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Topic: My Experience Learning Outside School – The Covid-19 Pandemic Provided a New Opportunity to Learn Outside The Normal School Environment

I remember one of my friends being scared to come home from school on the onset of the pandemic. The virus has caused havoc and unimaginable fear among us. At the time the schools were closing, most of us hadn't been exposed to any knowledge about pandemic so we just left the school with our hearts in our hands.

During the onset of the pandemic there was fear of the virus. For a whole week, I spent an average of 14 hours alone since my parents were off to work, my siblings were far away and I was too afraid to go out. Being home alone wasn't a necessarily bad thing. In fact, it gave me an opportunity to learn new life skills like baking. I also took time to evaluate career choices and my self-identity. In school, we have less time to examine ourselves and our mental state which at times adversely affects our grades. With a less strict academic schedule, I had much needed time to socially connect with my brother and cousins.

We also had online classes. Attending online classes allowed me to interact with my friends remotely. Distance wasn't a barrier at all. With time, these interactions helped me grow certain virtues like working with little supervision because I am self motivated. I think self motivation is a really under-rated trait. Phone notifications kept popping up and the urge to venture into social media applications was too overwhelming. With the teacher not being able to view everything you do, self control and personal discipline is needed during online classes.

Adherence to finishing homework on time has been quite a challenge to my procrastinative nature. I prefer doing homework at the very last minute. With help from my online teachers I have been able to improve by submitting my homework and assignments earlier than I used to.

I have also been able to change my negative mindset about Mathematics. This is because studying from home allowed me to tap into different mathematics resources and platforms that gave me a simplified approach. Minor distractions such as my siblings laughing at me trying to answer questions make up the little joys of my day.

With more access to the internet, I have been able to access new or additional information on all manner of subjects. At school, our teachers have taught us to think in a certain way. We deem information we are taught in school to be true, the opinions our teachers' express about us shape our futures. Gaining additional information and guidance from online platforms such as ZOOM meetings organised by my local church has enabled me to have a broader picture of real life experiences. Receiving information in a different setting has enabled me to relate to some subjects in a personal manner as my goal is not just to get good grades but to also achieve a deeper understanding in a given subject matter.

A major setback I have faced is the huge consumption of data bundles. I spend most of my time in an area where there is no free internet or WIFI. I have to buy expensive data bundles everyday. My current location also has poor mobile network access. In some cases, our teachers complain of having poor network or internet access which forces us to put off a lesson. The virtual classes have been able to open my eyes to the privilege and opportunities I have as it's only a handful of students that are able to attend them. I have a greater and empathetic understanding of economic disparities between the poor and the rich in Kenya. My friends from less privileged homes do not take online classes.

There are also so many free websites offering e-learning or free classes on ZOOM. My parents complain that some of the sites offer low quality services. Other platforms are costly or have limited topics. This limits me to a few platforms with credible content. I have therefore learnt to filter through massive amounts of links in order to get the right information from the internet.

After all I said, I still miss my school, my teachers and friends.