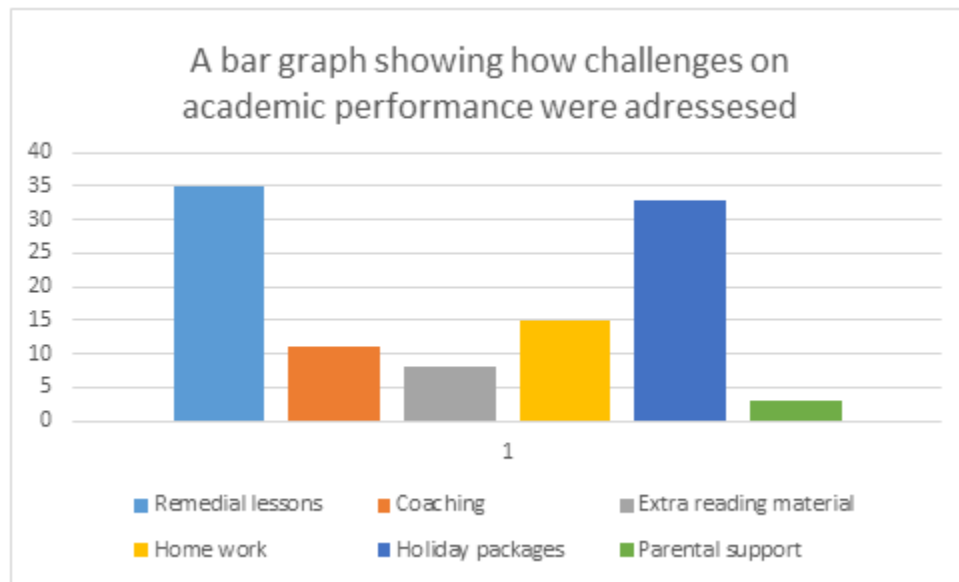


Fig 2: A graph showing how challenges on academic performances were addressed.

The graph above shows that students had accessibility to remedial lessons at school as they were made compulsory while a few of them had access to parental access while at home as most parents concentrate on Tea plucking to get money for buying scholastic materials, pay school fees and get food to make the family survive.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

These findings are in line with (Agrawal 2020) who asserted that most respondents showed that increased risk of family violence and child abuse is the major effect of the pandemic to secondary school going children this is in line Campbell 2020). Child protection services (CPS) across

countries impacted by COVID-19 are reporting an increase in cases and referrals of child abuse. Parenting contributes in important ways to the course and outcome of child development (National Academies of Sciences 2016) and parental stress is one important area of focus in parenting research.

Exposure to domestic violence, this is in line with (Cappa & Petrowski, 2020) the pandemic, large-scale prevalence studies of adolescents' exposure to violence have been scant and statistics on this topic have remained inconsistent in scope and quality (Cappa & Petrowski, 2020). While data on violence at home have increased significantly over the last 15 years, forms of abuse that are particularly

challenging to measure, such as commercial sexual exploitation, have been largely ignored in data collection.

Increasing the risk of child maltreatment, with (Deater-Deckard, 2004), (Prime et al., 2020), COVID-19 poses unique stressors to families, as well as cumulative risks that include social, economic, and health-related stressors. Exposure to stressors can lead to cognitive, emotional, and physical fatigue, which may in turn place undue strain on the parent-child relationship.

Parents work remotely without access to childcare according to (Pfefferbaum and North, 2020). Adolescents transitioned to online schooling, with an increased burden for managing learning falling on parents. Many families faced additional concerns related to job loss and food and housing insecurity, as well as long-term effects of isolation on family members' mental and physical health. Additional family-level challenges included securing medical care for individuals with chronic conditions, having inadequate supplies or access to technological resources at home, and dealing with the monotony and uncertainty inherent in indefinite quarantine.

The established findings concur with Zeanah & Humphreys (2018) who found that violence at home, for instance, is linked to parental stress, financial hardship and poor mental health (These issues may have deepened with the spread of the disease and with its associated economic and social impacts (Ramaswamy & Seshadri, 2020). Likewise, adolescents' increased presence online might be tied to other forms of violence, such as cyberbullying and online abuse (Yang, 2023). School closures and national lockdowns have also meant that teachers and healthcare workers, who usually identify and report instances of child maltreatment (Feng, Huang, & Wang, 2010; Kenny, 2001; Nayda, 2002), are no longer interacting regularly with adolescents.

Increased adolescents and, in turn, increased risk of harsh parenting according to (Campbell 2020), In particular, the disruption and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic presents significant risk for increased family violence, including child abuse. Although rates of reported child abuse appear to be decreasing during the pandemic as families shelter in place and reduce contact with mandated reporters in countries outside of the United States, COVID-19 has led to serious burden (Marazziti, Pozza, Giuseppe & Coversano, 2020; Piece et al ..,2020), with the prevalence of anxiety, depression, and sleep problems ranging from 18 % to 35 %, especially among younger individuals who are preoccupied with thoughts regarding the disease (Haung & Zhao). With mounting unemployment rates, nationwide school district closures, and stay at home orders, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic abruptly and significantly upheaved the daily lives of young adolescents and families across the globe.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted educational experiences for secondary school students in Kyamuhunga sub-county, Uganda, as the abrupt transition from traditional classrooms to remote learning exposed critical gaps in infrastructure and resources. Many students faced barriers such as limited internet access and a lack of electronic devices, exacerbated by economic challenges that hindered their ability to engage in education. The pandemic led to notable learning losses, increased risks of domestic violence, and heightened mental health issues, further complicating students' academic performance. As schools reopen, addressing these educational gaps requires comprehensive strategies and targeted support to ensure that disadvantaged students can rebuild their learning trajectories and achieve equitable educational outcomes. In conclusion, the transition from classrooms to confinement has underscored the urgent need for resilient educational frameworks that can withstand future crises.

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