

Assessment of Student's Engagement on the Utilization of NCDC Home-study Learning Materials during COVID-19 Lockdown; A Case Study of Senior Two Class of St. Peter's College Tororo

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Received May 08, 2022; Revised June 11, 2022; Accepted June 21, 2022

Abstract This qualitative study assessed student's engagement in utilizing the 2020 NCDC home-study learning materials on continued learning at home during COVID-19 lockdown. Sampled purposively, students were grateful for government home-learning materials whose learning activities occupied them while at home much as many learners revealed that it was not easy to study without the teachers' explanations, and also indicated parent's contribution towards the implementation of the home schooling program was highly seen. Thus NCDC should develop a strategy to prepare home study-materials for all classes to keep on occupying learners on self-study since the pandemic recess is now a new normal.

Keywords: NCDC-Uganda, home study material, students engagement

Cite This Article: Emokol Francis, Muweesi Charles, Namisi Moses, Musiime Joseline, and Kaweesi Muhamadi, "Assessment of Student's Engagement on the Utilization of NCDC Home-study Learning Materials during COVID-19 Lockdown; A Case Study of Senior Two Class of St. Peter's College Tororo." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 10, no. 6 (2022): 409-412. doi: 10.12691/education-10-6-6.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent closure of schools in the world and specifically Uganda impacted on learning especially curriculum coverage, the Ministry of Education and Sports responded by constituting an Education Sector Response Taskforce which in conjunction with the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) a government body that is mandated with the content and material used in teaching which developed print home-study materials for some selected subjects for the new secondary lower curriculum for senior one sciences and humanities (NCDC, 2020).

The lower secondary school curriculum is a competence-based learning curriculum with five learning outcomes of; acquiring *Knowledge* of facts, concepts and principles; *Understanding* the knowledge and apply in real life experience; acquiring *Skills*; developing *Values* for relating with self and others; and developing *Attitude* as they perceive things (KUSVA). The aim is to produce a learner that has the competences that are required in the 21st century. (NCDC, 2020)

The teacher's foresight in developing designs and methods that are able to attract students so that they continue to be eager to learn at home has become extraordinary. The variables in mediating the level of

parental involvement range from parental and family characteristics to student variables, and school characteristics. Fathers and mothers have different levels of involvement of parents depending on work demands or family responsibilities, such as more children are negatively associated with the involvement [1].

1.1. Problem Statement

According to the ministry of education frame work (2020) on provision of continued learning during the lockdown the print and self-study materials were interactive and meant to help learners study on their own while they are at home. At lower secondary (senior one to four) seven core subjects of: English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History and Political Education, and Geography have been considered. Each lesson has a variety of activities in form of scenarios which reflect real life experiences to enable broaden learner's creativity, innovation and critical thinking skills with expected learning outcomes. The senior one class students of St. Peter's College Tororo went home with senior one NCDC home-study learning materials with lesson activities, summary notes and assessment activities, the learners were expected to use reference materials to get more information from the NCDC website at www.ncdc.go.ug and advised to develop the learning time table for continued learning at home [2].

According to the MoE&S circular no 5/2020, parents and guardians were to ensure that the learners are given adequate time to engage on the educational activities using the home-study materials focused on term one work. This has motivated the researcher to study the level at which the learners were engaged in continued learning using the home-study materials with the guidance of parents /guardians without the teachers input?

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The study intended to examine the extent to which the learners adapted to learning at home (during lockdown) using the home-study materials as well as assessing the level of parent's involvement in supporting the learner's learning process using the home study materials.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Parental Involvement in Supporting the Students Home Learning Process

According to the MoE&S frame work for provision of continued learning at home during lockdown parents, guardians and siblings' had roles of supporting the learner's home study process by guiding and Providing materials that children need for learning. Conceiç, M. etal [3] points out that parental participation is a relevant role in children's schooling and success, different articles on parental involvement definitions use parent-child communication about school; home-supervision; checking learners' books; homework assistance; education expectations and aspirations; attendance and participation in reading with children; communication with schools; and parental attitudes toward education. Parents putting attention towards the learner's home learning activities as a follow up and supervision to complete home based assignments.

When parents and children collaborate in learning activities, it results to increase in bonding between parents and children as they are able to spend much more time together. Such instances allow parents to become a source of comfort in easing pain and worry and engage in discussions with their children to help them in lightening their anxiety [4].

2.2. Adaption of Students to Home-study Learning Materials for Continued Learning at Home

According to Yarbro, R. [5] adaptable factors in the home environment believed to influence learning are conditions that support school efforts in the learning process. The study revealed that the higher percent of the students work on their homework assignments at home than at school. Student to be effective in-home learning requires the ability to guide one's own learning activities effectively. Students choose what to study, how to study, when to study, and how long to study; these self-regulated aspects of learning have important implications for the effectiveness of their learning efforts and achievement in education [6].

According to the MoE&S framework [7] students had a role to self-assess their readiness to learn, adapt and apply the knowledge and skills learnt by following learning instructions, define their learning goals and develop a learning contract to attain the learning outcomes. The perceptions presented in the home learning materials engage students in learning. The activities provided develop a sense of responsibility among students and they progressed on their own. They discover new things, and they experience their knowledge on their own [8]. For learning to be successful they need to define their own goals, interpret success and failure appropriately, and translate wishes into intentions that contribute to their readiness. Some research findings indicated that many learners had positive experiences with flexible school days when they organized their own daily routines, worked at their own pace and experienced independence [9].

3. Methodology

The qualitative research method was used since it permits the researcher to discover the phenomenon from the students' personal engagement in learning using the home study materials [10]. The target population is 60 students randomly selected purposively from a total of 200 students in the three streams, each stream twenty students of senior two class and 12 students selected by systematic random sampling as 20% sample. Gay, L. R. [11] recommends that when the target population is small (less than 100 members), a minimum sample of 20% is adequate for educational research. The sample consist of accessible respondents from the target group, hence no inconveniences in establishing and maintaining contact with participants [12] and thus Data was obtained from 12 respondents from three streams, 2M, 2G and 2R. 2M-04, 2G-05, and 2R-03, selected by systematic random sampling from the sample of 20 participants all with the age bracket of 14-18 years males only.

4. Findings

Findings were guided by six research questions assessing the student's attitude towards the home study materials and adaptations to learning at home, parent's involvement and provision of alternative supportive learning options. Six themes relating to learners engagement to utilize the home study materials describing strongly about students experiences from each study include the learners attitude towards the home study materials, the strategies developed by the learner to engage in the learning process, how motivated the learner was when studying with the parents support without the teacher, parents interest on the home study materials, alternative learning options provided by the parent and parents availability to monitor the study times at home.

Learner's factors to engage on the study; Attitude towards the home study materials.

Several students were grateful for the opportunities of the home learning materials they felt that without the study materials most of them could have joined bad groups, the activities occupied them while at home.

A senior 2R learner when commenting on his attitude towards the materials mentioned that "he got ample time to concentrate and thanked the teachers for sending them home with the books", it made him busy and prevented him not to do bad habits. This indicated some positive attitude towards the home study materials.

Three students indicated some negative attitude, one of 2G mentioned that "the information in the study materials could not satisfy and he had to endure". Another of 2R stated that "it wasn't easy for him to understand some areas it needed the teacher to guide". He also added that he had just to keep himself around with the books because he could join bad groups that would mislead him during that lockdown period.

Strategies in place to manage the study program.

A majority of the students indicated that they had prepared study time tables. One 2M participant articulated that "the time table helped him to keep in touch with the study materials and he could handle all the tasks". Another 2G participant mentioned that "his strategy was keeping time". Some students indicated that there was too much work at home that they could not have prepared routine for the study time, they only tried in the afternoon hours but not effectively observed. One 2R participant commented that "his strategy was a fixed program to share with the friends using his mum's phone in the evenings". The home study materials induced some motivation on the learners to put some time aside for self-study.

Students' motivation to study with the parents without the teachers.

Most learners revealed that it was not easy to study without the teachers' explanations, but the parents reminded them that it was for their future and some had siblings that had attended secondary education. One 2R participant mentioned that "it was hard, it needed more explanation from the teacher, my parent new little". A participant in 2M stated that "his mother was an illiterate but she encouraged him to have time for his books and the dad only appeared at home over the weekends much as he was literate". Another participant of 2M was very proud that he had a nearby secondary school and the teachers could help him with some explanations, this kept him motivated during the home study time.

All in all, from the general observation of the students views about the home study using the home study materials. The self-learner process was entirely depending on the learner's personal interest but above all the home study material in their presence improved on their study contact time. Their motivation for self-study also depended on the parents' ability to read and location of the home in rural or urban areas.

Parents factors to support the learner during the home study time;

Parental involvement on learner's study activities, the combined efforts of parents, teachers and learners can provide purpose, direction, and continuity, to the child's educational experience [5]. Parents involvement in all aspects can create a good learning environment during home study sessions if they have interest, provide with learning materials and also be available to observe the learning sessions.

Interest of the parent in monitoring the learning sessions.

The findings reveal parents' attributes in monitoring the learners study programs, the utilization of the study materials attracted the attention of most of the parents. One participant of 2M revealed that "his parent was surprised to see him with the home study book and inquired on how the book will be used". And having looked through, my parent was excited and thanked the teachers and NCDC for availing materials for learners to occupy themselves during the second lockdown, he lamented that "the first lockdown was a challenge to convince learners to have private study time".

Another learner of 2R indicated that his mother kept on following up his learning time table, her believe was that this could make me get occupied to avoid getting distracted. One 2G participant was interesting, he mentioned that "it was too much for me, much as my mother was an illiterate my father who had no time mobilized questions from his friends who were teachers and the mother became the class teacher". She gave me too much pressure that he was about to escape from home. Another 2m participant stated that his mother enjoyed the study books because she also came to know much especially in biology. From the observation of the learners' statements, it indicated that most parents closely monitored the students during the learning sessions.

Alternative home learning options provided by parents to enhance the home study.

Most learners revealed that their parents secured smartphones to enhance their learning during the home study sessions and this could make them search for what they did not know. Two students stated that they were not provided with any other option for learning at home. Two participants from 2R and 2G indicated that their parents provided them with laptops and Data for online studies. The 2G participant mentioned that the mother gave him a laptop with Data and connected him to other schools for online studies. A participant from 2R also revealed that the parent hired some teachers to help him during the study time at home.

Other alternative learning options where text books, Newspapers, Televisions and radios as revealed by few respondents. Majority of parents supported the learners with alternative learning options, most of them revealed the use of smartphones provided by parents especially mothers.

Availability of parents to observe the learning sessions.

The findings indicate that most parents tried their best to have time for the learners during the self-study time. One participant of 2G lamented that "in most times as he was trying to answer questions his parents could look at his work and made him develop fear while answering". He added that he was not given enough time to refresh his mind and he developed negative attitude towards revision.

Some learners revealed that the parents were very busy and kept referring them to friends for discussions or elder brothers and sisters. One participant of 2R said that his mother advised him on answering questions and the elder sister marked the work in the evening. A 2G participant summarized "that it isn't so bad but they were too busy."

5. Conclusion

Transforming learning to the use of home study materials is the key to implementing learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a change in learning pattern due to certain conditions so that learning continues to run effectively and efficiently in agreement with the learning objectives to be achieved [1]. The learning alteration undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic is to change learning to shift from school to home environments. The implementation of the home study activities needed the input from the learner to be in the fore front to develop ploys of managing the study time. Parents have a bigger stake in the absence teachers to support and monitor the learners' activities during home study sessions.

The findings reveal that the home study materials could maintain the learner's ability to avoid regression and the learners were kept on their toes to have constant contact with school environment even when at home. The NCDC home study materials were timely most parents appreciated the new development and it was an advantage to protect the learners from the harsh diverse environments of drugs and violence.

Evidence from this study also reveals that students can benefit from home study if the study materials are prepared with learning activities that develop critical thinking and simple to be interpreted by the parents. Learners' control over their own learning boost performance, and the control strategy utilized during self-regulated learning curbed this enhancement [6].

6. Recommendations

The students need to have control over their own learning, this gives them potential to improve their learning experiences, skills and knowledge. The learners develop skills of teaching themselves to research for knowledge that benefits their academic work. Schools to

plan for home learning materials whenever there a holiday break to reduce regression among learners. The presence of the study material makes learners plan their learning time and reduce the parents' interference with too many home activities for learners to have contact with learning materials. NCDC develops a strategy to develop home study materials for all classes to keep on occupying learners on self-study.

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