



## **THE CHALLENGES FACED BY PRIMARY TEACHERS WHEN THEY TAUGHT ONLINE DURING THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC**

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The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted traditional education systems worldwide, necessitating a rapid shift to online teaching methods. This study explored the challenges faced by primary school teachers in the Kalutara District, Sri Lanka, as they adapted to online teaching during this period. The research utilised a quantitative approach, surveying 98 primary school teachers from 10 schools within the Kalutara Education Division using a Google Form. The primary aim was to identify the difficulties these educators encountered and how they coped with the sudden transition to online instruction. The findings reveal several key issues. Firstly, a significant gender imbalance was observed in the teaching profession with 92% of respondents being female, most of whom were in the 31-40-year age group. This demographic detail suggests that the majority of primary school teachers were mid-career professionals with substantial experience but possibly limited in exposure to digital teaching tools prior to the pandemic. In addition, 64% of the teachers reported feeling uncomfortable using technology for teaching, indicating a lack of prior training and familiarity with digital platforms. Despite this discomfort, a majority (61%) of teachers made efforts to create multimedia materials to engage students although this was often done with limited technological resources and support. Technological infrastructure emerged as a major challenge, with 55% of respondents identifying it as a significant barrier to effective online teaching. Issues such as unreliable internet connections and lack of access to appropriate devices were prevalent, echoing similar findings in global studies on online education during the pandemic.

This study concludes that while primary school teachers in the Kalutara District made commendable efforts to adapt to online teaching, their effectiveness was hampered by inadequate technological infrastructure and insufficient training. To address these challenges, the study recommends that educational institutions invest in necessary technological resources, provide comprehensive training for teachers, and employ dedicated technical support staff. Such measures would enhance the quality of online education and better prepare educators for future disruptions. This research highlights the urgent need for policy interventions to support primary education in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Primary School Teachers, Online, Covid-19 Pandemic Period

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Online education became the most attractive mode of learning for many during the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic period. Some time ago, the digital world movement was initiated and intended to transform every avenue of our society with hassle-free use of digital technology (Gupta, 2021). The current situation presents such an opportunity among adversity to use digital technology. The global COVID-19 pandemic severely damaged educational systems everywhere, including in Sri Lanka (Senaratne et al, 2021). However, the pandemic situation forced countries to come up with innovative strategies to overcome these challenges (Nawastheen et al, 2022). To assure students' ongoing education, the Sri Lankan government ordered a move from conventional classroom instruction to online instruction. Primary educators were expected to adjust to new teaching approaches and technology, which presented them with a number of difficulties. The education sector has a major impact on the development of a country and primary education forms the foundation of a child academic life. Accordingly, special attention should be paid to the academic performance of students in the primary section. Sri Lanka, like rest of the world, has faced many challenges in the last few years, and the spread of the epidemic since 2019 was the primary one. This situation greatly affected all sectors, including the education sector. During the pandemic period, online education was introduced to the Sri Lankan school system for the first time to maintain the education sector while keeping the country closed. After this, online platforms have been used to continue the education of the children even during the various other crises in the country. Although the online learning and teaching process is used to protect the integrity of the children's education process, both students and teacher faced many problems and challenges using this method (Hebbaz, 2021). Accordingly, this study aimed to analyse the problems faced and solutions created by teachers in the online education system in order to succeed in the learning and teaching process of primary education. Therefore, the research objectives of this study were to identify the activities conducted by primary school teachers using online platforms during the COVID-19 period, and identify the challenges they faced when they engaged in online teaching activities during the COVID-19 period.

The process of adapting the school system to a complete online learning and teaching process from face-to-face education in the school system is not simple. Under normal circumstances, it should be a step-by-step process. However, without information and communication technology devices within existing curricula, or without the knowledge or skills to use such tools, especially without understanding the nature of online education or its successful methods, teachers in our country as a country we should be a happy to maintain online teaching as much as possible for the betterment of our student community.

Primary school teachers were required to adjust to online teaching methods during the COVID-19 pandemic period in the Kalutara district of Sri Lanka. This study sought to identify the challenges experienced by primary teachers during online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was particularly challenging given the varying levels of technological infrastructure, teacher training, and student engagement in the district. The results of this research may have substantial consequences for education policy and practice in Sri Lanka.



## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted through a survey research design with a quantitative approach. Data was gathered from 98 primary school teachers from 10 schools in the Kalutara Education Division via a Google form. The Google form survey was distributed to all teachers within the research area, totaling 138 teachers, and of these, 98 responses were received. The population of this research included primary school teachers in the Kalutara Education Division who have had to switch to online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample was selected to ensure representation from different types of schools and obtain a diverse range of experiences. The questionnaire was given to 98 primary schools teachers from 10 schools in the research area. To validate the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted with 15 primary school teachers. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

### 3.1.1 Teacher’s Background (Gender & Age group)

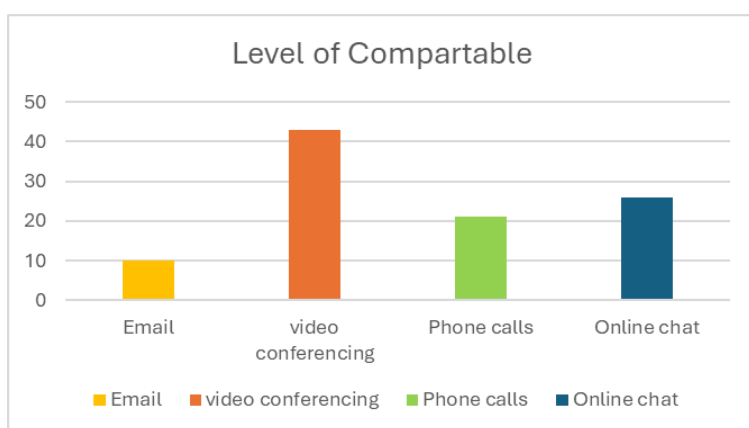
**Table:01 Teacher’s Background**

Gender	Age Group			
	25-30	31-40	41-45	>45
Male	1%	3%	3%	2%
Female	08%	69%	13%	1%



Table 1 shows the teachers’ background of which 8% were male and 92% female, which suggests that there may be a gender imbalance in the teaching profession, particularly at the primary level. This is consistent with broader trends in education, where women are more likely to enter the teaching profession than men. The findings that the highest percentage of respondents fell into the age range of 31 to 40 years (72%) suggest that this age group is well represented among primary teachers in a sample. This age group is likely to be composed of mid-career teachers who have several years of experience in the profession and are established in their roles. According to the Nambiar’s (2020) study on the impact of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic reveals that the majority of participants were aged 24 to 35 years (56.9%), followed by the 36 to 50 years (32.7%) and the above-50 years (10.4%). This study highlights the challenges experienced and adaptations created by students and teachers during this time, emphasising the significant shift in educational dynamics and delivery.

### 3.1.3 Level of comfort using technology for teaching

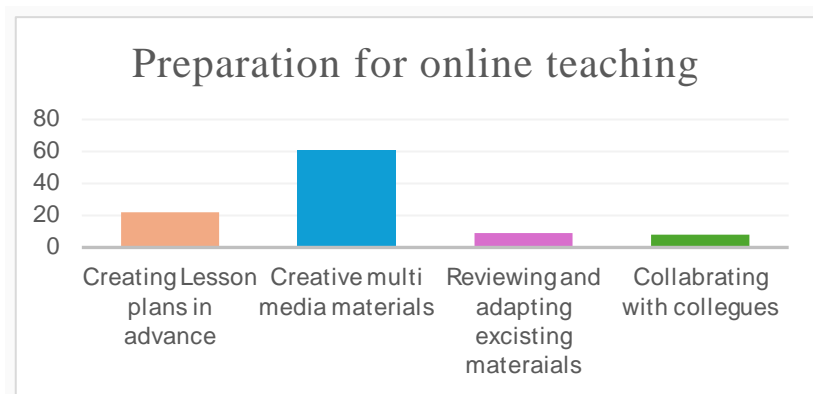


**Figure 1: Level of comfort using technology for teaching**

Figure 1 shows that the highest percentage of respondents (64%) reported feeling not very comfortable with using technology for teaching, which suggests that many primary teachers in the sample may not have had extensive or training in using technology for teaching purpose. According to the Nambiar’s study (2020), 15.4% of respondents found online classes less interactive, reflecting a lack of communication among students and with teachers. This reduced liveliness and friendly atmosphere restricts participation due to the absence of social interaction. The finding that 64% of respondents were uncomfortable using technology for teaching suggests insufficient training. Nambiar (2020) found that 15.4% of respondents found online classes to be less interactive and lacking in communication, thus reducing participation.



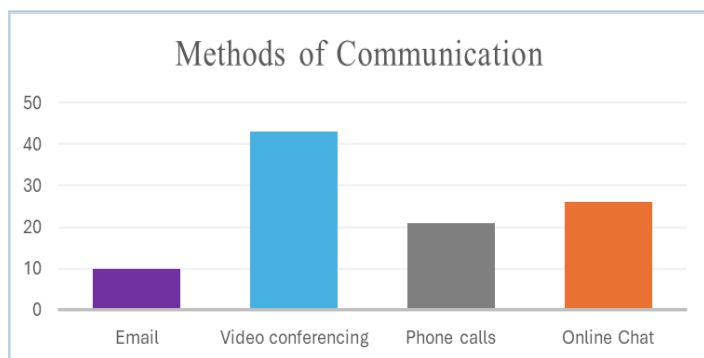
### 3.1.4 Typical preparation for online classes



**Figure:2 Preparation for online teaching**

Figure 2 demonstrates that the highest percentage of respondents (61%) reported preparing for online classes by creating multimedia materials, which suggests that primary school teachers in the sample utilised technology to create engaging and interactive learning materials for their students. Preparing for online teaching involved creating lesson plans ahead of time (22%), reviewing and adjusting existing materials (9%), and collaborating with colleagues for input and feedback (8%). These activities ensured effective and comprehensive online learning experiences.

### 3.1.4. Methods of Communication

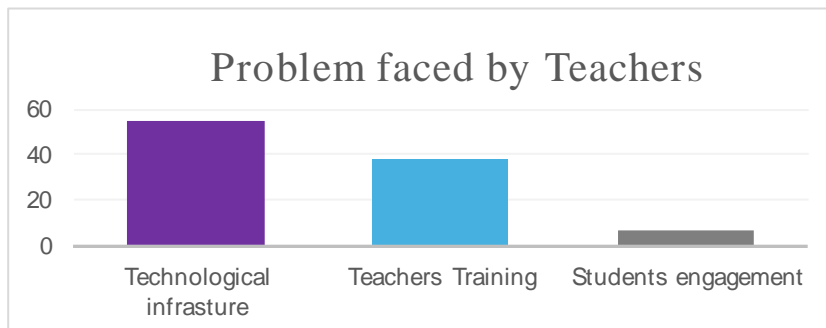


**Figure 3: Methods of Communication**

Figure 3 findings show that the highest percent respondents (43%) reported that their preferred method of communication with students and parents during online teaching was via conference while others preferred email (10%), phone calls (21%), and online chat (26%). These modalities facilitate efficient exchange of information and interaction among educators, students, and stakeholders, supporting diverse forms of collaboration and learning.



### 3.1.5 Challenges faced by Primary school teachers when using online platforms



**Figure 4: Problems faced by Primary school teachers**

Figure 4 represents those respondents who identified technological infrastructure as a significant problem (55%). The high number of respondents citing this issue suggests that many schools might have been struggling to keep up with the technological advancements needed to support effective teaching and learning environments. Moreover, Zhang et al. (2020) research found that technology infrastructure was the main challenge in the implementation of ‘Suspending Class without Stopping Learning’. Internet availability and stability, as well as internet-connected devices such as laptops and smartphones, are the two most crucial elements in online teaching and learning. Thus, without proper internet and devices, the lesson cannot take place.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey results indicate significant trends regarding the use of technology in primary education. A notable 64% of respondents felt uncomfortable using technology for teaching, suggesting a lack of extensive training or experience. Despite this, 54% of teachers prepared for online classes by creating multimedia materials, demonstrating their efforts to engage students through interactive content. The concern over technological infrastructure, cited by 55% respondents, highlights a prevalent issue in many schools. Firstly, It is strongly suggested that institutions of higher education create the necessary technological infrastructure to facilitate online instruction. This includes providing instructors with the required technology and software, as well as ensuring there is adequate bandwidth and internet connectivity to enable teachers to deliver online classes without interruptions. . The hiring of technology support professionals who can assist instructors in the resolution of any technological difficulties is another worthwhile investment that schools should consider making. In conclusion, the outcomes of this research sheds light on the considerable influence that online instruction has on primary school instructors, as well as the challenges they encounter. School must support primary school teachers in the delivery of effective online lessons and ensure that students continue to receive a quality education during times of disruptions by providing adequate technological infrastructure, comprehensive teacher training, and effective student engagement strategies



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