

# Effect of Covid-19 on SN Learners' Access to Training in TVETs

Lornah C.Nakera Sirima  
Email: [lornahlornah76@gmail.com](mailto:lornahlornah76@gmail.com)

## Abstract

*Education is vital as it gives students opportunities for growth, development and hope for a brighter future. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goal number four which states that: Quality Education seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. During the Covid-19 pandemic schools and higher education institutions closed as directed by the government. The closure put learners with special needs (Especially the visually and Hearing impaired) at more vulnerability thus increasing pre-existing education disparities by reducing the opportunities for many of the most vulnerable children who experience various challenges. Institutions of higher learning including the Technical and Vocational Education Training Institutes (TVETs) replaced face-to-face lectures with online learning during Covid-19 pandemic thus affecting learning and education of those with special needs. Further, closure of schools has other effects on the provision of essential services in education to children with special needs (Visually and Hearing impaired) including access to digital education and students' sense of belonging to schools; these are important for inclusion in education. This paper centered on access and inclusive education for all which is in line with SDG 4. The paper further examined the schools re-opening issue by giving the World Health Organization Covid-19 guidelines and strategies aimed at ensuring that the pandemic does not hinder inclusion of children with special needs (Visually and Hearing impaired) in education system in case of future lockdowns.*

**Keywords:** *Special Needs Learners, Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Covid-19, Access, Inclusion*

## Introduction

Education enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escaping poverty. Over the past decade, major progress was made towards increasing access to education and school enrollment rates at all levels, particularly for girls. Nevertheless, about 260 million children were still out of school in 2018 — nearly one fifth of the global population in that age group. In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 91 per cent of students worldwide. By April 2020, close to 1.6 billion children and youth were out of school

Never before have so many children have been out of school at the same time, disrupting learning and upending lives, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. The global pandemic has far-reaching consequences that may jeopardize hard won gains made in improving global education.

To protect the well-being of children and ensure they have access to continued learning, UNESCO in March 2020 launched the COVID-19 Global Education Coalition, a multi-sector partnership between the UN family, civil society organizations, media and IT partners to design and deploy innovative solutions (Unesco, 2020) Together they help countries tackle content and connectivity gaps, and facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for children and youth during this period of sudden and unprecedented educational disruption. Specifically, the Global Education Coalition aims to:-Help countries in mobilizing resources and implementing innovative and context-appropriate solutions to provide education remotely, leveraging hi-tech, low-tech and no-tech approaches; Seek equitable solutions and universal access.

Special education covers a range of needs, from children who could use a little help with reading to children with visual or hearing impairments, to children with multiple disabilities. In developed countries, Special education students have Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which are legal contracts between schools and parents that set goals for the child and outline the special education services to be provided. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on learners with disabilities who were already experiencing social and educational disadvantage. As many as half of the estimated 65 million primary and lower secondary-school age children with disabilities in developing countries were already out of school before COVID-19 according to GLAD. ‘They face a lack of accessible public health information, significant barriers to implement basic hygiene measures, and inaccessible health

facilities', said United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres. Girls and women with disabilities in particular face greater risks such as domestic violence.

Persons with disabilities are less likely than others to complete education, and more likely to be excluded altogether from schooling (UNICEF, 2020). Because of COVID-19, most States have temporarily closed education institutions<sup>27</sup> affecting all students, including students with disabilities. To reduce the impact of disruption in education, some States are adopting remote learning practices. In these cases, however, students with disabilities are facing barriers on account of the absence of required equipment, access to internet, accessible materials and support necessary to permit them to follow online school programs. As a result, many students with disabilities are being left behind, particularly students with intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, students with disabilities are also negatively affected by other dimensions of school closures, including access to school meals and opportunities to engage in play and sports with their peers. What are some promising practices? The United States of America issued a guidance document on the federal legislation applicable, the Individual with Disabilities (USA department of education, 2020) • Ecuador issued recommendations for teachers on supporting the education of children who need to remain isolated at home. According to UK department of Education (2020), the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland disseminated information and established systems to support parents and caregivers to guide them on how to face competing responsibilities while at home and to better support the educational process of children with disabilities.<sup>30</sup> These States and other stakeholders took key actions; provide clear guidance to education and school authorities on the scope of their obligations and the variety of available resources when providing education outside schools; Ensure access to Internet for remote learning and ensure that software is accessible to persons with disabilities, including through the provision of assistive devices and reasonable accommodation; Provide guidance, training and support for teachers on inclusive

education through remote learning; Establish close coordination with parents and caregivers for early education of children with disabilities; Provide guidance and distance support for parents and caregivers to assist in setting up equipment and to support the education program of their children with disabilities; Develop accessible and adapted materials for students with disabilities, to support remote learning and Develop accessible educational audio-visual materials to disseminate through different media (e.g. online on demand, televised educational programs, etc.)

On March 15, 2020, the Kenyan government abruptly closed all schools and colleges nationwide in response to COVID-19, disrupting nearly 17 million learners countrywide. The closure of institutions not only affected learners and teachers but it also brought forth numerous economic and social issues, including interrupted and loss of learning, education exclusion, homelessness, nutrition and economic crisis, childcare challenges and increase in teenage pregnancy cases, financial cost implication to households, and sexual exploitation among others. The effects have been more severe for the underprivileged children and their households from the urban poor communities (Jelimo, 2020). With the government adopting a remote and digital mode of learning the learning gap has increased and most learners especially the SN learner's being excluded from online education due to challenges of access to internet and reliable electricity.

To keep the learners engaged, and mitigate loss of essential learning time, the government of Kenya through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) stepped up measures to facilitate learning through different platforms such as the Kenya Education Cloud, TV, radio, ed-tech apps, and mobile phones. These modes of learning though effective may only benefit a few students who have access at home to computers, smart phones, and the appropriate technology. For the vast majority of students, learning was interrupted due to lack of access to

electricity, internet connectivity, and digital technology. This may further widen the education inequality gap, in equity, access and quality of education (Anderson, 2020)

The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of special needs education as a crucial subsector for accelerating the attainment of Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sustainable development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all focuses on eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. In addition, the proposal calls for building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and also provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. COVID-19 pandemic has triggered many changes in education the major one being learning remotely from home. While most students have had routines interrupted, the children perhaps most affected by that disruption are special education students. It is in the light of these literature, that this papery sought to determine the effect of NN SN learner's knowledge and skills in online learning; access and identify strategies used by the government to ensure online learning for SN learner's in TVET institution, Kenya.

### **Research Methodology**

This paper reviewed both theoretical and empirical studies with the main objective of bringing to the limelight the Effect of Covid-19 on SN Learners' Access to Training in TVETS in Africa and what African nations ought to do in order to address the challenges of the access of SN learner's to online learning in the African continent. Global Literature on Effect of Covid-19 on SN Learners' Access to Training in TVETS was further explored.

### **Challenges of access to digital learning**

1. Lack of electricity in some homes and Slow internet connectivity

2. Lack of support materials e.g smart phones and even Learners without digital devices slow in catching up
3. Power cut outs especially in rural areas
4. No personal aids to guide the SN students
5. Lack of essential aids e.g hearing aids, braille machine
6. Lack of translators /transcriber gadgets for those with low vision
7. Financial constraint to purchase data
8. No internet in rural areas
9. The SN students could not follow the online lessons
10. Majority could not attend online classes due to various challenges
11. Many were unwilling to adapt to the digital education

**Strategies for inclusion in digital learning:-**

1. Kenya Technical Training College (KTTC) and National ODEL in TVET have currently adopted short online courses through virtual trainings to ensure trainers are mentored on the use of digital platforms. However there is need that the mentoring programmes should be extended to the students more so the SN students.
2. Online and Blended approach kind of learning are slowly being embraced in Kenya for it is the future.

3. Ministry of Education was allocated 6.5 Billion so as to hire 10,000 teachers and 1,000 ICT interns to support digital running and to also improve the schools infrastructure to enable social distancing.
4. The government of Kenya through the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) stepped up measures to facilitate learning through different platforms such as the Kenya Education Cloud, TV, radio, ed-tech apps, and mobile phones.

### **Recommendations**

#### **The government and policy makers should plan to:**

1. Support ODEL by having a pedagogical structure for both learners and trainers to ensure learner's awareness of the challenges of online learning.
2. Provide SN learners with opportunities to realize their potential by providing them with special technologies such as adaptive computing technology by using digital devices to bypass challenging tasks. Provide Screen reader applications such as JAWS along with specially designed braille keyboards to allow visually challenged students to use the computer
3. Reduce costs i.e. high cost of internet access and expensive technology. Electricity to run the devices is also expensive; therefore, the government could collaborate with private partners to help offer financial aid to low- income areas so that they can afford the technology.
4. Properly designed software and hardware to allow students with special needs to get modern education and acquire any given information online
5. Allocate budgetary resources to Open Distance E- Learning (ODEL) for the purpose of planning for TVET institutions

## Conclusions

Covid - 19 has clearly exposed that digital gaps exist, that there is a huge problem of access of SN learner's to the online platform. The solution to this involves collaboration with various stakeholders to ensure digital accessibility, digital literacy and awareness for the SN learner's. There's need for counties in conjunction with the national government to come up strongly in identifying and supporting the SN students. Further, need for empowering and supporting the SN learner's together with parents on the importance of digital learning. That, blended kind of teaching and learning is good if it can be embraced by the students. Digital learning has denied the Special needs (low vision, hearing impaired, etc) learner's access to education as ODEL offers unlimited access to education. Finally, online education is a sustainable way to go if properly planned as it will help overcome barriers posed by pandemics such like covid-19.

## References

- Albright, A. and Mwangi-Powell, F. (1 May 2020), "Opinion: Don't let girls' education be another casualty of the coronavirus", Thompson Reuters Foundation News.
- Ashley Anderson, September 9, 2020 Communications Specialist
- Catherine Jelimo – report* 1 September 2020  
Department for Education (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education*
- Emma Pearce, Disability Considerations in GBV Programming during the COVID-19 Pandemic, at <https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020->
- GOV.UK website, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementingprotective->
- <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1454Prototype%20Global%20SD%20Report.pdf>.
- <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/945> for primary school, completion rate of persons with disabilities is 56% compared to 73% for others
- Kenya Confirms Third Wave of COVID-19Africa 12/03/2021 • Esther Nakkazi



Lancet report, Published: March 24, 2021 Identification DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)00632-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00632-2)

The impact of school closures in Kenya goes beyond education

UK's Coronavirus (COVID-19): support for victims of domestic abuse <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-and-domestic-abuse/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-victims-of-domestic-abuse#disability-specialist-services> 36 Penal Reform International, Global Prison Trends 2020, at <https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Global-Prison-Trends2020-Penal-Reform-International.pdf>

UNDESA, Disability and Development Report, pp. 7, 16, 113-115, 249-252, at <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-DisabilityFinal.pdf>; Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, A/72/133, para 35.

UNESCO estimates that closures are impacting over 91% of the world's student population. See <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

UNESCO IUS, "Target 4.1", Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4.

UNESCO, (2020) "Education transforms lives".

UNESCO. (2020a). *"290 Million Students out of School due to COVID-19: UNESCO releases*

*first global numbers and mobilizes response"*: Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco>.

UNESCO (2020b) *"How to plan distance learning solutions during temporary schools closures"*. UNESCO. Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news>.

UNESCO (2020c). *"Coronavirus Deprives nearly 300 Million Students of their schooling: UNESCO"*. From <https://thetelegram.com/news/world/coronavirus>.

UNESCO (2020d). *"Half of world's student population not attending school: UNESCO"* Retrieved from <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-2020-03-19>. View publication

United Kingdom, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>. See also, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-children-with-send-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

United Nations Sustainable Development Group (May 2020), Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19.

United Nations, (2015), Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report, Division for Sustainable Development, New York, June,

USA, Department of Education, Questions and answers on providing services to children with disabilities during the coronavirus disease 2019 outbreak, March 2021.

World Health Organization, COVID-19 and violence against women What the health sector/system can do, at

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331699/WHO-SRH-20.04-eng.pdf>