



Original Research Article

The Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of free education policy in Tanzania: A case of public secondary schools in Arusha City

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This study assessed the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on implementation of free education policy in Tanzania by focusing on public secondary schools in Arusha city. The sample size employed in the study was 91 respondents chosen randomly from the population of 1035 teachers. The study applied descriptive-correlation design using quantitative approach whereby the questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS. Findings showed that while schools did not report cases of COVID-19, the pandemic resulted to school closure, disruption of school timetable, anxiety among teachers. Findings also revealed that public secondary schools in Arusha City implemented free education policy by abolishing school fee. Findings further showed that there was weak positive correlation between the COVID-19 situation and the implementation of the free education policy. On the basis of study findings, this research concludes that COVID-19 has affected provision of free education in terms of disruption of school time table leading to inefficiency in completion of syllabus. Based on the study findings, this study recommends that the government should increase grants for education to schools so as to allow schools to have adequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) such as hand sanitizers, and face masks.

Keywords: COVID-19, free education policy, implementation, secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Free education is a global development agenda. Promotion of free education policies can be traced in 1948 when the United Nations (UN) established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Several countries in the world have taken enacted laws to allow free education. By 2018, a total of 161 countries in the world had already created legislations to allow free primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2018). However, educational systems globally has been affected following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that lead to total closures of schools, early childhood education and care services, colleges and

universities. As of mid-January 2021, about 825 million learners worldwide were affected as a result of school closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the education delivery in terms of lack of face to face teaching, poor technology and connectivity and lack of electricity to some students. Also many students received no instruction, feedback, or interaction with their teachers. In April 2020 it was reported that COVID-19 has affected school attendance by 91%. As result about 1.6 billion students were unable

to attend schools (UNICEF, 2020).

Postponement of face-to-face teaching in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has led to concerns with reference to the effects for students' learning. Engzell et al. (2021) evaluated the effect of school closures on primary school performance using remarkably rich data ($n \approx 350,000$) from the Netherlands and revealed a learning loss of 0.08 standard deviations or about 3 percentile points. This effect is equivalent to one-fifth of a school year. Learning losses are up to 60% larger amongst students from less-educated families, substantiating worries as regards the uneven toll of the pandemic on children as well as families. The findings entail that students made diminutive or no progress while learning from home and imply losses are even larger in countries with weaker infrastructure or longer period of school closures.

In India, COVID-19 has affected a huge number of students across states, regions, class, and gender. This resulted to high rates of school dropouts; lower wages, reduced quality of life, children inequality. The closing down of schools in addition to the decision of shifting traditional classrooms to the digital platforms are increasing learning inequality among children, as well pushing a huge number of children out of school owing to the digital divide. The role of the budget in the existing situation and even beyond the pandemic is very critical to guarantee inclusive education for all (Kundu and Sonawane, 2020).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has warned that higher rates of school dropouts due to COVID-19 will have long-term effects on children and on the economy, resulting in lower wages along with a reduced quality of life all over the world. For instance, a study in Brazil revealed that about 5 million children between 6 and 17 ages were not able to access education in November 2020 because the Brazilian government has failed to deal with the huge impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. School closures affected children unequally, with the greatest impact on Black or Indigenous children and adolescents, as well as those from lower income households were affected the most due to school closures (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

In Africa, COVID-19 has resulted to widespread school closures in 14 countries. More than 10 million students in Africa has missed schools (Otieno, 2020). Closure of schools has affected teaching and learning activities in the sense that students receiving no education, students learning less through distance education, limited access to technologies and digital literacy education. The damage of COVID-19 has been more severe in the least developed countries of Africa and elsewhere in the world where teaching and learning facilities are inadequate.

Furthermore, another report from UNICEF has revealed that COVID-19 has affected social and emotional wellbeing of children from poor communities in Africa (Chavez, 2015). The damage of COVID-19 can be more severe in the least developed countries of Africa and elsewhere in the

world where teaching and learning facilities are inadequate (Ferreira and Shady, 2020). Under this volatile situation, provision of free education is likely to be affected. Hence, further studies are needed to investigate the influence of COVID-19 on the implementation of free education policy. Forecasts made prior to the COVID-19 pandemic estimated an increase (in real terms) in public education spending in all regions as well as in all income groups. However, baseline forecasts that take into account the probable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic estimated that education spending in 2020 is expected to decrease in low and middle income countries (World Bank, 2020).

Examination of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children through 57 remote interviews with teachers, students, education officials and parents across Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Morocco, Zambia and South Africa revealed that school closures caused by the pandemic worsened the earlier existing inequalities in provision of education, and that children who were already at risk of being barred from quality education have been mostly affected (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In the Central African Republic the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has affected negatively the rate of school attendance (IPIS, 2020). In Madagascar, an organisation that incentivizes agricultural families to send their children to school is worried that some children will not return to school following the schools closure due to COVID-19 pandemic (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Implementation of free primary education in Kenya is influenced by availability of teaching and learning resources as well as financial management. The teacher-pupil ratio was found to influence quality of education negatively in view of the fact that the introduction of free primary education increased pupil's enrolment massively while there is shortage of teachers to respond to the colossal enrolment levels (Ndege, 2015). Nevertheless the study was carried out prior to COVID-19 pandemic and did not look into influence of any pandemic on implementation of free education system.

The Tanzanian government issued Circular no. 5 on November 27, 2015 to start implementations of the Education and Training Policy of 2014. The circular directs public bodies to make sure that secondary education is free for all children by removing all types of fees as well as contributions. The government released a monthly fund of TSHS 18 billion to schools to cover the cost of implementing the new directive to offer free primary and secondary education for all. Enrolment and attendance in both primary and secondary schools have been increasing due to the eradication of school fees (Right to Education Initiative, 2016).

The free education policy in Tanzania has reduced parent's burden on financing children education whilst reducing truancy among students (HakiElimu, 2016). While the policy has produced positive outcomes, it has triggered unprecedented increase of enrolment. Since the inception of free education policy, enrolment of pupils in Tanzanian

primary schools has tripled. In some schools, classes that used to accommodate 45 students were obliged to accommodate 130 pupils which is an increase in 188.8% (Hakielimu, 2016). Also, the free education policy has triggered unprecedented increase of student's enrolment by 46%. Consequently, government schools face challenges to cope up with the massive change under shortage of teaching and learning materials (Hakielimu, 2016).

Additionally, schools and learning institutions in Tanzania were closed in March 2020 following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. In June 2020 the government of Tanzania allowed school re-opening with conditions that schools are required to mobilize facilities and supplies for prevention of spread of corona virus at school environments (WHO, 2020). These requirements were issued while the implementation of free education policy was still under inadequacy of resources.

For instance government secondary schools in Arusha City in Tanzania are facing the challenges of unpleasant teaching and learning conditions which are characterized by shortage of classroom, shortage of water access and shortage of desks (Mangare, 2018; Kaduma, 2018). Moreover, government secondary schools are facing the challenge of inadequate school supervision (Dhinat, 2015). These challenging conditions which require serious deployment of resources may intensify problems on implementation of free education under COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the effect of COVID-19 on the implementation of free education policy in Tanzania using public secondary schools Arusha City as a study case.

In the midst of implementation of free education policy and its consequential challenges was the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic that has affected the education delivery in several countries globally, including Tanzania, where more than 10 million students have missed schools (Otieno, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic can be more devastating in the least developed countries of Africa and elsewhere in the world where teaching and learning facilities are inadequate (Ferreira and Shady, 2020), thus affecting provision of free education. Baseline forecasts that take into account the probable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic estimated that education spending in 2020 is expected to decrease in low and middle income countries (World Bank, 2020). It is therefore, imperative to examine effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of free education policy in government secondary schools in Tanzania through a case of public secondary schools in Arusha city.

The objective was achieved by answering three research questions.

i) What is the situation of COVID-19 at public secondary schools in Arusha City?

ii) What is the extent of implementation of free education policy in terms of education infrastructure, student enrolment, class room attendance, teaching efficiency, learning outcomes, and students pass at public secondary schools in Arusha City during the COVID-19

pandemic?

iii) Is there any significant relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic situation and the implementation of free education policy at public secondary schools in Arusha City in terms of education infrastructure, student enrolment, class room attendance, teaching efficiency, learning outcomes, and students pass?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design

The study employed descriptive-correlation research design. Descriptive-correlation design is the type of research which is employed to describe and test relationship between variables (Andres, 2012). In this study, descriptive-correlation design was applied to establish the effect COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of free education policy at public secondary schools in Arusha City.

Population and Sample Size

Population is a full set of elements or cases from which a sample for a study is drawn (Saunders et al., 2012). The study was based on the population of 1035 teachers from 29 public secondary schools in Arusha City. According to Kothari, (2004) sample size is the number of elements chosen from the universe to form a sample from which required data for the study are expected to be drawn. A sample size of 91 respondents was determined by using the following Equation.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$e = 0.1$$

n = number of derived sample size

N = total number of target population = 1035

e = margin of error

$$n = \frac{1035}{1 + 1035(0.1)^2}$$

$$= 91$$

The sample was drawn from teachers working in 9 public secondary schools in Arusha city constituting about 30% of all PSS in the study area. The sample was distributed as indicated in Table 1.

In particular, systematic sampling was used to select secondary schools in Arusha City and participants to be involved in the study. All PSS in the Arusha City were first listed alphabetically. Then 9 secondary schools were systematically selected by starting from the first listed school, and thereafter every third school was picked until the required number was obtained. Teachers from each school were also listed alphabetically and the required number of participants from each school was selected systematically.

Table 1. Sample Size for Respondents from the Selected Schools

SN	Wards	Schools	Number of Teachers	Sample Size	% of sample drawn
1	Moshono	Moshono	39	9	22.0%
2	Daraja II	Felix Mrema	41	9	22.0%
3	Engutoto	Njiro	26	6	22.0%
4	Kaloleni	Kaloleni	48	11	22.0%
5	Kati	Arusha sec	78	17	22.0%
6	Ngarenaro	Ngarenaro	53	12	22.0%
7	Lemara	Lemara	37	8	22.0%
8	Themis	Arusha Day	40	9	22.0%
9	Elerai	Elerai	52	11	22.0%
Total			414	91	

Table 2. Mean Score Interpretation

RESPONSE	OPTION	MEAN SCORE
Strongly Disagree	1	1.00-1.49
Disagree	2	1.50-2.49
Neutral	3	2.50-3.49
Agree	4	3.50-4.49
Strongly Agree	5	4.50-5.0

Source: Field Study (2021)

Table 3. Reliability Test

SN	VARIABLE	CRONBACH ALPHA	RESULTS
1	COVID -19	.748	Reliable
2	Free Education	.763	Reliable

Data Collection

The study collected data by using questionnaires. Self-administered questionnaires were used to obtain opinions and experiences of teachers with regards to effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of free education at public secondary schools in Arusha. Closed item questions were constructed by using five-item Likert scale whereby respondents were instructed to provide their opinions among the alternative choices including strongly disagree (1), disagree (2); neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data for demographic characteristics of respondents and data for the first and the second research questions. Data collected for demographic characteristics of respondents were analyzed by using frequencies and percentages with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data for the first and second research questions were analyzed by using mean score with the aid of SPSS. Mean scores were interpreted by using the scale presented in

Table 2.

Data for the third research question were analyzed by using inferential statistics by means of Pearson Correlation Coefficient.

Validity and Reliability

Face validity and content validity checked to ensure questionnaire and interview instruments are clear and include related concepts of the research study. Two education experts from the faculty of education of the University of Arusha were consulted to check face and content validity of the research instruments. Content validity was done to ensure that research instruments examine the intended research topic. A pilot study was carried out to pre-test the data collection instruments prior to the massive data collection. To realize these, 10 questionnaires issued to randomly selected participants for pilot testing, as recommended by Fink (2009).

Reliability is used to measure the extent to which the research instruments produce similar results even after they are replicated consistently. The study ensured reliability of research instruments by using the Cronbach's Alpha technique (Table 3). The questionnaire instrument administered to 30 secondary school teachers. Afterwards

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
GENDER		
Female	53	58.2
Male	38	41.8
Total	91	100
AGE		
18 to 30	38	41.8
31 to 40	38	41.8
41 to 50	9	9.9
51 and above	6	6.6
Total	91	100

Source: Field Data (2021)

the data entered and analyzed using SPSS. Polit and Beck (2008) argue that reliability of 0.6 minimally accepted and reliability of 0.75 is regarded as excellent.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

It was necessary to present the demographics of respondents in terms of gender and age, in order for readers to know the type of people who participated in the study. Therefore, Table 4 describes the demographic characteristics of such respondents.

As shown in Table 4, majority of respondents 53 (58.2%) were females while the males were 38 (41.8%). These findings suggest that majority of teachers in public secondary schools are females.

As far as age is concerned, those with 18 to 30 years and 31 to 40 years tallied with 41.8% each, followed by those within the age group of 41 to 50. The least were those within the age of 51 years and above. Therefore, various age groups were engaged in this study. These findings suggest that public secondary schools in Arusha City are composed of teachers from different age groups.

Data Analysis for Research Questions

Research Question 1:

What is the situation of COVID-19 at public secondary schools in Arusha City? The findings are presented in Table 5.

As indicated in Table 5, respondents agreed with the first three items in the questionnaire regarding the COVID-19 situation. Particularly, they agreed that their schools were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is supported by the history whereby at the beginning of the year 2020, the government of Tanzania announced that schools should be closed for a period of one month. They also agreed that the school community was surrounded by fear during intensive

COVID-19 situation. Furthermore, respondents agreed that their school calendar had been disrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Research Question 2:

What is the extent of implementation of free education policy in government secondary schools in Arusha City?

Data for this question were analyzed by using mean scores on SPSS. The findings are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that respondents disagreed that their schools have enough teachers for all subjects and that the schools have enough textbooks for all students. This is a very important finding which is an eye opener for school supervisors to ensure the good supply of teachers and textbooks which are key factors for the effective implementation of the free education policy in the schools under investigation.

Findings presented in Table 6 also show that respondents were neutral on whether schools have abolished parent's contributions, whether schools provide lunch, whether schools receive enough supplies. These responses could be attributed to the nature of respondents who were teachers who are not involved in school management.

Finally, respondents disagreed that their schools had cases of COVID-19 among students and teachers. This means that even though the COVID-19 pandemic had contracted many people in the country, the schools under investigation did not have any case of infection.

Research Question 3:

Is there any significant relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic situation and the implementation of free education policy at public secondary schools in Arusha City?

The third research question called for a hypothesis testing and therefore was analyzed by Pearson Correlation with the help of the SPSS in order to establish whether the COVID-19 situation affected the implementation of Free

Table 5. Situation of COVID-19 at Schools

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MEAN	SD	INTERPRETATION
1	My school was closed during COVID-19 pandemic	4.1538	1.26424	Agree
2	The school community was surrounded by fear during intensive COVID-19 pandemic	4.0659	1.15280	Agree
3	My school calendar has been disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic	3.8901	1.40199	Agree
4	I faced depression during COVID-19 pandemic in my school	3.3626	1.37045	Neutral
5	My schools has had cases of COVID-19 among teachers	1.9121	1.12199	Disagree
6	My schools has had cases of COVID-19 among students	1.8022	.94540	Disagree

Source: Field Data (2021)

Table 6. Implementation of Free Education

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	MEAN	SD	INTERPRETATION
1	My school implements free education policy by abolishing school fee	3.7033	1.21559	Agree
2	My school implements free education policy by relying on government to provide teaching and learning materials	3.4615	1.14802	Neutral
3	My school receives free education funds on time	3.4176	1.11620	Neutral
4	My school implements free education policy by relying only on government grants	3.1889	1.17936	Neutral
5	My school supplies enough learning and teaching resources	3.1429	1.43427	Neutral
6	My school provide lunch for students	2.9451	1.37730	Neutral
7	My school implements free education policy by abolishing parents contributions	2.8681	1.19451	Neutral
8	My school has adequate physical facilities for all learners	2.6813	1.21910	Neutral
9	My school has enough teachers in all subjects	2.5604	1.24015	Disagreed
10	My school has enough textbooks for all students	2.4333	1.09185	Disagreed

Source: Field Data (2021)

Table 7. Correlation between COVID-19 and Free Education Policy Implementation

VARIABLES		COVID	FREE EDUCATION
COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	1	.223*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033
	N	91	91
FREEEDUCATION	Pearson Correlation	.223*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	
	N	91	91

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data (2021)

Education Policy in the schools under investigation. The nature of possible correlations would be either positive or negative and its interpretation based on the Cohen's formula as follows: $\geq .70$ = strong relationship; $\geq .50$ = moderate relationship and $\leq .50$ = weak relationship.

This research question sought to establish whether COVID-19 had affected the implementation of the free education policy in schools under investigation. The research question called for testing the following null hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic situation and the implementation of free education policy at public secondary schools in Arusha*

City.

As indicated in Table 7, there is the Sig of .030 which is lesser than the critical value (0.05) and the r of .233 which signifies a very weak positive correlation between the COVID-19 situation and the implementation of the free education policy in schools under investigation. This leads us to reject the null hypothesis and maintain that there is a significant relationship between the COVID-19 situation and the implementation of the free education policy. This suggests that the implementers of free education policy were a bit more careful during the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure that the free education policy is implemented effectively.

DISCUSSION

With regards to the first research question, the findings of the current study are in line with previous studies. A study by Msigwa (2021) showed that COVID-19 has affected education governance in Tanzania in terms of delays in implementation of school time table. School time was extended to accommodate the three months which were lost when students were at home. Moreover, findings by the UNICEF (2020) also revealed that COVID-19 has affected provision of education in African countries. According to UNICEF (2020), measures such as school closures caused by the pandemic worsened the earlier existing inequalities in provision of education, and that children who were already at risk of being barred from quality education have been mostly affected.

Findings for the second research question are similar to previous studies by David (2014); Saga, (2014); Kisakali and Kuznetsov (2015) who have also found that implementation of free education policy in Tanzania is affected by limited resources such as shortage of textbooks.

Findings in the third research question have shown that there is relationship between COVID-19 and implementation of free education policy among public secondary schools in Arusha City. The foregoing findings are in line with previous studies. A study by Msigwa (2021) showed that COVID-19 has affected education governance in Tanzania in terms of delays in implementation of school time table. School time table was extended to accommodate the three months which were lost when students were at home.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Assisting and supervision of learning burden of managing learning was governed largely by parents. For many parents this was undesirable because it increased pressure on them due to too many responsibilities they have. Some families did not have a literate person who can assist learning; neither the father nor the mother has gone to school. So, it was crucial to find ways to reduce the burden on parents for example, providing learners with information about educational content in various websites, on television, or radios and giving them a guide and advice on home learning. COVID-19 has affected provision of free education in terms of disruption of school time table leading to inefficiency in completion of syllabus. Public secondary schools in Arusha City implement free education policy by abolishing school fee. Moreover, findings have shown that implementation of free education at public secondary schools is affected by shortage of teachers and shortage of teaching resources such as textbooks, laboratories and libraries. Also, this study concludes that there is significance relationship between COVID-19 and implementation of free education policy.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following are the recommendations that were made:

This study recommends that the government should increase grants for education to schools so as to allow schools to have adequate supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) such as hand sanitizers, and face masks.

The government should also deploy education capitation grants on time so as to allow schools to accommodate needs of teachers and students during the pandemic.

The government should also allow schools to receive contributions from parents, private sectors and non-governmental organizations. This will help schools manage buying supplies for protection of members of the school against COVID-19.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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