

Teaching Experience during the covid-19 Pandemic-Zambia

Introduction

- Greetings and recognition of the host and other participants present
- As introduced, I am a teacher of science in Zambia at Twin Palm Secondary School and it's an honor for me to be part of this very important discussion and convey the teachers' voice in Zambia

Preamble

As of March 18th Zambia, had recorded its first two cases of COVID-19 which led to the closure of all schools on 20th March 2020. Heightened screening measures and travel restrictions were put in place as a response to the pandemic. The Ministry of general Education announced the opening of schools effective 1st June 2020. This is only applicable to examination classes 7 9 and 12. This was done with full support of the Ministry of health which provided clear health guidance. Each school was given measure to put in place to ensure a safe environment for both teachers and learners

I am glad to announce that Zambia has successfully completed a full academic term and currently conducting the first batch of national exams. This without a doubt has been possible with the multi sectoral efforts from our Government and all stakeholders. It's with this background that I wish to share our experiences, challenges and best practices with you all. Despite all the efforts from government we still have areas that require our attention in readiness for the reopening of schools to all grades.

- Today I will share cardinal points on the best practices and experiences that we have had as educators in Zambia with the hope that this will serve as a base upon which countries which have not yet opened schools and those that have allowed exams classes to reopen can draw lessons from.

Challenges

With the prolonged closure of schools, it has now become evident that the following challenges have arisen.

1. Reports and Indicators from communities and some schools are beginning to show that the number of teenage pregnancies are on the rise. Therefore there is need for proper guidance for learners on how they can keep themselves during this period of stay away from school. We will only get the full statistics once all learners return.
2. There more than five months being away from school is not easy. Some of the learners may never go back to school. Governments need to invest in guidance and counseling services through community outreaches. This is as urgent as now!
3. With the long absence from school hunger and poor nutrition is a looming crisis among learners in remote areas who depend on feeding programs conducted within their schools. For non-exam classes they have been away from school for over 5 months and those who are vulnerable have even serious challenges.
4. There are high levels of stress and anxiety among teachers and learners as the number of new cases increased from June to date.
5. Few learners are able to access lessons via E-learning and TV lessons both in rural and urban areas. However, to what extent this covers all learners is another challenge.
6. Lack of programs for the most vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities. For example, we do not have any information regarding the impact of this lock down on learners with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS: These are my recommendations for best practices as in ensuring continued learning during this period.

7. Having as many wash points in a school and promoting good hygiene among learners and teachers
8. Reducing the number of learners in a class which in turn reduces the teacher pupil ratio and ensures social distance.
9. Equipping learners with learning skills that can allow them to learn remotely and independently.

In summary I urge all of us as leaders and above all, our host and leading organizations that may these presentations and discussions be recorded, summery minutes be published or documented to serve as a base upon which further research would build upon. Should we face another crisis in the future I believe this information will work as a point of reference on what we can build our course of action as for Africa as a continent in the education sector.

I further appeal for an increased voice of advocacy on adequate preparedness of the Ministries of Education such as investments in ICT and other modes that support distance learning for all. The COVID 19 period has been a difficult time of learning new ways to service in the education sector.

May we also use these experiences and current indicators to establish strong support programs or reinforcing already existing programs in all schools in readiness to handle the full effects of covid-19 beyond the present.

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