

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Reimaging of basic education; panacea for catalyzing change for inclusion and access during pandemics**

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The worldwide health epidemic has glinted serious challenges on the vulnerabilities. However, on the other hand it has given a glimpse of existing disparities and a wakening call on what mitigations are needed to be considered. At the top-most is the need to address the education of over one point five billion learners whose education has been interrupted due to the COVID-19 crisis. As the world globally navigates the COVID-19 catastrophe and its repercussions, there is need to reflect on fundamental principles and identified strengths, while contenting with unprecedented distraction to economies, education and societies. Distractions occasioned by the epidemic are aggravating disparities both inside and across nations. We promptly need reimaging of education so that short-range impediments do not translate into bigger, lifelong challenges. To this end, renewal and reimaging of education takes center stage. This premise is anchored on global solidarity and EFA goals that do not condone the echelons of inequalities that have emerged in the modern-day world. Methodologically, secondary data and purposive random sampling was utilized to review articles that were concerned with reimaging of basic education. Drawing from the Covid-19 relevant experiences and relevant theories, this study established that Covid-19 experiences heightened disparities, accentuated the threats that arise due to privatization of education being a common good coupled with unpreparedness for immense change to virtual learning platform. The study recommends interventions meant to promote inclusive learning to minimize disparities for the vulnerable learners and assist various countries to realize their already initiated 100 per cent transition policy. Significantly, the study contends that reflections on renewal and reimaging of education may prove fruitful towards catalyzing change for inclusion and access during epidemics to the advantage of our learners

**Key words:** Reimaging, education, catalyzing, change, inclusion, access.

## **INTRODUCTION**

COVID-19 has occasioned numerous prevailing trends and patterns distinctively experienced globally (Amujiri et al., 2021). To the extreme, we have been treated to numerous weaknesses and susceptibilities: these entail

accentuated disparities, threats that arise due to privatization of education being a common good, unpreparedness for immense change to virtual learning (Marginson, 2016; Toquero, 2020; Tawil and Locatelli,

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2015). Conversely, positive facets within our social order have also been made progressively noticeable. We are noticing camaraderie spirit and a robust, buoyant response to challenges in several countries and continents. We are witnessing augmented commitment to the public good. Further noticeable is ingenuity, dedication and inventiveness emanating from various educators, learners and families who are collaboratively fostering outstanding learning experiences (UNESCO, 2020). COVID-19 is perilous to public education, with threats of disintegration and detachment as we are bound to lose both educators and learners who might not make it to institutions as they slowly reopen. Some level of privatization ensues when learning relocates from institutions into homes (Toquero, 2020). It is the view of many stakeholders that the recent alternative measures should be transmuted into lifelong reforms. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that several stakeholders have now appreciated educators' work. Many communities are becoming conscious of the diverse roles that institutions play in facilitating the welfare of learners, and in guaranteeing health and sustenance, in conjunction with academic business (UNESCO, 2020). This augmented consciousness and appreciation needs to be the starting point for revitalization of education as a public good (Marginson, 2016). The epidemic has compelled immense change from the traditional teaching and learning set up characterized with physical exchanges. This is a big challenge for learners enshrined in abject poverty globally, who frequently depend on the physical institutional set up to offer educational resources, meals, guidance among other valuables (World Bank, 2020). While in their homes learners can encounter several forms of violence and abuse. Scarcity of resources, mainly digital gadgets and connectivity, imply that the cost of education and general welfare will soar for vulnerable groups. As for learners in higher institutions of learning; practicums and internships were put on hold, however those who had resources continued with minimal interruptions. These are the challenges that must be addressed urgently, lest drawback propel more drawbacks (World Bank, 2020). As we think on how to revitalize education, welfare and interaction ought to be given precedence. The digital technology that facilitates collaboration, and virtual learning is a worthwhile measure, not a remedy nonetheless a welcome invention and evidence of capabilities in mitigating our challenges. Despite this progress there is a concern that changes to virtual learning will aggravate disparities in many of the Sub-Saharan Africa states and even in the many sound economy states. We ought to ascertain that digitalization doesn't weaken privacy, curtail freedom of expression, influence offensive surveillance among other vices. It is a fallacy to imagine that virtual learning is a panacea for all (Cullinan et al., 2021).

To protect the right to education amidst the unusual conditions fashioned by the epidemic, and to build trust

needed for worldwide collaboration in marshaling resources to guarantee right to education for all (Cullinan et al., 2021). All education stakeholders need to ensure that education resources are utilized for the intended aim of enriching the potential of learners. Of great concern which calls for enhanced vigilance is corruption to deter the seizure and digression of education resources towards self-gratification. Three essential obligations ought to be cogitated: common goods, public education, and universal solidarity. The pandemic is opportune moment to reinforce and affirm these essential obligations and not to weaken them. We have chance to guard and augment public education, to strengthen universal common goods, and to consolidate global collaboration (Marginson, 2016). Didactic lessons from history have reminded us that transformational change can occur abruptly especially as an aftermath of any pandemic.

The present pandemic is drawing our attention to how vital public education is in society, and at individual level. It is a reminder that education is a barrier against disparity and its ability to enable lives of self-respect and purpose (Bernardi and Ballarino, 2016). As we hold this special chance to transform the globe, and as we reimagine our educational institutions and learning space, we will need to reflect on what we desire to become. The time has come—though unpredictably—where jointly revisiting the objectives of education and re-organizing of learning is increasingly imperative. It is on this premise that this theoretical review offers guidance on how to reimage education as a catalyzing agent for change in terms inclusion and access during pandemics in an effort to irradiate the ethical impasses and choices confronting us during pandemics.

### **Study objectives**

The following general objectives guided this study:

1. To evaluate education as a common public good to enhance inclusion and access
2. To assess collaboration and participation of all education stakeholders as a strategy of enhancing inclusion and access
3. To establish need for robust wholistic education reforms to accelerate inclusion and access.
4. To determine need for resource mobilization to boost inclusion and access.

### **THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**

The study is anchored on the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities advocated by Sherman and Wood cited by Njeru and Orodho (2003). The central tenet in this theory is quest for equal opportunities in education for all

learners. The theory upholds the view that every child is born with already having some ability which to some extent is inbred and cannot be changed. Thus, education structures need to be organized in a way that removes obstacles of any nature like the one occasioned by the pandemics that thwart efforts by students from disadvantaged backgrounds from exploiting inborn talents, which propel towards social promotion. This theory intimates that social mobility would be motivated by equal opportunity enabled through the provision of well-structured education systems. Based on this philosophical view point, education structures need to be arranged with a view of eradicating impediments of any nature like socio-economic, socio-cultural, ecological, and institution-based dynamics which hinder learners from diverse backgrounds from benefiting from their inborn aptitudes thus education becoming the greatest equalizer. Pandemics such as COVID-19 and similar transmittable diseases, which force institutions to unanticipated protracted closures affect the disadvantaged and susceptible learners. While those from privileged households afford decent meals, modest accommodation, best medication and good digital gadgets as they continue to learn from the comfort of their houses, the converse for the underprivileged learners is true. Given this scenario it practically becomes implausible to disdain the argument that unequal participation in education will eventually jeopardize the chances of the disadvantaged and marginalized learners in terms of access and equity (Njeru and Orodho, 2003). It is for this reason that reimagining of basic education is of necessity to militate against any obstacles that might hinder the smooth progression of underprivileged and the susceptible learners

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study selected and reviewed empirical literature related to the study between 2005-2020. The study utilized document examination as a method of qualitative research where documents are interpreted by the scholar to give meaning and voice to an assessment subject (Bowen, 2009). The study collected information from published articles on basic education with specific focus on change to enhance inclusion and access within the Kenyan context and other countries globally. The study employed a purposive random sampling strategy as it only reviewed articles that were concerned with reimagining of basic education. Description as a statistical unit of measurement was utilized in document examination and analysis in enhancing the secondary data collected qualitatively.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study sought to review literature on reimagining of basic education as a remedy for Catalyzing change for inclusion and access during pandemics under the following thematic areas guided by the study objectives which are:

### ***To evaluate education as a common public good to enhance inclusion and access***

Public education and public health are meticulously interrelated as they explicitly indicate the undisputable inevitability of teamwork, and shared responsibility for the common good (Zimmerman et al., 2015). The COVID-19 disease will not be conquered by health protocols alone. It further needs human empathy, enhanced public trust, progression in science, and valuing our common humanity. Education stakeholders ought to work in tandem with public health stakeholders. Each is depended on each other hence interdependence in the context of public space. Consequently, they cannot be in opposition to each other (Gan and Gong, 2007). A reinforced obligation to education as a common good implies consciousness that we are not only educating our children but also educating publics. Moreover, community active engagement and community-led learning is a crucial element of education and ought to be fundamental to any approach that acts as a panacea to both current and forthcoming challenges. Education has special significance in social, economic and political development for both the individual and the society (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2000). The worldwide epidemic has made noticeable the essential role of all-time learning, as persons of all ages require learning new approaches of re-structuring economic, social, and political life to suit the prevailing circumstances. The closure of public institutions, community centers, and libraries has made visible the crucial, corresponding roles that these institutions engage and the manner in which they must be looked at as indispensable component in understanding of the concept of public education (Chick et al., 2020). Various countries have not managed to counter public health catastrophes without the aid of society as a whole. The societal responsibility has been relived. The communities have realized the key part that public education takes in our symbiotic subsists (Zimmerman et al., 2015). It is apparent that each aspect of well-being affirmatively influences another. In public education just as in public health, the emphasis ought to be on collaboration not competition. We progress when everybody progresses. We are secure when everyone is secured.

### ***Re-definition of the right to education***

Education is a human right in itself and an essential platform for comprehending other human rights. The Kenyan Constitution, in Article 53 (1) (b) underscore the fact that every learner has a right to free and compulsory basic education. Further Article 55 (a) emphasizes that the government must take initiatives to guarantee the youth admittance to appropriate education and training. The underprivileged learners as provided in Article 56 (b) have a right to be accorded with opportunity in education

sector too. To actualize the same, the Basic Education Act (No 14 of 2013) has engrained the same tenets as law to control the delivery of basic education in the country. The 2011 Children's Act also recognizes and defends each learner's right to education. Societies ought to make effort to execute these statutory provisions and enhance them. During pandemics which lead to interruption, it has become challenging to guarantee the accessibility of quality operational educational institutions. All stakeholders must make effort to ensure that any regression is momentary, and restored as soon as the situation stabilizes so that what has been gained is not lost. Owing to the significance of a reinforced public commitment to education as a common good, there is need also to re-think how knowledge itself should be part of universal common good (Toquero,2020) This needs stakeholders to think beyond increasing and democratizing the approach in which knowledge is gained. We need to progressively take into account the ways the production and circulation of knowledge interconnects with the right to education. The COVID-19 disease has demonstrated that the right to education requires flexibility, ought to be altered to suit various contexts and to the demands of dynamic societies. Re-definition and expansion of the right to education has evidently become essential. The pandemics have laid bare the significance of digital online modes and connectivity to the level that we require to consider access to information as a basic right, linked to the right to education in manner that was not foreseen there before (O'Keefe et al., 2020). As the pandemic rages monocultures and homogeneity has been proven to respond shoddily to shocks and disruption especially in academics, consequently we are noticing transition towards fluid approaches to learning as a continuum where schooling and other formal education institutions network more meticulously with other less formal educational experiences from early childhood (UNESCO,2020). We ought to re-think perspectives in which right to education might need to be widened to include variability, capillarity and the varying contexts of modern societies.

### ***Advocating for universal solidarity rising above the existing echelons of disparity***

The swiftness at which the COVID-19 disease has spread has left us with a didactic element especially on our association to one another. Apparently out of this experience, anything drawing us apart must be redressed. The disjointed and uncoordinated approach to the pandemic is likely to attract disastrous and dreadful ramifications (Shipton, 2020). Notably, the pandemic has stimulated the rebirth of unhealthy politics of nativism that has been going on for some time now in several sections of the world. Regularly intertwined with political radicalism

and autarchical contempt for democratic ideologies, several nations have shifted towards separation and competition as opposed to cohesion and collaboration which is the panacea to help us mitigate the pandemic efficaciously (Shipton, 2020). Nevertheless, there are traces of hope noticeable. A rejuvenated sense of unity has taken hold of several communities efficaciously through lockdown as evidenced through constant supply of foodstuffs and medical attention to the deprived though not enough. The worldwide scientific scholars are working jointly transcending the national boundaries to alleviate the suffering caused by the pandemic. Our common humanity—principally has exposed by this epidemic—dictates universal solidarity. We are safe when everybody is safe (UNESCO, 2020). COVID-19 has similarly revealed the level at which societies exploit gender disparities and power inequalities. As children and whole families are restricted within homes, they face numerous challenges than ever before; gender violence has characterized the limited movements and home confinement and increased childbearing regularly leading to minimized openings for women. Education stakeholders ought to reimagine education to redress any of the abusive and lopsided relations where they occur (UNESCO, 2020).

The severest heights of human-made disparities are evident between the Global South and the Global North—and the pandemic has forced us to a situation of reckoning. Sadly, the most awful ramifications of these inequalities in the context of loss of human lives and incomes. Education stakeholders cannot stand and watch the echelons of disparities that have been tolerated to develop in our society today. There is still chance for education stakeholders to halt what might be the extremely grievous undoing to education opportunities realized in an era, where significant strides have been made (O'Keefe et al., 2020).

### **To assess collaboration and involvement of all education stakeholders as a strategy towards enhancing inclusion and access**

#### ***Teacher collaboration***

The COVID-19 crisis response especially to education has shown the capability of teachers to utilize their professional prowess to collaboratively mobilize resources and engage creativity that could not be possible administratively through issuing top-down orders (Grace et al., 2020). The education sector has proved to be among the most robust and pliable among all social institutions during this pandemic. Based on this development emanating from this catastrophe it is evident that we need to grant educators more independence and liberty to shape their professional ethos. Educators are indispensable partakers in informing

the future of education. The ability to initiate, test and invent that has been revealed during these epidemic interruptions must be galvanized. Teacher collaboration ought to further to be conceptualized as increasing to encompass engagement with a wide set of educational stakeholders (Robert et al., 2020). The nerve center of an educational process is the rapport between a learner and an educator. The educational environment that values its educators and accords them autonomy and encourages collaboration is best placed to deal with pandemics such as COVID-19 (Shipton, 2020). This catastrophe on the other hand has shown how tedious it is to deal with unanticipated circumstances in centralized bureaucracies.

### ***Reinforced youngsters involvement to their rights***

The rights of youths to get involved in decisions that affect them, mainly those concerning their future hasn't been given the seriousness it warrants. There is much conversation on the threats posed by the present pandemic to human rights. However, there is little attention given to the dangers it contributes to the rights of the youths (Terriquez, 2015). The COVID-19 protocols have caused great distress universally. Specifically, the psychological well-being of youngsters has been greatly impacted in a manner that could pose enduring ramifications (Ngwacho, 2020). During the post-COVID-19 era it will be important to provide redress to aftermaths like separations that have been occasioned due to isolations and social distancing limits. Education stakeholders are required to reflect ingeniously on approaches to re-connect with the youths. Empowering them to think and act collaboratively is one significant approach to achieve this. Strategies and policies to remedy the huge political, social, and economic interruptions instigated by the COVID-19 must be worked out through civic engagement; most importantly, the involvement of youths in these discussions must be a priority. In schools, learners ought to be given a leading role in designing the learning experiences and activities as institutions reopen (Terriquez, 2015).

### **To establish need for robust wholistic education reforms to accelerate inclusion and access**

#### ***Education transformation focused on protecting the social space of the school***

Radical transformation has characterized the education sector currently. Part of the changes has been motivated by ongoing pandemics (MoE, 2012). The closure of schools to minimize the spread of the disease may be misconstrued to mean that schools as physical structures are unessential. This is not true. The physical space in institutions as the main locale of learning is a key

component of formal education at every level. The COVID-19 catastrophe has reiterated the significance of institutions as centers of social services, remarkably in the provision of wholesome meals. As communal centers, institutions offer support for independence and cultivates ecologically bearable relationships with nature (UNESCO, 2020). Of significance is that, the space of the institutions accommodates social relationships. Human relations, discourse and exchange form part of education and learning. Precisely institutions are key components of collective living that cannot be substituted by distant learning. Institutions further provide learners with innocuous setting where to tolerate risks, test possibilities, and discover potential. They are crucial avenues of becoming who we want to be. Significantly, institutions are also avenues where we meet others who are different from us, others whom we learn from and with, others who increase our insight of the worldwide tapestry of humanity (Liu and Sibley, 2004).

Even though the institutional space has been underscored as being essential, it requires transformation and improvement by a much wider space for learning. It is evident how in this pandemic how economic and professional life is structured around the institutions, its timetables and its almanacks.

### ***Participatory, open and free technologies for educators and learners***

In the wake of COVID-19 catastrophe focus in mobile digital learning technologies has grown tremendously. Portable digital gadgets have freed learning from restrictive and fixed environments, essentially providing paradigm shift from the manner on how knowledge is diffused globally (Robert et al., 2020). In this digital era, it is ridiculous to ignore institutions especially in terms of access to knowledge and communication that are progressively perceived as obligatory elements of everyday life consequently leading to digital divides. This paradigm shift underscores the significance of connectivity and internet access. On this pretext emphasis should be put on open access and open licensing policies that enable no-charges and reuse. Open educational resources ought to be given priority; digital platforms facilitated by private corporations cannot be relied upon by public education institutions (Areba, 2021a). Public educational institutions cannot be shaped and controlled by methods and content crafted outside the pedagogical space of educators and learners. Ready-made materials and content distort the skillfully well-thought-out work of educators and learners. The abrupt a must do or die competition for resources, materials and platforms evident during epidemics poses a great danger to the teaching profession and its independence and could pose grave challenges to the future of education (Areba, 2021b). Any digital shift should have all

educational stakeholders getting involved in shaping these transformations and discourage the push-down syndrome from technological corporations to enhance ownership and efficient utilization from the direct users.

### ***Curriculum entrenched in robust scientific literacy and purpose***

The ongoing pandemic (COVID-19) has triggered reflections from education stakeholders on what learning is for and calls all of us to re-examine the kind of skills and competences we desire education and learning to impart. The present limitation of learning to curricular essentials that we observe happening as institutions close will be a barrier to wide-ranging humanistic aspects of education that are significant for thriving of democracy, peace, and intercultural appreciation (Robert et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic provides us with the right opportunity for serious reflection on curriculum. Curriculum emphasizing on wholistic development of learners and not just academic skills ought to be our priority. The 1996 Delors report 'Learning the treasure within' re-affirms this position, in its description of four supports of learning as learning to know, to be, to do, and to live harmoniously. Curricula ought to be progressively integrated and structured alongside thematic areas that permit us to learn to co-exist harmoniously in one accord based on our common humanity. Critically, one specific curricular facet needs our urgent consideration. This challenge has been with us and did not start with the ongoing pandemic but it is becoming most critical with the raging pandemic: the spread of fabrications and misinformation. This is becoming dangerous for social fabric that binds humanity and terminating many lives (Robert et al., 2020). This is complex challenge, concerning the association between knowledge and science. In critical times such as the pandemics and climate change we have witnessed the disowning of scientific knowledge and the construction of "facts" that serve conceited motives. The education sector needs to come out and provide guidance on this critical matter (O'Keefe et al., 2020). It is important that there be a re-energized campaigns to encourage global scientific literacy, particularly to marginalized populaces. Almost all of us have encountered unparalleled quantity of information, which many a times is characterized with a lot of inconsistencies even when emanating from reliable sources. The classic difference between vagueness and risk is no longer legal, given that there is rising uncertainty on risk itself. The classical example is how to interpret opposing representations of data and trends. Education sector cannot overlook this state of affairs (UNESCO, 2020). The connection between knowledge and facts ought to be openly discussed. The subject of scientific literacy has gained great prominence and urgency.

### **To determine need for resource mobilization to boost inclusion and access**

#### ***Protection of international and domestic funding of public education***

The full effect of the epidemic on the future of education is not yet fully established. What is clear is that the economic impact has led to loss of jobs, incomes and rising levels of susceptibility than ever before. These economic strains have severe repercussions on parents and guardian's capability in terms of advancing the education of their children due to lessened financial ability to provide assistance in terms of education requirements for their children (Toquero, 2020). Easing the economic strain due to this crisis is expected to lead to fiscal austerity. The economic decline is further likely to bring down generally the base of public resources. The aftermaths of such changes are possibly to affect excessively the marginalized and vulnerable children of the underprivileged. Such adverse effect to this group of children is negating the fundamental principles of fairness and human rights. As we forge the way out of this mess, all states need to resist pressures from without to extremely constrain education expenses (Toquero, 2020). The ramifications of the pandemic already with us and now thwarting educational opportunities for many disfranchised learners will be remedied by how individual states and international partners respond now and in future. Currently, several states globally are severely indebted and the gravity of debt repayment lessens the fiscal ability for financing the urgently required projects in educational institutions. Many states are staring into serious cash crunch and will be required to make a choice between funding critical services to safeguard critical social and economic wants, and repaying the much-accrued rising debts. There is still chance to halt what might be the utmost grievous interruption of education opportunities in an era, where significant improvements in educational growth and steps to attain educational fairness might be obliterated (Zimmerman et al., 2015). International funding organizations and states need to synchronize energies to guarantee protection of the internal and international sources of funds of education with the view of sustaining continuous learning. With strict compliance to redistributive fairness, funds ought to be shared to the vulnerable that have been affected severely economically, socially and academically. There is dire need for every state to re-examine and restructure their education financing models. There are attempts already made to some extent to limit public services at the time when we should enhance and upsurge service delivery. The United Nations leadership and other global development players will be vital in supporting the fiscal commitments that may protect the Sustainable Development Goals and Education vision 2030 reform agenda from lagging

behind (Toquero, 2020). Giving priority to education and seeking enhanced global collaboration to assist guarantee the right to education is what is expected to be extremely challenging amidst calls for accountability and efficiency from global education sponsors for them to continue adding value to national initiative to deliver education to all that is appropriate to a fast-changing society.

## Conclusion

The ravaging pandemic has exposed the uneasy challenges that accompany that intricacy; nonetheless it has revealed to us that intricacies similarly generate strong dynamism and numerous potentials. The devastating challenges that come with indecision have been meticulously made visible. The pandemic has proved that indecision also encompasses exceptional capacities. We have come face to face with startling menaces and susceptibilities of our frailty, nonetheless the pandemic has provoked us to remember that frailty similarly prompts consciousness, sensitivity to our interrelationships, and can be a fountain of hope where there is none (Cullinan et al., 2021). Conclusively, reinforced concept of education as a public good, wholistic robust reforms, collaboration, involvement of all stakeholders, resource mobilization, and enhanced sense of education as a shared responsibility, inventions and ingenuity are likely to be possible mitigations towards existing education disparities geared towards reimagining of education so that short-range impediments do not translate into bigger, lifelong challenges.

## Recommendations

Ensuing from this epidemic is the fact that education is on the verge of great transformation. This demands for resource mobilization and involvement of all education stakeholders to lead the education transformative agenda. There are no suitable off-the-rack remedies, scientific or otherwise, it is out of the responses we mutually reach at by means of all-encompassing discourse and decision-making which will be part of reimagining of education as a panacea to existing challenges laid bare by the pandemic (Toquero, 2020). The COVID-19 catastrophe has revealed that invention and ingenuity are widely spread and not restricted to a few designated human beings. There is need to learn from and strengthen the responses emanating from educators, learners and common folk—for in them lies the potential for transforming education during and after the current crisis. Responses for the ongoing raving pandemic may be at variance from one region to another, from one setting to another.

Nevertheless, all these efforts must be anchored on humanitarian vision of reimagining education as a human right for all. All reforms must reinforce public education,

strengthen common goods and increase universal unity that stresses the shared responsibility for education of all regardless of any affiliations (World Bank., 2020).

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests

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