The Impact of COVID-19 on Children’s Learning and Development in Ghana

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated social and economic downturn are undermining children’s educational and development outcomes, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Leveraging a previous study, researchers in Ghana are conducting phone surveys and other direct assessments to measure the pandemic’s repercussions on children’s education and broader development outcomes. The results will provide the government and development partners with unique, real-time data to inform remote-learning and social-protection efforts.

Policy Issue

According to the United Nations, 94 percent of students globally have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through school closures. This is having a disproportionate effect on vulnerable groups, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The impact is expected to go beyond educational outcomes, as closures hamper the provision of essential services to children and communities, including access to school meals, the ability of many parents to work, and increased risk of violence against women and girls. These risks will be exacerbated by the economic impact of the pandemic.

Understanding how children, families, and teachers are faring during the crisis, and whether children are being reached through government remote-learning initiatives and social protection programs, is needed by governments and international organizations alike. This is especially important in sub-Saharan Africa, where learning outcomes are lowest globally, poverty and food insecurity are greatest, and state capacities to respond to crises and reach the most vulnerable are limited. The results will provide the government and development partners with unique, real-time data to inform efforts to mitigate the pandemic’s short- and long-term effects on children’s education and broader development outcomes.

Evaluation Context

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, children in Ghana were facing important educational and developmental challenges. According to the Ghana Human Capital Index, children born in Ghana today can only be expected to reach 44 percent of their potential. Challenges in schools are not minor, 80 percent and 70 percent of the children in the second and fourth grades are unable to read simple words or solve basic arithmetic problems. Classes are usually overcrowded, water and sanitation are
often inadequate, and there is a shortage of trained teachers and textbooks.\(^1\) School closures are likely to exacerbate this situation, as other threats to children's development arise, including crisis-related income shortages, food insecurity caused by the suspension of school meals, and unequal access to distance learning activities. These losses could continue even after the children return to school.\(^1\)

### Details of the Intervention

*Note: This study is not a randomized controlled trial*

Researchers in Ghana are conducting a study to measure the effects of COVID-19 on children's educational and developmental outcomes. They will build on the Quality Preschool For Ghana (QP4G) study, which surveyed five-year-old children (now aged 10-12), their parents, and their teachers over a five-year period. Leveraging this sample, the research team will now conduct the following activities:

- Three phone surveys with 2,000 parents to track the pandemic effect on livelihoods, food security, children's health/nutrition and children's participation in remote-learning.
- Two additional phone surveys with 400 teachers and one round of in-person interviews with 600 teachers to obtain their insights on distance learning, return to school, livelihoods, and food security.
- One rapid phone survey with 2,000 children to assess learning during the remote education period.

Additionally, researchers will capitalize on a child and teacher direct assessment, programmed for the 2021 school year, as well as the prior rounds of data, to examine the effects of the crisis on educational outcomes and inequalities.

### Results and Policy Lessons

Project ongoing. Results forthcoming.

### Sources

2. UNICEF. “Education in Ghana”.