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Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic and Issues in Adapting to Online Learning: A Case Study of Selected School Children**L.W.P.M.S. Rukmalgama***Assistant Lecturer, Department of Public Policy, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka***N.T. Marasinghe***Assistant Lecturer, Department of Public Policy, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka*

Abstract: Education has been severely impacted worldwide as a result of the Corona virus outbreak. Millions of educators and students who had previously attended conventional classes in their institutions were forced to use an online education system that was utterly new to them. The impact of covid-19 pandemic on school children and issues and opportunities in adapting to online learning is the subject to the research. Hambantota district was chosen for the case study and it is discussed how school children in the particular district had to adjust to the new circumstances. It also looked at how the country reacted and accepted the new trend, as well as the hazards and benefits of online learning. A hundred students from Hambantota district were chosen at random to observe about the obstacles, resources, outcomes and impact of online education. Mixed methodology was used in the study. Information including scholarly ideas in books, journals and the online resources were mainly used for the

historical demonstration. Data and information were collected using a mixed technique approach. For quantitative data collection, online surveys and analytical data sets were used, whereas for qualitative data collection, interviews, questionnaires and selected groups were used. The findings of the study were crucial because the chosen area was impoverished. Because it was not engaged in new educational reforms like other countries, it was discovered that the administration was unprepared for unanticipated barriers in school education. Furthermore, schooling budgets were frequently inadequate. Children in rural communities like Hambantota were found to have considerable English and computer literacy challenges. COVID-19, on the other hand, had a good influence since it gave students the opportunity to try out a new type of education and engage with the world.

Key words: Covid-19, learning, online education, school, school children

INTRODUCTION

The Corona virus outbreak has had a significant adverse effect on education throughout the world. Millions of teachers and students who had previously attended traditional classes at their institutions were required to use an entirely new online education system. Social relationships are kept at a distance when pandemics are sweeping the globe. Therefore, social corporations' place in a society fluctuated in some ways. The education system was facing serious opposition in this situation. Sri Lanka is one of the leading countries offering free education in both rural and urban areas. According to the article "Which Countries Offer Free Primary Education?"¹ Every student from primary to higher education can benefit greatly from free education with classroom activities, direct instruction, committed teachers and governmental rules. Students had to adapt to online education as an impact of COVID-19. Although this online education gives students the opportunity to learn about trimming technologies, it may not be as effective as traditional instruction because students may not be directly under the teacher's supervision. Education is a process that develops a person's knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. In modern emerging countries like Sri Lanka, one could argue that the educational system in place is outdated. The study's main interests include how the Covid-19 pandemic affected students as well as challenges and opportunities for online learning. The research was done selecting a specific area in the country, Hambantota and the study is discussed how students had to adapt to the new environment. The study also considered the risks and advantages of online learning, as well as how the government responded to the new trend.

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning has taken the status of interim remote teaching that serves as a response to an exigency. However, the migration to a new learning space has faced several major concerns relating to policy, pedagogy, logistics, socioeconomic factors, technology, and psychosocial factors (Donitsa-Schmidt & Ramot, 2020; Khalil et al., 2020; Varea & González-Calvo, 2020 as cited in Barrot, 2021).

The research aimed to answer the question of whether, in light of the sudden Covid-19 outbreak, internet-based platforms and smart devices have replaced the traditional classroom in the global educational system. What were the children's reactions to the unexpected situation in rural areas like Hambantota? Another significant issue when taking classes online is poor networking, which has an effect on many both students and teachers. Many children were unable to acquire a quality education during this pandemic because their households lacked smart equipment. Education might thus only be available to a few students.

With reference to policies, government education agencies and schools scrambled to create foolproof policies on governance structure, teacher management, and student management. Teachers, who were used to conventional teaching delivery, were also obliged to embrace technology despite their lack of technological literacy. To address this problem, online learning webinars and peer support systems were launched. On the part of the students, dropout rates increased due to economic, psychological, and academic reasons. Academically, although it is virtually possible for students to learn anything online, learning may perhaps be less than optimal, especially in courses that require face-to-face contact and direct interactions (Franchi, 2020).

¹ Lowe, S. (2020, June 5). *Which countries offer free primary education?* Synonym. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://classroom.synonym.com/countries-offer-primary-education-7998042.html>

There are some articles been written by many scholars and researchers on the topic that is used for the research. But this study is focused on the situations of students in a developing district in Sri Lanka and how the development in the particular area had been supported the school children. And, it is focused on how the development in such areas has been affected on the education system. As well as, this study is significant among other studies because it also discusses about the opportunities that the students received in adapting online education. Both advantages and disadvantages could be recognized during the research.

It is found that the students of the selected area have improved on the language and the computer literacy before how it was at the beginning of the Covid - 19. The students now are able to face and manage their issues by themselves. Hypothesis of the study was built accordingly.

Method

This study is supported by Mezirow (1997) theory of transformative learning. This theory explains that the learning begins when the learners experience an anticipated situation or a discomfort position. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic created dissonance in the education system around the world, and caused paradigm shifts and transformation in higher education. Transformative learning is the expansion of conscience through self-adaption to a changing situation. Mezirow believes that disorienting dilemma causes alterations that leads to cognitive differences and dramatic changes in the education. This theory is suitable for the current paper because it examines students' experience of teaching and learning during a sudden transformation in Afghan higher education. The theory of transformative learning focuses on experiences of a person to the learning situation. It states that when students experience learning, they create meaning which causes transformation in their attitudes, behavior and understanding. This theory proposes that learners experience challenging tasks during the paradigm shifts so that they should be encouraged to think critically and rationally to measure their understanding of the learning process (Hashemi et al., 2021).

The study sites for this investigation were two rural schools in the southern province's Hambantota area. The main reasons for selecting this location were the absence of internet signal coverage and the poverty of the neighborhood. Mixed methodologies and primary and secondary data were predominantly used in this research. To gather primary data for this study, two schools were chosen, and questionnaires were given to 100 students along with teacher interviews. According to the chosen sample survey, the structured conversation approach of gathering parent perspectives was used in the research together with the questionnaire method for data providers. The annual reports issued by the Hambantota Secretariat Office, the Ministry of Education, Gramaseva Officer's information, policies used as secondary data. Additionally, publications, newspaper articles, books and data from the internet among other sources were utilized. This was due to the unequal distribution of resources between schools. Structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data and quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, and qualitative data were examined using inferential methods.

Discussion and findings

Education is to bring out the individual abilities and create a complete human being from within. Education also represents different aspects. Accordingly, sociologists interpret education through various theories. However, the knowledge that a student receives in a formal manner is obtained through institutions such as school and university. But what if that information is inhibited at the same time? The current Corona pandemic has created this circumstance. Children's attitudes about online education were examined in this study among those from Beragama village in the Hambantota education zone, where they voiced a variety of views. The opinions of the parents could also be learned through discussions. In this study, questions about the educational practices used during the Corona period were posed to students in rural schools.

- **Students are not familiar with the use of technology tools and online education is an unfamiliar experience**

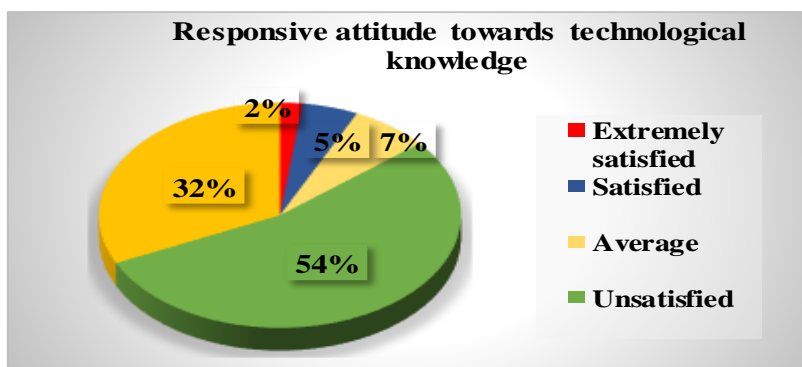
Table 1 - Responsive attitude towards technological knowledge

No	Situation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Extremely Satisfied	2	2%
2	Satisfied	5	5%
3	Average	7	7%
4	Unsatisfied	54	54%
5	Extremely Unsatisfied	32	32%
6	Total	100	100

(Source: Field study 2021)

In dealing with the 21st century, children should be given an understanding of technology. The rural schools were in the opinion that information technology knowledge was given to them at a low level even through school. Accordingly, 86% of the entire sample was of the opinion that it is appropriate to provide technical knowledge formally. The school did not have internet facilities, they were of the view that information technology knowledge is at least referred to study due to the lack of sufficient computers. Although online education is not widespread in the rural environment of Sri Lanka, this education system is very widespread in foreign countries. This knowledge is necessary to maintain relations with another country and develop international relations. It was further evident with the spread of Corona disease.

Chart 1 - Responsive attitude towards technological knowledge



- **Internet education requires minimum phone signal connections and internet signal connections.**

Rural development is a socio-economic positive transformation that should take place in the rural society to solve the problems common to the rural people based on their capabilities and needs. (Chambers, 1983) Another major drawback for rural students is the lack of signal connections for students to study. 90% of the total sample opined that the area does not have telephone signal, internet and a space for them to connect to classes through various software. It was revealed that as few as 10% of people have used routers for internet connections in the payment method. No matter how equipment is bought, the lack of signal facilities in the area was a strong problem.

- **Parents were not having enough income to pay for their children's online education.**

Due to the actual social transformation in the Asian village which had been colonized for approximately three centuries, the village now has the following characteristics.

- Rising poverty
- Declining productivity
- Unemployment and underemployment
- The gap between education and development
- Difficulties faced by the farmer in accessing development
(Pravada, 2009:4)

Thus, it is clear that most of the people in the rural areas are suffering from poverty. It was found that most of the families in this area are engaged in farming and there are also self-employed and wage-working families. Most of these people are prosperous and they do not have the use of smart phones. Also, this could be due to the large number of children in the family.

Table 2 - Income Levels and Poverty Levels by Study Area

No	Income range per month Rs.	Village Officer Domains %	Hambantota Divisional Secretariat Division %
1	Less than 3000	60	31
2	3000-5000	28	32
3	5000-8000	4	26
4	8000-10000	3	8
5	Less than 10000	5	2
6	Total	100	100

Source: Lunugamwehera and Hambantota Divisional Secretariats – 2018

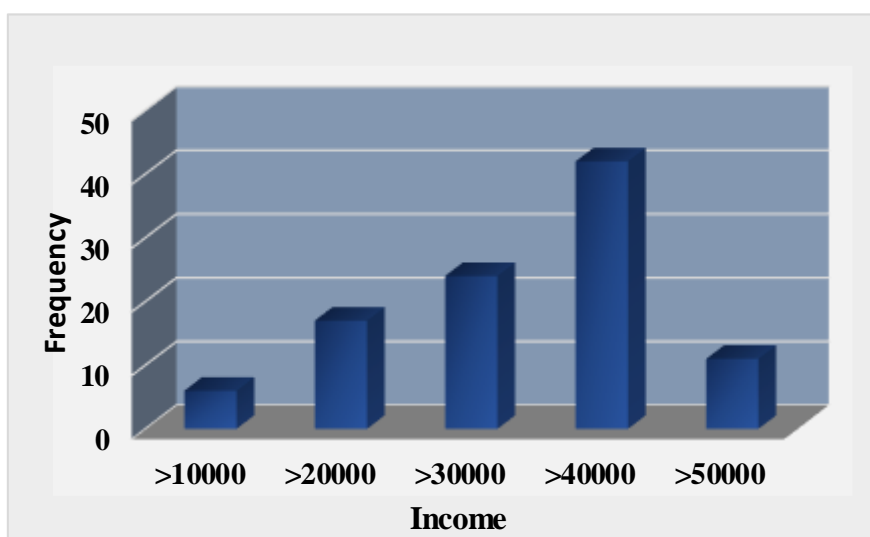
The official records maintained in the Grama Niladhari domains confirmed that 53% of the families living in these areas were welfare beneficiaries. According to the survey, when examining the income level, it was confirmed that the majority of the sample had a monthly income of less than 5000 rupees- but they somehow met the needs of the children. It was concluded that 54% of the families who have fulfilled the requirements in the payment method even though they could not afford a phone for hand money were met.

Table No. 3 - Income level of parents

Number	Income	Frequency	Percentage
1	>10000	6	6
2	>20000	17	17
3	>30000	24	24
4	>40000	42	42
5	>50000	11	11

(Source: Field study 2021)

Chart 2 - Parental Income Level



- **Unreasonable fear of parents to give their child internet connection and phone use**

Here, parents' attitude towards children's use of the Internet was investigated and 72% of the total sample did not have a positive attitude towards it. 38% responded positively explaining the need for it - accordingly, ideas were raised about matters such as the development of love relationships between children, wastage of time, and the emergence of health problems. Parents should be informed about the need to engage in education outside of the traditional education pattern and they should also be guided in this regard. According to the international index, Finland has achieved the best education in the world since 2017. They did not hesitate to experiment. Also, attention should be given to Sri Lankan citizens in this regard.

- **Responsive attitude towards technical knowledge and English usage after online education**

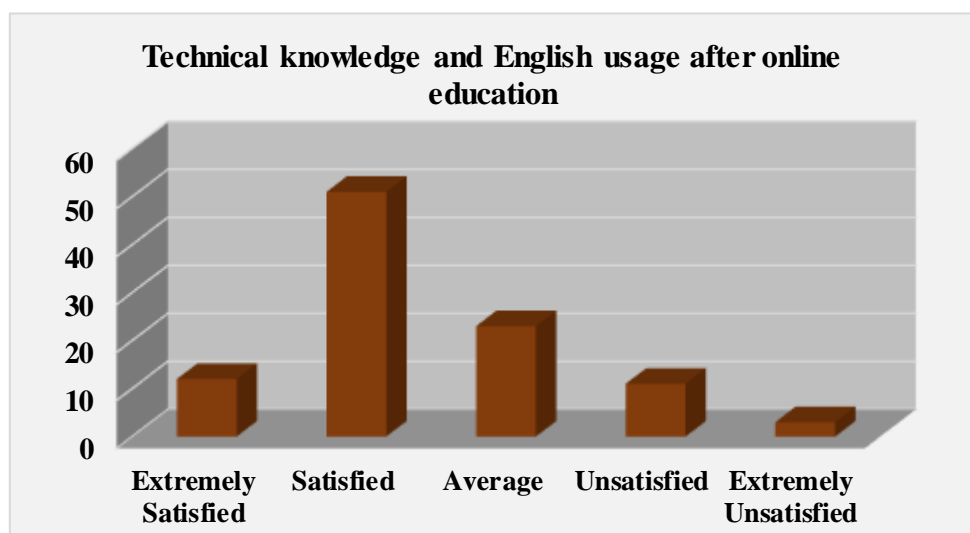
Since students began embracing online learning a year ago, a new trend has emerged. The learners were somehow inspired to think positively about it as the first discomfort with using technical equipment vanished with the availability of these instruments. Additionally, a link to other classes could be seen through it. It is evident that pupils have become more familiar with new technology and a new language because of their progressive adaptation to the new educational system. The children would get a wonderful chance to explore the outside world.

Table 4 - Technical knowledge and English knowledge after one year of online education

No	Situation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Extremely Satisfied	12	12
2	Satisfied	51	51
3	Average	23	23
4	Unsatisfied	11	11
5	Extremely Unsatisfied	3	3
6	Total	100	100

(Source: Field study, 2021)

Chart 3 -Technical knowledge and English usage after online education



- According to these educational reforms, a necessary mechanism should be prepared to provide equal opportunities in education to every child.
- Expanding communication facilities in rural communities and providing educational facilities at school level.
- To carry forward the concepts such as 'E-Thaksalawa' and Smart classrooms.
- Providing affordable means for children from low-income families to access e-learning devices.
- Educate parents and children about online education.
- Allocate resources to expand English education and IT needs in rural schools.

Conclusion

When investigating the facts under the mentioned research topic, the need to change the education system to suit the twenty-first century was strongly felt. If the education system was formally connected to the Internet, it would not be a new thing for children. If there was widespread communication technology in urban as well as rural areas, education would not have been affected by the corona virus that hard. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the problems of adapting to the

new education pattern have arisen due to not having received education under an internet system and not focusing on learning through remote relationships since childhood. In addition, the authorities should take necessary measures to improve the information technology knowledge of students in rural areas. It was concluded that remote areas should be provided with signal facilities and low-income families and need support to provide the necessary facilities. The Corona pandemic convinced that the education system should be changed from the British introduced education culture because it is a need of the various development expansions. The government should provide the necessary infrastructure for a rural environment.

Vietnam can be introduced as the best example of this. By 1980, the country's education index was negative according to the Asian index. But nowadays, Vietnam has surpassed other countries by taking the concept of E-education to remote rural villages. Sri Lanka also needs such an education system. Internet learning system like E-Taksalawa should be further implemented to take digital education to children to overcome the problems of e-education. In the interviews conducted with those officials in the website of E-Taksalawa, they stated that due to the changes in the syllabus from time to time and the problematic conditions of the teaching staff and the delay in providing a new building, the works are somewhat inefficient. Paying attention to such things, the signal internet facilities to the rural community should be provided. But the distance between education and development in today's rural societies is advanced and the following recommendations can be made when examining how the factor of online education affects rural students with the spread of Corona virus in the age of standard technology.

Accordingly, conclusion and recommendations regarding how children in rural schools are less comfortable with the online education system than children in urban schools were found, and in that, the reforms that should be implemented in schools at the rural level.

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