

ABSTRACT

Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak affected educational systems worldwide, leading to widespread and lengthy closures of educational institutions. The containment measures of COVID-19 put in place interrupted learning, nutrition, and equal access to digital learning portals and led to rising cases of child labour, drug and substance abuse, and teenage pregnancies. It also exacerbated previously existing inequalities among learners from different backgrounds. All this impacted the internal efficiency of education. Focus on Internal efficiency of education endeavors to ensure optimal utilization of scarce resources. Nevertheless, with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya, the government instituted containment measures for COVID-19 to curb the rapid spread of the virus. Empirical data on the effect of these containment measures on the internal efficiency of public secondary schools remains largely unknown. This study aimed to establish the effect of containment measures for COVID-19 on the internal efficiency of secondary schools in Machakos County, Kenya. The study was guided by the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities and the Production Function Theory. Descriptive and correlational research designs were adopted. The population for the study was 93,204 respondents comprising 296 principals, 5,920 teachers, 86,979 students, One County Quality and Standards officer (CQASO), and Eight Sub-County quality and Standards Officers (SCQASO). Proportionate and simple random sampling were used to obtain 382 respondents, including 195 students and 89 teachers. Also sampled purposively were 89 principals, one CQASO, and eight SCQASOs. Study instruments included questionnaires for principals, teachers, and students, while an interview schedule was designed for CQASO and SCQASO. The tools were subjected to reliability and validity tests before use. Face, content, and construct validity were ascertained before administering the instrument. Reliability was computed using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient on the data obtained from a pilot study in Kitui County, reliability coefficients of 0.726, 0.924 and 0.799 obtained for principals, teachers and students questionnaires respectively ascertained an acceptable reliability threshold. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Quantitative data was cleaned, coded, and analyzed descriptively and inferentially using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 computer software. The descriptive used included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation. Hypotheses were tested using simple linear regression statistics at $\alpha = 0.05$ significance level. The study's findings established containment measures for COVID-19 affected participation, retention, management of resources, and learning outcomes in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The study recommends the establishment of computer studies as a core subject to equip learners with technological know-how for use in case of disrupted learning leading to the abrupt closure of schools. Ministry of ICT in Collaboration with the Ministry of Education to supply computers to schools and ensure country-wide network coverage. Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services to build and equip community learning centers incorporating digital technology in every location to ensure equal access by all learners to learning materials irrespective of their background. TSC to increase the capacity of school principals in resource management during disease pandemics, natural disasters, or human conflict. The findings and recommendations will contribute to new knowledge on effect of containment measures of infectious diseases on internal efficiency of secondary schools that will help the education policy makers and educational planners on how best to respond in times of pandemic, natural disaster or human conflict without exacerbating inefficiency.