

# Shifting Boundaries for Parents in School Engagement at the Wake of Covid-19

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**Abstract** The epistemological perspective fashioned on the industrial model created a dualism between universal and particular knowledge, and consequently, a dichotomy between specialized knowledge taught in schools and the local knowledge applied in communities. This dichotomy relegated the parents to the periphery making their knowledge and experiences irrelevant and a source of contempt in the formal school. This paper uses the Goodall and Montgomery model to seek a deeper understanding of the shifting boundaries in the enforced parental involvement in children's home learning when educational institutions were closed in 2020 and 2021 because of COVID 19 pandemic. The three-point dynamic continuum indicates that parents can participate in school affairs, from acting as teachers' assistants, to more interaction with the school, and forming partnerships with teachers and administrators. Voices of parents that participated in the home-schooling program organised at the primary level were recorded to understand the shifting boundaries in their school involvement. Results highlight the parents' enthusiasm to adapt and also reimagine the learning of their children. Despite the challenges encountered, the school is significantly transformed into a learning community to benefit of the learners, teachers and the parent's community.

**Keywords:** *shifting boundaries, parental involvement, parental engagement, home-schooling, Uganda*

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## 1. Introduction

The formal school structure that was started around the mid-17th century in Western Europe was founded on a closed and self-sufficient system that came to be referred to as the mechanical worldview. This worldview was constructed in accordance with physical laws that in principle left no room for the human mind to directly influence the functioning of the world. The universe was understood either through rational or empirical approaches, supported by unimpeachable or unchanging laws. This created a boundary and dualism between episteme and doxa, specialized knowledge and opinions, universal and local knowledge. Such approaches that were used to explain the physical phenomena were also applied to human nature and society, including the field of education. Consequently, supported by this worldview, the corresponding education formed was among other things characterised by a rigid hierarchical structure where the administration was at the top and the students (consumers) and parents (customers) at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The dualism made the experiences, aspirations, passions and feelings of the parent irrelevant, dangerous and a source of contamination in the school context. This

is the reason why the experiences outside the school were not counted as part and parcel of learning. In addition, this paradigm emphasized measurable and testable outcomes and thereby ignored the non-measurable aspects of education such as social skills, attitudes, and community aspirations. Following the reductionist approach, the mechanical worldview made clear-cut divisions between the education stakeholders; teachers and students; teachers and parents, and the school and the home [1].

This worldview created ideological boundaries that clearly demarcated the duties and roles of every stakeholder and as a result left the school administrators and teachers at the centre while the rest of the stakeholders including the community members, parents and learners were relegated to the periphery. In this sense, the educators became the technocrats / the expert of the social realm and were thus believed to know the real concerns and interests of the students and the parents as well as the community at large. Since the educators had professional power over the community, their relations to the rest of the stakeholders were top-down or hierarchical. As the issues pertaining to the intellectual realm became a preserve of the professional educators, the parents took on subsidiary roles (lower interests) such as teaching children the norms of society, good conduct, understanding ongoing social issues and children's welfare. This division of labour

resulted in a demarcation between the school and the home and rules were put in place to minimize any significant contact. The hierarchical structure of the school made it necessary for the parents to over relinquish their responsibility to the teachers until the Covid-19 interruption.

The closure of all business and all educational institutions in Uganda in March 2020 for almost two years significantly shifted the traditional roles of the school and the home. This paper reflects on how these roles were shifted and lessons learnt in order to improve the relationship between school and the parents. The reflection is viewed as significant in helping parents and community members appreciate more the kinds of teaching and learning that schools make possible as well as come to terms with the constraints that teachers often experience. By gaining more understanding of the basic facts of the situation, parents might realise the need to join hands with the school-based educators to engage in the complexities of teaching and learning that are often taken as straightforward features of school life. More reflection is also made on what parents learned about their children in the lockdown, what schools often overlooked that became critical in the children's learning, and generally the imperative for the priorities of education stakeholders to be reshuffled.

## 2. Study Context and Methodology

### 2.1. Study Context

The study was undertaken in a private primary school that is located in Mityana district, 70kms west of Kampala city. It is a collection of views from the parents that participated in the home-schooling program between June and September 2021. In the pre-pandemic period, the school-parent population amounted to 223 of which only 96 participated in the home-schooling program. This study is also a reflection of the researchers about the processes and approaches they used in the home-schooling and the reflections thereupon. This study is therefore a collection of the researchers' experience in implementing the home-schooling activities which were used during the country-wide schools' closures brought about Covid-19. It was more of a trial-and-error exercise because both parents and teachers were not used to the home-schooling programme and thus every step was a learning moment.

### 2.2. Study Participants

The study participants included 90 parents and 14 teachers of the target primary school. These include 54 parents, a section of the parents who participated in the programme and 36 parents who represent a section of the parents who did not participate in the programme. The parents who participated in the programme were included in the study because we wanted to understand their experience and how this experience informs their views about education and schooling. The parents who did not participate in the study were included because we wanted to understand the reasons behind their decision not to participate in the programme and the lesson we could draw from their inability to participate to inform education

policy and practice. The school has 613 students but only 320 participated in the home-schooling programme. We explain the reasons for the non-full participation of both parents and students in the section of challenges. This implies that the programme did not cover the entire school and thus this study only covers the teachers, parents and students who participated in the home-schooling programme and the resultant reflections, challenges and lessons.

### 2.3. Study Methods

We used action research and self-study methods to understand how our actions and those of others within the home-schooling programme could inform and improve our practice and future action. As [2] suggested, the way a self-study might be done depends on what is sought to be better understood, and in this study, we sought to understand, reframe and improve our practice around home-schooling which is a relatively new phenomenon in Uganda. At the centre of this study was a collaboration between school administrators, teachers, parents and students.

We collected data through an iterative process throughout the home-schooling programme. This means that we collected data as we implemented the programme. This was done through WhatsApp, phone call follow-ups and zoom meetings. At the class level, teachers organised Zoom lessons through which students were expected to join in with the support of their parents and or guardians. Feedback was constantly collected through phone calls and WhatsApp. Throughout the programme, teachers and the school administrators had weekly meetings to discuss the progress, share feedback from parents and or students and any challenges as a way of setting strategies for the following week. Besides, we also collected data through interviews at the end of the programme to better understand the motives for the parents and or the students joining the programme or their failure to join the same.

### 2.4. Data Type and Sources

We collected data from a variety of sources including our reflective experience, reports from teachers and feedback from parents and students. At the end of the programme, we also conducted focused in-depth interviews with the parents and guardians who participated in the home-schooling programme and those who did not participate.

### 2.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of data for this study focused on our reflective notes and weekly meeting reports. The conversations during our weekly meetings guided our home-schooling programme decisions and also allowed us to engage in preliminary data analysis during data collection in order to establish initial understandings [3]. Furthermore, our meetings helped us as critical friends in an effort to see beyond our own experiences and self in the study. It was a way to check impressions against one another and it added another layer of critical analysis. As [4] writes, 'It is important in a self-study report to demonstrate that different perspectives on teaching and

learning situations have been sought, considered, and to (again) minimise possibilities for self-justification or rationalisation of existing practices and behaviours' (p. 16). Each of us engaged in ongoing data analysis as we described our narrative experiences. The data was categorised in charts with selected examples representing each a priori code. We did the final data analysis in four major steps. We exchanged our individual experience narratives where each member made a critical analysis of the others' narratives, gaining a general understanding of the entire research narrative. This served to establish interrater reliability and allowed for us to continue to develop our roles as critical friends. We wrote as many codes as possible. We then compared these codes by grouping together similar ones. These groups of codes were then made into themes which we later used to write the final research report.

### 3. Study Findings

The outcomes of this study revealed four key lessons for teachers, school leaders, instruction designers and educational researchers. It highlights parents' experiences, parents' adaptation to the new mode of learning, how children's learning has been reimaged and some challenges involved in the home-schooling programme.

#### *Parents' experiences with home learning*

When remote teaching began many parents felt obliged to get involved beyond mere monitoring of children's progress. For instance, a number of parents saw the urgent need to take a leading role in the learning of their children, after realising that they could no longer delegate this task to anybody else. As one parent remarked:

*I have decided to work a half-day so that I can spend more time with the children. No one can supervise them as they do the daily assignments". She further added, "Keeping a strict schedule might mean that the kids will not learn completely.*

The learning program was fluid and flexible as there were no clearly laid programs to follow. The general routine was that the school sent assignments on WhatsApp groups for every single class at the beginning of the week and the answers to the challenges therein would be forwarded over the weekend. In addition, zoom lessons were held every Sunday as a channel for learners to directly talk to their teachers about the work done within the week but also interact with their classmates. The majority of parents took advantage of this flat structure afforded by social media to give some feedback and also suggest alternative ways of engaging the learners better. For example, while the zoom lessons were initially conducted every Saturday, they were later on shifted to Sunday to adapt to the parents' work schedules. Three weeks after commencement the remote teaching received wide acceptance from the parents' community as one parent with learners in lower primary remarked:

*In the first lockdown, my children always yearned to return to school. No single day would pass by without giving me some reminder. But when they joined the remote teaching, their talk completely changed as they always looked forward to receiving more assignments from school.*

It should also be noted that the abrupt closure of schools brought significant stress to numerous families as it interrupted the family work schedules. But as time went on, different parents found a way of dealing with the situation. One parent indicated how he dealt with the inconsistencies that arose from the assignments:

*The weekly assignments sent from school are very beneficial. However, there are sometimes disagreements about the right answers. We are doing our best and the teachers will fill up the gaps when schools reopen.*

This showed a level of parents' willingness to actively engage in learning of their children but without pretending that they know everything.

Before Covid-19 children used to learn under the supervision of a teacher. The parents' views during the lockdown suggested that quite a number of children experienced some sort of role ambiguity as they struggled to identify the 'teacher figure' in other people around the home.

*I am usually rough while supervising my children's assignments, but all the same, they don't listen to me. I have resorted to hiring another helper to supervise their work.*

This role ambiguity points to the historical separation between the home and the school that had for decades disempowered the parents leaving them indifferent to their school roles and responsibilities.

Another parent remarked:

*Home-schooling can be more beneficial when the parents have the ability to supervise the children's work. If one of the parents is a teacher or has at least attained some level of education. No wonder children in Kampala, Wakiso and Mukono districts do best in national examinations. It is because such parents can support very closely the learning of their children*

[5] in her book, "The Smartest Kids in the World", made stunning observations about the rigorous education that can increase the child's life chances. She believes that parents who raise smarter kids are not those that are most active in their children's schools, but the real impact happens mostly at home:

*Parents who view themselves as educational coaches tend to read to their children every day when they are small; when their children get older, they talk with them about their days and about the news around the world. They let their children make mistakes and then get right back to work. They teach them good habits and give them autonomy. They are teachers, too, in other words, and they believe in rigour. They want their children to fail while they are still children. They know that those lessons-about hard work, persistence, integrity, and consequences – will serve a child for decades to come (p.213).*

[5]'s reflection confirms that the home support mechanism and motivation is critical and cannot be equalled. [6] examined the approaches used in knowledge, skills and attitude acquisition before, during and after independence on the African continent. He noted that prior to colonialism, the training of young people had interesting attributes. For example, the family unit served as a basic structure for knowledge provision and acquisition, and every member of society with worthwhile experience took part in the training of the children.

However, colonial education disregarded the centrality of local family knowledge and experiences in learning and instead privileged scientific knowledge that was believed to be universal, pure and certain. This dichotomization of the intellectual development of the individual and the expectations of the wider society is responsible for the production of individuals that are completely faceless and anonymous, unable to encounter the challenges in their local environment [6]. The shifting boundaries challenge modern schooling to overcome intellectualism and embrace approaches that can make the children more engaged in the practical concerns of their communities.

#### ***Parents' adaptation to the new mode of learning***

When schools were closed to slow down the spread of Covid-19, it was no longer possible for the teachers to physically meet their learners. Consequently, teachers and parents had to find innovative ways to enable the children to proceed with some form of learning. The news that there was a program in the offing to enable students to learn while at home created some warmth "*our kids are going to learn online and offline while at home*". The easiest way to connect the home and the school was through the use of social media. Thus the smartphones that were formerly not very applicable for the learning of young students became a useful tool for sharing assignments and complimentary videos, guiding instructions to parents, voice messages for making clarifications and weekly updates from the schools. It is noteworthy that 53% of the parents' population welcomed the programme and several messages were occasionally shared on the platforms thereafter appreciating the staff:

*"Thank you, teachers, for the effort you put in". "Great thanks to our committed teachers please bravo".*

*"Thank you headteacher for the communication and the work you are doing for the good of our children".*

The responses indicated how education still served as a ray of hope and a sign of normalcy in many communities.

The female parents showed a lot of enthusiasm to learn the new skills necessary for the program to take off and some even pressurised their spouses:

*I have talked to my husband about the need to get a new phone that the children can use to receive work. We cannot depend on his phone since he is rarely at home during the day. My phone no longer picks up the internet...*

As female parents exhibited agility to deal with the complexity surrounding their children's learning, some male parents looked at the move suspiciously as they could not imagine that learning could happen in an unstructured or less formalised environment. This shows how women took over leadership roles that were traditionally reserved for men. It also highlights their strong maternal instinct and resilience as well as creativity in unpredictable times while men tend to be inflexible and fear perturbations. However, the lack of harmony can have a significant impact since the control over the materials and financial resources are more often skewed in the developing world.

After being thrown into emergence, the parents made several trials before they could come up with alternative approaches to the familiar schools-based learning. The passion to have their children learn in some way made

parents act like artisans, using leftover materials to make new pieces, bricolages [7]. For example, some parents revamped old cellular phones so that they could be turned into learning tools. There are also parents that had not used social media before (Emails, WhatsApp) but adapted to the technology to enable their children to receive work from school.

It is also interesting to note how the social media platforms such as WhatsApp acquired local meanings and practical use. This channel created more possibilities for schools and families to have open communications more easily and cheaply. It also created an avenue for teachers and parents to exchange information, discuss and draw programmes in a more just way, get feedback from either side almost instantly, parents correcting mistakes made on the sent work, content learnt in school being more discursive than rigid and openly sharing it out, and give chance to parents to air out their feedback more openly. This platform created an easier network for constituting a learning community of parents that talk and advice each other and becoming a community of friends with shared goals. It was a moment for making the children a centre of focus as opposed to the pre-pandemic situation where the school programmes rolled out following a pre-designed agenda authored by the school authorities.

According to [8], social media is one of the constructivist based approaches to learning that can create room for participation, collaboration, interactivity, communication, community-building, sharing, networking, creativity, distribution, flexibility and customisation in the learning process without the limitation of space and time. But on the other hand, the interruption exposed the excessive digital divide, for while the rest of the world is advancing in Internet Technology, the 3rd world is lagging behind by far. In Uganda, while some students have had access to online learning, the majority have little or no access to the internet, computers or phones – or even electricity.

Notable was a group of parents that was unable to acquire smartphones who employed other creative options such as sending flash disks (memory sticks) to school in order to receive the weekly assignments. As one parent remarked:

*We are doing whatever it takes to have the children attain some level of learning.* It was observed that quite a number of parents within reasonable distance found a way of getting to the school to seek more clarification about how the kids were to learn without teachers.

Furthermore, on the class WhatsApp groups it was evident that some parents were eager to help each other to cope by sharing the technics they used to download the files of assignments. Such support was critical as parents were adopting technologies that were formerly used for other functions to become essential learning tools. It was a time to restructure the available resources to fit new purposes. In the process, home-schooling transformed teachers, children and their parents into members of a community of practice. According to [9], a community of practice is a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (p.4). Home learning was a time for teachers, parents and the children to acquire not only new

tools but also new vocabularies, new skills and new learning sites that were relevant to the times, including browsers and video downloading software. It was also a time to make new learning alliances that are handy in the management of technical and non-technical aspects of the programme.

In the process of managing the home-schooling programme parents became teacher-learners, and for their teaching role, they were typical artisans and not experts as one parent remarked: *When I receive the assignments, I first peruse through before passing them to the children. I need to first make sure that I can guide them on all the sections adequately.* Another parent had this to say:

*I had to sacrifice and leave my second cell phone that is on WhatsApp for my daughter. It is the easiest way for her to access the work sent from school. Therefore, those people who try to call me at that time cannot reach me since I get back home late in the evening.*

Another parent made similar remarks: *I have adjusted my work schedule. I am able to at least spare a day and stay home to oversee my child's work.*

But there are parents that found the whole experience as disgusting as one Male parent remarked: *Personally, I am fed up with education completely. How can the children catch up after losing so much learning?*

Indeed, several parents experienced difficulties and could not let their children join the program. Others narrated how they struggled to receive online materials: *I for one it has been easy and ok, and I think if every parent installs the apps that help us reach the work it will be ok.* Another parent made the following remarks: *Thank you so much for your kind support. Yes, it has been a great challenge to get the work, but now personally am okay.* Still, another parent indicated how the power challenge was hindering the learner's progress: *We have to charge but our solar takes almost a full day to charge these big phones.*

School management improvised strategies in order to receive feedback and be able to assist parents that were undergoing some difficulties. One approach was sending short circulars on the class WhatsApp groups at the beginning of a new week highlighting the major emphasises, activities and innovations or alternations within the week. In addition, one of the school administrators sought feedback from parents on a monthly basis through telephone conversations about their overall experience of the program. The topics covered ranged from reception of weekly work, experiences of zoom lessons and the children's grasps of classwork. Such engagements were beneficial in unearthing the children's milestones, parents' aspirations and challenges encountered in the remote learning. In a typical learning community, it is incumbent on everyone in the family circle to support the other.

### **Reimagining children's learning**

In the pre-pandemic period, teaching and learning was done following a clear structure to help students attain a strong foundation for knowledge, skills and attitudes. As a norm, teaching was broken down into single lessons of 40 minutes or double lessons of 80 minutes to ensure that all elements of the examination syllabus are covered. Therefore, on a single day, a class can switch teachers

and subjects between 4 to 8 times. However, since the teacher-learner ratio is often higher than the recommended 1:55 [0], teachers are denied a chance to get to know students well enough as well as give them appropriate feedback. Students on the other hand have limited opportunities to create new ideas on their own since the examination syllabus is too intensive.

The remote teaching enforced by the pandemic was a sigh of relief for a number of parents. This approach tended to be more relaxed and could allow some space of action for students to learn deeply and come up with new meanings that can help them respond to the real issues in their context [11]. As one parent noted:

*Although my children have missed school work, on the other hand, they have gained some new skills. Before the lockdown, the school program was so tight that we never stayed with the children for a long time. For that reason, they do not know the common chores done at home. During the lockdown, my children have learnt to prepare the family meals, clean the house and do the dishes. I have suspended the maid for this very reason.*

Some parents described how their children struggled to make a giant leap from being spoon-fed by their teachers to becoming independent and lifelong learners:

*My daughter has learnt to undertake her daily classwork without the guidance of an adult. But it took her some time before she could learn to settle down. I am sure that when schools are reopened she will be able to perform even much better.*

Another parent gave similar views:

*My son enjoys his work much more now. He knows when to wake up and the subjects he is supposed to take in the morning. He only complains when we do not do literacy in the afternoon. He has learnt that he cannot watch the TV unless I have given him permission.*

Parents came to know what their children were capable of doing as well as understanding their preferred learning styles as one parent narrated:

*Before the lockdown, I had a casual worker who looked after the family poultry. When the kids returned home I noted that one of the boys aged 12 had an interest in feeding these chickens. Since then it is his responsibility to care for the poultry project. He does so every morning after sweeping the yard. He loves the dogs also... maybe he will be a farmer.*

The children's enforced stay at home gave them the opportunity to attend to concrete problems with the family members in more meaningful and creative ways. They were able to explore their zone of proximal development by learning and creating what they have always wanted to do. In the parents' responses, the recognition of the essential caretaking role of the teacher was a recurrent narrative. As parents struggled on a daily basis to guide the children to do the school work, many of them came to appreciate more the demands of teaching and their respect for teachers improved. For instance, due to the proximity caused by the lockdown, some parents came to learn that their children had discipline issues, as one parent commented:

*I have five children and two of them are in secondary school. Since their early primary level, I had never lived with all the children for more than two months in one go. It was only in the first lockdown when I noticed*

*that the boys had many issues. In fact, the oldest had acquired a smartphone 6 months earlier without my knowledge that kept him awake chatting with friends. They was no way I could have known this. I just wonder how teachers manage all these issues!*

Another parent had this to say;

*Besides the many side effects, this pandemic is a blessing in disguise. It has allowed us to get to know our children better. This time we have had fewer excuses not to be with them. Apart from realising that they missed school work, I have really loved this moment and have no regrets.*

This paper highlights that the school closure gave parents a chance to understand their children as learners beyond the report card comments they often received at the end of academic seasons. Learning assumed a more holistic dimension as the dichotomy between reality and its shadow arising from the separation of the school and the community narrowed. Learning was no longer a business of the school alone and could happen anywhere around the home, in the family living room, on the veranda, under the shed and at the farm. From the pictures posted by parents about weekly assignments, one could not miss noticing how the children were taking advantage of the natural setting of the home. While some kids were seen using chairs and tables, others worked on the floor. In addition, some children came to appreciate more what their parents did to earn a living as well as their daily struggles and high moments.

The experience of the parents and their children makes it more evident that learning can be integrated with home chores and that productive learning environments do not have to be too structured always. This paper highlights how the learning model that is integrated with a wide range of other activities can be much more beneficial to the learner than the traditional model that often robs children of various forms of enchantment.

The above narrative highlighted how Covid-19 became a medium to effect the recommendations of [12] (as advanced in his seminal book, *De-schooling Society*). Ivan stated that for one to believe that all learning is a result of teaching is an illusion, for while teaching may contribute a certain percentage of the knowledge that people acquire, most of their understanding is acquired beyond the brick and mortar [12]. For that reason, the school should not be a place of confinement in the early years but exploit all possible alternatives to ensure that education can be broadened to include learning, sharing and care. He further illustrated that important skills such as language are learnt casually with peers, on a trip and also through co-curricular activities and not as a result of sequential teaching. [12], therefore, suggested the breaking down of the traditional classroom and the constraints of the curriculum so that the opportunities for skill learning could be vastly multiplied [12].

In Uganda, there is a longstanding debate about the benefits and challenges of using English as opposed to local languages as a medium of instruction. While some parents place a huge value on their local languages, others view English proficiency as a guarantee to the children's future economic stability. Consequently, there are families that only use English while communicating with their children for the same purpose. However, during the school

closure, some parents thought otherwise about the place of the local language: *The lockdown has benefited the children in many different ways. Currently, they can all speak their mother tongue fluently and with confidence. That was not the case before since we have limited time to interact*, as one parent observed.

### **Challenges**

The abrupt school closure forced parents to take on roles for which most were not prepared. As a result, there was a feeling among some parents that they were not fit to be teachers. One parent shared: *I cannot manage the children. The school should organise some physical coaching sessions and tell us the money we should pay.*

Another parent retorted:

*We appreciate the work you send every day but my challenge is that I cannot guide my children in Mathematics and Science. I do not want my children to notice that I don't understand what they are learning. Every time they ask me something, I find some excuse to avoid embarrassment.*

This indicates how some parents were comfortable to continue with the traditional form of involvement in school affairs. These issues were compounded by the way some children challenged their parents' competency to provide adequate guidance as well as their teachers. Consequently, there is a common thread in the parents' responses indicating the children's lack of belief in the parents' academic support. In response to this, some parents indicated how they could not motivate the children in the same way their teachers did.

The other challenge related to the inability of some parents to afford the devices needed for remote learning particularly for low-income families that were at the same time scratching for survival. *'We do not have a smartphone at the moment and we don't have a computer'* were common responses. For instance, one parent gave feedback regarding the payment needed to support the program via WhatsApp:

*Good evening pals, I take this opportunity to ask, this point, is it compulsory to pay for the packages each week? Or it's optional? Because I am seriously looking for food, rent and work, I may not manage to pay any amount. I am sorry, but enlighten me.*

The above discussion showcased how innovative technology supported children's learning amidst the pandemic and how it enabled timely communication between the school and home. Indeed, the paper has underscored the synergy resulting from the teacher-parental partnership and the subsequent innovations that enabled the continuation of children's learning. Unfortunately, some families were marginalized as they could not receive the services due to either lack of devices, network coverage or money to buy data.

Other than work-related challenges, for some parents and their children, schools are a safe haven for the children as one parent shared her experiences:

*Although my children can learn from home, I have nobody to leave behind when I go to work. I am always in tension as I suspect that anything bad can happen to them in my absence. Some of my common fears are fire accidents and defilement. I keep calling home to make sure that they are safe... the school environment is secure and cannot compare with in any way.*

Schools are widely known as a sign of normalcy in society as they are a centre of community engagement, services and problem-solving. They are also safe haven for orphans, families that cannot afford a mid-day meal and separated or divorced spouses that see the school as a neutral ground [13].

The unanticipated change from face to face to working remotely made it difficult to reach out to some parents. Communication was often compounded by issues such as loss of mobile phone and change of phone number. For that matter, not all children were able to receive work at the same time, as one parent shared her displeasure about the school's failure to connect to her in time to enable her child to learn: *I am surprised that the school could not include me on the remote learning program for 4 weeks. There is no explanation yet as to why no teacher has called me all this time. However, I hope that the teachers will work out a special program to enable her to catch up.*

## 4. Conclusions

At the inception of the home learning program, the school administration implored the parents to reserve the WhatsApp forums for academic-related business. The discipline and restraint exhibited by not posting non-academic related materials and the reprimands made for parents who posted diversionary issues was amazing. This shows the potential in galvanizing synergy from the parents' community and how it can be critical in solving the challenges of teaching and learning.

During the school closure, parents supported the learning of their children and the school initiatives enormously. As seen above, a number of them surrendered their mobile phones to the children, but also had to buy data as well as pay for the printing of the school work. Without commitment and sacrifice this program would not bear fruits, as one parent confirmed:

*Sustaining home learning is a real hustle. I spend 6000/- (about \$ 2 Usd) to print out work every day. On top of that, I have to buy data and pay an additional 100,000/- Ug Shs (about \$ 28 Usd) on a monthly basis for the teacher I hired to supervise the assignments. This is a huge amount of money for lower-income families that happen to be the majority of the parents' population.*

When lessons conducted via Zoom were introduced to supplement the remote teaching, 60% of the parents already on the programme embraced it. Even after the briefing session to the parents on how to use the technology, parents with children from Grade 1 to Grade 3 continued to support them. For example, on several occasions, the parents' voices would be heard in the background urging the learners to respond to the teachers' challenges. There were also parents who came to school to set up the Zoom technology. In one instance, after several unsuccessful attempts of downloading the zoom application, a parent loudly exclaimed: *'How am I going to explain this to my son? That his classmates are attending classes but he cannot?'* In other words, the personal involvement in the learning program made parents more accountable for their children's progress than before.

In addition, after 5 weeks of assignments, the 6<sup>th</sup> week was dedicated to practical work to enable the learners not merely to remember and understand but get mentally stimulated to analyse and produce new knowledge [13]. In this week learners had a wide range activity to undertake including, drawing, shading, moulding, constructing, role-playing, writing poems and stories. Given the enormous support from the parents, a lot of success was achieved by the children. The video recordings shared on the group platforms indicated that the art crafts were not just a result of isolated individual learners but a contribution of everyone in the home. Similarly, the confidence and joy that the children exhibited in the photos and videos showcased the motivation children receive when parents are actively involved in their learning. It is noteworthy that on top of the set assignments, more than 30% of the learners picked projects of their own choice, the results of which were also exhibited. This was to defy the 'egg crate' mentality which tends to assume that students of the same age and class have the same ability and interests. This paper recommends that such homemade initiatives and local flavours should be sustained even when the pandemic subsides.

Emerging studies de-campaign the separation of the learning in school from the rest of life and the urgency for a reconceptualization of the students', parents' and teachers' roles [14], boundary adjustments [15], and the adoption of a new world view [16] a participatory approach to learning [1].

[14] suggest a holistic model to transform young people into lifelong learners that can match the ever-changing world. In this model, the traditional roles are reconceptualised so that students become strong contributors to their learning, while both the parents' and teachers' knowledge and thoughts are equally heard and appreciated.

This paper is in strong agreement with [16] proposition of the learning ecosystem in place of the closed school system that can no longer meet the demands of societies that are more connected and interconnected. Ecosystems present a new way of learning and school organization that is consistent with the emergent social and economic reality. Under this social biology approach, individual and freestanding schools become school networks, and teachers cease to be sole providers of education and instead become co-participants in the education arena. The other features of learning ecosystems include working towards diversifying learning resources, activating and sharing resources for learning, having distributed governance, and combining both traditional and new educational providers to develop learning more holistically. Therefore, schools are expected to tap the resources within the ecosystem that are unused, and focus on developing the technical and soft skills of the students.

The emergence of the ecosystem was not detected by Hannon and colleagues alone. [1] observed how the participatory world view is gradually replacing the mechanical world view exemplified by the shift from a predictable and certain world to a probabilistic, chaotic and creative one; from objective aloof observers to individuals linked to their physical world; from hierarchical conceptions of the world to a biological world view ruled by ecological interdependence principles, and

from domination and control of nature to community and relationship with nature.

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