



Shocks to School Attendance

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Key messages

1. School attendance is confirmed to be critical to human capital development but presence of shocks like Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the normal school attendance in Kenya.
2. Response strategies such as school closures, cessation of movements and lockdowns have exacerbated the problem of school attendance.
3. Given the disparity in access to learning technology between private and public schools across Kenya and between the poor and the rich, has aggravated the inequality in access to basic education.

4. In boosting learning activities and school attendance, the public policy interventions implemented nationwide during the pandemic inadvertently favored private schools as they benefited comparatively through internet accessibility and fiscal policy measures.
5. The government should provide better and targeted fiscal incentives to mitigate against the shocks, particularly to the vulnerable group

What are the issues?

Shocks threaten household welfare and the ability to send children to school. Shocks ordinarily manifest themselves in many forms and affect households differently depending on the nature and the status of the household. Shocks are categorized as either idiosyncratic-affecting a specific household in isolation or covariate- affecting all households simultaneously. Covariate shocks are mostly natural, climatic, pandemic or economic in nature.

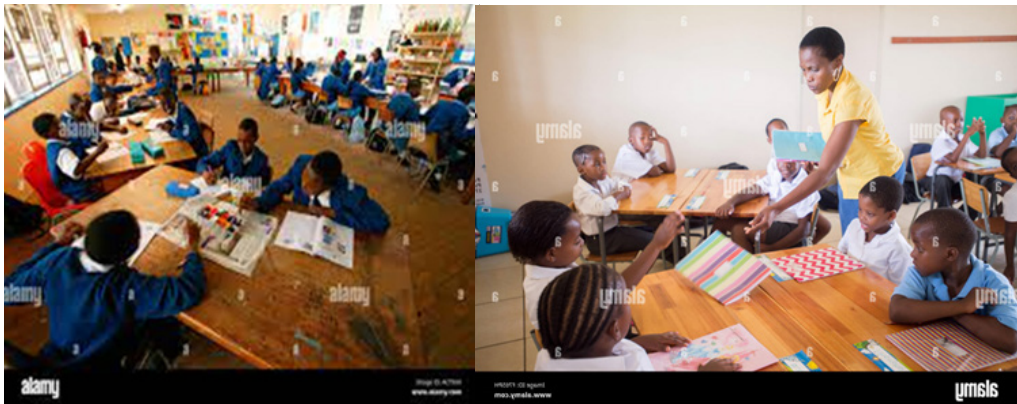
The COVID-19 pandemic is a health-related shock that has adversely affected the entire globe due to its adverse multiplier effect on all sectors of the economy including the education sector. For instance, learning across the globe was severely disrupted and the effect of this closure has long term effect on learners. Closures of educational institutions hampered the provision of essential learning services to children.

Why are the issues important?

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the way children experience education and, by extension, the learning capability. It is evidenced that the longer they stayed out of school, the greater the risk of the poorest among them dropping out completely. Furthermore, even when they returned back to school their performance was dismal (Miguel and Kremer, 2004; UN, 2020). Access to learning technology during the period of closure in Kenya seems to have favored disproportionately the private schools' pupils at the expense of public-school pupils. This in a sense introduced inequality in school attendance which to large extent was not justifiable. In addition, it contravened the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)10 on reduction of inequality. It is therefore clear that the pandemic adversely affected quality and quantity of learning outcomes in Kenya and more severely the poor households.

Approach

The paper used the World Bank's high-frequency phone survey data collected in five waves between May 2020 and June 2021. A panel Random Effects Logit control function model was estimated to account for both endogeneity and heterogeneity. School attendance was regressed on COVID-19 incidence and other control variables.



Source: <https://www.alamy.com>

Policy options

We find that a 1% increase in the proportion of children with COVID-19 incidences reduced the probability of school attendance by 2.3%. In addition, a 1% increase in the proportion of households' head age, reduced the probability of school attendance by 4.5%. Therefore COVID-19 incidences caused unprecedented disruption to schooling in Kenya. Even after opening of the schools, some parents, especially the older ones feared taking their children back to school to avoid Covid-19 infections mainly due to self/family isolation.

Furthermore, children in public schools had a reduced probability of school attendance by 0.27% compared to their counterparts in private schools. Within the public schools, children in urban schools had an increased school attendance probability by 0.08% compared to those in rural areas. Public schools are inadequately financed by the government compared to private schools where they are financed through school fees. During the closure due to Covid-19, private schools were able to transition smoothly to virtual teaching while public schools remained literally closed. There were also differentials within the public schools with those located in urban areas being a better position to transition to virtual learning.

While school closure was an immediate reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic shock, it failed to address needs of children in different school setups. In future, there is need to put measures that can support public primary schools to cope with such shocks. This may include acquisition of information and communications technology (ICT) gadgets, subsidized data bundles and basic media equipment that facilitates remote learning. Households in remote rural areas need targeted cash transfers, particularly, those whose household heads are aged. In addition to this, there might be need to educate or create awareness to old people on the needs for vaccination to boost immunity.

Sources

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