



Parents' Experience with Remote Learning During COVID-19 Lockdown in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The closure of primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a rapid shift to remote learning, placing more responsibility for learning on parents and guardians. This study sought to explore parents' experience while engaging in their children's remote learning during that period. The study is particularly timely in light of a dramatic growth in remote learning due to the continued disruption of face-to-face learning in schools. A study of parents' experience may yield useful data and identify trends to inform the development of programmes and policies targeting parental needs and support in this emerging form of learning. A descriptive qualitative design was used to conduct this study so that relevant responses could be sought to get insights into parents' experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questionnaires and online interviews were used to collect data from a purposive sample of 25 parents, whose selection was based on their involvement in their children's home learning and access to internet connectivity in the home. The results revealed that parents found the sudden closure of schools extremely disturbing, and they were concerned about their children's routines. Parents highlighted that they had difficulties with balancing responsibilities, adjusting to remote learning, children's lack of motivation to learn, poor accessibility of learning material, lack of capacity to assist multiple children, and finding appropriate space for learning. The results of the study have important implications for policy, and generated strong recommendations for teachers, school authorities, and policymakers.

Keywords: remote learning; experience; pandemic; parents

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has caused an unprecedented global disruption of the socioeconomic order. The whole world is adjusting to the reality of the pandemic by finding alternatives to the disruption caused so far. COVID-19 has upended the way of life worldwide, resulting in school closures from 24 March 2020, working remotely, and physically distancing as part of wider efforts to curb the spread of the virus. Parents, children, and teachers around the world felt the unprecedented and extraordinary ripple effect of the novel coronavirus as schools remained closed and lockdown measures were ordered to cope with the global pandemic. To reduce disruption in learning, many countries have come up with strategies for remote learning, including the internet, television, radio, and many other options that are available to schools (Wang et al., 2020). (By "remote learning" we mean learning that occurs when the learner and the instructor are separated physically—they cannot meet in a traditional classroom setting.) It has been generally observed that, since the end of March 2020, most schools moved to online platforms to provide education during the pandemic (Cullinane & Montacute, 2020). When schools in Zimbabwe closed on 24 March 2020, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPS) introduced alternative learning approaches to ensure the continuity of