



## EDUCATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS: THE CHALLENGES OF LEARNERS IN THE EXAMINATION CLASSES IN COMPLETING THE SYLLABUS

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### **Abstract:**

The right to education is a fundamental human right for children. Each country adopts and defines its curriculum, requirements for each level, rules, roles, and responsibilities of all education stakeholders. Each school year starts with a clearly defined calendar and the assumption that everything will be equal. However, wars, epidemics, natural disasters, and socio-political crises often erupt and disrupt the school calendar. 300 participants will be used in the study. The article will attempt to look at the challenges from the point of view of learners, teachers, parents, and school authorities. A sampling technique, some theories, and data will be coded, analyzed, and reported using inferential and descriptive statistics. The reliability of the research instruments will be tested. From the findings, recommendations for education stakeholders will be made.

**Keywords:** education, crisis, challenges, examination, syllabus

### **1. Introduction**

There have been challenges experienced by learners in the examination classes in completing their syllabus and sitting in for the end-of-course examination without stress. This is supported by Annie, Howard, and Mildred (1996) who said that academic performance was the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational goals.

Kuh *et al.*'s (2006), said academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills, and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational outcomes, and post-college performance are predictors of impacting better grades and success in students. This

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attainment can only be achieved if the difficulties that require adequate attention in curriculum implementation are addressed.

Support concerning learners in the examination classes to complete their end-of-course program or syllabus has been done at the international level by UNESCO and the national level by the Ministry of Secondary Education and some stakeholders including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and majors, implemented to help in the time of crises. For instance, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the world in 2020, disrupting the schooling of more than 1.6 billion learners at its height, UNESCO moved quickly. Creating a new model for international cooperation, it founded the Global Education Coalition (GEC) to develop inventive responses to help countries cope with the crisis. One of the most ambitious partnerships in UNESCO's history, the [GEC](#) rapidly assembled 150 institutional partners from multilateral organizations, the private sector, non-profits, civil society, networks and associations, and the media that offered their expertise to help ensure continuity in education.

In 2022, the coalition has shifted its focus from emergency response to recovery and building resilience. Partners are working to assist countries to re-open schools safely, bring all learners back to school, and organize effective remedial learning. Promoting digital transformation is a key priority to bridge gaps and craft new inclusive and equitable solutions. Learners have considerably received support in terms of teaching from different organizations including the government.

However, they did not identify the challenges faced by learners in the examination classes in completing their syllabus for better feedback in terms of better results.

Kumar *et al.* (2001) in their research carried out, suggested that the provisions of teaching materials and methods as the best support that make learners with visual impairment learn in an inclusive classroom. He only concentrated on materials and teaching methods provided to the learners with visual impairment in an inclusive classroom but failed to point out the challenges that these learners in examination classes faced in completing their program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our surroundings, and the political climate, were all found in crisis. Educators and learners alike are often caring for family members, friends, and themselves. This is demonstrated by the fact that learners are continuing their studies which shows they do care, and they likely care deeply, for the people in their lives. But with the distractions brought about during this time of crisis, it was and is a challenge for them to focus their care in addition to their studies. This therefore, disrupts the syllabus and is not properly or not covered at all during the teaching /learning process through out that year.

As educators, we know there is a strong relationship between caring about learning and the quality of learning. As Fink (2013) argues, when students care about something, they then have the energy they need for learning more about it and making it a part of their lives. Without the energy for learning, nothing significant happens. It simply means that students who care about what they are learning will invest more time and effort required to learn it well and will always remember it. So, for learners in the

examination classes to complete their syllabus, stakeholders need to help learners to focus on learning, during a crisis which is a distraction.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

There has been support toward learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic period at the international level, and the national level. Despite this support, the problem of identifying the challenges faced by learners in the examination classes in completing the syllabus still exists. Therefore, the study will identify the challenges faced by learners in the examination classes in completing their syllabus during the COVID-19 Pandemic period and still performing well at the end of the examination period.

### **2.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify the challenges faced by learners in the examination classes in completing their syllabus during the COVID-19 Pandemic period in Government Bilingual High School Etoug-Ee Yaoundé 6 sub-division of the Centre Region.

### **2.2 General Research Hypothesis**

Education in times of Crisis significantly affects learners in the examination classes in completing their syllabus in Government Bilingual High School Etoug-Ebe in Yaoundé, 6 Mfoundi division in Cameroon.

### **2.3 Specific Research Hypotheses**

**RH1:** There is a significant relationship between crisis and learners in examination classes completing their syllabus in Government Bilingual High School Etoug-Ebe Yaoundé 6 in Mfoundi Division.

### **2.4 Research Objectives**

The study was guided by a single objective which was:

- To find out the challenges learners in the examination classes face in completing their syllabus in times of crisis in Government Bilingual High School Etoug-Ebe Yaoundé 6 in Mfoundi Division.

### **2.5 Research Questions**

The study shall be guided by one research question:

- What challenges are faced by the learners in the examination classes in completing their syllabus during the COVID-19 Pandemic period?

### **2.6 Significance of the Study**

The study is significant because it might identify the challenges faced by learners in the examination classes with difficulties while learning to complete their syllabus and sit for

the official examination at Government Bilingual High School in Etoug-Ebe. It is also important because the findings from the study may be added to the body of knowledge on the challenges faced by learners in the examination classes with difficulties in completing their syllabus in secondary and high schools

### **2.7 Limitation of the Study**

In this study, quantitative analysis was employed and the instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and an observation checklist. The research limitation was that when administering the questionnaires, the respondents did not respond accurately to some of the questions. However, the researcher covered up the limitation by using the observation checklist for the questions that were not properly answered as another instrument for data collection.

### **2.8 Delimitations**

The study was confined to one selected secondary school in the Yaoundé 6 sub-division in the national capital of Cameroon. The delimitation is that the researcher has chosen a population of learners only in the examination classes and no other learners from the intermediary classes. This is because the answers and the sample for this study will be drawn from this population and not the learners from the whole school in question.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the safer learning environment model developed by Dr. Hartwell (2020). It is an approach that concentrates on the ways to provide access to safe spaces, physical infrastructure, and basic education services, primarily for children and youth. This model also provides insight into learning strategies and opportunities in the classroom as well as the teacher's expertise, subject theory, and practice in the classroom context. This model also helps in identifying challenges faced by learners in the examination classes while learning to complete their syllabus.

## **4. Methodology**

In this study, the researcher worked with GBHS Etoug-Ebe, one of the schools in Yaoundé 6 in the Centre Region of Cameroon, in the Mfoundi Division. This school is selected through a stratified sampling technique, where units of the entire group are selected and included in the sample. This school uses English and French language as the language for instruction. It has classes from forms one to upper sixth and only students in the examination classes were sampled. That is form five classes and Upper Sixth classes. The data collected through questionnaires were constructed along with the Likert scale pattern: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), strongly disagree (SD), Disagree (D), with a population of 300 students (97 male, (38,8%) and 153 females, (61,2%). The test items in the questionnaire were designed following; Education in times of crisis (10 items),

challenges in examination (10), challenges in the syllabus (10), and demographic data (5 items). Testing the reliability of the questionnaire was done and it gave a Cronbach Alpha index of close to 0.87. Content validity was used for qualitative data and descriptive and inferential statistics with SPSS version 21 for quantitative data.

#### **4.1 Education**

Education is characterized as a learning cycle for the person to achieve information and comprehension of the higher explicit items and explicit Huge Indonesian Dictionary (1991).

According to John Dewey (1978), Education is every one of the ones with developing; it has no end beyond itself. He further analysed it and said, education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.

According to Durkheim (2011), education is a society's means of guaranteeing the continuation of its existence by assimilating new individuals into it.

According to Piaget (1980), education is individualised learning, and students are measured on their individual rather than collaborative performance.

According to H. H. Horne (1932), education in the broadest sense is the device by which a social group's continued existence renews itself and defends its ideals. Socrate defines education as a means that brings out the ideas of universal validity which are latent in the mind of every man.

#### **4.2 Crisis**

Pauchant & Mitroff (1992) said that a crisis is a disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, and its existential core.

Timothy Coombsin (1980) defines crisis as the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes. Bloom (1987), said we have been observing a substantial transformation in the way public life is organized which is a result of a persistent spreading of economic politics and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1990) claim that the strength of a pedagogy is defined by its weight in the structure of the power relations and symbolic relations and the latter always expresses the former between the agencies exerting an action of crisis. This structure in turn expresses the power relations between the groups or classes making up the social formation in question.

#### **4.3 Challenges**

A challenge is a situation needing great mental or physical effort to be done successfully, or a situation that requires great effort (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). A challenge is something new and difficult that requires great effort and determination. A challenge is when a problem is tackled head-on, targets a secondary consequence of a problem, or acts as a preventative measure against something that has the potential to develop into a

problem. In times of crisis, the education sector needs to tackle an issue like COVID-19 or war, a socio-political crisis head-on by pressing on the challenges. If the problem is the mortality rate, the challenge is reducing that rate. The problem is why we act and the challenge is how. The problem is the situation and the challenge is the response. When we ignore the problem, it gets worse; when we overcome the challenge things get better.

#### **4.4 Examination**

An examination is a formal test that students take to show their knowledge about a particular subject often done in written or oral form. According to Teachmint, an examination is defined as the evaluation of the understanding of the knowledge of a person. The assessment can be done in the form of a formal test. The exam is taken to check the knowledge of a student of a particular subject.

The examination includes a variety of questions like objective, subjective, one-word, etc. Each question in the examination is assigned marks according to the level of knowledge it requires. Students are required to answer the questions asked in examinations. Marks are given based on the quality of answers given by a student in their examination. Evaluation is done based on marks obtained in the exam. Different exams are being conducted at different levels. The examinations conducted in schools and colleges test students' knowledge of all the subjects being taught.

In education, an examination is a test to show the skills, ability tacit knowledge of a learner. Bloom's taxonomy helps teachers to understand objectives and program teaching in their various classrooms. With Bloom's taxonomy, teachers change the complexity of the examination and help students achieve higher and better grades. Examinations play an important role in the educational system by giving useful facts and information for vital purposes. Stakeholders base their decisions such as selection, and placement, on determining the better instructional effectiveness of a syllabus through the administration of the examination. Research has shown that examinations have an influence on the learning/ teaching process and that such influence could be either positive or negative. Stakeholders must look into and evaluate the challenges or effects of not completing the syllabus that has on the learners in the examination classes.

In a crisis, the quality of learning and teaching is not usually the best, and consequently a low workload coverage. Students and teachers are the main actors within a classroom, if examination feedback indicates low performance in the area of content mastery of the concept, then it shows a challenge in the workload coverage before the examination.

#### **4.5 Syllabus**

Breen (1989) defines a syllabus as a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our student's learning. He further explained that a syllabus is a plan of work drawn up for teaching and learning a course during different periods, and different approaches in the teaching/learning process.

Nunan (1988) suggested that a syllabus might specify two types of tasks. Real-world tasks or communication tasks such as using the telephone and pedagogical tasks like information gap tasks.

A syllabus is how a student is guided towards attaining the intellectual and moral discipline requisites to the role of an intelligent citizen in a free society. It is a whole spectrum of compulsory and optional activities which are formally planned for students (Carl, 2002). These include all planned activities by an educator which will help to develop learners. These can be extracurricular or moral activities, a debate, or even visits to a library (Harley, 1999).

For this study, the term syllabus refers to all planned formal and informal activities, including oral and written exercises, projects, assignments, research projects, sporting codes, etc., that the learner and the teacher will be engaged in throughout the teaching and learning process to effectively complete the school syllabus in times crisis and sit in for the examination. The syllabus is a strong inclusionary and exclusionary device because it encompasses what is believed to be essential for children to learn to become productive citizens in an inclusive society (Soudien, 2006).

## 5. Results

The researcher self-administered (with the aid of some teachers) the two sets of questionnaires by visiting the school to explain the purpose of the study. Participants were guided as to how to respond to the items by a circle. In some subjects, learners who are visually impaired got the questionnaire filled out by some peers through their oral responses. To ensure a high rate of returns, the timetable for the administration and collection of the questionnaire were strictly and personally done by the both researcher and the vice principal in charge of personnel. In this study, the first phase of the data presentation was on learners' opinions on education in times of crisis, their challenges, completing the syllabus, and end-of-year examination and performance. In the second phase, a chi-square analysis test was conducted to test the relationship that existed between the predictor variables. Traditionally a 95% confidence level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) or 99% confidence level ( $\alpha=0.01$ ) is deemed acceptable. This significance analysis was to determine the "correctness" of rejecting or accepting the null hypothesis and gave the researcher confidence in the findings.

The frequencies calculated for question 1, based on teachers' qualifications reveal that some (90%), of the teachers have considerable academic qualifications and (90%) professional qualifications in teaching in the examination classes. None of the teachers (100%) had been exposed to teaching in times of crisis.

Research question: What are the challenges learners faces in the examination classes not completing their syllabus?

The research question was presented along with the corresponding frequency and was revealed by learners that, 140 (46.6%), learners in the examination classes strongly agreed and admitted that some of the teachers do not complete the syllabus with the two-

shift system. Of the 300 learners in the examination classes 109 (36.3%), agreed that teachers have the fear factor of coming to school during a crisis and confirmed that there was limited time allocated to cover the work or the syllabus; while 33 (11%), disagreed teachers are overburdened with work and so many classes consequently the syllabus was not completed 18 (6%), strongly disagreed that the 2 shift system was a problem, Hence the teachers exhibit poor attitude toward learners in the crisis such as late coming, sense of insecurity, fright, negative thoughts about the crisis and learners in the examination classes are the victims.

Learners revealed that reduced number of hours per subject (92.4%), lack of teaching resources (86.7%), overburdened with work (88.8%) and (92.62%) are fatigue (77.24%), teaching method, (6.90%), extra-curricular activities (85.6%).

### 5.1 Verification of Hypotheses

**RH1:** There is a significant relationship between challenges and learners in examination classes completing their syllabus in times of crisis in the government secondary school in Mfoundi Division.

It is seen that the correlation between changes and completing the syllabus was examined according to the participants' views. The null hypothesis state; there is no relationship between challenges and learners in examination completing their syllabus meanwhile the alternate states, there is a relationship between challenges and learners in examination classes in completing their syllabus. It will be verified and established if there is a relationship while taking note of its level of significance. The confirmation of the relationship and the hypothesis testing were done using the chi-square contingency table. To get this the expected value has to be gotten and compared with the critical by using the formula below.

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

$X^2$  is the chi-square test statistic,

$\Sigma$  is the summation operator (it means "take the sum of"),

$O$  is the observed frequency,

$E$  is the expected frequency.

The larger the difference between the observations and the expectations ( $O - E$  in the equation), the bigger the chi-square will be. To decide whether the difference is big enough to be statistically significant, you compare the chi-square value to a critical value.

**Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ):** There is no significant relationship between challenges and learners in examination classes completing their syllabus in times of crisis in Government Bilingual High school Etouge-Ebe in Mfoundi Division.

**Alternative hypothesis ( $H_A$ ):** There is a significant relationship between challenges and learners in examination classes completing their syllabus in times of crisis in Government Bilingual High school Etouge-Ebe in Mfoundi Division.



**Table 1:** A3x4 Contingency Table

Education in times of crisis	Challenges in completing the syllabus				Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Fear	20 (14.2)	9 (8.25)	5 (15.15)	3 (16.66)	37
Loaded time table	40 (28.5)	30 (27.5)	9 (27.5)	3 (16.66)	82
Shift system	30 (21.4)	30 (27.5)	10 (30.3)	2 (11.11)	72
Limited hours	50 (35.7)	40 (36.6)	10 (30.3)	8 (44.4)	108
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>300</b>

The figures in brackets are the expected frequencies. From the table, following the test for independence the observed frequency and the expected frequency show that the calculated frequency is 25.94 and the critical frequency is 11.07. The calculated values exceed the critical value; hence we reject the null hypothesis. This implies that teachers do not complete their syllabus for examination students who are to sit in for official exams due to the crisis.

## 6. Discussion

Rh: There is a significant relationship between crisis and the completion of syllabus for students in examination classes in Government Bilingual High School Etoug-ebe Yaoundé 6 sub-division in Mfoundi Division of Cameroon. From the number of valid cases used for analysis, only cases with non-missing values for both education in crisis and the completion of the syllabus were used in the test. Since the p-value is greater than our chosen significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), we do reject the null hypothesis we conclude that there is enough evidence to suggest an association between the crisis in education and the completion of the syllabus for learners in the examination classes. Because the statistical test is based on a 3x4 cross-tabulation table, the degrees of freedom (df) for the test statistic is  $df=(R-1)*(C-1)=(3-1)*(4-1)=2*3=5$ .

The key result in the Chi-Square tests table is the Pearson Chi-Square.

- The value of the test statistic is 25.94.
- The footnote for this statistic pertains to the expected cell count assumption (i.e., expected cell counts are all greater than 5): no cells had an expected count less than 5, so this assumption was met.
- The corresponding p-value of the test statistic is  $p = 11.07$
- An association was found between crisis and completion of the syllabus for examination learners ( $X^2(2) > 25.94, p = 11.07$ ).

## 7. Conclusions

We live in a world where we are accustomed to the growing challenges to an extent that everything has to be paid for and human existence is burdened with overwhelming uncertainty. Observing this transformation as changes in education systems, learners are exposed more and more to uncertainty that has to be taken up seriously by critically analysing the processes taking place. It is very important because giving education up in times of crisis as such, the outcome will significantly hinder and disrupt the syllabus thus, the school calendar.

We can say that these are provisional considerations, given the scenario of uncertainty that we are experiencing. As of the time of writing this paper the pandemic is seemingly still a reality, therefore education stakeholders need to first acknowledge the crisis and how to address it, humanize the course, reconsider rigor, make it manageable, stay positive, give learners the choice to be autonomous, then the tasks given to learners should be relevant, appropriate, and worthy of their attention.

From the barrier majors taken, classes are not to be more than 50 learners in a classroom, a two-shift system, the number of teaching hours is reduced and therefore giving more work to teachers meanwhile the syllabus remains the same. General or overall statistics should be taken, to measure and evaluate the state of workload coverage on the syllabus before setting exams. Time allocation for each subject should be increased and some subjects on the curriculum should be studied, merged, or dropped to create time for those to be taken up during end of course examinations.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The researcher declares no conflicts of interest.

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