



Search for Equal Access to Learning: Perspectives of Rural Parents on Home Based Online Education in Sri Lanka During Covid 19 Pandemic

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Abstract – *In the context of Covid 19 pandemic, what we witness within the macro social system is rapid weakening of social institutions like education. With Covid 19, educational institutions became worst casualties with governments deciding to close them. eLearning is currently the delivery mode, but many were unprepared attitudinally and structurally for it. Moving away from traditional methods to eLearn mode created unanticipated challenges for students and parents; being compelled to operate from home. It was not so productive as anticipated, according to researchers (Kara & Gok, 2020, Klapproth et al, 2020), and the overwhelming majority almost globally had no proper internet facilities for online learning. Users complained about eyesight issues as they had to use inappropriate devices (Ullah, Ashraf, Shanza & Sajad, 2020). In Sri Lanka's rural areas, devoid of basic learning facilities, this study examines the perspectives of parents. A descriptive qualitative design and manual thematic analysis were used to analyze qualitative data obtained from 50 rural parents whose children attend five schools in the Northwestern, North Central, and Northern Provinces. Travel restrictions necessitated telephone interviews. The study reveals that many children do not concentrate properly during online sessions, parents' technical knowledge on eLearning was insufficient to help children, they were constrained by burdens of childcare, became victims of high economic costs, even sparking off domestic unrest affecting the children and their parents. The study has implications for State policy on education especially regarding infrastructure*

needs, if home-based eLearning is to be pursued in Sri Lanka as a viable option during the New Normal phase of life.

Keywords: Home-schooling, Covid-19, Challenges, remote learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, which began in 2019, disrupted the formal functioning of society as a whole. It enormously affected the economy, education, health and wellness of human beings. Globally, educational institutions were temporarily closed due to the rapid spread of COVID-19. Though that decision is a temporary solution that was badly affected on social interaction, peer learning activities for the wellbeing of the children. As a result, that mode of delivering was transferred to home-based learning from school classroom learning. Online communication apps such as whats app, MS teams, Zooms, radio, television, ect act as the communication tool. With this dramatic transformation, Students, teachers as well as parents must adjust with the new technology and their daily routine also was changed. But this dramatic change of delivering online education has been affected differently for rural and urban people based on unequal resources, infrastructure facilities that they have. But eventually all the students have to face the same examinations. Barriers that they had will never not be considered. In this context one dreams of each and every parent to give the best education for their children. Simultaneously Parents have to pay much attention to their children while engaging in their tough daily routing with the



conversion of the conventional education to the eLearn education. Since the most of parent are not having enough technological knowledge, always being unprepared for distance learning, exposure to the violence and exploitation while in the home-based learning, challenges in measuring students' knowledge and skills development, widening educational inequalities can be seen as challenges that rural parents are facing in presence of the current home-based online education. This study explores rural parents' perspectives and challenges to online education. This study hypothesized that the transition to online home education would not represent a healthy change in skill development, and its three main objectives were to identify parents' perceptions of online home education and to determine what parents use in online education. It was difficult to solve and identify. The effect of online homeschooling on online education.

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies show that schools provide different learning opportunities and set different required levels of performance in dependency on the composition of their student body (Baumert, Stanat, & Watermann, 2006; Belfi, Haelermans, & De Fraine, 2016; Palardy, 2008; Peetsma, Van der Veen, Koopman, & Van Schooten, 2006).With the wake of this pandemic social development of the children was affected at a deep level. Basically, school plays an enormous role in disciplining and polishing social skills. The transition from the traditional system to the eLearn system has created many challenges for students and parents when students learn at home. The eLearn education excludes the students who cannot purchase the equipment necessary to connect with their peers and teachers. Although online learning seems useful in protecting students' and faculty's health amid COVID-19 pandemic, however, some researchers pointed out that it may not as productive as expected (Kara & Gök, 2020; Klapproth et al., 2020) even it has a potential to be used various digital tools such as tablet and smartphone (Guo et al., 2020). Abaid Ullah et al. A study of 88% of students found that they had poor

internet access, many internet problems and 65% of students were dissatisfied with their online learning. 85% of students complained of vision problems due to online classes on the device. Compliance (Ullah, Ashraf, Shanza, & Sajjad, 2020).The findings revealed that the major concern of the parents was related to children facing the problems due to sudden school closure and a complete lockdown on social gatherings. There were also numerous newspaper articles and notifications about student learning loss (CDC, 2020; Jinshan, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). In response to the educational crisis, several countries have taken different measures. When moving into the Sri Lankan context schoolteachers, parents as well as students have not received any training on distance learning and teachers have created their own created mechanism to communicate with students as well as parents. China, Korea, Mexico, Rwanda, Iran, Peru and Thailand are using massive open online course (MOOC) styled lessons. The lessons are either delivered through apps, television or other media. Teachers have access to training through these avenues as well (Chang & Yano, 2020). Since the barriers to face to face interactions between teachers and students' parents have to put extra effort to take their kids' attention to the educational programs which are telecasted on TV channels. Governments have been launching (e.g. Saudi Arabia and UAE) awareness campaigns on distance learning for parents, teachers, administrators and students (Chang & Yano, 2020). The educational levels of different countries also maintain equality and inclusivity. For those without access to technology, governments in countries like China and South Korea provide devices and printed assignments. (Bhamani,Makhdoom,Bharuchi,Ali,Kaleem&Ahmed,2020).Economic affordability of parents in Sri Lanka is weakening in home based online learning. Parents have to cope with all the cost of learning. Both advantages and disadvantages can be analyzed with the beginning of the home- based learning. Bonding between children and parents increases as they are having enough time to spend together. As



well as parents will be able to be close members for their emotional support. Parents are encouraged to learn to intervene to provide emotional support to children in times of uncertainty (Wang, Zhang, Zhao, Zhang, & Jiang, 2020). When considering the impact of social development on children, one study found that parents play an important role in their children's social relationships, as physical interactions such as holding hands, hugging, partying, eating together and praying are important for tolerance and the harmony we made. life. life. Development. At the same time, I realized that it will be an opportunity to strengthen family ties and participate in various activities together (Bhamani, Makhdoom, Bharuchi, Ali, Kaleem & Ahmed, 2020). In the living space or at home, many students suffer from psychological and emotional distress and are unable to engage productively. Online homeschooling needs to be explored further (Petrie, 2020). Domestic violence and child abuse are on the rise as the perpetrators are many a time at home or in the neighborhood, which is a mental distraction and threat to the learners (Ravichandran & Shah, 2020). Broadly identified challenges with e-learning are accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning and educational policy (Murgatrottd, 2020) If the people are away from the mentioned factors long term online education will not be successful for the country such Sri Lanka. Students with special needs having learning difficulties, such as hearing impairment, visual impairment and mobility disabilities, require additional training with support and guidance. Many caregivers and parents at home are not able to cater to such needs, hindering the learning of this group of learners (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021). Recent studies conducted during COVID-19 class suspensions showed that parents would report a higher level of stress if they experienced more difficulties in supporting their child's learning than before the pandemic (Spinelli et al., 2020). By handling all those issues and challenges, continuously parents are supporting in the children's' online education.

3.METHODOLOGY

This study was aimed at exploring rural parent's perspectives and challenges on home based online education in presence of the covid-19 pandemic. Covid 19 pandemic differently affected the education system based on the infrastructure facilities, economic stability, and educational background of the parents. Descriptive qualitative design was used to describe the experiences of parents on transforming conventional systems towards their children's online education. Primary education makes the literacy proficiency of humans. Especially when improving children's skills away from classroom-based education, it creates considerable challenges among the majority of the rural parents. Since the study followed all ethical standards Questionnaire was anonymously collected from voluntary participating parents.

3.1Participants

Purposive sample was used to gather data for this study. In a qualitative research purposive sample is used to acquire the qualitative needs and reach to the identified objectives of the study. Target population of this study was the rural parents whose children are learning in grade 1 to 5. 50 parents from five schools in Northwestern, North Central, and North provinces were selected as the sample group of this study.

3.2Data collecting techniques

A self – constructed questionnaire was designed to gather qualitative data. Three sections were covered through the questionnaire: descriptive factors, perceptions of parents on home-based learning, Nature of building interaction between teacher parents and challenges of e learning system was focused within the three sections. Since most of the parents are technologically marginalized telephone interview was an easy way to investigate their perceptions and challenges in a home-based learning system.

3.3Data Analysis

Thematic analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data. Themes and sub themes and open coding were formed by using the acquired data.

3.4 Findings

Based on the infrastructure facilities, parents' technical knowledge on online education, economic background of the parents and their educational level may differently be affected on the Home-based online education in rural areas. This study was focused to identify the parents' perspectives and challenges on HBOE. The demographic factors of the rural parents were analyzed by using the research tools in excel. Considering the frequency distribution of rural parents such as age, residence, occupation, level of education, number of children, number of schooling children, name of the school, parents view on their ICT knowledge ect.... Analyzing part was done. Based on three main sub- themes data were collected in this study. Those factors depended on descriptive data, parents 'perception on home -based online education and challenges they encountered as they live in rural areas.

Theme 01. Descriptive factors of the study

Table 1: Demographic information of participants in terms of

Title	Item	Percentage
Age	20 -24	0%
	25-29	20%
	30 - 34	40%
	35 - 39	20%
	40 - 44	15%
	45 - 49	0%
	50 - 54	5%
	Northwestern	35%

Residence	North central	45%
	North	20%
Occupation	Housewife	55%
	carpenter	10%
	Farmer	15%
	Teacher	15%
	Other (Development officer)	5%
Level of Education (Grade)	1 - 5	0%
	6 - 10	30%
	GCE O/L	45%
	GCE A/L	5%
	Graduate	20%
	Postgraduate	0%
Number of schooling children	1	50%
	2	45%
	3	5%
	4	0%
	4 above	0%
	Male	45%

Sex of child	Female	55%
Name of the school	Galgamuwa Bandaragama Viduhala	30%
	A/Billewa Viduhala Thanthirimale	20%
	Thri/Thri Uthura/Padawi Yaya 13 Vidyalaya	25%
	Padavi Sri Pura Vidyalaya	10%
	Padavi Palugaha Wanguwa Vidyalaya	15%
View on their ICT knowledge	Yes	35%
	No	65%
In which grade your child is in? (Grade)	1	14.3%
	2	14.3%
	3	23.8%
	4	33.3%
	5	14.3%
Using Device	Laptop	0%
	Desktop	20%
	Tablet	0%

	Smartphone	70%
	Other (Not using a device)	10%

Source: Field data ,2021

Generally, the study was focused on the educational background, occupation and the parents 'view on their computer knowledge to handle online classes at home. Findings of the study revealed that Majority of the parents (45%) have received formal education up to GCE O/L and 55% are housewife. That is not meant that they are engaging only domestic works. They are constantly engaging chena cultivation, paddy cultivation and self-employment. Considering the view of their computer knowledge 65% don't have positive image on their computer knowledge. This basic background has become a challenge in the home-based online education. Since they are having lack of understanding about the teaching style, they believe that highly they need school-based education.

Theme 2: Parents' perception on home based online education

In the context of covid -19 pandemic, what we witness is rapid weakening of education system in Sri Lanka. As an alternation mode of delivery became eLearning for teachers, students, and the parents who were unprepared structurally and attitudinally. When families are adjusting to a socially distance education that was created unexpected economic, cultural, social, and individual barriers. Issues of accessibility of engaging daily school activities have directly impacted for lower income families. This movement have not facilitated them to chase their educational targets since the parents don't have much educational background and economic stability fulfill the infrastructure facilities whatever required on online education. Majority of the parents were able to provide a smart phone with the minimum

facilities while few parents struggle to buy a smartphone.

2.1 perception on the barriers they encounter to meet their educational needs

Though the parents are concerned about virtual classes, they have to familiar with the WhatsApp facilities due to the digital inequity. Most of the parents were failed to support online learning because lack access to high-speed internet service. The study reveals that 90% of rural parents are encountered with same issue. Most of the parents are concerned about lack access to rich learning environment and level of parents' active involvement on online learning.



Fig -2: Place where the router place to have signal
Source: Field data,2021



Fig-1: Poor learning environment
Source: Field data,2021

Parents believe that the lack access to move to the online education with these minimum facilities creates the inequality of education.

2.2 perception on impact of online education.

In this section was tried to focus to convince that children's' behavioral changes, gaps in socialization, increasing health issues, frustrating and violation freedom in home-based education. In rural areas though the kids have lack face to face interaction with their teachers during the online learning comparatively they have enough access to have face to face contact with their peers. Reasons behind that all the students don't have necessary devices and sufficient internet capacity. As an alternation they all have to learn together even in the pandemic period. Further among the parents' grievances following factors were identified. Teachers unable to identify with an accuracy which student need more support to improve their knowledge and skills. Lack access to participate continuously to online discussions make unproductive class discussions. Considering the anger management most of the students are released their anger on the parents since the parents intentionally try to concentrate them into the online sessions. The ideological conflicts



between children and parents have increased since they are staying many times at home.

Beyond the impact of home-based online education parents reveal that they have allocated much time in engaging their children's educational activities. When the parent doesn't have much sense of teaching activities that is negatively affected on their kids. Most of the kids who are in primary education are easy to handle since they are under fully control of their guardians. As the result of that kids do not intentionally skip the classes or playing phone games. This space provides lack access to refrain from eyesight and any other health issues. Due to the economic instability, lack signal strength, less capacity of parents' involvement, lack of sharing emotional cues is recommended the peer and teacher interaction inside the classroom. Less discipline formation and violating kids' freedom at home can be seen in the home-based online learning system.

2.3 Perception on pros and cons on online education

Parents recommended the home-based online education only as an alternative than stay away keeping touch in learning during the pandemic period. Further parents can get better understand what their children are learning and the academic strengths and weaknesses. But Parents believe that the structured class-based routine distracted when they are at home. Since the parents should engage their other domestic works and responsibilities parents have to struggle to offer the same level of education that children get at school. Fostering a sense of motivation via peer relations are no longer via the home-based learning system. Kids don't have access to learn daily via online since they are encountered economic and internet barriers. Losing jobs of parents who are under daily paid labors category due to covid 19 pandemic is emotionally affected on students learning environment. Further, Parents stated that,

The main objectives of closing schools were to avoid social gatherings and to keep social distance as an alteration. But adhering to the health guidelines is

not always success hence, rural communities are not facilitated with adequate infrastructure facilities. As a result of that again children have to be together to cover up their school lessons. Not having required equipment and lacking high rich internet capacity has broken these limitations.

Until these mentioned difficulties rural kids will not be able to fully adhere with the imposed health guidelines.

Further, they expressed that online education will not be a fully fixed education system hence, the skills such, social emotional skills, leadership skills, peer interactions which are learned in the schools cannot be developed through an online education system. As well as attitudinally and structurally unprepared communities were not adequately facilitated to continue a distance mode learning. These social conditions will be dramatically affected to an equal education opportunity.

03. Challenges of home-based online education.

It is clear that moving to an eLearning mode is not always ideal since the three parties (teachers, parents as well as students) are not attitudinally structurally and situationally unprepared. Basic requirements such availability of computers, signal coverage and attractive learning environment which are needed in online learning are not positively encountered since they are live in rural areas. This theme entails with following sub – themes: (a) Seeking uninterrupted internet connection; (b) Confusion and stress for teachers; (c) Gaps occurred in childcare; (d) non-affordable economic cost; (e) unintended health care issues; (f) Increased pressure on remain school closed; (g) exposing environment to violence and exploitation; (h) Widening educational inequalities.

(a) Seeking uninterrupted internet connection.

Lack signal coverage and limited devices directly disproportionate for under – privileged learners. Remain school closed has badly affected for an



interrupted learning system. 90% parents indicated that they have to continuously seek neighbors help to complete day to day school activities.

“As the result of on an off logins issue in teachers and students, it was decided to move from virtual classes to WhatsApp activities. But when the teacher arranges a zoom session, we feel that we are not ready to join with the scheduled time due to poor internet connection. Even when it is a gloomy or rainy-day, kids can't even login. But when sharing study materials via WhatsApp group as the parents we should have proper understanding of the teaching and conceptually thinking. Further they are in the stage of primary education. There should be a well-trained teacher in the formation of their letters and thinking skills. Lacking this facility pushes towards unequal access to learn”

Further, parents expressed that they have realized exclusion of consecutive learning practice has decreased the proclivity of their educational involvement.

(b) Confusion and stress for teachers

With the sudden move to the unexpected eLearning system that can be seen when teachers are themselves not trained for online teaching has created a bad image on both students and teachers. That factor also hampered the learning continuation. Following words were highlighted by the parents.

“We respect that the teachers had taken appropriate measures in this hard period without having support from the relevant authorities to help our kids to keep them in the learning process as they are currently at home. But both parents and teachers don't have enough facilities to measure students' development through an online examination since the lack of eLearn and teaching training”.

Further the parents emphasize that students who are in grade 1 to 5 should be taught by using practical activities. Doing experiments inculcates extra knowledge and skills. But with the failures of

structural arrangements students as well as their parents have to tolerate all the difficulties.

(c) Gaps occurred in childcare

In the absence of subjective knowledge, new technology and alternative options, parents have to take risks on their security. When the environment is not ready to keep them at home to engage with online activities, parents have to send their children to the nearest home and place where the signal is accessible irrespectively during daytime or nighttime. That will be a threat to their lives and less attention paid on their learning activities since the children are out of home. A respondent explained:

“Still, we don't have the economic stability to buy a smartphone. So, my daughter has to go to her friend's home to participate in school online classes. I'm also unable to stay a long time with her because I'm having another little kid at home and need to attend to fulfill her needs. It is difficult to allocate time only for her activities while I'm engaging in other domestic work. Therefore, I personally feel that I missed her a lot”.

Poverty, access to poor infrastructure facilities further push them towards unequal educational opportunities.

(d) Non-affordable economic cost

Study revealed that majority of the mothers (55%) are housewife, and the fathers are not engaging in permanent jobs. They are daily basis labors. In the context of covid 19 they may have loss their jobs. Online teaching system excludes students who do not have the economic strength to buy the equipment which necessary to continue home based online practice including data card, smartphones, Computers, laptops ect.... Parents wordings on high economic cost,

“I have two schooling kids. We need to facilitate both equally in online education. Some days we have to put 3 data cards and the cost is 300 rupees. Since we all are having a daily basis wage this extra expenditure cannot be affordable.”



Not only for the equipment electricity bill also comparatively has been increased.

(e) Unintended health care issues

Considering the devices, Majority of the students are using smartphones for their educational purposes. Seeing Small screen, reading small letters via the phone can be harmful to eyesight. Though the study has not revealed such conditions parents have a doubt about this. Incorrect posture for a long time also directed them towards the back pain issues.

Most popular learning methodology is sharing study materials via WhatsApp group while zoom gatherings are organized once per week. Teachers have not encouraged us to get printouts and we also can't afford the printing cost. So, the copywriting is the practice. Looking at small letters on a phone screen for a long time is uncomfortable. Since there is a signal issue my kid doesn't have a stable place to learn. Then the wrong posture of sitting may cause side effects.

It is evident that there may be a health risk according to the parents' perspective on online education.

(f) Increased pressure on remain school closed

It is understandable that both parents and children are under pressure since they are unable to complete the lessons successfully. Incomplete notes, incomplete homework, unclear lessons keep their stress level up. Lack of day care facilities and caregiver facilities were settled during the period in which schools were opened. Finding solutions for these unexpected issues arise with the covid 19 have been affected on parents' mental wellbeing.

Being at home and keeping children busy with their schoolwork is not an easy task. Our day today domestic works, as well as duties of our jobs cannot be balanced since kids are at home.

This statement has given a clue that home-based eLearn education has widened parents' pressure as well as unbalanced workload.

(g) exposing environment to violence and exploitation

Both parents and kids are at home. Ideologically they are having conflict among the children and parents, they are at home since last two years. the study has shown that children want a freedom to play with their all the friends. Increasing violation is not good for the mental wellbeing of our children. Parents explained that:

Teachers send the study materials and due dates to upload the complete assignments and as the parents we are not ready to stay with the children until the lesson is over. Since I'm a working parent, sometimes I'm unable to balance school and the workload of the office. Mean time mu kid does like to complete his homework alone. Then my anger and frustration are released on my kids.

One parent revealed that:

Since the schools are closed, I take my elder one who is in grade 4 to look after his little sister. I know that she doesn't like to do that work. But in the sense of having a little rest I used my elder daughter to look after her little sister. Sometimes I feel that our kids are exploited by us. At the end of the day when they go to bed, I feel so sorry for her.

This statement revealed that children's rights are unintentionally violated, and they were exploited hence they are at home.

(h) Widening educational inequalities.

Although the parents are making a big effort to keep their children in a comfortable zone, rural poverty creates educational inequalities in the presence of covid19. Somehow whatever challenges are being faced by the parents as well as their children. Eventually they all have to face the same examinations. Unequal facilities are measured by equal opportunities. Lack of infrastructure facilities, lack of human resources, lack of training is widening the educational inequalities. 100% parents had the poor signal coverage issue. But ultimately unintentionally these types of students are excluded



from the learning system as the eLearn system hampered them in mentally, physically, and socially.

4. DISCUSSION

It is imperative to note that the rural parents are not ready fully mentally or physically to a home-based eLearning system since they do not have adequate infrastructure facilities and the majority of the parent's educational level are not enough to engage in online education. The findings of this study highlighted true reflections of the rural parent's experience in eLearn education. Demographic factors, perception on eLearn education system and challenges of the rural parents were focused to find through this study.

According to the analyzed demographic data, the majority of the parents are housewives and the majority's educational level was up to GCE/OL. Comparing their educational qualifications, they believe that they need formal assistance from the teachers to form the basic skills of their kids.

Finding revealed that the rural parent's perception on the eLearn home based education is not ideal for the rural students. They believe that before starting technology-based learning system the authorized people must facilitate the required environment for the rural community. Otherwise rural children's will be deprived the rights of having access to equal educational opportunities.

Further the study expressed that a poor learning environment pushes towards the interrupted learning system. Considering the pros and cons of the study, parents have the chance to identify in which level their child is in and what the gaps that need to be filled can be identified. Parents expressed that they are unable to adhere with the health guidelines and maintain the social distance because the children who have not required equipment for eLearning should have assistance from the children who have.

Among the challenges of the Home-based eLearning education there were mainly eight (8) challenges. All the challenges have been raised due

to the interrupted and poor internet capacity, non-awareness of the parents and poverty.

All things considered, comparatively the parents who are living in the rural areas are facing numerous challenges while they are searching alternation for the interrupted conventional teaching. If those challenges remain unsolved the rural children will deprive equal opportunities in education.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Home learning has become an alternative for the conventional school system. So far, the required facilities which are required in shifting to class-based education towards home based eLearning systems have not been provided at rural level for the betterment of the rural community. Voluntarily schoolteachers have found some alternatives to reach their students in the period in which schools were closed because of covid 19 pandemic.

Home based online systems are not successfully functioning in rural areas because teachers, children and parents were not made aware about the new transitions. Not facilitating even schools has become a tremendous issue in continuation of the school syllabus.

Time by time schools will be closed based on the situation of the spreading of the pandemic. Therefore, all the school children should have the same rights and facilities to continue their school education within a pandemic period. These strategies should be applicable irrespectively to the region that they live. If the government or any other authorities fail to provide required facilities for distance learning, intentionally an important fragment will be excluded from the main society. Access to equal opportunities for learning will be deprived from them.

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