

COVID-19 School Closures in Uganda and their Impact on the Well-being of Teachers in Private Institutions in Semi-urban Districts

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This article explored how teachers were supported for continued professional growth and on their general well-being before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Experiences of teachers of private schools in Semi-Urban districts during COVID-19 Wave 1&2 lockdown in Uganda are explored. It assess professional growth aspects and their well-being before and during closure of education institutions. The study illustrates challenges experienced by the teachers as well as coping strategies adopted.

Methods: In-depth individual interviews, and key informant interviews were employed. At the time of reaching saturation, one hundred and three private secondary school teachers had been interviewed; eight key informants that were head teachers of selected private schools. Data was analyzed using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory.

Results: Teachers' professional growth is in limbo after suffocation during the COVID-19 given longtime school closures with inability of private schools to earn from their clientele. The well-being of teachers is wanting. Many teachers ought not return to teaching and are engaged in various trades for a living.

Conclusion: Teachers of private academic institutions contribute to government's effort in providing quality education. Exploring their experiences during emergencies such as the current COVID-19 pandemic informs stakeholders in education on how to deal with their professional growth and general well-being.

Keywords: Teachers, COVID-19, Uganda

1 Introduction

The Corona Virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has impacted all sectors of society especially education where it has disrupted teaching and learning as well as professional growth and wellbeing of teachers across the world (Assunção and Gago, 2020). At the peak of the pandemic, an estimated 85 million teachers worldwide: 9.4 million in pre-primary; 30.3 million in primary; 18.1 in lower secondary; 14.0 in upper secondary; and 12.5 in tertiary education globally (World Bank, 2021) were affected. For the case of Uganda, in the year 2020, then the lockdowns were announced, 548,000 teachers who serve more than 15,100,000 learners in 73,200 academic institutions (MoES, 2020) were adversely affected by the lockdowns and had to step down from their teaching responsibilities. COVID-19 pandemic worsened the education system, making it impossible for learning to continue, and substantively increasing the demands placed on teachers (Linda and Hyler, 2020). While for private schools in Uganda online teaching was mainly adopted in some international and highly prestigious schools; the vast majority of schools simply closed down.

Uganda reported the first case of COVID-19 on 21 March 2020. The first national lockdown was declared on 24 March 2020 (MOH, 2020; Kawuki, Sserwanja, Obore, Wan, Lau, 2020). On 30th March 2020, a national curfew was started at 7:30 pm (The State House of Uganda, 2020). The government suspended and ordered school closure as way of combating the spread of COVID-19. Since then, more lock downs have occurred and schools closed. As of 2nd July 2021, there were 82,082 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 1,127 deaths reported (MOH, 2021).

On 7th June 2021, a third lockdown was announced in Uganda by the president with a directive to specifically close institutions of learning, and stay at home advisory was issued thus closure of schools (UNESCO, 2020) that were noted to be a major driver of community spread. This national lockdown was then extended for another 42 days ending on 29 July 2021. This was intended not only to curb the second wave where H.E the President announced new measures mainly to quarantine and isolate the sick but it was also meant to support campaigns for vaccination rollout and follow epidemiological guidelines for sanitation and hygiene to prevent further outbreaks. At the end of the forty two days, the president of Uganda, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, announced partial national lockdown and uplifted some measures that were ongoing. The pandemic has prompted total closure of education institutions and also disrupted the phased reopening plan. The year 2021 is a dead academic year (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021). Reopening of schools requires massive vaccination of majority of teachers that are over 550,000 in total. At the time of writing this article in mid-September, 2021, a total of 237, 930 teachers had received their first doze while only 88,825 had received their second doze (Ministry of Health, 2021). In addition, given the proposal to re-open Universities and Tertiary education institutions, students above 18 and lecturers are given priority for vaccination. In his nation address on 22nd September, 2021, the President of Uganda made it clear that reopening of Universities and Tertiary institutions is 1st November, 2021 while primary and secondary schools reopen in January, 2022. It should be noted that there is a notable vaccine hesitancy due to individual and community beliefs about the COVID-19 vaccine. Our interpretation is that there is not much hope for teachers in private schools at primary and secondary school level to have their jobs soon. They have not earned any monthly salary close to two years now since private schools mainly depend on revenue collected from school dues. One does not only wonder about current state of teachers 'well-being but also how much this discourages aspiring educators (Linda and Hyler, 2020). It is also a concern on whether there have been any efforts made in terms of ensuring professional development for the teachers as a way of keeping them with knowledge, skills and values of their profession.

The fact that Education is considered a vehicle for National development, the government of Uganda ought to be concerned about education continuity for the learners thus should be anxious about teacher quality, the current well-being of teachers and how they will be able to meritoriously support learners when schools reopen in the Post COVID-19 period. There is no doubt that teachers of private schools also need to have very competent skills in order to meet the requirements of the changing classroom practice during and after COVID-19. They need to continue to be competent in the subject area that they teach and also be very knowledgeable about the current education curriculum (Jaquith, Dan, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010). Moreover, the Uganda government has reviewed and condensed the education curriculum for both primary and secondary education in order to suit the current trends given that a lot of time has been lost (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021). A mid all this, there is no doubt that there is no end in sight to the uncertainty of the current total closure of schools in Uganda.

1.1 Problem statement

Between 2020 and early 2022 over 188 countries were affected by the COVID-19 virus which directly prevented more than 1.5 billion learners from attending school (UNESCO, 2020; Reimers, 2021) with over 15,100,000 of these learners found in Uganda (MoES, 2020). Over 54,000 teachers in Uganda have also been affected. Moreover, even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, there was a crisis in the education system (Education International, 2020; Assunção and Gago (2020). About 60% of secondary schools in Uganda are private schools run by religious organisations, individuals, businesses and charities

with no help from local authorities (MoES, 2021; Awobamise & Jarrar, 2021). The year 2021 was been declared an academic dead year by the President of Uganda Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, implying that it will be considered that learning did not take place and students should not be penalised for it. The lockdowns resulted in teachers losing their jobs, and being unable to progress professionally. The future indeed looked bleak for teachers in Uganda, as it appeared the government had all but abandoned them. To ensure their continued survival, a lot of teachers have sought employment elsewhere and since the lockdowns were lifted in January of 2022, a lot of these teachers have refused to return back to work. World Bank (2021) asserts that by 2030, close to 49 million teachers worldwide will be needed to replace those who leave the workforce due to multiple reasons. Uganda is not exceptional to this likely calamity. This study is aimed at exploring the forms of professional support accorded to teachers before and during school closures as well as any other support aimed at boosting their general well-being. Moreover, studies have shown that the quality of teachers is a key determinant of children's learning and well-being determining their long-term labour and social outcomes (World Bank, 2021). It also determines the quality of well-being of teachers themselves and enhances their motivation to teach students when schools officially reopen for face to face sessions that many Ugandan families embrace. The study targeted teachers in private semi-urban schools because of their academic, social, psychological and economic vulnerability paused by closure of academic institutions during the COVID-19 lockdown.

2 Theoretical considerations

This study is premised on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory as proposed by Hobfoll (2001). The theory has been empirically tested in various disaster settings and it has been found to be reliable in predicting the wellbeing of those affected by a disaster or employees of an organisation that have gone through some form of trauma or disaster. It is a reliable theory for understanding the processes involved in the experience, coping and overcoming traumatic stress (Hobfoll et al., 2012). The COR theory suggests people are mostly motivated to safeguard, procure and research resources (Hobfoll, 2001). In the context of this theory resources are anything that is of value to an individual, and these resources can be categorised into four broad categories, namely; Objects (this includes, phones, houses, cars etc), conditions (employment, health etc), personal characteristics (for instance, hope, optimism, perseverance etc), and energies (knowledge, skills, etc). According to this theory, stress is developed when any of these resources are threatened, depleted or do not yield the expected returns (in the case of an investment). Hobfoll (1991) posits that the general wellbeing of individual is threatened when there is an accelerated loss of resources. Particularly, resources that are most valuable to an individual. According to Meyer, et al. (2021), this theory has been successfully employed in numerous studies relating to disasters and how it impacts on the wellbeing of individuals that experienced such disasters. Based on this premise, this theory appears particularly useful in predicting the emotional and other physical and mental tolls the pandemic has caused for private school teachers in Uganda, who have had to live through a pandemic, lost their means of livelihood without any cushion or support from the government and been forced to live in isolation (far away from loved ones) for extended periods of time.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory is relevant to this study because it helps in explaining how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted teachers of private schools in Uganda. COVID-19 pandemic has been perhaps one of the most traumatising worldwide events this century and has led to the loss of employment for most people in Uganda, but more so for private school teachers and lecturers who have had to sit at home for close to two years and not sure of ever resuming or even if their institutions (places of work) will even survive the pandemic. The COR theory posits that this sort of trauma and loss of resources can lead to detrimental effects on the mental wellbeing of individuals. It is therefore against this backdrop that the researchers sought to understand the school closures as a direct result of COVID-19 and its effects on the wellbeing and professional growth of private school teachers in Uganda.

3 Methods

A qualitative exploratory approach was used during data collection. In-depth individual interviews were employed in order to make in-depth analysis of the ideas and experiences of private school teachers related to their experiences of professional development and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. As well, key informant interviews were conducted. Private secondary schools' teachers were identified through snow ball sampling where one alumnus led us to another. This was an easy alternative way compared to identifying them through their respective school head teachers that are not often in school given the school closures. At the time of saturation, 103 teachers had been interviewed. In addition, ten key informants including district education officers (2), head teachers of selected private schools (7) and leaders of private schools' networks (1) were interviewed. These were purposively selected basing on the criteria that; i) the respondents possess knowledge, experience in relation to the topic and would give valuable contributions. Similar to the case with primary respondents, the above numbers of key informants had been interviewed respectively at the time of saturation. The study shows two characteristics of qualitative research as descriptive data and also meaning (Bogdan and Biglen, 1998).

Data were analyzed using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Thematic analysis was used (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005) to derive ways of improving the well-being of teachers and according social justice that they deserve.

4 Results and Discussions

The findings are presented focusing on the period before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and during its challenging times. The authors analyze what changes have occurred in the lives of private school teachers in terms of capacity building activities for professional growth before COVID-19 and during the pandemic aiming at enabling them to remain better professionals even after close to two years away from the classroom environment. Attention is also given on the well-being of private school teachers both before and during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic especially that existing literature points to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teaching across the globe (Assunção and Gago, 2020). The study notes that the poor state of well-being for teachers impacts heavily on their attention to academic and professional growth. The cycle does not only end at teachers but also extends to students and their entire communities as mentioned by some of the teachers. Thus, professional growth and well-being of teachers are two equally important elements. First, we discuss the capacity building opportunities for teachers' professional growth before and during the pandemic in a concurrent manner as well as their general well-being.

4.1 Professional development of teachers before and during the COVID 19 period

4.1.1 Teacher professional development

When asked to mention any professional development courses they have ever attended before the onset of COVID-19, majority of the teachers were able to give a high light and narrated how they attended in-service courses at various institutions of higher learning during school term and respective school holidays through their networks in order to improve their teaching skills. Examples of professional development courses mentioned include those that are subject related such as mathematics, chemistry as well as psychosocial support. These were organized by the ministry of education and Sports, employers (school boards) of the respective private schools and personal initiatives by teachers.

Teacher [1] mentioned her experience as

... the duration of the course that I attended was four months and this bothered me a lot. You have to go there on Saturdays and Sundays for only a 3 hour lesson per day. To make matters worse, only theories in books were being presented.

This already shows negative attitude towards some of the professional development courses given the nature of the arrangement. This same teacher has never had any opportunity to attend a professional course since the onset of the COVID-19 monster. So, how can we count that the 'new normal' announced has

been embraced in Uganda! Scholars such as Kasten and McDavis, (2005) assert that building professional capacity of teachers is one way of being consistent in promoting learning as well as the well-being of teachers and learners. However, the many challenges involved in this such as limited time as teachers concentrate on various trades to fend for their survival, lack of adequate training on online teaching, lack of support from parents are some of the hindering factors put forward by some scholars (Assunção and Gago, 2020). These aspects portray the need to pay attention to pedagogical matters as a way of addressing teachers' needs which had become more evident during the COVID-19 school closures.

A number of other teachers interviewed from over 26 schools each shared that they have ever attended short term in-service courses related to counselling and guidance for a period of between 2-3 weeks. These courses were arranged by their respective school boards. These teachers were entirely satisfied by participating in the courses. For instance teacher [2] explained his experience as “sometimes, a renowned counsellor comes to our school twice a year to conduct seminars. She gave real life examples from our own lives. We were generally pleased with the way she delivers her seminars. Similar to this, it is important to know what we can do in practice”. Thus, as pointed out by the teacher, real life examples in teacher education is a critical aspect but not even a glimpse of this is possible during this COVID-19 period.

Teacher [3] shared her proficiency that:

The counselling seminars that I attended before the COVID-19 period were invaluable, incredible and reasonably worthwhile. The knowledge and skills gained helped me to provide counselling sessions for my students who never loved mathematics and chemistry. It made me feel proud being able to support my students. However, COVID-19 has not only hidden away this opportunity from me but also my students.

Other teachers pointed to the absence of practical knowledge in professional trainings as a problem that needs urgent attention. Similar to teacher [1], these teachers have never been invited for any professional development activity by their respective schools since the start of COVID-19. Information could have been shared about how to use platforms for online teaching such as Zoom, Colibri, moodle, google meet etc... so that we are equipped with knowledge and skills as a way of promoting the good practice to students and parents that could afford. Possibly, this would have been another great stride not only our life as teachers but also students.

The findings show that since the onset of COVID-19, only the few lucky teachers have had theoretical online training. Majority of the teachers have not had an opportunity to participate in professional trainings given that their respective schools have not been earning since their clientele are in lockdown. Many teachers lament how professional and skills development has been curtailed by lack of funding for the private schools where owners have to strive on their own to raise all the necessary resources during the most challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given these circumstances, when schools reopen, we are likely to see very poor teaching without pedagogical approaches yet this cannot be blamed on teachers but on the system-level policies (World Bank, 2021) that have not suitably planned for retooling teachers and recruiting new ones, preparation, supporting, managing and motivating teachers prior to reopening.

Head teacher [1] voiced

We're...all aware that the main source of income for most of our private schools is through school fees. We use it to cover all running costs, including professional development courses, motivating teachers in many ways such as teachers' salaries which used to range from \$98 to \$240 (350,000 to 870,000 Ugandan shillings) per month before COVID-19. Without other major sources of income, it is impossible to train teachers further or even pay them amid the school closures. Moreover, when schools closed, parents stopped paying, income dried up and most of our private schools had to stop paying teachers' salaries.

Teacher [4] noted that; “the future of all other people depends on us teachers thus our professional development must be considered key if we are to teach again”.

Noteworthy, dissatisfaction regarding teachers' initial professional programs was a concern pointing to: limited access to professional development opportunities; little or no support in conveying professional development ideas into the classroom; standardized approaches that ignore the varied needs and experience of teachers and lack of systematic evaluation of professional development. This finding is protested by scholars who assert that teachers do not believe that professional growth aid them to prepare for the altering nature of their jobs (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

None the less, teacher [5] raised a concern that; transformative learning which would be a thematic area for professional development because it is a natural way of learning is yet discouraged in many institutions of learning, giving preference instead to only learning that is gained from instruction and one-way communication rather than learning that is gained from questioning, reflection and proposing solutions and action by both the teacher and student. In this way, the creative capacity of both the teacher and the learner is therefore not harnessed nor is their confidence in themselves as knower's or creators of knowledge, to be able to take ownership of and responsibility for the learning process. This creates the tendency to look outward for initiating change in our reality, waiting for the government. From the above narration, we find that transformation, therefore, becomes slow, unsustainable and difficult to achieve and most importantly at the discretion of- another party. The transformation of education and teachers plus society in general will not be without challenges but when teachers are empowered, they not only impact learners and can take control of their situations. In this way, change becomes a sustainable process that is people driven and people empowered.

Teacher [6] shared her experience that:

I love teaching but I am not sure whether I still have the guts to teach. I have come to notice that it is a volunteer job where I only work for survival. I recommend professional development to continue when we resume because it might be another source of motivation for many of us.

Such statements are threatening the dwindling numbers of teachers. Moreover it is affirmed by scholars that shortage of teachers was already a problem in many countries before the pandemic closure of schools (Linda and Hyler 2020).

The above narration gives hope that when professional development is continued as the case was before COVID-19 prior to official reopening of schools, it is most likely that some teachers will be motivated to get back into teaching and help their students better. With the current academic setback due to COVID-19, a refresher in pedagogical skills is ideal. This is reinforced by recent studies (Assunção and Gago (2020); Negassa and Engdasew, 2017; Daniels, 2017).

The ideal and most impactful teacher specialized development programs that tailor to the specific needs of the teacher, would be those linked to professional impetuses. Unluckily, that is not the norm with the Uganda case. To fill this gap, there is need to develop specific tools that support teacher professional development and ensure these are tailor-made with implementation focused on critical skills besides incorporating the major elements of training and giving and receiving feedback.

4.1.2 Mentorship and Coaching before COVID-19 according to teachers

The findings reveal that prior to COVID-19, the practice of mentorship and coaching was vivid involving external resource persons with knowledge and experience in specific subject areas especially the science subjects that are compulsory for ever learner at ordinary level. Majority of the teachers interviewed revealed that they had received some form of mentorship in their own subject area. When asked how this practice has continued after the outbreak of COVID-19, none of the respondents has had such an opportunity since the onset of COVID-19. The reason for this is that private school owners did not have any resources to invest into coaching and mentorship at the expense of the loans taken from the banks which they have to keep repaying. It can be deducted that private school leaders are not experts in managing crisis yet when well managed during the pandemic, it can turn out to be another form of innovation and transformation

(Linda and Harlye 2020). In this case, expert private school teachers would be motivated to support fellow teachers in multiple ways basing on current needs during the COVID-19 education related critical aspects. Head teacher [2] voiced;

Hundreds of our private owned schools are being put up for sale due to pressures from banks to repay loans. In such a situation, not many head teachers can think of paying for coaching programs for teachers when we are closing up. Moreover, we are aware that many of our former teachers have also have found new careers, which is another factor that threatens the future of our private schools. A number of my teachers left because of COVID-19 closures. Two of those who left have officially informed me that they went to join the army while others have relocated to distant villages.

In addition, soon after wave 2 lockdown, the Minister for Finance Mr. Matia Kasajja, advised directors of private schools to sell off their property to service their loans and stop putting government on pressure to support their schools that have been affected by COVID-19 closures. Moreover, this announcement came at a time when banks in Uganda are stuck with trillion of money as customers avoid borrowing (Ministry of Finance, 2021).

Most of the private school head teachers and teachers that we interacted with, none had kind words....

One 49 year old male Head teacher [3] voiced.

Most of us have borrowed huge sums of money form the bank and we are failing to pay given that schools are currently closed. My own school is on sale to enable me pay back the bank loan worth 210 million Uganda shillings. I feel cursed.

In addition, the findings show that during the pandemic, social distancing measures that were designed to limit the spread of the pandemic seem to have prohibited in-person professional development activities thus teachers have not received specific coaching in blended pedagogies that would be key when schools reopen.

4.1.3 Seminars, Conferences and Workshops

The findings reveal that before the onset of COVID-19, teachers had opportunities for participating in seminars and workshops as part of the professional development initiatives such as Secondary Science and Mathematics teachers' (SESEMAT) program, counselling, curriculum planning among others. This did not only help them to improve their competences but also helped them to apply best teaching practices besides utilizing networks for teaching and collaboration. This helps to build fruitful networks and affirm the aspect of collaboration as one of the most significant variables for teachers' learning and retention in the profession. Head teachers would take systematic action to support cooperation amongst teachers as they advance new or modify teaching practices way before schools reopen. Similarly, Linda and Hyler (2020) affirm the need to constantly figure out ways to re-tool teachers in the most creative and innovative way while relying on the principle of effective practice. Options such as role plays indicating a conversation with teachers, parents and children could be a good skill especially during the COVID-19 challenging times. Techniques such as discussing manifold ways to remain attached with families during the pandemic comprising communication that centers on social emotional well-being of families and academic development. The core values and mission in the teaching profession cannot be under estimated. Overall, support from the Ministry of Education and Sports for teachers of private schools to engage in seminars and workshops prior to COVID-19 is said to have resulted into improvement in terms of teachers attending workshops, joint examinations and joint evaluations which did not leave teachers the same as some of them testify.

I enjoyed the five day course that I attended a year before COVID-19 as it was very helpful in synthesizing how to integrate the cross cutting concepts into our lesson planning. I also loved the stories, activities, and the bonus jokes and I miss them after this long time of school closures where no seminar is being organized.

It can be concluded that private school teachers have different professional development experiences that can be categorized as experiences from the courses organized by the Ministry of Education and Sports; experiences from short courses offered by their respective private schools and experiences from individual efforts. There were multiple benefits but currently in limbo since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The need to continue transmuting educators' learning opportunities to meet the current demands before reopening of schools for face to face is also vital as emphasized by Linda and Hartley (2020). In Western countries, more teaming and learning time was organized among teachers when schools closed physically but for the case of Uganda, the reverse is true. Therefore, it is high time to strengthen teacher professionalism now even when, it remains one of the unexpected outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.2 The well-being of teachers before and during COVID-19 lockdowns

Well-being is a broad phenomenon, this study capitalizes on particular aspects of well-being namely; teachers feeling secure with access to basic items such as food, water, health care and accommodation, feeling useful and optimistic. Before the onset of COVID-19 majority of the teachers interviewed felt secure with their jobs and were optimistic about the future. The feeling of being useful to their schools and communities was an automatic one as shared. However, the onset of COVID-19 turned everything the reverse way. Teachers [13] wailed that they have become the most demotivated beings that society is laughing at today asking themselves why they went to school since they are not any different from the illiterate.

Other [28] teachers lamented that "it is hard to cope during this difficult time where finding food for the family is challenging. In the third week of the first lock down, many of us were already hungry and thirsty. Many of us immediately started having no food for our families. This finding reminds us of the link between COVID-19 and food insecurity as teachers lose their employment and income (UN, 2020). Voices as "I have missed my salary for the last 19 months..." were outstanding.

Some of us female teachers resorted to other activities such as tailoring, brick laying, riding bodaboda, mobile money agents, farming, and laundry cleaning among other enterprises. Every enterprise has its own requirements. For some of us in brick-laying, we urgently needed capital to buy firewood and burn the bricks to be able to sale and earn income for survival. It makes us sad that we have to leave this profession but it is also not worth it. There is no money". This implies that the absence of social safety nets that could help meeting teachers' needs during crisis renders them vulnerable and tempts them to abandon the teaching profession.

The findings reveal teachers' increase in anxiety with male teachers being the most affected. The high likelihood of leaving the teaching profession was often mentioned.

Head teacher [4] voiced.

Many private schools may not reopen because the staff we laid off during the lock down seem to have got new work and will not return to the profession. Some teachers have recently said to me that when schools were shut following the government directive, they were left with no income while others were left with too little and had to find alternative ways to fend for their families.

Another 48 year old female teacher [8];

I started working eight years ago but at the time schools were ordered to close in March 2020 due to COVID-19, I had only been able to put a grass thatched house, I had bought 1 radio, 1 phone, 5 chicken and banana plantation of 1 hectare. All my property totals to 1.5 million (an equivalent of about USD 416) and I know there are colleagues who may not have this much but they have clothes to wear and are still being accommodated in school houses.

A 43 year old female teacher [9] voiced;

The last message I received from my head teacher was in April, 2020 a week after receiving half of my March, 2020 salary. The message was notifying me not to expect any more payments until schools reopen. My wages dried up. In the next few weeks, our survival largely depended on the goodwill of the parents whose children I taught but it reached a point where other teachers also started begging parents and they got tired of us calling us beggars. I together with my children left the rented house and relocated to my mother's house in the village. I found another source of income and fetched water for people at the neighborhood at a small fee. Later I started farming specializing in tomato growing. My produce has ready market. For the next season, I hope to rent another piece of land to grow onions and ginger. I will not leave my business, which I started, to dedicate all my time to being a teacher again.

With these findings, schools are likely to experience a new wave of resignation of teachers as well as early retirements due to health challenges posed by the pandemic (Linda and Hyler, 2020).

Another concerned 36 year old male teacher [10] noted

I have only very old trousers and shirts. Some of them are torn. I am not sure what perception students will have on me when schools reopen. I keep wondering whether they will respect me as they did before. I feel ashamed when I am dressed in such old rugs which I have been using in the garden. I have no money to buy even a single new pair of clothes. I am only lucky that the school still provides me with accommodation and occasionally food for my family.

Thus, the findings reveal that the closure of schools was psychologically disturbing to the teachers and their families. These have developed negative self-perception amid the many challenges at their disposal such as sickness and death of loved ones due to COVID-19. Others have not been able to send off their loved ones as they would have wished. There is also lack of financial support for teachers to meet their basic needs. A number of female teachers interviewed were single mothers that had difficulty in meeting family needs. Both the parent and children loss of weight were witnessed. Linda and Hyler, (2020) affirm the need to support the current educators well in their life challenges.

Similarly, a rise in cases of domestic violence in families of teachers was highly expressed. Bitterness, fights including kicking and beating of wives. Male teachers expressed how they remain quiet even when they experience domestic violence because of fear of being cackled. During the 2020 lock down over 20,000 cases were registered in Uganda. Some of these were cases of teachers. It is believed that the inability to meet basic needs and the long stays of couples together which was not the case before were the major causes.

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain insight on professional experiences of teachers and their wellbeing both before and after the onset of the COVID-19 monster. Although, the government of Uganda has lifted the lockdowns, and life appears to be gradually going back to normal, the effect of the lockdowns and the Covid-19 pandemic are still being felt, especially among private schools. A lot of schools have been forced to permanently lockdown, teachers have abandoned their profession in search of greener pastures elsewhere and there is a still the fear that the pandemic is far from over. Due to these fears and the effects of the pandemic, there appears to be a stagnation in the growth of the few teachers left in the profession and a need for a retooling and retraining of teachers to ensure that they are ready to meet and evolve alongside the new realities of today. The findings of this study showed that the pandemic have had a deleterious effect on the mental health of teachers and even students. To address this issue, there is a need for the government of Uganda to support schools (both public and private) to assist their teachers and students with their mental health and ease them into the new normal. Finally, it is recommended that the professional development, post-COVID-19 lockdowns, should be prioritized by the government and the government

should also prioritize the training of new teachers to replace those that have left the profession due to the pandemic.

6 Declarations

6.1 Competing Interests

The authors declared that there is no conflict of interest exist.

6.2 Publisher's Note

AIJR remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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