An Evaluation of the Health Safety Concerns in Zimbabwean Public Schools Operating under the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract
This paper sought to evaluate the health safety concerns in public schools' operations under the Covid-19 pandemic and focused on schools in Masvingo Urban. The study was necessitated by an increasing number of public schools in Zimbabwe reporting significant cases of Covid-19 infections since reopening in September 2020 raising public fear that the Standard Operations Procedures (SOPs) prescribed for schools to prevent, combat and manage the spread of the coronavirus were not being enforced hence schools were not safe for the learners and teachers. The study used a descriptive design narrative and a qualitative discourse. The descriptive survey design was preferred for its suitability and simplicity as well as its focus on analyzing data gathered for purpose of describing attitudes and behaviours that influence and shape how the population under study feel and understand things around them. The data for the study, particularly the obvert breaches of SOPs were gathered through observation. Interviews and questionnaires were used to ensure triangulation of techniques so as to better understand whether the shortcomings in implementation of SOPs were due to personal omissions or challenging circumstances that school communities found themselves in. While observation was for all and sundry at the fifteen (15) school selected for the study, targeted sampling was used to come up with seventy-five (75) respondents for interviews and questionnaires. The study revealed that the implementation of SOPs in public schools is far below stakeholders' expectations and World Health Organization benchmarks. Regrettably, the school environment meant to be improved by the SOPs was still congested and characterized by risk behaviours which expose learners and teachers to the Covid-19 scourge. Chief among the undesirable behaviours include doing without personal protective equipment (gowns, gloves, face masks) or improper use of the same, failure to keep social distance, loopholes in screening of learners and visitors for Covid-19 symptoms and poor hand hygiene. The study further revealed a plethora of underlying challenges to the implementation of the SOPs. Central to the challenges is understaffing of all the school covered by the study. The shortage of teachers has made it difficult to split the mega classes (doubling normal teacher-pupils' ratio) to desirable and manageable numbers. The neck breaking workload shouldered on the teachers in post that now included close monitoring of learners to enforce Covid-19 prevention and management protocols weighed down on their morale and commitment to duty. Financial constrain was also detrimental as all school did not have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment and sanitizers. The study primarily recommends that the highlighted challenges faced in the implementation of the SOPs be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) should engage the Public Service Commission with the view of employing additional teachers to easy the staff shortage and spread the workload. MoPSE should also explore possibilities of introducing a separate school calendar for various levels to meaningfully decongest classrooms and hostels. The Ministry of Finance must step up its appropriation allocation to public schools through grants to ensure adequate supply of personal protective equipment and sanitizers. In order to empower learners through life skills positive behaviour change for the **'new normal'** school environment, psycho–educational in form of intensified guidance and counselling programmes must be offered to all learners at all levels in the schools.
Keywords: COVID-19, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Coronavirus Management Protocols.

1. INTRODUCTION
On 20 March 2020, the Government of Zimbabwe closed schools amid imminent threats from Covid-19 pandemic. Not only Zimbabwe closed its schools but other countries in Southern Africa and the rest of the world. The hope was that the virus could be contained and possibly exterminated in the shortest possible time and allow learners to go back to the class freely and safely. However, the much awaited freedom was not to be. Instead, the virus persisted without signs of ending leaving education authorities no option other than exploring possibilities of fulfilling their mandate to deliver education under the constrains of the pandemic. The same was advocated by UNCEF under international banner encouraging that with meticulous planning it was possible for schools to resume operations (www.uncef.org 21 September 2020). UNCEF presumed little danger in Southern African countries reopening their schools as South Africa which apparently had the highest case load had road mapped its schools back to business as early as July 2020.

The final resolution by the Zimbabwe Government was to open the schools under strict Covid-19 controls. In order to cab or minimize the risk of the pandemic, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education working

closely with the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare developed a cocktail of measures to guide schools on how they have to operate under the new circumstances. The measures were developed within the general and universal Covid-19 Management protocols prescribed by the World Health Organization (WHO) (*http://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus*) as well as the National Response Strategy as proclaimed in Statutory Instrument 83 of 2020, Statutory Instrument 110 of 2020 and Statutory Instrument 174 of 20 – all on Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) . The measures by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education were put together to give a pact commonly referred to as the schools Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs). The crux of the SOPS is on prevention of the spread of the virus. Such prevention is underpinned on sanitary improvement, social/physical distancing and use of personal protective equipment - all which require substantial budget thereby putting huge responsibility on the School Development Committees that fund school operations.

While the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) claim the SOPs put in place can keep the virus at bay and create a safe environment for the learners and their teachers, no proportional assurance was given on the full and effective implementation of the same. The effective implementation of the operation procedures is apparently a positive function of the preparedness of the individual school hence may vary from school to school. Thus any malpractices and compromises in the implementation of the SOPs exposes the teachers and learners to the scourge. According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the numbers at risk if schools are exposed stands at 4.6 million learners and 127 000 teachers (Zimbabwe's Education Sector's COVID- 19 Response Plan July 2020)

As planned, in September 2020, schools opened their doors to the learners. This was a time when maximum cooperation was expected from the teachers to enforce behaviour change by the learners and ground them for the new environment. However, most public schools started without teachers who, through their labour unions had withdrawn their services citing the risk of Covid-19 as well as unsatisfactory remuneration among other grievances. The social media was awash with videos of learners displaying an array of mischief apparently breaching the Covid-19 management protocols. Soon reports from schools of Covid-19 infections started making headlines in news, the hardest hit being boarding schools in different provinces of the country. Table 1.1 below shows the cases of Covid-19 infections reported in schools in eight (8) of the ten (10) provinces of Zimbabwe by the 30th of November 2020.

Table 1.1: Cases of Covid-19 infections reported in Zimbabwean public schools

Province	Number of school Affected		No. of Cases Reported
	Boarding Schools	Day Schools	
Matabeleland North	2	6	218
Bulawayo	2	7	59
Midlands	1	3	29
Mashonaland West	-	4	135
Harare	1	5	49
Masvingo	2	5	19
Mashonaland East	-	1	7
Matabeleland South	-	5	31
Total	**8**	**36**	**547**

Source: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Information Department 30 November 2020

The developments cast doubt on the health safety in public schools in general. The grip of fear on what is happening in schools has affect many communities including Masvingo Urban as it harbours three (3) of the five schools in the province that have reported Covid-19 infection cases.

1.1 Statement Of The Problem
The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe has set Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) to followed by all public schools to ensure prevention and containment of the spread of Covid-9 virus in schools thereby creating safe teaching and learning environment. The set SOPs have been endorsed by the Health authorities as meeting the general World Health Organization's universal Covid-19 management protocols and prevention guidelines, thereby instilling confidence in the parents who released their children to school. However, since the reopening of the schools in September 2020, a number of schools have since reported significant cases of Covid-19 infections raising public fear that the SOPs are not being enforced and schools may fast become the epicenters or hot beds of the virus. The study sought to assess the extent to which the operations and practices at public schools in Masvingo Urban complied with Covid-19 prevention and management protocols for the safety of learners and teachers.

1.2 Objectives

o   To assess the extent to which the public schools' operations and practices complied with the set Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the prevention and management of Covid-19.

o   To establish if there were any underlying challenges faced by the schools in complying with Covid-19 prevention and management protocols.

o   To explore strategies which can be adopted to strengthen schools' compliance levels to Covid-19 prevention and management protocols so as to create safe teaching and learning environments.

1.3 Research Questions

o   To what extend do operations and practices at public schools in Masvingo Urban complied with the set Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the prevention and management of Covid-19.

o   What challenges were being faced by the schools in aligning their operations and practices to Covid-19 prevention and management protocols set by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for creation of safe teaching and learning environment?

o   What strategies can be adopted to strengthen schools' compliance levels to Covid-19 prevention and management protocols so as to create safe teaching and learning environment?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 What Schools Are Expected To Do To Ensure Safety Of Learner And Staff

Since time immemorial, the world has suffered many pandemics of various levels of difficulty in containment. Some were confined to specific zones but others such Covid-19 and HIV, just to mention a few, blew out of proportion and spread to all parts of the world. In time of infliction and turmoil, people usually think of vaccine but at times this may not be ready available. Experience has however, taught that when dealing with communicable or infectious diseases, the most prized remedy is prevention and containment of transmission. This has become the standard. While the world is grappling to develop a vaccine for the novel Covid-19 pandemic, the World Health Organization has already pulled a trigger to try and contain the spread of the virus through a cocktail of measures that all countries have to cautiously follow in all their day to day general lives and activities (*http://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus*).

At local level, the Government of Zimbabwe, as per Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Standard Operating Procedures Manual for the Prevention and Management of COVID-19 and other Influenza Like Illnesses (September 2020), a **Thirty – eight (38) point** set of SOPs has been developed for all schools registered in terms of Section 10, 15 and 18 of the Education Act 2006 as amended to followed. The set SOPs are summarized as follows;

o   General Covid-19 Preparedness (setting up of management teams, training of teachers and learners, information dissemination, stock piling of material requirements including liquid soaps, alcohol based hand sanitizers, appropriate protective gowns, gloves, stipulated health standard face masks, information and communication materials, infra –red thermometers, etc.)

o   Appointment, training and supervision of teachers to perform the function school heath coordinators.

o   Appointment, training and supervision of teachers to perform the function station health coordinators.

o   Conducting regular health promotions programs aimed at educating staff and learners about communicable and non-communicable diseases.

o   Use of face masks or face shields/guards and proper adornment of the same.

o   Availing gloves to each class for use by learners and teachers when handling task materials where there is risk of hand contamination.

o   Provision of protective gowns for use by school health coordinators.

o   Keeping of social / physical distance among learners as well as the staff members.

o   Avoidance handshakes, touching, hugging, and other bodily contact. Teachers to closely monitor the learners.

o   Setting up of hand washing stations with running water and liquid soaps at convenient points in the school such as main entrance, toilets classrooms etc. The points must be functional all day long.

o   Hand sanitization using alcohol-based sanitizers at convenient points in the school for the teachers, visitors and learners.

o   Availability of infra-red thermometers for screening learners, teachers and visitors for COVID-19 at every entry into the school. The screening should focus on body temperature, history of fever, cough, etc.

o   Ensuring that only necessary visitors are allowed into the school. Those allowed must use designated points of entry and must undergo routine screening and disinfection protocols.

o   Ensuring that unwell staff / learners stay at home until they have recovered.

o   Ensuring that temporary isolation holding bays are established for those suspected of infection at screening points. Those hold must be referred to the Covid-19 Rapid Response Team for further

management.
o   Ensuring that any member or learner that has been in contact with known Covid-19 infected persons is isolated from the rest of the school and immediately referred to local health center for appropriate attention.
o   Ensuring that sharing of materials, equipment, eating utensils, linen, clothing is avoided.
o   Ensuring regular cleaning of ablution facilities.
o   Ensuring that classrooms and other facilities occupied by learners and staff are well ventilated for free circulation of fresh air.
o   Availing a covered bin for every classroom and ensuring that such refuse is disposed by burning.
o   Ensuring that frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, tables, desks, light switches, doorframes, toys, teaching aids used by learners are regularly disinfected.
o   Sporting activities including matches, choral practice indoor games of all kinds are prohibited until further notice. Only low risk sport as defined in Statutory Instrument 110 of 2020 on Public Health (Covid-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) (Amendment NO. 8, 2020) can be permitted in schools.
o   Ensuring that storage, preparation and saving of food is always in compliance with that Food Safety Standards and food handlers must have a valid Public Health Screening Certificate issued in terms of Section 3(2)(a) of the Public Health (medical examination) Order of 1994.
o   The use of play-centers, sporting equipment and sporting facilities is prohibited until further notice
o   Transporting learners and staff to and from home – schools to educate learners and parents on the importance of maintaining social distance when walking home or the need to strictly adhere to health and hygiene safety precautions when using public transport.
o   Ensuring that the school is attached to specific Health Care Services provider in line with the School Health Policy (2018).
o   Ensuring that any member of the school community suspected of having been in contact with confirmed Covid-19 infected persons stays at home in quarantine and the public health authorities are notified for appropriate intervention.
o   Ensuring that Parental are informed of the SOPs for involvement and support.
o   Ensuring that additional school related measures are adopted and implemented.
o   Ensuring that break and lunch times are well managed to avoid unnecessary interaction of learners.
o   To restrict or minimize mixing of classes.
o   To adopt hot sitting as a way of decongesting the classrooms and other facilities.
o   To review boarding hostel carrying capacity and adopting set ups that respect social distancing.
o   Ensuring that learners in informal boarding arrangements are well informed and constantly reminded of the need to strictly adhere to health and hygiene safety precautions.
o   Providing psycho-educational support – guidance and counselling programmes and services for life orientation skills must be provided to learners.
o   Ensuring that overcrowding of learners at the entrance when leaving school is avoided.
o   Providing and caring for the learners and staff with underlying conditions.
o   Extra measures for le0arners and staff with disabilities.

2.2 International Best Practice
The SOPs highlighted above are well aligned to the general guideline set by World Health Organization (*http://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus*)and borrow significantly from some other countries that have successfully reopened their public schools in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. A good example of such a country is the Republic of South Africa whose blue print was had similar measures as set by Zimbabwe (https://www.education.gov.za) South Africa had to put strict measures after seven hundred and seventy-five (775) public schools had been invaded by the coronavirus affecting One thousand, one hundred and sixty-nine (1 169) learners and teachers.(South African Government: www.gov.za) If the measures worked in other countries, then they should work for Zimbabwe particularly if comparable conditions and circumstances for implementation are created. The disparities in results are therefore a positive function of deferential in circumstances which countries find themselves – the financial resources, material resources, manpower capabilities and commitment as well as methods adopted.

2.3 Factors to Consider for the Effective Implementation of the SOPs
In light of successful implementation, there is a general position that focus should always be on the critical success factors. According to Ishikawa (1960), there are four central factors that contribute to the effective implementation of a programme/project which are environment, people, methods, material resources/equipment.
   Linked to people are skills level, attitude, motivation and commitment to the obligations involved. Methods

covers approaches, strategies, procedures followed in the implementation process. Material resources/equipment raises issues of quality and quantity of identified material needs. The environment entails availability of required space and security issues. All the four factors are generally tied to funding, which in essence looks at budgets set aside to remunerate, train and develop manpower as well as acquiring equipment and material needs for the programme.

If the four factors are put together being of the right quality and are applied in the right quantities, there are high chances of getting positive results. Lamb, (2011) subscribes that effectiveness is a product of people's attitudes, beliefs, values coupled with individual empowerment through motivation, skilling, information operating in a capacitated environment with materials and equipment. This insinuate that when a programme fails, the tracing of the failure is most likely to be linked to the identified four success factors.

Precisely, what the Zimbabwean schools must do to fulfill the demands of the SOPs is depended on the attitudes and commitment of the teachers and learners, availability of a secure and decongested environment, availability of materials and equipment and most importantly results oriented strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey design coupled with a qualitative approach. The descriptive survey method was preferred for its flexibility in allowing the researcher to interact with respondents in a natural and unobtrusive manner thus experiencing reality in how respondents view things. The descriptive survey also allows focused analysis of data gathered for purpose of describing attitudes and behaviours that influence and shape the feelings and understanding of the population under study. Cooper and Schindler, (2014) note that the descriptive study has the power to describe the phenomena / characteristics associated with the subject population as well discovering the association between variables of interest. The descriptive survey was also found handy because it allows and empresses the use of multiple qualitative techniques such as comparing and contrasting, measurement, classification and evaluation. Cooper and Schindler, (2014) observe that understanding different meanings that people place on their experiences require qualitative research techniques that delve deeply into people's hidden interpretations, understandings and motivations.

The data for the study was mainly collected through observation, use of questionnaires and interviews to ensure triangulation of techniques. The targeted population were all students enrolled with the Zimbabwe open university Masvingo Regional Campus across all programmes on offer and levels.

The study used convenient sampling to come up with Seventy-five (75) respondents made up of two (2) senior prefects two (2) senior teachers and the school head from each of the fifteen (15) public schools covered. Teachers and school heads were interviewed while learners completed questionnaires. Observation by researcher targeted behaviours and practices that were inconsistent with set covid-19 prevention and management measures at all the schools. Observation was preferred to play the central role in this study for its advantage of providing natural and unbiased results as people behave their usual if they are not aware that they are under scrutiny (Chikoko and Mhloyi 1995)

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Compliance to Set Covid-19 Prevention and Management Measures - Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs)

Tabulated below is an analysis of gaps identified in the schools' operations as compared to the laid down SOPs that should be followed. Fifteen (15) schools were covered of which two (2) are boarding.

Table 4.1: Gaps identified in the schools' operations as compared to the laid down SOPs

SOPs Check List	Observed Gaps / Breaches in Implementation	Non-Compliance Proportions		Compliance Proportions	
		No. (n=15)	%	No. (n=15)	%
1 General Covid-19 Preparedness (setting up of management teams, training of teachers and learners, information dissemination, stock piling of material requirements)	• No school had enough of these resources serve for the infra-red thermometers	15	100	-	-

	SOPs Check List	Observed Gaps / Breaches in Implementation	Non-Compliance Proportions		Compliance Proportions	
			No. (n=15)	%	No. (n=15)	%
2	School heath coordinators	• Committees established but some members not aware of their duties reducing the effectiveness of the committees	6	40	9	60
3	Station health coordinators	• Committees established but some members not aware of their duties reducing the effectiveness of the committees	6	40	9	60
4	Health promotions activities	• Guidance and counselling activities not programmed in most of the schools and being offered sparingly	5	33.3	10	66.7
5	Face masks	• Sub-standard masks • Dirty and hazardous masks, Improper adornment of masks, Exchanging of masks by kid for fun, • Removing of masks at the slightest opportunity, • Learners coming from home without putting on their masks – only putting them at entrance point to be allowed to pass through.	15	100	-	-
6	Gloves	• Not available for every class • Members sharing the few pairs available breaching point 17 of the SOPs which prohibits sharing of such items as it exposes members to deposit and collection risks.	15	100	-	-
7	Care and maintenance of protective gowns for school health coordinators	• Not available for everyone • Members sharing the few pairs available breaching point 17 of the SOPs which prohibits sharing of such items as it exposes members to deposit and collection risks.	15	100	-	-
8	Social / physical distancing	• Social distance was not being maintained inside and outside the class. • Classrooms and hostels not adequately decongested because of • the abnormal carrying capacity that existed even before the pandemic	15	100	-	-
9	Handshakes, touching, hugging, and other bodily contact	• Though reduced learners and staff alike still struggling to get over the habit of handshaking and touching	15	100	-	-

SOPs Check List		Observed Gaps / Breaches in Implementation	Non-Compliance Proportions		Compliance Proportions	
			No. (n=15)	%	No. (n=15)	%
10	Hand washing stations	• Limited points established due to lack of resources. • In some schools, the points are affected by shortage of running water. • No soap in ablution facilities. Learners mostly wash their hands once when they enter the school gate.	6	40	9	60
11	Hand sanitization	• Instead of availing it to all and sundry as per SOPs schools restricted to staff members and visitors in all schools under study due to prohibitive cost of sanitizers.	6	40	9	60
12	Screening for Covid-19	• Process skipped by learners and visitors that use undesignated entry points were schools have porous and insecure boundaries.	6	40	9	60
13	Screening of visitors	• Process skipped by learners and visitors that use undesignated entry points were schools have porous and insecure boundaries. • Main entrance not manned all day. Visitors that come after health coordinators have left checkpoints move in without screening.	6	40	9	60
14	Unwell staff / learners to stay at home	Well adhered to by all schools	-	-	15	100
15	Temporary isolation holding bays	Well adhered to by all members	-	-	15	100
16	Action taken after contact with known Covid-19 infected persons	Well adhered to by all members	-	-	15	100
17	Sharing of materials, equipment, eating utensils, linen, clothing.	• Leaners particularly those in boarding sharing stuff in breaching point 17 of the SOPs which prohibits sharing of such items as it exposes members to deposit and collection risks. • Leaners particularly those in infant classes exchanging masks for fun if left unattended in breaching point 17 of the SOPs which prohibits sharing of such items as it exposes members to deposit and collection risks.	12	80	3	20
18	Cleaning of ablution facilities	• Not done to satisfactory • Not regularly done	15	100	-	-
19	Ventilation	Well adhered to by all members	-		15	100

SOPs Check List		Observed Gaps / Breaches in Implementation	Non-Compliance Proportions		Compliance Proportions	
			No. (n=15)	%	No. (n=15)	%
20	Refuse disposal	• No covered bins in individual classrooms.	15	100	-	-
21	Disinfecting frequently touched surfaces	• In some schools, these have been disinfected once at the time when school reopened and never after.	15	100	-	-
22	Sporting activities	Well adhered to by all members	-		15	100
23	School feeding	• Serve for the boarding schools, other schools have shelved the feeding programme indefinitely to reduce the pressure on them	-	-	2/2	100
24	Play centers, sporting equipment and sporting facilities	Well adhered to by all school	-		15	100
25	Transporting learners and staff to and from home	Very little can be done by the school other than passing the information	-	-	-	-
26	Health services providers per school	Well adhered to by all school	-	-	15	100
27	Treatment of suspected contact with confirmed Covid-19 infected persons	Well adhered to by all school	-	-	15	100
28	Parental involvement	Well adhered to by all school	-	-	15	100
29	Additional school related measures	• Very little innovation noted except sending learners home when not occupied.	-	-	-	-
30	Break and lunchtimes	• Learners mixing and mingling particularly in secondary schools. • No social distancing maintained. • Some learners remove their masks as they eat and drinking.	12	80	3	20
31	Mixing of classes	Well adhered to by all school	-	-	15	100
32	Hot sitting	Well adhered to by all members but has not adequately decongesting the schools.	6	40	9	60
33	Boarding hostel set up	• Social distance was not being maintained inside and outside the hostel. • hostels not adequately decongested because of the abnormal carrying capacity that existed before the pandemic	2/2	100	-	-
34	Learners in informal boarding arrangements	Not applicable to schools under study	-	-	-	-
35	Psycho-educational support	• Guidance and counselling activities not programmed in most of the schools and being offered sparingly	6	40	9	60

SOPs Check List		Observed Gaps / Breaches in Implementation	Non-Compliance Proportions		Compliance Proportions	
			No. (n=15)	%	No. (n=15)	%
36	Overcrowding when leaving school	• This was observed to be the order of the day at secondary schools were learners desire to interact with their peers. • At primary schools, learners are often left unattended at the holding bay while waiting for parents to pick them. They get carried away and pick up their fun little games that naturally get them together	15	100	-	-
37	Learners and staff with underlying conditions	• No registers of such people maintained by some schools	-	-	-	-
38	Extra measures for learners and staff with disabilities	• The only special school that enroll predominantly learners with disabilities remained closed.	-	-	-	-

Source: Original Data from Observation Interviews and Questionnaires

The results in table 4.1 above show that all the fifteen (15) public schools that were covered by the study were failing to comply in the most critical aspects of the Covid-19 prevention protocols, such as face masking, good hand hygiene, screening for symptoms and social distancing denoting an exposed and insecure environment where the virus can easily spread. Schools only complied in matters of management of suspected and confirmed cases of infection. This is probably because of the involvement of third parties like Ministry of Health and Child Care.

4.2 Challenges Faced in the Implementation of set Covid-19 Prevention and Management Measures
4.2.1 Challenges Raised by School Heads
The fifteen school heads that participated in the study attributed failure of SOPs to the challenges outlined in table 4.2 below;
Table 4.2 Challenges Raised by School Heads of the Fifteen (15) Schools Assessed

Challenge	Effect	Schools Affected	
		No. (n=15)	%
Lack of financial resources	Failure to provide personal protective equipment and other provisions	15	100
Low staff morale and lack of cooperation	Learners not closely monitored to enforce proper adornment of masks and social distancing	15	100
Shortage of staff – unattainable teacher – pupil ratios	Failure to make use of strategies such as hot sitting and class splitting i.e. a mega class of 90 needs to be broken into three classes which become difficult to be run by one teacher.	15	100
Inadequate Infrastructure	Overcrowding compromising social distancing Shortage of classrooms and hostel to meet revised holding capacities	15	100

Source: Original Data from Interviews and Questionnaires

The school heads totally agreed that lack of financial resources, low staff morale and lack of cooperation, shortage of staff – unattainable teacher –pupil ratios and inadequate infrastructure were key challenges that derailed the successful implementation of SOPs.
4.2.2 Challenges Raised by Teachers
The thirty (30) teachers that participated in the study concurred that the challenges given in Table 4.3 below affected them all and had an effect on their commitment to duty.

Table 4.3 Challenges faced by teaching staff

Challenges	Effect
Neck breaking workloads – mega class sizes	Difficult to keep an eye on every child because of large numbers involved
Lack of incentives to do the work	Eroded earnings divides the attention of the teacher as they have to look elsewhere to supplement.
Lack of PPE putting them at risk	Teachers refrain from carrying certain duties without personal protective equipment
Inadequate training on Covid-19 matters	Techers that missed training done during lockdown never got a second chance.

Source: Original Data from Interviews and Questionnaires

Apparently, the teachers' views confirmed and affirmed the school heads' claim that there was an element of teacher reluctance to drive the system and advance the smooth running of the school.

4.2.3 Difficulties Raised by Learners

Thirty learners that participated in the study raised a number of challenges they faced in varying proportions as outlined in Table 4.4 below;

Table 4.4: Challenges faced by the learns in school under Covid-19 pandemic

Challenge	Effects	Proportion Affected No. (n=30)	%
Lack of provisions	• Sharing of personal protective equipment such as gloves when cleaning classrooms and other facilities • Doing without personal protective equipment	**30**	**100**
Poor water and sanitary health (WASH) facilities	• Poor hand hygiene • Misuse of ablution facilities • Improper disposal of refuse	12	80
Lack of supervision by teachers	• Poor enforcement of covid-19 prevention measures • Wrong things learners do without rebuke from teachers gradually part and parcel of learners' lives	9	60
Teacher absenteeism	• Idleness pushing learners into fidgeting and other monkey games breaching social distancing requirement	4	26.67
Lack important information	• Some behaviours are ignorant induced	9	60
Overcrowding	• Due to large class sizes, it is difficult to keep social distance and avoid physical contact	15	100
Mischief and show off by some learners.	• Learners defying rules for fun and pushing each other into mischief	9	60
Oversight	• Certain things like removing or dropping face masks are done spontaneously because they are things not constantly done at home.	3	20

Source: Original Data from Interviews and Questionnaires

The challenges raised by the learners are mostly centered on teachers' questionable commitment to duty and lack of resources and congestion which are in essence the school heads' major issues. This affirms that the challenges raised by the school heads are the real challenges that must be given all the attention if any action has to be taken to bring sanity in the schools.

5. CONCLUSION

In view of the findings presented and discussed above, the study concludes that the safety of learners and teachers in public schools is at risk due to high levels of non-compliant operations to the set Covid-19 prevention measures. The implementation of the SOPs meant to create safe learning environments in the public schools is far below stakeholders' expectations and World Health Organization benchmarks. The school environment is still congested or overcrowded and characterized by risk behaviours which expose learners and teachers to the Covid-19 scourge. Chief among the undesirable behaviours include doing without personal protective equipment (gowns, gloves, face masks) or improper use of the same, failure to keep social distance, loopholes in screening learners, teachers and

visitors for Covid-19 signs and symptoms and poor hand hygiene. The study further concludes that there are serious underlying challenges that weigh down on efforts to migrate from old practices to Covid-19 prevention and management SOPs. Central to the challenges is understaffing of all the school covered by the study. The shortage of teachers has made it difficult to split the mega classes (doubling normal teacher-pupils' ratio) to desirable and manageable numbers that decongest the school environment. The fewer teachers in post are grappling to closely monitor the learners and enforce Covid-19 prevention and management protocols. Financial constrain was also detrimental as all school did not have adequate supplies of personal protective equipment and sanitizers.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings highlighted and discussed above, the study recommends that;

- o While rotational attendance and hot sitting have been introduced to decongest day - schools, the strategies do not seem compatible with the boarding school where decongestion has to be done in the classroom and hostel. Considering that the pandemic may be with us into unforeseeable future, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) should consider further adjustments including possibility for a separate and shorter school term calendar for various levels. Switching learners after a "term" allows both day and boarding schools to manage their carrying capacity with easy. Similarly, a 'fixed term' makes it easy for the teachers to meaningfully monitor and assess the progress of their learners.
- o In light of the abnormal teacher – pupil ratios that are currently running, the MoPSE should engage the Public Service Commission and other authorities in government with the view of employing more teachers such that the teacher – pupil ratios are improved to manageable levels. Improved teacher – pupils ration would also allow effective monitoring and supervision of learners to ensure that they follow the set Covid-19 prevention guidelines and management protocols.
- o Bearing in mind that availability of personal protective equipment and sanitizers are at the core of the desired Covid-19 preventive measures pronounced in the SOPs, the MoPSE should engage its various partners to mobilise financial resources to improve supply of PPE and other critical sanitary provisions to schools that are financially stressed.
- o All staff members and learners must keep informed on Covid-19 issues. Schools should intensify age appropriate guidance and counselling programmes for sustained behaviour change in learners and teachers so as to develop a collective sense of responsibility in fighting the spread of the virus. There should be unending provision of information should involve extensive use of experts from the department of health and child care.
- o Considering the ages of learners involved and how at times they succumb to peer pressure and desire for the lost freedom, teachers and other staff members must step up supervision of learners to ensure that they adhere to set protocols such as proper adornment of face masks, social distancing and good hand hygiene.
- o The MoPSE should review its policies and procedures disciplinary issues to ensure that mischievous learners that persistently breach protocols and expose the innocent to the risk of Covid-19 are easily excluded from the school.
- o Schools should work hand in glove with the School Parents Assembly and share common position on SSOPs to ensure that what the school emphases is also practiced in the home setting. The harmonization of the two environments would go a long way in making the learner accept the restrictions as a 'normal way of life' thereby making enforcement of preventive measures easy.
- o Monitoring of compliance of schools to SOPs should not only left to MoPSE. Ministry of Health and Child Care must also directly be involved to ensure that expert advice is always availed. Generally, external monitoring brings about checks and balances and adds value to how a system operates.
- o Security at schools must be improved to ensure that unnecessary visitors are shut out while those with valid reasons follow and observe all protocols applicable in the school.

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