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Gendered Perspectives on Covid-19 Recovery in Africa pp 93–109Cite as

Palgrave Macmillan

Covid-19 Pandemic and the Girl Child Education: The Case of Nigeria and South Africa

Ebes Aziegbe-Esho, Adebukola E. Oyewunmi & Grietjie Verhoef

Chapter

First Online: 03 January 2022

90 Accesses

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has not only radically affected lives and ways of living but has wreaked havoc on education systems globally. United Nations estimates that over 1.6 billion students worldwide have been affected by school closures that were necessitated by the pandemic. Although learning and teaching continued virtually in various countries, the challenges of this new mode of education were more burdensome in some countries than in others. While studies on the impact of the pandemic on education and gender inequalities have been conducted, few have focused specifically on the impact of the pandemic on girl child education. This chapter discusses the impact of the pandemic on girl child education in Africa. Although the authors present the cases of two of Africa's biggest economies, Nigeria and South Africa, the recommendations for research and policy presented will undoubtedly prove useful to other countries on the continent and improve education generally.

Keywords

Covid-19

Pandemic

Gender disparity

Girl-child education

Africa

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Introduction

The director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared Covid-19 viral outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). Since then, apart from the many lives that have been lost, the most notable effects of the pandemic have been the closure of airports and the halt of international travels. Many businesses and schools were also shutdown in an attempt to stop, or at least slow down, the spread and infection rate of the Covid-19 virus. Global economies suffered through the pandemic. Overall, Africa's economy in 2020 was projected to contract by 3.3% resulting in the continent's first recession in twenty-five (25) years (World Bank, 2020a). It was also projected that most African countries would rebound and grow only at modest rates in 2021 and 2022 (World Bank, 2020a). While economic growth may rebound, the education sector is most likely to feel the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic long after its eradication.

The shutdown of schools meant that formal learning and education was disrupted in most countries. School closures have affected about 1.6 billion students in over 190 countries across the globe (United Nations, 2020a). The disruption to schooling brought many changes to the education sector globally. Online and virtual learning using various digital platforms has become the norm in many educational institutions. This has, fortunately, in some ways, allowed learning to continue during the pandemic. Arguably, this is a positive change to the mode of education worldwide and brought many schools to rethink didactic strategies and modes of delivering learning to their students. It may be easy to see and measure the impact of the pandemic on the education sector. However, the overall impact on the girl child education in Africa, which was already severely affected before the pandemic, may be more subtle to observe and measure.

Several studies on the impact of Covid-19 on the female gender concentrated on mental health, gender roles, and socio-economic effects such as unemployment and job losses (e.g. Alon et al., 2020a, 2020b; Casale & Posel, 2021; Fisher & Ryan, 2021; Oreffice & Quintana-Domeque, 2021; Parry & Gordon, 2021; Reichelt et al., 2021). Others focused on the impact on education generally (e.g. Le Grange, 2020; OECD, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Sir Daniel, 2020). Conducting studies on the impact of the pandemic on women and girls, and education, have great utility. However, few studies directed the focus to the effects of the pandemic on the education of girls.

In this chapter, we discuss the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on girl child education in Africa. Although the pandemic also affected the education of boys, existing socio-economic and cultural factors make the impact on girl child education more imperious. Pandemics generally have a gendered impact where girls and women are disproportionately affected (Parry & Gordon, 2021). While we focus on the two largest economies in Africa, Nigeria and South Africa, the negative impact of the pandemic on the girl child education, undoubtedly, can be generalised across board to other African countries. We go beyond discussing challenges and issues to making specific policy and research recommendations. Our hope is that the recommendations we present can be tailored to tackle similar issues and challenges to girl child education across all African countries. Finally, although the chapter focuses mainly on girl child