

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON THE PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL TEACHERS' COLLEGES IN UGANDA

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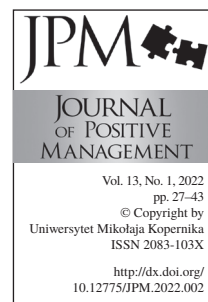
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Abstract

Purpose: This study attempted to investigate the effects of COVID-19 on the performance of National Teachers' Colleges (NTCs) supported by Enabel.

Methodology/approach: The study adopted a cross sectional research design. The study population consisted of staff working in the NTCs purposely or randomly selected. The self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data that was analysed using both descriptive and inferential analysis.

Findings: The research findings showed that programmes disruptions ($r = 0.496$); funding disruptions ($r = .403$) and capacity gap ($r = .556$) are moderately significant and positively associated with NTC performance respectively. Overall, the variables studied explain 33.9 percent of the variation in the organizational performance of NTCs.

Implications/limitations: The research findings have shown that whereas programme disruptions and capacity gaps significantly contributed to the explanation of performance in NTCs during the lockdown, funding disruptions do not. The study recommends the continued adoption of innovative approaches to realize the objective of quality teacher training and education. Research into the effects of Covid-19 on the students in NTC is recommended, as this current study did not explore the component of students.

Originality/value: While the effects of Covid-19 on the education sector have been studied, this has been mainly done at the primary and secondary levels of education in Uganda. This paper has attempted to investigate Covid-19 effects on NTCs supported by Enabel.

Key words: Covid-19; programme disruptions; funding disruptions; capacity gaps; organizational performance

Paper type: Research paper

1. Introduction

The novel human coronavirus disease 2019 also known as COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China in 2019 and eventually spread worldwide culminating into a pandemic. The virus has had far-reaching consequences, many of which remain to be seen (Evans and Mead, 2020). As a result of the pandemic, the economic and social livelihood of population has been disrupted, so are the programmes in the various organizations (Sunday *et al.*, 2021). In Africa, the pandemic may have taken a relatively small toll in terms of fatalities, but the social economic toll has been extremely grave in mainly sub Saharan Africa. Stakeholder engagement in most instances has been broken almost irreparably. Non-Government organizations that receive part of their funding from National Governments have registered shortfalls in revenue and are being forced to cut back on key activities (Mahler *et al.*, 2020).

Uganda adopted a strict response to the pandemic that led to the close of education institutions at all levels in the country for close to two years (National Planning Authority, 2021; Sunday *et al.*, 2021). This in no doubt affected the operations of education institutions in the country. The World Bank policy research working paper argues that the socioeconomic consequences of Covid-19 were more likely to outweigh the related positive health impacts (Maliszewska *et al.*, 2020). The pandemic effects were likely to lead to the underutilization of factors like capital and labour causing a fall in global GDP by around 2.5 percent and 1.8 percent for developing and developed countries respectively (African Union, 2020; Maliszewska *et al.*, 2020). In Uganda, the Covid-19 lockdown measures resulted in the slowdown of the economy mainly as a result of the disruption on business activities (Sunday *et al.*, 2021). Enabel used to conduct quarterly performance reviews for the National Teachers' Colleges (NTCs) it supports but all these were affected by the Covid-19 containment measures (Enabel result report 2021). National Teachers Colleges (NTCs) in Uganda are institutions mandated to train Grade five teachers or teachers that teach in the ordinary secondary schools (senior one to four). The secondary education in Uganda is divided into ordinary secondary level (senior one to four) and Advanced secondary level (senior five to six).

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome resulting from the coronavirus. COVID-19 has resulted in the disruption of many programmes supported by international agencies due to the containment measures put in place by many countries to slow down the proliferation of the virus. These disruptions are a direct consequence of having difficulty in implementing the virus containment measures. As a result, very many programmes are lagging behind schedule (Sunday *et al.*, 2021). Among the restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 were the restrictions on movement and social distancing rules.

One of the key roles of higher education institutions, a category in which NTCs fall, is to build the capacity of the country's labour force. Capacity building refers to the processes adopted to transmit knowledge, skills, values and the right attitudes in the trainees. This activity was hitherto performed face to face but became distracted mainly because of social distancing rules and restrictions on movement during the Covid-19 lockdown. The ability of institutions to undertake capacity-building activities were greatly limited during the Covid-19 lock down (African Union, 2020). Funding refers to the provision of financial support to an organization. In this research, we use funding to refer to the support provided to the NTCs by Enabel in the form of financial resources. Organizational performance is used to refer to the ability of the NTC to attain its set goals. The performance of NTCs in relation to their mandate can be measured in terms of students' enrolment, graduation rates, tuition fees collection, state of instructional infrastructure and materials.

The government of Uganda ordered the closure of all education institutions from March 2020 to October 2021 (National Planning Authority, 2021), and the NTCs were not spared. This meant that NTC programmes especially in the area of teaching and learning got distracted. Teacher training colleges play a critical role of producing teachers to teach in the secondary schools. Without quality teacher training, the quality of the graduates of any education programme is bound to suffer with poor skills. The colleges had to adopt online training in order to further the education of the students. This however was limited by the lack of wide spread internet connectivity, general lack of online learning systems and the lack of smartphones by both teachers and students (Sunday *et al.*, 2021).

Enabel is a Belgian International Development Agency that works in close collaboration with the Government of Uganda (GoU) to improve, among other activities, the quality of education in the country. In collaboration with the GoU, Enabel undertook to support the reconstruction, equip and build the capacity of staff in NTCs in Uganda under the Teacher Training and Education (TTE) project since 2011. Among the key objectives of the TTE project is grounding staff in NTCs in learner-centred methodologies that are best achieved through a face-to-face teacher-learner interaction. Before the onset of Covid-19, there was a regular interaction between Enabel staff and the beneficiaries (NTCs). The onset of Covid-19 was abrupt and brought on board new restrictions that were unexpected. This in essence meant the disruption of the planned activities of Enabel towards the support rendered to NTCs (Enabel result report 2021). This research attempts to explore the extent to which the Covid-19 containment measures affected the organizational performance of NTCs. Specifically, the research explores how programme disruption, funding disruption and capacity building affected NTC performance during the Covid-19 lockdown.

2. Literature review

This research was guided by the stakeholder theory recommended by authors like Bosse *et al.* (2008) as a major guide to managers in managing challenges characterized by uncertainty, such as was the case with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Stakeholders are people with a stake in a given entity, wherein if involved, the identification of common challenges and the exploration of a common will to solve the challenges as stakeholders become pertinent in the efficient management of any organization (Jones, 1995). Several authors have conducted studies on the effect of the Covid-19 on organizational performance (Köpsel *et al.*, 2021; Rick, 2020) but no such study has explored the effect on the performance of teacher education training institutions like NTCs especially in Uganda.

2.1. Programme disruptions and performance of organizations

Attah (2021) investigated the impact of Covid-19 on organizational performance in relation to forest management in African states. The study findings revealed that less than 12 percent of programmes were being implemented as planned and more than half of the remaining programmes were either cancelled outright or indefinitely postponed. The disruption in economic activities due to the Covid-19 restrictions is also alluded to in Sunday *et al.* (2021). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) report (2020) acknowledges the distraction of GEF financed programmes due to Covid-19 (Global Environment Facility, 2020). The study on the impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning in Africa, (Nwokeocha, 2021) discovered, among others, the massive disruptions of education, poor digital skills of academic staff and the lack of the necessary infrastructure. The intensity in the disruptions seems to have a bearing on the location of the learners during the lockdown period with the rural learners more affected than their counter parts in urban areas (Kyagaba *et al.*, 2021).

To manage the disruptions in learning, education institutions had to adopt to online learning systems (Goldberg, 2021) that may however have widened the disparities between learners with the necessary skills and gadgets and those without (Nwokeocha, 2021; Sunday *et al.*, 2021). It should be noted the before Covid-19 online learning was something that many education institutions were not practicing or even planning to adopt. The Covid-19 containment measures thus found education institutions (NTCs) in Uganda ill-prepared to implement online learning. Both staff and students were short of the requisite digital skills, and the institutions were ill-equipped in terms of the necessary infrastructure needed to manage online teaching and learning. The country as a whole was also ill-prepared given the state of the limited internet connectivity throughout the country and the necessary competences to monitor online teaching and learning. Research shows that Covid-19 adversely affected the learners' academic growth (Goldberg, 2021).

Authors like (Bagshaw and Winton, 2022) advise education institutions to harness these disruptions to their advantage by creating value for money for the beneficiaries, as advocated for in the adoption of online learning. Disruptions will always surface and the education institutions that are able to exploit this to their advantage will gain a competitive advantage in such an environment today and tomorrow. The need to consult both the internal and external stakeholders is advised among the necessities to create value for money in the education setting out of any innovation aimed at managing the disruption.

2.2. Funding disruptions and performance of organizations

In their contribution towards the understanding of the impact on Covid-19 and its implication on crisis financing (Poole and Gressmann, 2020) observe that the pandemic posed a challenge that the global community was never prepared for. The authors cite various disruptions that were brought about because of Covid -19 that affected sectors like the transport and commodity markets. They raised a concern that the financial response could not be adequate to manage the secondary impacts caused by Covid-19. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) performed several scenario simulations where predictions revealed global growth to fall by 0.5 for the year 2020 (African Union, 2020). When the global economy contracts, the actors in this economic ecosystem are also affected often in the same direct proportion. This is so as donors flattened off their funding and shifting their funding priorities to most pressing needs to solve life-threatening problems caused by the pandemic (Poole and Gressmann, 2020). Enabel funding activities and priorities could not have been spared during this period, hence the need for this study.

In an article published about handling the secondary effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in struggling communities of Afghanistan, Eastern DRC and Syria, (Fiorella, 2021) explains how medium and long-term initiatives have been adversely affected disruption through prioritization of funding to cater for emergencies such as refugees feeding. The diversion of funding from pre-planned to cater for emergent unplanned activities negatively impacts on the performance of an organization. Even in situations where NTCs could raise additional funding from students' tuition, this was limited by the significant fall in college enrolment during the pandemic (Goldberg, 2021). Fortunately, NTCs being government owned felt less the financial disruptions on its activities especially the payment of staff salaries as these continued to be paid by government throughout the pandemic period.

Nwokeocha (2021) identifies some of the disruptions in education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to include delays, reductions and at worst termination in the payment of staff salaries. The non payment of salaries to staff demotivates them and some opt to finding alternative forms of employment. Teachers in most

private schools in Uganda turned to other economic activities in order to survive during the pandemic period as most private institutions halted the payment of salaries to their staff. The adverse effect of this on an educational institutional performance is manifest where some staff opted out of the teaching profession as they never reported to work when the institutions were re-opened. On the contrary, most academic staff in public education institutions reported back to work when the institutions were re-opened (Kyagaba *et al.*, 2021). This makes it clear that institutions that faced severe funding disruptions as a result of Covid-19 also experienced deterioration in performance of their institutions due to loss of competent staff.

2.3. Capacity gaps and the performance of organizations

The onset of Covid-19 has changed the dynamics of capacity building (Rick, 2020) with the growing importance of the need for the donor community to empower the local communities. The challenge brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic lies in the way this can be best executed. The immediate lessons from the pandemic is that the capacity of the local communities (NTC staff) to manage online activities need to be prioritized. When the government announced the closure of education institutions in March 2020 due to Covid-19, it was conceived by many that this was something temporal. However, education institutions had to soon grapple with the reality of the uncertainty surrounding the schools re-opening. NTCs and other education institutions were encouraged to find alternative means of interfacing with their learners, and among the options was to launch online learning systems. The view to adopt online learning was highly popularized in Digital, Online, Teachers, Safety, and Skills (DOTSS) framework by the African Union Commission (Nwokeocha, 2021). This raised the issue of capacity of staff to handle online teaching on the one hand and the capacity of students to effectively engage in online learning on the other hand.

Research studies report that the numerous limitations that students faced during the pandemic include the limited access to internet, the lack of the necessary gadgets like smart phones as well as simple IT skills like how to log in an online learning platform (Nwokeocha, 2021; Sunday *et al.*, 2021). Enabel had to enrich its Teacher Training and Education programme (TTE) to include building staff capacity on how to conduct online teaching and learning. It should be observed that the Enabel capacity-building programme in NTCs mainly targets the staff with the hope that the empowered staff can easily impact the learning outcomes of the learner. Unfortunately, the closure of education institutions was abrupt and neither the staff nor the students were prepared for the online type of teaching and learning. The method of assessment also had to shift from majorly face-to-face assessments to embracing online assessment (Hughes *et al.*, 2022). The usual fear associated with the integrity of online assessments hand to be

dealt with. Staff had to be trained in new skills of setting and assessing online examinations. The issue of integrity of online examinations is better handled by setting examinations that require application. This requires the need to train staff in skills of setting examinations that require application.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a cross sectional research design, which is best suited to deliver cost effective quality data using tools like the self-administered survey questionnaire (Newman, 2016). The time covered is from March 2020 to October 2021 when NTCs were under closure due to the Covid-19 containment measures. The study population comprised of both teaching and non-teaching staff in the five National Teachers' Colleges supported by Enabel. The study sample was 113 respondents selected either purposefully or randomly. Random sampling was used to give equal chance to the target group to participate in the study. The use of purposive sampling was meant to ensure that only participants with expert information on the topic under study participate in the study. This sample size fits well the recommendation of Sekaran and Bougie (2010) *of between 30 and 500*. *The main tool for data collection was the self-administered questionnaire that followed a five-point Likert scale. This was complemented by an interview guide to enable data triangulation. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was estimated to establish the reliability of the study instrument. A reliability index of 0.727 was obtained for the study instrument, which meets the recommendation of authors like Sekaran and Bougie (2010), Bryman (2017) and Burns (2016).* The data collected was analysed to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of the SPSS Version 25 software. Throughout the research process, ethical principles of identification, anonymity, privacy, confidentiality and informed consent were observed. This study was conducted when the country was not fully open due to the Covid-19 restrictions, which limited the researcher's active interaction during the research process. The data was obtained using contact persons from the various institutions that were relied upon to administer and collect the filled questionnaires from the respondents.

4. Research findings

4.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

From the distributed 113 questionnaires, 81 fully completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 72 percent. A response rate of 72 percent in the view of Burns (2016) is a good return rate. The male respondents were 54 (67%) while the female respondents were 27 (33%). The majority of the respondents were above 41 years of age – 48 (59%), a few were in their middle ages – 25 (31%) and very few were in the range of 26 -30 years – 8 (10%). This

age pattern is expected as ideally teachers who constitute the bulk of the workforce in NTCs are recruited based on prior experience of teaching at the secondary level of education. This means that they join the NTCs when they are of a reasonable age having spent some minimum years teaching mainly at secondary level. The majority of the respondents – 46 (57%) possessed postgraduate qualifications, 28 (35%) had bachelors qualification while only 7 (8%) had either a certificate or diploma qualification. In Uganda, to teach in the NTCs requires candidates to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. However, the government effort to turn the NTCs into University Colleges offering bachelor's degrees has necessitated teachers in NTCs to seek for higher qualifications to secure their employability with the proposed University colleges. The majority of the respondents had worked with the NTCs for more than seven years – 49 (60%) which implies their possession of a clear understanding of the operations of the NTCs. The information obtained from these respondents has a high degree of reliability.

4.2. Descriptive statistics

4.2.1. Programme disruptions and the performance of NTCs

The overall mean obtained of 3.84 and the corresponding standard deviation of 1.057 indicate the existence of a wide variation in opinion among the respondents of the effect of Covid-19 in relation to programme disruption at the NTCs. The respondents demonstrated a clear understanding of programme disruption as planned activities not proceeding as expected (Mean 4.27, SD 0.633). The pandemic had disrupted many programmes supported by Enabel (Mean 4.11, SD 0.949) leading to the downsizing of the partner scope of activities (Mean 4.06, SD 0.857). The disruptions as majorly caused by the Covid-19 containment measures though agreed to (Mean 4.04) showed wide variations in opinion (SD 1.123). This may be explained by the fact that some college activities continued unabated during the Covid-19 lockdown. This was achieved through leveraging ICT and social media tools (Mean 4.07, SD 0.997). The disruption in programmes had negligible effect on college staff employment. There were no registered cases of employee layoffs due to the Covid-19 lockdown and slow in activities as it was in some of the commercial sectors in the country. In all, respondents generally agreed that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, stakeholder engagement in programme implementation was adversely affected (Mean 3.73, SD 0.895).

4.2.2. Funding disruptions and the performance of NTCs

The advent of Covid-19 resulted in major donors reducing their funding to the entities they used to render support worldwide. The NTCs in Uganda supported by Enabel were no exception. The research findings revealed wide variation in opinion among respondents with overall Mean 3.57 and SD 1.148. The funding disruptions resulted in innovative ways of communication from face to face to

virtual meetings (Mean 4.59, SD 0.703). Though funding disruptions were evident, the respondents were varied in opinion about the effect this had on donor-planned activities with the colleges (Mean 4.00, SD 1.061). To some extent, funding disruptions had an adverse effect on the delivery of college services (Mean 3.40, SD 1.262) and stakeholder engagement (Mean 3.88, SD 1.133). The funding disruptions had negligible effect on college staff salaries (Mean 2.73, SD 1.414). This finding is not surprising as NTCs supported by Enable are government funded. The government continued to meet its salary obligations for all its workers in the various government institutions during the period of Covid-19 lockdown. Little wonder then that colleges did not resort to local fundraising to close the funding gap left by donors (Mean 2.77, SD 1.372). In any case, donor funding is mainly in development and capacity building activities as opposed to financing current expenditures.

4.2.3. Capacity gaps and the performance of NTCs

Among the key priorities of Enabel funding is capacity building of college staff. Before Covid-19, this activity was mainly conducted face to face. The restrictions on movement and social gatherings meant that this activity could not be effected in exactly the same way as planned during the programming period. The findings revealed a consensus on the concept of capacity building among respondents. The general opinion is that capacity building is meant to develop and strengthen the abilities and skills of staff to deliver towards the attainment of the organization's set targets (Mean 4.42, SD 0.845). On the positive side, threats to capacity were less existent given that staff in NTCs are on the government payroll. The fear of loss of skilled staff due to layoffs mainly fuelled by financial constraints was thus non-existent. Neither did staff contracts need to be revised to fit in the new conditions caused by the pandemic. Indeed, the respondents disagreed though with wide variations in opinion on the issue of the pandemic lowering the quality of staff (Mean 2.85, SD 1.108). This was supported by the fact the colleges maintained most of their skilled and competent staff despite the challenges experienced during the pandemic period (Mean 2.65, SD 1.305). It was also expressed that much as the face-to-face capacity building sessions were adversely affected by the Covid-19 measures, this did not imply abandonment of capacity building sessions (Mean 2.95, SD 1.440). Indeed, capacity building sessions took on a new form of online/virtual training sessions that in itself also involved capacity building of staff in the use of online tools.

4.2.4. The performance of NTCs during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 containment measures affected the performance of NTCs in various ways. The student admission and enrolment into the colleges was restricted (Mean 4.32, SD 0.960) though variations in opinion was registered

as to whether the students' application to the NTCs had been affected as well. What is true is that even those that may have applied were not considered during the pandemic as college activities especially physical interactions and training sessions were temporary suspended. This did not spare college graduations as well (Mean 4.00, SD 1.183). The wide variation in opinion may arise from the fact that unlike Universities in Uganda that have regular annual graduations, NTCs have predetermined graduations of between every two to three years. The Covid-19 restrictions could thus have only affected the graduation activities of those colleges that had planned graduation during the abrupt lockdowns.

The suspension of the physical interactions had adverse effect of course content coverage (Mean 4.11, SD 1.118). The variations in opinion is explained by the reality that some college lecturers were able to conduct online lectures during the period of the containment. The limited content coverage also adversely affected the quality of examination (Mean 2.81, SD 1.062). This may be explained by the new concept of the abridged curriculum that emphasizes the teaching of selected core content in order to catch up with lost teaching time. There is a general thinking that the lack of face-to-face interactions and the abrupt shift to virtual training sessions adversely affected the quality of teaching and learning in the colleges. In a way, the shift to online teaching may have caused issues in relation to college retention and dropout rates (Mean 3.68, SD 1.13). As the results indicate, the dropout rate may not be as worrying as it was the case at lower levels of education in the country.

There was also a general feeling among respondents that the shift from the physical to the virtual teaching sessions in a way increased the academic staff workload, increased the students' workload and worsened the student lecturer ratio. This feeling may arise from the fact that during online sessions the staff ought to handle the whole class that perhaps was handled in different groups during the face-to-face interactions. The Covid-19 containment measures imposed several requirements on the colleges such as lecture space to ensure the recommended social distancing measures. There were variations in opinion as to whether the colleges had adequate lecture space to meet the new norm. This variation may be explained by the analysis of the different capacities of the colleges and their enrolled student population. For NTCs with high student population, the issue of lecture space could be significant. The same argument could suffice in relation to student accommodation during the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 restrictions brought on board the concept of virtual learning. Enabel conducted capacity-building sessions to enable college academic staff efficiently and effectively adopt online teaching and learning tools. The respondents had positive remarks on the Moodle learning system as enabling online discussion forums (Mean 4.01, SD 0.958) and keeping track of online teaching and learning activities (Mean 4.06, SD 0.871). The Moodle learning

system is interactive and enriches learning, enables one store learning content and allows easy tracking of the learners' progress (Mean 4.14, SD 0.984). What deserves special attention is the general feeling among respondents that the colleges are ill-equipped with the necessary ICT facilities needed to conduct effective online learning (Mean 2.88, SD 1.259).

4.3. Inferential statistics

4.3.1. Correlational matrix

The Pearson correlation coefficient was run to measure the degree of association between the independent and dependent variables. The results are presented in Table 1.

Variable	Programme Disruptions	Funding Disruptions	Capacity Gap	Organizational Performance
Programme Disruptions	1			
Funding Disruptions	.491**	1		
Capacity Gap	.539**	.628**	1	
Organizational Performance	.496**	.403**	.556**	1

Table 1. Correlation matrix results

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results revealed the existence of a moderate positive and significant relationship between programme disruptions ($r=0.496$), funding disruptions ($r=0.403$), capacity gap ($r=0.556$) and organizational performance respectively.

4.3.2. Multiple regression

The multiple regression test was performed to determine the contribution of the predictor variables on the response variable. The results of the parameter estimates are presented in Table 2.

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	Coefficient	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	Sig.
Programme disruption	0.202	0.082	0.272	2.454	0.016
Funding disruption	0.012	0.076	0.019	0.16	0.874
Capacity gaps	0.274	0.086	0.398	3.201	0.002
Intercept	1.755	0.284		6.187	0

Table 2. Parameter estimates

The estimated equation is provided as $Y = 1.755 + 0.202 X_1 + 0.274 X_3$. This implies that a unit increase in programme disruption affects the organization performance of NTCs by 20.2 percent, while a unit increase in capacity gaps will affect the organizational performance of NTCs by 27.4 percent.

Source	Sum Squ- ares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F-value	Sig
Model	5	3	1.67	14.69	0
Residual	8.74	77	0.113		
Total	13.74	80			
R-Squared	0.364		Adj.R-squared	0.339	

Table 3. Model
summary

The findings from Table 3 revealed that the predictor variables collectively explain 33.9 percent of the variation in the performance of NTCs. The F-test is significant, and the difference between R-squared and Adjusted R-squared of 0.03 is small implying a good fit for our model.

5. Discussion, conclusion and policy recommendations

5.1. Discussion

5.1.1. Programme disruptions and the performance of NTCs

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted programmes implemented by Enabel in NTCs. There was wide variation in opinion among the respondents implying that perhaps this disruption was not much felt by some respondents. This may be attributed to the fact that despite the Covid-19 restrictions, most of the pre-planned programmes of Enabel with the NTCs continued in a virtual setting. For example, NTC staff during the lockdown received training on how to conduct lessons online. There was continuous engagement of the NTC staff and Enabel during the lockdown especially in the area of capacity building. Despite this variation in opinion, there was agreement that the scope of activities was narrowed due to the lockdown restrictions. The narrowing of the scope of activities with the NTCs during the Covid-19 pandemic was not unique to Enabel, and collates the findings of (Attah, 2021; Global Environment Facility, 2020; Nwokeocha, 2021). The difference between the findings from the current study and the previous studies lies in the scope of disruption, wherein Attah (2021) cites cancellation or suspension of more than half of the planned programmes in some organizations due to the pandemic.

In some organizations, staff were laid off given the slowdown in economic activities. This is contrary to the NTCs that has most of her staff on the government payroll. During the whole period of the lockdown, the GoU continued to meet its obligations towards payment of staff salaries, with no attempts to either reduce or postpone the salary payments. In such a case, apart from the limitations of close interaction with colleagues and students, life continued to near normal. The leveraging of ICT and social media tools allow the continuity of the major mandate of the NTCs, which is teaching and learning, albeit with several limitations. The

results revealed the existence of a moderate positive significant relationship between programme disruptions and funding disruptions ($r=0.491$), programme disruptions and capacity gaps ($r=0.539$) and programme disruptions and organizational performance ($r=0.496$). In the model, we find that programme disruption explains 20.2 percent of the variation in NTC performance during the pandemic. Programme implementation is basically dependent on availability of funding, and the disruption in the flow of funds inevitably affect the performance of the organization.

5.1.2. Financial disruptions and the performance of NTCs

Financing is a driver of most of the activities of an organization. Whereas there was agreement among respondents that Covid-19 affected the financial flows of funds from Enabel to the NTCs, the opinion was greatly varied. The respondents were all clear when it comes to NTCs programmes being affected by Covid-19 as manifested in the reduction of the scope of activities. There was agreement on the benefit of this being a blessing in disguise as innovative ways of meeting planned targets were brought on board. Significant among the innovations are the virtual meeting sessions and interactions that have become an integral aspect of NTC activities to date. Much as the interactions between Enabel and the NTCs almost continued unabated during the Covid-19 lockdown, it is clear that the form of interaction changed. In the case of NTCs, the more regular physical interactions to virtual interactions. For this to be successful, the capacity of staff in online tools had to be developed in this area which seemingly had not been planned for. This revision in the way of doing things brought about by the pandemic is in agreement with Poole and Gressmann (2020).

The priorities of Enabel were modified from mainly planned physical sessions to building staff capacity in the use of online tools. In a way this meant funding prioritization as explained in (Fiorella, 2021). The correlation results revealed the existence of a strong positive and significant association between funding disruptions and capacity gaps ($r=0.628$). A moderate positive and significant relationship was found to exist between funding disruptions and organizational performance ($r=0.403$). In the model, the contribution of funding disruption to organizational performance was found to be insignificant. The strong relationship between funding disruptions and capacity building is expected given that most of the capacity building activities such as hiring of consultants and trainers, hiring of the training venue and the related activities all require funding. The insignificant result posted in relation to the overall contribution of funding disruption and NTC performance may be explained considering that Enable continued to support the NTCs even during the lockdown. As such, most of the planned NTC activities were not affected by disruptions in funding. This result is contrary to the findings of Fiorella (2021) where due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations had to cut their programmes by more than half.

5.1.3. Capacity gaps and the performance of NTCs

As earlier observed, among the key priorities of Enabel funding in NTCs is capacity building of college staff to enable staff efficiently and effectively conduct teacher-training activities. Before Covid-19, these activities were mainly made of physical interactions, which became impossible during the lockdown and the corresponding standard operating procedures (SOPs) requiring social distancing. The loss of staff due to layoffs or voluntary resignations has an adverse effect on the quality of college staff. Fortunately, despite the onset of Covid-19 the quality of NTC staff remained intact as the GoU continued to pay staff salaries in time. In addition, Enabel continued to build the capacity of staff, first by developing staff capacity in online tools, and building on the gained skills to continually build the staff competences in the planned teacher training methodologies. The need to build capacity of staff in digital skills is supported by (Nwokeocha, 2021) findings of teachers' poor digital skills.

The capacity gaps were found to have a moderate positive and significant relationship with organizational performance ($r=0.556$). This implies that the performance of an organization is greatly influenced by the competences of its staff. The finding supports earlier researchers that attribute the quality of an institution to the competences of its human resource (Rick, 2020). The model results showed that capacity gaps explain 27.4 percent of the variation in the performance of NTCs.

5.2. Conclusions

5.2.1. Programme disruptions and the performance of NTCs

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted programmes implemented by Enabel in NTCs. The disruption was not much expressed by the respondents since alternative approaches were sought and used to ensure the smooth flow of the programmes. Paramount among these approaches was the shift to online tools, which have become an integral part of Enabel implementation programme with NTCs to date. There exists a moderate positive significant relationship between programme disruptions and organizational performance ($r=0.496$). A unit change in programme design influences a change in the organization performance of NTCs by 20.2 percent.

5.2.2. Financial disruptions and the performance of NTCs

Covid-19 affected the funding priorities of Enabel to the NTCs especially in the area of capacity building. Funding moved from focusing on physical training to integrate the use of online tools to circumvent the restrictions on movement and gatherings arising from the Covid-19 containment measures. The change in funding priorities is supported by authors like (Poole and Gressmann, 2020; Fiorella, 2021). There exists a moderate positive and significant relationship

between funding disruptions and organizational performance ($r=0.403$). The overall contribution of funding disruption to organizational performance was found to be insignificant.

5.2.3. *Capacity gaps and the performance of NTCs*

The capacity building activities of Enabel to the NTC staff had to be modified from mainly physical activities to online activities. This change seems to have become the new normal as the capacity building activities are increasingly taking on the blended learning methodologies. The capacity gaps are moderately positively related with the organizational performance of NTCs ($r=0.556$). This result stresses the key role provided by staff competences in realizing the goals of NTCs. Capacity building activities explain 27.4 percent of the variation in the performance of NTCs.

6. Policy recommendations

Enabel need to enhance the innovative approaches used during the Covid-19 pandemic to realize their goals in relation to the Teacher Training Programs. This approach should be comprehensive enough to include both the hardware in addition to the soft and technical skills provided. This would necessitate facilitating the NTCs with the procurement of user-friendly learner management systems. The NTCs should also be enabled to identify reliable and cost friendly internet service providers. It is essential that academic staff in NTCs be trained in how to set, evaluate and manage online examinations.

The government of Uganda should ensure access to internet throughout the country since the learners in the NTCs come from different parts of the country. The government should also spear head the procurement of the necessary gadgets like computers and smartphones to allow the smooth implementation of the adoption of online learning. It is recommended that the GoU encourages the adoption of blended learning methodologies to orient the community of the new realities of digital technologies. This may as well act as a hedge to future possible lockdowns.

The staff of NTCs should embrace the use of modern technologies in the teaching-learning process. Teachers should aid the adoption of eLearning by popularizing the use of blended learning methodologies. The staff should continuously interest the learners, the parents and apathetic colleagues in the beauty of online teaching and learning tools.

This research has explored the impact of Covid-19 on the performance of the National Teacher's Colleges supported by Enabel in Uganda. It is recommended that a study involving other beneficiaries of Enabel projects such as the Technical Training Institutions is conducted. Research studies may also be undertaken to investigate how the activities of other organizations supported by donors other

than Enabel fared during the period of Covid-19 restrictions. A study to highlight the impact of Covid-19 from the perspective of students is recommended.

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