

Psychosocial Support On Changed Students Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges And Prospects

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Abstract This research sought to investigate the role of Psychosocial Support on changed students amidst Covid-19 pandemic by assessing the challenges and prospects. The specific objectives were to: establish the challenges of protracted Covid-19 pandemic influencing psychosocial support on changed students' behaviors; investigate the extent to which schools have achieved the benefits of psychosocial support on changed students' behaviors; determine the extent to which psychosocial support programs can be improved in schools. The research adopted descriptive and purposive sampling research methods and questionnaires with both open and closed ended items were administered to 14 secondary school teachers. Data was presented through tables, analyzed using frequencies and discussed. The findings show that PSS programs plays a crucial role in curriculum implementation in schools despite the challenges experienced which can be mitigated.

Index Terms- Psychosocial support, Covid-19 pandemic, Challenges, Prospects, Curriculum,

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly discusses psychosocial support on changed learners and what it entails amidst coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

British Psychological Society (BPS) (2020) shows that the provision of psychosocial activities is often mentioned during humanitarian crises. Therefore, amidst COVID-19 pandemic, there is need to understand what psychosocial activities exactly refer to and what these programs consist of, and how effective they are in supporting changed students' behaviors. The COVID-19 disruption has had some serious impact of trauma on students' well-being and mental health, which can manifest in depression, shame, withdrawal or aggression. Therefore, it is important to

understand psychosocial support on changed students and what it entails amidst COVID-19 pandemic.

The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support (2014) states that psychosocial refers to "the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimension of a person, where one influences the other."

Ager et al (2011) explain the relationship between the psychological aspects of development and the social aspects of development where psychological aspects of development refer to an individual's thoughts, emotions, behaviors, memories, perceptions, and understanding whereas on the other hand, the social aspects of development refer to the interaction and relationships among the individual, family, peers, and community.

Mattingly (2017) states, "psychosocial support is an approach which moves away from focusing on individual clinically based diagnoses to focusing on holistic, broad-based preventative programs that promote resilience and develop coping strategies across the entire affected group." This leads to improvements in general stress related symptoms among those with and without specific disorders and can thereby significantly reduce the numbers of those that do require any specialist intervention. It refers to psychosocial programs that are integrated in curriculum implementation in school using multi-sectoral approaches.

Halladay, Danna, Maze, Pickens and Ake (2020) see psychosocial supports as approaches of schools creating trauma-informed learning environments by promoting the wellness of all students, ensuring they feel safe and supported physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. It is a way of promoting healthy interactions among students and staff, and teaching social, emotional and self-regulation skills. According to Halladay et al

(2020) these skills and interactions are even more essential during COVID-19 pandemic.

The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2010a) refers to psychosocial support (PSS) as the “processes and actions that promote the holistic wellbeing of people in their social world. It includes support provided by family and friends.” Psychosocial support can also be described as “a process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families and communities, to help them recover after a crisis has disrupted their lives and to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events.

According to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2016), “Psychosocial support focuses on most or all the affected population regardless of individual differences in traumatic stress reactions and that it is education that can offer learners a safe, stable environment, and help restore a sense of normality, dignity, and hope by providing both some structure and supportive activities along with social and emotional learning.” Further, United Nations Children’s Fund (2016) recommends the provision of psychosocial support should focus on three core aspects: skills and knowledge; emotional well-being; and social well-being. For Nicolai (2003), “the process of psychosocial support is rooted in three main approaches that have to be considered during crises. They include the non-formal education initiatives and safe spaces, training teachers on psychosocial issues and psychosocial support, and the introduction of new curriculum or learning content.”

The process of psychosocial support, notes Global Education Cluster (2012), “promotes child-friendly activities which encourage the development of children’s pro-social behaviors, including enhanced self-esteem, hope and a sense of self-efficacy and increases protection of children.” According to Reyes (2013), “in contexts of crises, psychosocial support contributes to well-being, and well-being to learning which are therefore inextricably linked. Reyes (2013) suggests that a three-tiered approach for promoting the social and emotional well-being of students should focus on classroom and school climate, teaching pedagogy and school personnel support, and student skill building. Weare and Nind (2011) show that social and emotional learning (SEL) programs, especially in crisis contexts are indispensable of psychosocial support programs which are more oriented towards children’s psychological and social well-being. The two tend to operate simultaneously and build on one another and are considered the heart of most educational programs designed to support students’ healing, social cohesion, and resilience.

The World Bank (2013) states that SEL competencies are core and often outlined in most programs intended to build social cohesion before, during and after a crisis. They are most effective and designed to empower students to have improved academic, social

and emotional learning outcomes. According to World Bank (2013), each country should empower teachers with psychosocial knowledge and skills, vital to support students during and after a crisis. Teachers should be well advised on how to integrate the SEL components and processes into their academic programs and classroom instruction to boost students’ engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom. The World Bank (2013) report shows that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can assist in implementing the practice of training of trainers, which involves a short-term training of community members and teachers in the basic skills of psychosocial intervention and alleviation of distress. There is need for regular teacher professional in-service trainings and consultation during a crisis.

II Background to the Research

Internationally, it is noted that humanitarian crises are on the rise causing threats in terms of people’s health, safety, education or well-being. Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic captures the world’s focus and was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 30 January 2020 and on 11 March 2020 recognized Covid-19 as a pandemic, prompting a global closure of schools and affecting an estimated 1.6 billion learners worldwide (UNESCO, 2020).

In the United States of America (USA), at the start of the pandemic, the Washington Department of Health (WDOH) (2020) forecasted (based on models derived from population-level responses to disasters) that “impacts from the Covid-19 outbreak and related government actions will likely cause a surge in behavioral health symptoms across the state.” Globally, data indicates these predictions have come to pass. According to WHO (2020) census data, symptoms of anxiety and depression increased gradually across countries worldwide, higher than pre-Covid-19 levels for patients under 27 years old. Further, the WHO (2020) report show that, for instance in USA, mental health issues for youth (aged 12-17) increased by 31% during Covid-19 pandemic. This trend has also been found at inpatient hospital facilities in other countries globally and from June 2020 it was found that mental health conditions due to the effects of the pandemic had disproportionately affected young adults (aged 18-24) and one in four young adults was found to have seriously considered suicide – an increase from one in 10 young adults pre-pandemic.

In the Caribbean, Parker and Alfaro (2021) show that Covid-19 threatens to reverse the progress made so far on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and its target 4.5, which aims to eliminate disparities in “access to all levels of education for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.” Further, Parker and Alfaro (2021) confirm that the pandemic led to closure of education

facilities from March 2020 onwards impacting negatively on estimated 12 million learners in 29 Caribbean countries. The crisis risks the well-being of students.

Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic forced governments worldwide, Kenya included, to introduce travel restrictions, inadvertently stopping aid workers from travelling, and thereby hampering humanitarian responses. Also, in-country aid workers have been unable to deliver vital services because of governments restrictions aimed at protecting their own citizens. Countries have been forced to operate under strict lockdown regulations as they try to return to normality, limiting students' access to basic education services and other opportunities (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020).

In Kenya, the government announced the first case of Covid-19 on 13 March 2020 through an executive order and closed all learning institutions on 16 March 2020. The move saw the Government of Kenya (GoK) ratify WHO measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on citizens' well-being and students' academic progress. The GoK established a mitigation committee at the national level, coordinated by the Cabinet Secretaries of the Ministry of Education, Health and Interior, which gave daily briefs on the state of the Covid-19 crisis in the country. Some of the measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus included social distancing, a dusk-to-dawn curfew and a ban on public gatherings. In addition to school closures, conventional after-school tutoring that a number of teachers offer privately to students in the homes of either teachers or pupils or in rented outlets was halted (GoK, 2020a).

Just like in other countries worldwide, the GoK adopted a shift to alternative instructional platforms, including virtual platforms and other social media to offer remote learning to students. However, despite a shift to alternative instructional platforms, which adopted existing technology-based remote teaching and learning approaches, little progress and success was recorded, as teachers and parents were not adequately prepared and requisite technological competencies were lacking. Over time, the long-term closure of schools seriously affected students' well-being, curriculum learning objectives, and desired course learning outcomes. Parents could supervise learning from home and ensuring that students undertake studies using the approaches adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology amidst Covid-19 pandemic has been a big challenge (Human Rights Watch 2020).

Rationale for Inclusion of Psychosocial Support in Education Settings

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) acknowledges that during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic,

prolonged school closures resulted in a reversal of educational gains, limiting children's educational and vocational opportunities as well as their social and emotional interactions and development. The longer a student stays out of school, the higher the risk of dropping out. Additionally, students who are out of school, particularly girls, are at increased risk of vulnerabilities, for instance subject to greater rates of violence and exploitation, child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Furthermore, prolonged school closures interrupt and disrupt the provision of, and access to, essential school-based services such as guidance and counseling in terms of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), school feeding and nutrition programs, and immunization. The WHO (2020) recommends that as COVID-19 pandemic becomes more protracted, there is a growing need for all countries worldwide to ensure that concerned stakeholders, especially teachers, have appropriate mechanisms and capabilities to offer psychosocial support to learners to assist them cope well with the evolving complications and situations.

The right to education, which is codified in multiple binding and non-binding international legal instruments, for instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (Articles 2, 26) and United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64th session, 290 on Education in Emergencies (2010) show that during a crisis, education remains a human right, relevant to all children worldwide (Alexander, Boothby & Wessells, 2010). Long-term exposure to a crisis without appropriate mitigation can be damaging to both physical and mental health. During such crisis situations, children face lots of risks and vulnerabilities which call for well-designed and appropriate psychosocial support activities that can enhance resilience processes and mitigate the vulnerabilities (UNESCO, 2020). Education is the relevant channel through which to provide such psychosocial support activities. According to Alexander, Boothby and Wessells (2010), education can offer: a stable routine and structure and support a sense of normality, all factors that can support children in healing and developing resilience; opportunities for friendship, as well as peer and adult support; and relational supports enhancing social cohesion to help children recover from distressing experiences and develop social and emotional skills. A report by the American School Counselor Association (2020) shows that during school re-entry amidst COVID-19 pandemic, supporting students' social and emotional learning and mental and behavioral health is vital because during the pandemic, the right to education is also critically affected. As such, it is incumbent upon the international community to look for the best way to continue providing education and offering psychosocial supports that enhance well-being to all students. The WHO (2020) recommends that globally, Ministry of Education and Health, education planners, and teachers should ensure that educational programs that support and enhance the psychosocial well-being of all students are adhered to.

In Kenya, the Government of Kenya (GoK) (2020a) report reiterates World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) findings that protracted COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to greater behavioral and health challenges on children and schools should have effective psychosocial supports on changed students, which should be conducted in liaison with Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and World Health Organization COVID-19 policy protocols to minimize the risks of the pandemic to all stakeholders, especially students. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in liaison with the WHO COVID-19 protocols and Ministry of Health (MoH) planned for re-opening of schools amidst COVID-19 pandemic. The MoE prioritized: efforts to address psychological and social learning which touches on the mental and behavioral health needs of students and equally important, the staff; sensitization on all policies or recommendations put across by MoH and WHO for safety of all learners and staff; equity and access to education by all students (GoK, 2020a). The GoK acknowledges education that supports the psychosocial well-being of students; especially those affected a crisis like COVID-19 pandemic.

Well-designed psychosocial support (PSS) programs in school can enhance resilience processes and mitigate the vulnerabilities students are facing amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Safe schools and non-formal learning spaces are some of the most beneficial environments for students during a period of uncertainty, like COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, investment in education-based PSS programs will protect students from the negative effects of COVID-19 pandemic. Well-designed PSS programs create stable educational routines, opportunities and experiences that may contribute to building of resilience, coping skills and self-esteem on changed students in the ages 25 and below, who may have been isolated for long due to overwhelming risks of the pandemic (Halladay, Danna, Maze, Pickens & Ake, 2020). Psychosocial supports would improve students' capacity to learn by refining their sensibility to cope with emerging issues in future (Parker & Alfaro, 2021). Students look to their teachers for support in terms of guidance and counseling on how to cope with humanitarian crises (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), 2018) and COVID-19 pandemic is indispensable of psychosocial supports to changed students (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), 2020).

III LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review presents an overview on re-opening of schools amidst Covid-19 pandemic, determinants of PSS, challenges, and prospects.

Overview on Re-opening of Schools amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2016) notes that humanitarian crises are on the rise across the globe, with an increasing number of man-made, natural disasters,

and climate-related episodes disrupting entire communities. Such crises are uncertain and can complicate situations if protracted and along with the day-to-day challenges of living, forcibly put children below 18 years at greater risks of suffering feelings of despair and hopelessness. Burde et al (2015) study notes, 'the resultant lack of learning and skill development, during crises, puts the affected learners at risk of future unemployment, low wages, stigmatization, and other social and economic disadvantages.' The WHO (2020) report reiterates findings by UNHCR (2016) and Burde et al (2015) that, "Re-opening of schools amidst the Covid-19 pandemic has been protracted and has had measurable effects on the well-being of students globally, in terms of education, health, inter-schools' interactions, and recreations." Therefore, re-opening of schools amidst Covid-19 pandemic has forced governments worldwide to adopt the WHO (2020) COVID-19 pandemic policy protocols with clear and discernible pattern as well as a rationale for PSS on changed learners. It is expected that school systems will consider creating, supporting and sustaining trauma-informed approaches to help students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn. This is rooted in PSS programmes which help to build resilience and coping skills within students (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 2020).

In Kenya, the GoK (2020a) report shows that schools re-opened at the beginning of January 2021 under strict guidelines from WHO, MoH and MoE. Further, the GoK (2020a) report notes that the protracted COVID-19 pandemic has affected many students' mental health, especially those who are vulnerable, due to underlying health conditions or are in situations considered to be at a higher risk of infection. The GoK (2020a) confirms that psychosocial support on changed students amidst COVID-19 pandemic is a crucial requirement and recommends that key stakeholders, especially policy planners, educationists, administrators, health officers and teachers, should ensure curriculum implementation runs effectively by addressing the need for PSS on changed students as touted globally by WHO (2020); Kaufmann (2016); and Burde, Guven, Kelcey, Lahmann (2015).

Determinants of Psychosocial Supports on Changed Students

Psychosocial support (PSS) is acknowledged globally due to the fact that education is a human right, relevant to all children, including those affected by emergencies, crises and pandemics. The right to education touts the need for safety and protection of students, to which PSS will appropriately contribute amidst COVID-19 pandemic (UNOCHA, 2020). Psychosocial support allows the international community to continue providing education to all students amidst COVID-19 pandemic. It brings all stakeholders together, ensuring that educational programs run effectively, and students' well-being supported through guiding them psychologically and socially. It is believed, 'Psychosocial supports will enhance successful teaching and learning amidst COVID-19 pandemic and help students to learn more readily and participate fully in classroom activities (WHO, 2020).

Kaufmann (2016) notes, 'Psychosocial well-being is based on an inseparable combination of biological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, social, mental, and material aspects of experience. Instead of focusing exclusively on the physical or psychological aspects of health and well-being, psychosocial programs emphasize the

totality of people's experience and underline the need to view these issues within the context of the wider family and community networks in which they occur. Further, Kaufmann (2016) states, 'The ways in which children respond to the stress of a crisis depend on their own circumstances and characteristics. These include individual factors such as age, sex, personality, and personal and cultural background. The risks to children amidst a crisis are also exacerbated by their stage of development and gender. Other factors are linked to the nature of the traumatic events, including their frequency and the length of exposure to the crisis.' In Burde et al (2015) study, "psychosocial programs that offer opportunities for students to participate in structured, meaningful activities including education, recreation, and interacting with peers well depend on government's support in terms of finances, training of key stakeholders on how to curb the spread and risks, networking through communication and referrals to specialist teams.' According to UNICEF (2020), "A supportive environment in which a child's family, school and community are connected provides the best foundation for psychosocial support. Education settings can facilitate effective PSS programs on changed students. Further, education settings bring together all key stakeholders ranging from students, parents, teachers, community leaders to other service providers like governments, NGOs, and private partnership companies. Therefore, an activity that focuses on addressing a crisis at the level of a child's social ecology, such as psychosocial support, is vital but should consider policy protocols for its implementation at school level. The UNICEF (2020) report concludes, "When designing PSS programs amidst a humanitarian crisis, educationists and policymakers should keep these linkages in mind and ensure that they are complemented and synchronized at other levels of education. To promote holistic and sustainable change, a new policy on PSS can be accompanied by or aligned with school-level initiatives to promote conducive classroom-management techniques and to establish protection-referral systems and complaint mechanisms.

Challenges amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

The WHO (2020) report shows that most countries re-opened schools amidst COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of January 2021 under strict guidelines as mitigation measures. However, the protracted COVID-19 pandemic has affected many students' mental health, especially those who are vulnerable, due to underlying health conditions or are in situations considered to be at a higher risk of infection. The UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and WFP (2020) report states, "Re-opening of schools amidst COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many students to multiple types of burdens and stressors. The back-to-school strategy therefore should address the physical, mental, and financial needs of students recovering from the aftermath of the pandemic."

According to WHO (2020), challenges may assist teachers, policy planners, service providers like governments and NGOs among others to determine what has worked or has not worked in helping students to protect and promote their well-being and that of others by, for example, identifying risks and responses to stress, and how their impact can be managed or mitigated. The WHO (2020) report affirm that COVID-19 pandemic has caused challenges on everyone, need for PSS on changed students' behaviors.

A study by Halladay et al (2020) show that during COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and school administration in particular are facing traumatic stress on well-being of school community which spills over to students causing additional stress. Teaching methods and practices have changed, and students have been forced to learn new skills and technology platforms under pressure. Also, many students have been forced to have the necessary means including internet access to shift to working from their homes. This has added stress to students' personal studies at home coupled with other stressors such as family members at home facing economic insecurity or having concerns for their own health and the health of loved ones. Teachers have faced a great deal of challenges trying to connect with their students and share concerns. Some students attend lessons sporadically or not at all. Other students are living in unconducive conditions and unable to connect one-on-one with teachers or friends to complete school assignments send online. All of these layered issues have the potential to contribute to anxiety, depression, or symptoms of secondary traumatic stress.

Parker and Alfaro (2021) note, "While some Caribbean countries and territories re-opened their schools in early January, the COVID-19 pandemic is still active and national education systems operate under very difficult conditions. This situation has imposed several challenges for effective curriculum implementation. Firstly, national education officials, school principals and teachers are still coping with this new reality, with little time available to engage in research activities. Secondly, the situation has also prevented any opportunity to engage with the stakeholders in person. Thirdly, the adverse effects of COVID-19 on the education system have paralyzed time and costs to conduct more expansive fieldwork, including surveys for schools, families or students." World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) indicates, "During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide have introduced travel restrictions, inadvertently stopping aid workers from travelling, and thereby hampering humanitarian responses. Also, in-country aid workers have been unable to deliver vital services because of governments restrictions aimed at protecting their own citizens. Countries across the world operate under strict lockdown regulations as they try to return to normality, limiting students' access to basic education services and other opportunities. COVID-19 pandemic has displaced entire world, causing measurable effects on the well-being of students. It has left long-term disruption of every aspect of daily living, including health, sanitation, recreation, and education." World Bank (2020) notes, "The uncertainty of COVID-19 pandemic and with the day-to-day challenges of living and a lack of long-term solutions puts children at greater risk of suffering feelings of despair and hopelessness. Further, World Bank (2020) states, "Parents, especially those who lost jobs or spent time in quarantine, are not able to afford tuition fees during re-opening of schools amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Further, governments' funding in schools in Africa has been a problem, affecting students' attendance. Therefore, countries are to be prepared in terms of psychosocial supports to students, not just during the pandemic but moving forward, even after. Countries need to think about social and emotional learning and mental health support that students need, which is the foundation of the education programs provided in schools to serve students better."

In Kenya, the GoK (2020a) report notes, “Schools re-opened with examinable cohorts resuming in-person learning on 12th October 2020 and on 4th January 2021, for all learners resumed. Upon resumption, it was evident that after a close to nine and a half months closure of all schools, learners were struggling with various aspects of challenges despite strict guidelines from WHO, MoH and MoE. Also, the back-to-school campaign itself had many challenges. For instance, some students were not able to return right away; especially those supporting their families. Some still require further flexible modalities or time to re-adjust. Notably, the long stay at home exposed some students to drugs and substance abuse while others, especially girls, were exposed to early relationships and unwanted pregnancies. Others became social media addicts, particularly those hooked to pornography. Nevertheless, others encountered parental violence, verbal or physical abuse, leading to psychological torture.” The GoK (2020a) concludes, “The protracted COVID-19 pandemic has affected many students’ mental health, especially those who are vulnerable, due to underlying health conditions or are in situations considered to be at a higher risk of infection. Besides, needy students stopped receiving incentives like school uniforms and scholarships putting them at risks of not returning to school. The GoK (2020a) recommends, “There is need for widespread alignment of psychosocial support programs in teaching and learning to ensure a unified response to disruptions of COVID-19 pandemic. Coordination among all stakeholders and collective decision-making initiatives is vital.”

Prospects amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

Globally, countries re-opened schools at the beginning of January 2021 under strict guidelines from World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministries of Education (MoEs), psychosocial support for learners by teachers and other stakeholders being the major requirement (Parker & Alfaro, 2021). Globally, teachers were encouraged to be aware of some children who are at risk already, but protracted COVID-19 pandemic would mean that others are now at risk and staff should begin to identify these children in advance of school opening and carefully monitor them. Prospects were that psychosocial support (PSS) is a crucial program that would address the mental well-being of the school community, learners being the key target (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) 2020). Countries have been forced to stick to COVID-19 protocols and assess their students through teachers and school administrators to know the extent to which psychosocial support would influence students’ changed behaviors, health and concentration on academic work, whose effects are stigma combined with lockdowns, isolations, shifting of educational programs and social gathering opportunities, and change of lifestyles due to parental job or income loss, and death (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) 2020).

Observing one meter (1M) social distance in schools, places of public gathering, and nonessential businesses and also regular washing of hands using soap and sanitizing are regarded as good measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. At home, parents and other caregivers are advised to continue reminding their children on COVID-19 protocols as a means of adjusting to the new

normal. Further, parents are advised to try and keep children occupied, feeling safe, and continue with schoolwork as best as possible. It is envisaged that it helps to make children stay focused on academic work, reinforcing a sense of control and reassurance that they are okay, and that the situation will get better (GoK, 2020a).

Statement of the problem

Learning institutions in Kenya were closed by Friday March 20th, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic as the government geared to control transmissions. This immediate closure together with other measures put in place to keep all citizens safe and healthy such as curfews, lockdowns, facemask wearing, stay at home directives and social distancing measures kept many students without other forms of learning, especially those whose parents and school administrators did not embrace digital learning forums. Successful teaching and learning require social contacts and opportunities for material use. In Kenya, many students come from varied socio-economic and educational backgrounds whose catchment areas also influence their well-being and academic performance in school.

As the Government of Kenya (GoK), local authorities and school leaders were assessing the situation and weighing options to re-open schools as part of the recovery from COVID-19 pandemic, it was vital to recognize the multiple roles that teachers play in the lives of children, families and the community. In its concerted efforts, the GoK’s first advice was on the return to school policy which came with initiatives like phased re-opening of all schools with examinable cohorts resuming in-person learning on 12th October 2020 and all schools reopening on 4th January 2021 for all learners. The second directive was adhering to COVID-19 protocols, strict guidelines from WHO, MoH and MoE. The third directive was of adopting a psychosocial support (PSS) perspective on the process of re-engaging students with schoolwork. However, despite the GoK’s concerted efforts put in place as interventions, upon resumption, it was evident that after a close to nine and a half months closure of all schools, schools received students who were at risk already due to protracted COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that the school community was also at risk with varied challenges. The GoK, through the MoE sensitized teachers to begin by identifying students struggling with various aspects of challenges in advance of school opening and carefully monitor them. Also, the back-to-school campaign itself had many challenges. For instance, some students were not able to return right away especially those supporting their families. Some required further flexible modalities or time to re-adjust. Others were exposed to drugs and substance abuse. Many girls were exposed to early relationships and unwanted pregnancies. Others became social media addicts, hooked to pornography. Nevertheless, others encountered parental violence leading to psychological torture. Needy students stopped receiving

incentives like sanitary towels for girls, school uniforms and scholarships putting them at risks of not returning to school. According to GoK (2020a), “The protracted COVID-19 pandemic has affected many students’ mental health, especially those who are vulnerable, due to underlying health conditions or are in situations considered to be at a higher risk of infection. Bringing them right away to school was difficult.”

Research shows that psychosocial support programs on changed students’ behaviors plays vital role during a humanitarian crisis. But will PSS be of benefit amidst COVID-19 pandemic when students learning opportunities are threatened?

This research gears to determine the influence of PSS on changed students’ behaviours in Kenyan secondary schools. This research therefore seeks to establish the influence of PSS on changed students’ behaviours in two schools in Kenya; Lavington Girls Secondary School in Nairobi City County and Masinde Muliro Memorial Secondary School in Trans Nzoia West Sub-County as students resumed amidst COVID-19 pandemic after a prolonged closure and examining the challenges and prospects and is guided by the following questions:

- (i) What are the challenges of protracted COVID-19 pandemic influencing psychosocial support on changed students’ behaviours?
- (ii) To what extent have schools achieved the benefits of psychosocial support on changed students’ behaviors?
- (iii) How can psychosocial support programs be improved in schools?

Research objectives

The objectives of the research are:

- (i) To establish the challenges of protracted COVID-19 pandemic influencing psychosocial support on changed students’ behaviours.
- (ii) To investigate the extent to which schools have achieved the benefits of psychosocial support on changed students’ behaviors.
- (iii) To determine the extent to which psychosocial support programs can be improved in schools.

Theory Supporting the Research

Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory of human development is used in this research. It is regarded as a useful psychological framework to understand the influences of the interacting systems and contexts that surround students and help the re-engage in academic work as schools re-open amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Tudge et al (2009) study explain that Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological (2005)

theory of human development is such a synchronized multi-level approach that can make people think systemically in a given crisis. Tedeschi et al (2018) study on ‘Posttraumatic Growth’ also cite Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory of human development as key when faced with a crisis. The two studies quote the uses and misuse of the theory.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) theory states that schools are viewed as systems supporting the view that everyone in that system has their part to play, from the student to teachers through to government departments. This helps to ease school-based learning programs. This theory also considers the challenges all stakeholders may encounter during a crisis ranging from the government, community, school, family and child levels and offers recommendations for action to prepare and support the return to school.

Humanitarian crises are a natural part of human development and present opportunities for both personal growth and huge challenges as we adapt to them. Each school community has its own unique characteristics and will therefore need to develop their own plans to support the process of integrating a new program like psychosocial support in curriculum implementation process. The theory presents vital views that focus on resilience, coping and strengths that can assist in facilitating psychosocial supports to foster a sense of connection and belonging on changed students’ behaviors amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the theory carefully shows how to plan for the school reopening procedures and how the school community can help to identify specific needs and to ensure effective support and resources are available at an early stage in the process. This is presented diagrammatically by Tudge et al (2009) as follows:

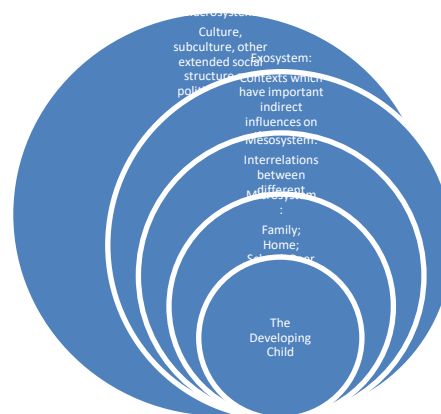


Figure 1.1: Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model (1979)

The model shows that systems are interrelated to each other, indicating that planning is helpful at different system levels. Those involved with planning the return to school should ensure that their response considers:

- The influence of social structures, political policy and culture (the Macrosystem)

- Community and local authority services (the Exosystem)
- School and family influences (the Microsystem)
- A focus on the individual in their context

The influence of social structures, political policy and culture (Macrosystem):

This includes national government policy formulated during a crisis. Globally, governments formulated some policy guidelines, aligned to WHO (2020) COVID-19 protocols, on schools reopening. Also, processes to support teaching and learning amidst COVID-19 pandemic to reduce the transmission of infections have been well outlined.

Community and local authority services (the Exosystem):

Schools are found in communities. There is a linkage between the wider community and schools. During COVID-19 pandemic, schools have to retain close and regular contacts with their community members via telephone or online. Community members are parents and guardians to students. Schools can use these contacts and relationships within the community to explore and understand the specific challenges and issues students have faced during the pandemic. This knowledge can be used to inform the plans to re-engage students in psychosocial supports. This process also builds trust and enhances resilience and a sense of belonging among students. Involving community members, teachers, parents and students in the process of re-opening of schools and identifying those affected amidst COVID-19 to offer psychosocial support helps to promote a healthier future for the whole school community (Parker & Alfaro, 2021).

Schools, Families and Friends (Microsystem):

Just like at the community level, consultation processes at school level are vital. Schools should engage students' families and friends when planning internal programs to support returning to school. Parents and guardians should be informed about psychosocial support programs in school and their perspective, meant to help students' mental health and psychological well-being. School leadership should highlight the importance of any new program to parents in a clear, open and decisive leadership manner so as to build a resilient community. This is particularly important amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Through such linkages, teachers are made aware of some children who are at risk already and that COVID-19 pandemic will continue torturing them psychologically. Teachers therefore begin to identify in advance those students affected to offer psychosocial support and carefully monitor them (Parker & Alfaro, 2021).

The Developing Child:

Students' individual needs have to be considered well. Teachers should be aware that students come from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Some students may have faced many challenges and coped well during the school closures, but for others they may have experienced considerable trauma, loss and hardship. Governments' restrictions on interactions through lock downs, curfews and lack of learning opportunities may have reduced

student's sense of belonging and caused isolations and unpleasant experiences. There is need for teachers to understand individual learner's needs, experiences and emotions as they return to school. Tedeschi, Shakespeare-Finch, Taku and Calhoun (2018) state that actively involving students in psychosocial support activities in school help to reduce their worries, fostering resilience and resolving their difficulties that they have gone through during a crisis.

IV RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Research Methodology

The study adopted a case study design (Best & Kahn, 2006 as this can be generalized in other schools as social institutions (Orodho, Khatete & Mugiraneza, 2016). The researcher collected information about respondents' opinions on the influence of PSS on changed students' behaviours amidst COVID-19 pandemic after a prolonged closure.

The target population constituted 14 teachers rich in information on Covid-19 challenges and prospects in schools. The study adopted a purposive sampling technique with a sample size of 14 teachers.

To determine instrument reliability, the raw scores obtained from teachers' questionnaires were summarized, coded, edited and synthesized to reveal the essence of data.

Research Findings and Discussion

Objective 1: Challenges of protracted COVID-19 pandemic affecting psychosocial support on changed students' behaviours.

In order to answer this question, it was prerequisite for the researcher to establish responses from teachers whether they understood psychosocial support programme in school amidst Covid-19 pandemic to deal with challenge, risks and vulnerabilities students faced amidst Covid-19 pandemic. Varied definitions were captured from teachers and summarized as follows:

Table 1: Teacher Definitions

Definitions
Programmes providing mental health support and emotional stability to learners, teachers and other staff members during Covid-19 pandemic.
Programmes meant to support mental, emotional, social and spiritual needs of those affected by Covid-19 pandemic.
Programmes with support and guidelines that students and staff receive in school against Covid-19 pandemic.
Programmes to cope with mechanisms put in place by WHO and governments during Covid-19 pandemic.

Programmes to guide teachers monitor students' psychological behaviour during Covid-19 pandemic.
Programmes giving support to children to avoid stress, anxiety and worry amidst Covid-19 pandemic.
Programmes aimed at preparing all stakeholders in school how to handle themselves, the infected and affected amidst Covid-19 pandemic.
Programmes with psychological messages given to students, teachers and other stakeholders in relation to Covid-19 pandemic stigma.
Programmes encouraging psychological support and ICT integration in teaching and learning amidst Covid-19 pandemic.

Majority of the teachers (98.7%) stated the definitions well, indicating that they had a good understanding what psychosocial support programme in school amidst Covid-19 pandemic mean.

Further, all teachers (100.0%) affirmed that Covid-19 pandemic led to closure of education facilities from March 2020 onwards impacting negatively on learners by risking their well-being. Teachers' information was in line with Parker and Alfaro (2021) who confirmed that Covid-19 pandemic led to closure of education facilities from March 2020 onwards impacting negatively on estimated 12 million learners in 29 Caribbean countries and that the crisis risked the well-being of many students. It was therefore necessary to find out on the challenges of protracted Covid-19 pandemic influencing psychosocial support on changed students' behaviours.

Teachers were asked to indicate their responses to show whether: prolonged school closures has increased cases of exposure to pornographic materials; students have faced the risk of dropping out; girls encountered vulnerabilities of rape, child labor, child marriages and teenage pregnancies; both girls and boys were subjected to Gender Based Violence, including defilement; learners, teachers and non-teaching staff who may have been exposed to the virus were stigmatized; and prolonged school closures increased cases of exposure to drugs and alcohol abuse.

Table 2: Increased cases of vulnerability

Statement	Percentage (%) Affirming increment
Increased cases of exposure to pornographic materials	57.1

Students faced the risk of dropping out of school.	64.3
Girls encountered vulnerabilities of rape, child labor, child marriages and teenage pregnancies.	35.7
Both girls and boys were subjected to Gender Based Violence, including defilement.	28.6
Students, teachers and non-teaching staff who may have been exposed to the virus were stigmatized.	38.6
Increased cases of exposure to drugs and alcohol abuse.	78.6

Findings show that teachers strongly agreed that protracted Covid-19 pandemic affected students, teachers and non-teaching staff in varying percentages.

Data show that students were the most affected and concur with researchers' views like Halladay et al (2020) who see psychosocial supports as approaches of schools creating trauma-informed learning environments by promoting the wellness of all students, ensuring they feel safe and supported physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. Hence the need for essential healthy interactions skills among students and staff amidst Covid-19 pandemic.

Question 2: To what extent have schools achieved the benefits of psychosocial support on changed students' behaviors?

Table 3: Benefits of psychosocial support

Statement	Percentage Affirming %
Establishment of chaplaincy sessions for psychosocial support through spiritual nourishment	35.7
Provision of adequate liquid soap at all hand washing points	50.0
Record of all persons entering and exiting the school and maintained at the gate	42.9
Provision of adequate space at least 1metre between students and staff	28.5

Mechanism to identify those affected by COVID-19	35.7
Teachers, non-teaching staff and students' readiness to handle COVID-19 cases	50.0

On leadership and management in school, respondents strongly agreed that management has established chaplaincy sessions for psychosocial support through spiritual nourishment (35.7%). On resource provision in school, respondents agreed that management has provided adequate liquid soap at all hand washing points (50.0%). On institution grounds, respondents strongly agreed that management has a record of all persons entering and exiting the school and maintained at the gate (42.9%). However, there were challenges concerning physical infrastructure and support to students and staff. Respondents strongly disagreed that management has provided adequate space at least 1metre between students and staff (28.5%) and mechanism to identify those affected by COVID-19 (35.7%) respectively. Further, the researcher sought to determine respondents' opinions about teachers', non-teaching staff and students' readiness to handle COVID-19 cases of those who may have been exposed the virus. Statements from the respondents indicate that they were ready to handle but not fully, some factors can be worked on and improved (50.0%). These results indicate that management in schools acknowledges the benefits of psychosocial support in curriculum, but there are still challenges that need to be addressed.

Researchers argue that psychosocial support allows the international community to continue providing education to all students amidst Covid-19 pandemic. That it brings all stakeholders together, ensuring that educational programs run effectively, and students' well-being supported through guiding them psychologically, emotionally and socially. It is believed, 'Psychosocial supports enhance successful teaching and learning amidst Covid-19 pandemic and help students to learn more readily and participate fully in classroom activities (WHO, 2020). According to the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2010a), psychosocial support (PSS) is justified as the processes and actions that promote the holistic wellbeing of students and other people by facilitating resilience to help them recover after Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted their lives and to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events. According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2020), psychosocial support in school can offer learners a safe, stable environment, and help restore a sense of normality, dignity, and hope by providing both some structure and supportive activities along with social and emotional learning. It was therefore for this study to establish the

extent to which schools have achieved the benefits of psychosocial support on changed students' behaviors.

V CONCLUSION

The study found that the facilitation of psychosocial support in curriculum implementation in schools, given the right conditions, would provide teachers, non-teaching staff and students with opportunities to improve resilience amidst Covid-19 pandemic, to enhance their ability to return to normality after experiencing adverse events. The psychosocial support programmes can offer students a safe, stable environment, and help restore a sense of normality, dignity, and hope if schools are equipped with adequate infrastructures and supportive activities along with social and emotional learning.

Recommendations

For the psychosocial support in curriculum implementation in schools to be realized, there is need for the study to provide recommendations that would guide policymakers. The recommendations are therefore divided into those with policy implications and those meant for further research.

Policy implications

- (i) The government should train teachers and non-teaching staff in psychosocial support programs for continued curriculum implementation in schools.
- (ii) The Ministry of Health should collaborate with WHO recommendations on Covid-19 pandemic protocols to equip schools with adequate facilities and supportive activities along with social and emotional learning.
- (iii) Schools should adopt the psychosocial support programmes that can offer learners a safe, stable environment, and help restore a sense of normality, dignity and hope.

Recommendations for further research

The following are recommended areas for further research basing on this study:

- (i) What happens next after Covid-19 pandemic as perceived by principals, teachers and students?
- (ii) The initiative of remote learning amidst Covid-19 pandemic in stimulating curriculum implementation.

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