COVID-19 Lockdown and higher education. Time to look at disaster-preparedness as a governance issue?

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Abstract

When COVID-19 broke out in Wuhan in 2019, the world looked at it as a 'Chinese' disease and no international efforts were made to assist China. Countries that supported China just offered solidarity messages. China adopted a raft of measures that included prescribing a lockdown on Wuhan and construction of infrastructure such as hospitals. In 2020, COVID-19 extended its tentacles across the globe. A majority of countries adopted the lockdown as a mitigatory measure. The lockdown activated an extraordinary instant emergency in the education sector as schools, colleges and universities shut down. What worsened the situation was that no solution was in sight as the medical researchers dithered from one suggestion to the other. This paper examines possible ways to deal with the emergency in the education sector by suggesting alternative learning solutions. The major argument of this paper is that countries should not simply copy and paste solutions that are not in sync with their local settings. Using the multistage designs sampling technique, three universities from a target of eighteen were selected. Convenience sampling was used to select the three universities and analytic rubrics were used to analyse clarity of policy and disaster preparedness by universities in Zimbabwe. For comparative purposes, four international webinars on education and COVID-19 were selected. This paper contributes towards addressing the lacunae created by global lockdown and subsequent shutdown of learning institutions due to COVID-19. The findings were that the lockdown approach was adopted and implemented without adaptation. Learning institutions were closed indefinitely despite the economic environment, the digital divide and the rural-urban divide militating against lockdown's entire adoption. Key proposals to deal with the lockdown include scaling up distance education based on mixed technologies, a paradigm shift on perceptions on digital education and resuscitation of postal services.

Keywords: COVID-19, lockdown, distance education, governance, disaster preparedness

Introduction

The whole world is desperate for a solution to the COVID-19 pandemic that has been wreaking havoc. Every facet of life has been affected and there has been massive loss of life. Education, one of the determinants of human development and socialisation, has not been spared either. Despite the adoption of various strategies against COVID-19, the spread of the disease in sub-Saharan Africa might be just beginning, hence learners should be expecting a long haul (King 2020). In a bid to mitigate COVID-19's ramifications, schools, colleges and universities in the global north came up with mitigatory measures that included online curriculum platforms and new

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courses for higher education institutions (Winthrop 2020). What motivated this paper is whether sub-Saharan Africa and other countries in the global south will be able to do what their counterparts in the global north have done. Globally, inequality, marginalisation and social isolation have continued to dominate relations at student level and this is largely influenced by the penchant of global south governors to adopt solutions performed in the global north, where the education sector has adopted total lockdowns that have seen schools, colleges and universities shutting their physical doors. To mitigate the negative effects, they have gone on to activate virtual classes.

Unfortunately, because of their penchant of adopting measures implemented in the global north without contextualising them, countries in the global south have also embraced lockdowns. This paper examines the possible ways to deal with the emergency in the education sector by suggesting alternative learning solutions. The major argument of this paper is that countries should not just copy and paste solutions that are not in sync with their local settings. In exploring the challenges posed by wholesome adoption without adaptation, questions that emerge include: what are the implications of university closure where students have signed agreements with sponsors and employers? How can it be possible to ensure that an education system facing severe and sustained disruption functions properly? (King 2020). Can the widespread use of remote schooling be a feasible panacea, especially when it comes to maximisation of learning and mitigation of the impact of disruption witnessed on the most vulnerable members of society? What can best guide the university in choosing remote forms to use? What has made us put emphasis on these questions is that the majority of global south countries have opted for lockdown as a response to the ravaging COVID-19. Apart from that, the universities and schools face a dilemma when it comes to selecting the appropriate remote schooling method. The dilemma comes since there are no universally accepted standards on what 'quality' means (King 2020). Furthermore, there are no clear guidelines on what would make one option more preferable to the others. It is therefore imperative that we come up with policy proposals for future implementation. Using the multistage designs and convenience sampling techniques, three universities from a target of eighteen were selected. Analytic rubrics were used to analyse clarity of policy and disaster preparedness by these universities. For comparative purposes, four international webinars on education and COVID-19 were selected using snowballing sampling technique. This paper contributes towards addressing the voids that emerged as a result of the global lockdown and the consequent closure of learning institutions due to COVID-19. From the analysis of the institutions' disaster preparedness, it emerged that considerable productive learning time was lost as universities were not prepared. The situation was worsened by the adoption of the lockdown approach without adapting it to the local context. The local context where total lockdowns were enacted did not have a matching macroeconomic environment, neither was the digital divide or the rural-urban divide favourable. The conclusion drawn was that the wholesome adoption of foreign interventions did not work in the global south. Key proposals to mitigate the ramifications of the lockdown include improving distance education based on using mixed technologies, a paradigm shift on perceptions about digital education and revival of post office services.

This paper focuses on COVID-19 as a global pandemic, the disaster-preparedness of the education sector for this global pandemic and the international response by the education sector to this pandemic. The paper adopts a case study of how the Zimbabwean education sector handles the pandemic and the ramifications of the adopted approach. Finally, the paper recommends the strategies that the education sector has to adopt so that students are not disadvantaged further by COVID-19.

COVID-19 Global pandemic

The genesis of COVID-19 can be traced to the Chinese city of Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province. The siege on Wuhan was announced on 9 January 2020 (Le Maris 2020). Due to its origins, some mainstream media started to call it the 'Chinese Flu' or 'Chinese disease'. The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 an International Public Health Emergency on 30 January 2020 (Le Maris 2020). Globally, 70 countries (including 12 in Africa) have declared an official emergency, placing more than 3.9 billion people on lockdown (Seyhan 2020). COVID-19 presents a triple threat, namely the virus itself (threatening life), economic consequences of lockdown (loss of production hours) and state repression (police brutality and abuse of human rights during the enforcement of lockdown). The economic consequences are linked to the notion that COVID-19 follows global commercial networks. African countries cannot simply copy rich countries' responses to COVID-19 (Strohm 2020; De Waal 2020). Strategies of containment adopted by the global north included an uncontrolled spread (letting the virus spread rapidly so as to build the immunity of the population, adopted in Sweden) (Strohm 2020). This strategy was based on Darwinism that promotes survival of the fittest. The other strategy was testing and containment. This strategy was adopted by Taiwan and Singapore but it demanded a strong public health system (De Waal 2020; Strohm 2020). The last option was the lockdown, either without income replacement as in the US or with income replacement as in Denmark and Canada (Strohm 2020). The lockdown involved prohibiting people to leave their homes. For Africa, uncontrolled spread and testing and containment were not viable options since they would destroy the already overburdened public health system. The only option that seemed available was the adoption of lockdown. However, lockdowns are not sustainable and issues of social distancing will only be adhered to if the basic needs are met. African countries went into lockdown without consultations with the grassroots. The populace was not given a chance to propose locally-suitable versions of transmission, control, and monitoring strategies (De Waal 2020). The lockdowns that were adopted as standardised sets of intervention strategies were alien, as they were copied from East Asia, Europe and North America (De Waal 2020) (Le Maris 2020). This was despite the differences in context, especially when it comes to ensuring social distancing and voluntary compliance. This difference was likely to lead to confrontations between the police and the general populace. Apart from different contexts, the rationale for lockdown is to flatten the curve of infections in populated urban areas, yet in Africa these lockdowns were adopted at the beginning of the infections. In addition, more that 56% of the African population live in the rural areas; one wonders how that would flatten the curve. In the end, the failure to consult saw the executive leaders giving orders that suspended social services like education. This had far-reaching ramifications globally, as 1.6 billion of 1.91 billion learners found themselves out of school (UNESCO 2020; Gyamerah 2020; King 2020; Rose 2020). These measures were taken without even considering the consequences of such actions, especially considering the nature of infrastructure in a majority of global south countries. The following section looks at the disaster preparedness of the education sector worldwide for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disaster preparedness of the education sector

When COVID-19 struck the world, lockdowns were embraced by many global south countries despite their different contexts from the countries in the global north. Globally, 1.6 billion of 1.91 billion learners are negatively affected by school, colleges and university closures (UNESCO 2020; Gyamerah 2020) and this translates to 91% of the enrolled learners worldwide. The learners who are affected are in 188 countries that have closed schools (Rose 2020) as a containment strategy. Thus, governments have temporarily closed education institutions as a

way of containing the spread of COVID-19 (Gyamerah 2020). Due to the different contexts and somewhat alien solutions, many activities were disrupted. In some instances, life came to a standstill and it is anticipated that in education, governments have to change their way of doing business and their governance after COVID-19. In 1918 during the Spanish flu pandemic, 40 US cities closed their schools, while after World War II, 1 million children dropped out of school in the UK (Winthrop 2020b). After World War II, the world embraced multilateralism in the form of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations (UN) (Amaglo-Mensah 2020). In addition, after the 2008 financial crisis, there were improved and synchronised financial regulations. Even though this is not the first pandemic, there are neither adequate evidence nor tried and tested coping strategies by education institutions when pandemics strike. History fails us as it does not offer us straight forward precedents (King, 2020).

New initiatives are crucial to dealing with reality affecting the global village, and there is no room for the traditional way of doing things (Amaglo-Mensah 2020). As a global crisis, COVID-19 should alter the way people view society as the other global crises did. If no alternative interventions emerge and are adopted, the ripple effects include sub-par delivery (Amaglo-Mensah, 2020) where limited time is used to cover many topics. Though a lot of countries have adopted reactionary measures such as distance learning, there are quite an array of questions outstanding. These questions focus on the implications of university closure to students that have signed agreements with sponsors and employers. The universities are in a quandary, uncertain how to deal with the change in programme timeframes. Universities are also not sure how to improve their service delivery in the light of the heavy blow dealt by COVID-19 that has resulted in severe and sustained disruption to the normal functions (King 2020). In cases where universities have embraced remote forms of teaching and learning, the universities and schools face a dilemma when it comes to selecting the appropriate remote schooling method. The dilemma comes since there are no universally accepted standards on what 'quality' means (King 2020). In addition, can the widespread use of remote schooling be a feasible panacea, especially when it comes to the maximisation of learning and mitigation of the impact of disruption witnessed on the most vulnerable members of society? What can best guide the university in choosing remote forms to use? What has made us put emphasis on these questions is that the majority of countries in the global south experience this phenomenon. Apart from that, the attachment to traditional methods of teaching and learning also negatively affects the use of remote schooling methods. This exhibits itself in the form of fatigue that militates against maintain learner engagement. Learning institutions find themselves facing hurdles when it comes to building interaction, either remotely or through "drip feeding" (King 2020). Other questions include those that focus on examinations when colleges and universities are closed. These are pertinent questions since the interruption of examinations has far-reaching negative repercussions. These include delaying decisions on student progress and graduation, thereby militating against their contribution to the socio-economic wellbeing of their societies (UNESCO 2020). The following section takes a bird's eye view of how the international community responded to the disruptions in the education sector as a result of measures that were taken to contain COVID-19.

International response to COVID-19 disruptions in the education sector

Globally, COVID-19 has triggered an unprecedented immediate education emergency (Srivastava 2020) and anxiety has gripped the world (Winthrop 2020). In order to deal with this emergency, the provision of alternative learning solutions (Atchoarena 2020) became a priority. In response, the World Bank established a US$14 billion education task force (Gyamerah 2020) because government-mandated quarantine made the traditional approach untenable (Winthrop 2020). Worldwide, staff, students and international partners have been arm-twisted and forced to

adapt quickly (Rose 2020) to deal with COVID-19. For those schools, colleges and universities in countries that have adopted lockdown as a containment strategy, UNESCO has come up with mitigatory measures. These include the adoption of relevant technologies (Rose 2020). For example, among other strategies, Ministries of Education in Kenya and Liberia have rolled out radio programmes. In China, more than 20 online curriculum platforms and 24000 courses for higher education institutions emerged (Winthrop 2020). Other real-time distance education programmes might be difficult to access because they demand access to the Internet, electricity and digital devices (Gyamerah 2020).

Quite a number of countries adopted national lockdown, while others opted for localised lockdown. Those that adopted total lockdown greatly affected their learners, especially those that were in their final semester and therefore about to take their final examinations. Of the 84 countries surveyed, 58 had postponed their examinations, while 23 introduced alternative methods that were home-based testing (UNESCO 2020). In addition, 22 maintained examinations, while 11 countries completely cancelled (UNESCO 2020). These countries found themselves in this unenviable position largely because they felt that using alternative assessments was neither feasible nor would it compromise the quality of the graduates. Though lockdowns have been implemented, it should be pointed out that working at home on your own might create a feeling of helplessness (Rose 2020). There is a danger of the school closures entrenching gender gaps in education, culminating the in increased risk of sexual exploitation and forced marriages for the girls (Giannini 2020). Transactional sex between girls and peers or older men might also spike. Looking at the preceding discussion, one can safely argue that the measures that were taken by countries in the global north seemed to yield positive results. These countries seemed prepared for the pandemic, especially in the education sector as they quickly switched to remote methods of teaching and learning. The following section zeroes down on the case of Zimbabwe, mainly focusing on how COVID-19 was generally treated, as well as how the social services industry, education included, dealt with the pandemic.

COVID-19 in Zimbabwe

Like any other country, Zimbabwe launched a US$26 million COVID-19 Preparedness Plan (Mugabe 2020), and it was designed to shape a cohesive and synchronised approach to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its effects. This plan was overseen by the Ministry of Health and Child Care in conjunction with World Health Organisation (WHO). Its major thrust was planning, communication, containment and case management. The major weakness of the plan was that it did not include universities, yet these had innovative hubs that were supposed to be part of the solution. Even though they were left out and asked to close, largely because they did not offer essential services, universities created partnerships with the private sector and manufactured sanitisers (Zinyuke 2020) and ventilators (Mudzingwa 2020). Even though universities tried to contribute in terms of their social responsibility, no one bothered to look at what the learners benefitted from the whole setup. This becomes a serious governance issue that needs to be examined for the learners might be short-changed without any recourse. The following section looks at the methodology that was used in this paper.

Methodology

The major focus of this paper is to examine possible ways global south countries can employ to deal with the emergency that emerges in the education sector as a result of the adoption of wholesome lockdown strategies by government. These ways include evaluating the feasibility of possible alternative learning solutions that universities can embrace. The major argument proffered in this paper is that countries should not simply copy and paste solutions that are not in sync with their local settings. This paper contributes to addressing the voids that emerged as a

result of the global lockdown and the consequent closure of learning institutions due to COVID-19. The target population for this study are both state and private universities in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is chosen first for convenience and largely because of her history and the importance she has attached to the development of education which has seen her leading even in SADC. Using the multistage designs that first groups the universities into their categories as either public or private, convenience sampling techniques are used to choose three universities. Two are public universities selected from 11 universities, while one chosen from seven universities is private. Analytic rubrics were used to analyse the clarity of policy on disaster preparedness and document analysis on how these universities managed their institutions after the declaration of lockdowns by the government. For comparative purposes, four international webinars on education and COVID-19 were selected using snowballing sampling technique. What emerged from the document analysis was juxtaposed against the recommendations from the deliberations of the four webinars that we attended. The following section provides the findings of this study and the subsequent discussions of the findings including the recommendations that were proffered.

Results and discussions

This section provides an insight into what universities did, including what mechanisms they had to put in place, how the students took it, what challenges the students faced as well as how the examinations were handled by formerly conventional institutions when they were confronted with the lockdown. The results presented in this section were from three universities (University A is private-owned while University B & C are government-owned), the major focus being how they coped with the lacunae created by their sudden closure as a result of the lockdown while the semester was in progress. Before the lockdown, all three universities were using the traditional conventional face-to face methods to deliver their lectures. Since universities were just ordered to close, the traditional-face-to-face methods could no longer be used. All three universities had enrolled students from all over the country, including some of the marginalised and remote areas like Binga, Chilonga, Mudzi and Gokwe. Among the students enrolled there were also international students.

What the universities did and challenges faced by students

All the universities complied with the Presidential directive to close and release students by the 25th of March 2020 (Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) Regulations 2020; Shonhai 2020). All the universities had e-learning platforms but a majority of their students were not using them as indicated in Table 1. This meant that none of the three universities were using their platforms for teaching and learning purposes. These platforms were maintained just as a requirement demanded by Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE). According to the memo sent to students, the private university's continuing education platform was still down since the process of revamping the whole university website had started about nine months before the lockdown (Registrar 2020). This militated against the embracing of e-learning. For example, University C chose Google Classroom but poor uptake by the learners forced some of the lecturers to dump it and adopt WhatsApp groups. As indicated in Table 1, after adopting the WhatsApp platform for teaching and learning, the uptake by the students increased. Even though it increased, uptake was not 100%, largely because there were students who come from remote parts of the country where there is either intermittent or no Internet connection. Some of the students could not afford the data bundles, which the telecommunication companies hiked tenfold at the beginning of the lockdown. In one of the conversations, one student said "*kwandiri kusango*" (meaning I stay in a very remote place) while another said "*Sir, ndokumbiravo kutumira zvandisina kuita kwandaiva kwakusina network*"

(meaning, Sir can I please send my assignments now, where I was there was no Internet network). There was also a group of students that did not possess smartphones or laptops. One student confirmed that "*Ndakazokumbira kusenderwa kuemail Sir*" (meaning he could not find a computer and therefore had to ask others to submit for him through email). At University C a total of 7 out of 67 students faced this challenge. Overall, the lack of laptops or smartphones, inability to purchase data bundles, intermittent or lack of Internet connectivity and lack of electricity were among the majority of explanations given by the students that failed to join the e-learning platforms and the WhatsApp group classes.

What mechanisms did universities put in place and what was the reaction of students?

There was a general feeling that the lockdown had caught the institutions unaware and unprepared. In an email directed to lecturers, University C only sent the guidelines to be used when giving students assignments on 13 July when the university's teaching period was ending on 19 July (ITS Director 2020). The guidelines were posted on YouTube[1] .Even though the intervention was a bit late, what was encouraging was the creation of a subscription YouTube channel containing more video tutorials (I.T S Director 2020).

University	Online platform chosen	Course	Students access (e-learning platform)	Student access with WhatsApp	Total enrolled students
Table 1 Students' Uptake of university e-learning and WhatsApp platforms					
A	e-Learning Management System (Moodle)	PHR500	7	37	40
		PHR501	6	35	38
		PHR502	8	30	37
B	e-Learning Management System (Moodle)	MIR502	4	25	27
		MIR503	6	23	28
		MIR505	6	31	28
C	Google Classroom	HISH231	3	28	28
		HISH414	5	31	33
		HISH411	6	32	34

Source: classroom.google.com/u/3/h

University A had to appoint an Acting Director-Online Learning. In a memo from the Registrar addressed to the University Community, they appointed an Acting Director with effect from 22 June 2020 (Registrar 2020). This appointment came long after first semester was over and long after the university had rolled out its teaching and learning to online platforms. At other universities, they maintained the Director ICT and that might explain why adopting e-learning became a challenge.

How universities handled their examinations

As shown by Table 2, in a memo from the Examinations Office, students were to enrol on Moodle for all their registered courses (The Examinations Office 2020). The universities' response was sloppy since by the end of the first 21-day lockdown period, no university had activated its remote learning system for the benefit of its students. University A placed the emphasis on

1. https://youtu.be/kqMUeU_iUX4.

curtailing academic dishonesty and plagiarism in their examinations. Other universities did not emphasise that to their students. In the coursework, University C faced a lot of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Of the 95 assignments submitted by students taking HISH411 and HISH414, 23 had a similarity index of between 75 and 90%. As a result of this similarity index in the red zone, 30 students had to resubmit the assignments, while 5 had to redo their resubmissions (Panganayi 2020). This greatly compromised the quality of their passes. As indicated in Table 2, those universities especially University B and C that failed to adjust quickly to the new normal had their examinations interrupted in July by the new spike of COVID-19 positive cases.

Table 2 How universities handled their examinations			
University	Person in charge	Examinations	How they were handled
A	Director E-learning	Changed from venue-based to competence based	Written on the university's learning management system (Moodle). Students were given 48 hours to submit their answers. Zero tolerance was given to academic dishonesty
B	Director ICT	Remained venue-based	Students were invited to campus and their examinations remained conventional.
C	Director ITS	Remained venue-based	In batches, students had to travel from all over the country to the campus. The university remained conventional.

The conclusions drawn were that the rural-urban divide affected some of the students when it came to e-learning. The institutions were caught unaware and unprepared by the lockdown and were not proactive in their mitigation measures.

What were the key suggestions from the webinars?

Following the conclusions above, key suggestions were drawn from recommendations from four webinars attended to help deal with the lockdown. The themes covered by the webinars were the COVID-19 and Doing Virtual Fieldwork (Lupton 2020), Research Ethics and Right to Health in COVID-19 (Wangari & Simiyu 2020), Interactive Discussions on the Impact of COVID-19 on Universities (Zeleza 2020) and Surviving and Thriving During the COVID-19 Lockdown Crisis (Nkala 2020). To deal with the rural-urban divide it is suggested that universities adopt distance education spiced with mixed technologies (Zeleza 2020), adopt a paradigm shift on discernments about digital education (Lupton 2020; Wangari & Simiyu 2020) and revive postal services (Nkala 2020). In Zimbabwe, there is a need to introduce or scale up distance education modalities based on different mixes of technology (Chang & Yano 2020; Lupton 2020). This should include Internet, online platforms for continued learning. These devices should be used to either deliver live lessons or record massive open online course (MOOC) styled lessons. The country should endeavour to promote the provision of quality remote schooling (King 2020). Live online teaching and learning facilitate real-time co-presence and interactivity through such applications as WhatsApp, Skype, Zoom or Textchat (Lupton 2020). These applications enable the lecturers and students to utilise both audio-visual interactivity and textual synchronicity. In cases where the learners and lecturers have access to these online platforms, they could also utilise the recording capabilities for easy transcription later. Access to the Internet, computers and other gadgets like smartphones will increase the opportunities to learn (Marshall & Moore 2020). Though

embracing educational technology might be the right approach, there is a need to decide on which remote schooling methods and tools to use. Why this decision is of utmost importance is because the learners in Zimbabwe are of a mixed bag nature. They have an array and diversified background when it comes to technological, economic and social needs. For instance, access to the Internet and the skills needed to use it (Marshall & Moore 2020) are not evenly distributed, therefore learners from affluent families are more likely to have access (Chang & Yano 2020). In addition, the rural-urban divide also matters when it comes to access to Internet and electricity (Chang & Yano 2020; Marshall & Moore 2020). These challenges suggest that equity in access is a major concern. As suggested and adopted by other countries, there is a need for user-friendly, accessible and cost-effective low-tech approaches in order to sustain the delivery of education (Amaglo-Mensah 2020; Zeleza 2020). Television, radio broadcasting and SMS on mobile phones can be used (King 2020; Lupton 2020). Use of education technology will aid a majority of the learners, but what will happen to the minority who are on the other side of the digital divide? The mixed bag nature of Zimbabwean learners creates serious logistical challenges. The negative consequences of these logistical challenges can be lessened if partnerships are signed with Internet service providers (Chang & Yano 2020; Nkala 2020). These partnerships might see learners having access to subsidised computers, data packages and smartphones. Hotlines could also be created for the lecturers so that they offer real-time assistance. As suggested by King, there is a grave danger that focusing on educational technology risks perverse consequences that might widen educational inequalities (King 2020).

There is a need for adjustment by the learners to digital education (Amaglo-Mensah 2020; Wangari & Simiyu 2020) and creative ways to maintain learner engagement (King 2020; Zeleza 2020) can also be factored into the teaching and learning scenario. It should be noted that getting content to the learners might be achievable, but how to maintain interest and momentum might be a big issue as fatigue easily creeps in. In order to deal with fatigue, there is a need to use SMS, peer role models and influential community members in the teaching and learning process. In addition, the post office could be resuscitated for those who do not have Internet access so that worksheets are delivered to their homes (Chang & Yano 2020; Nkala 2020). For those in the rural areas that have intermittent Internet access, submission of assignments could be by email, though it becomes an asynchronous way of learning. The following section concludes this paper by highlighting the key takeouts.

Conclusion

This paper looked at ways in which educational institutions can continue to offer services to the learners during emergencies like the global crisis of 2020 that was triggered by COVID-19. The pandemic owed its genesis from Wuhan, hence the use of the moniker 'Chinese flu'. When Wuhan was hit, China responded by enacting a successful lockdown of the city that seemed to tame the pandemic. Partial success in China created the impression that lockdowns are the real solution. When Africa was hit, quite a number of countries, Zimbabwe included, adopted lockdowns as the solution. What the Zimbabwean government failed to realise was that their context was completely different from the Chinese context. Above everything else, they failed to realise they did not have resources to sustain the lockdown. Among services negatively affected by the lockdown were learning institutions that were forced to shut their doors. In the process, a lot of production hours were lost, learners who were supposed to join the industry found themselves locked up in their houses. The major argument of this paper is that African countries should not adopt solutions that are not home-grown since their context is completely different from the global context. Africa is dogged by serious rifts when it comes to digital development, Internet connectivity and the gap between the rich and the poor. These are the factors that

largely militate against disaster preparedness by the education sector and even other sectors that contribute to human development.

Recommendations

One of the key proposals for the universities in the global south is that they should have private-public partnerships with network service providers. They have to strike deals with service providers so that on admission at college their students get an option to get a device that can be used to connect to the university website. This arrangement will cater for those students who cannot afford either laptops or smartphones. Apart from that, the university might also plan with network providers to have subsidised data rates for their students, or their content can be carried at subsidised rates. This will go a long way in mitigating the exorbitant data bundle charges for the students. Another option will be having a partnership with ZimPost for courier services so that in extreme circumstances either compact disks or memory sticks loaded with learning materials might be delivered to learners in extremely remote areas. In some instances, universities have to consider adopting social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Duo instead of just sticking to the traditional learning platforms like Moodle and Google Classroom. All these suggestions will go a long way in entrenching equity along the rural-urban divide.

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