

Parental perception of distance learning and homeschooling during COVID-19 pandemic: an empirical analysis in Sri Lanka

Distance learning and homeschooling in COVID-19

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Abstract

Purpose – Many countries around the world were compelled to adhere to rigorous practices of school closures due to the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). During the lockdown period, distance teaching and learning have become the only form to keep students on track. Reports have revealed that during this period, parents and students have strived hard to cope up with the learning method, which is new to the school education system in Sri Lanka. Against this background, this study explored the perceptions of parents in distance learning and homeschooling of their children during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. In addition, this study also attempted to assess the success of such educational practices in the country during the pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach – A quantitative research approach was used, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to a sample of 587 respondents through snowball sampling across Sri Lanka.

Findings – According to the collected data, about 52% of participants positively responded to the current distance learning practices adopted in school education. Meanwhile, about 57% of parents were negatively concerned about current practices. The respondents had negative concerns about the new role of teaching at home, difficulties in balancing work-from-home activities, too many distractions and unfamiliarity with the teaching methods and the subjects. Further with regard to depression, the majority of respondents have moderate depression which could be led to not favouring or being active in teaching. Accounting overall fact, the success of distance learning and homeschooling was higher with parents who have a good educational and socioeconomic background. The impact of these education systems appears to be long-lasting and may contribute to rising disparities.

Research limitations/implications – This study will help to pay close attention to the constraints and implications of distance learning activities, along with homeschooling and its adaptation in the future as a matter of urgency.

Originality/value – Several studies described obstacles encountered by students and academics in the higher education sector. However, this study helps to understand the existing difficulties experienced by parents/guardians with homeschooling and the introduction of distance education via the virtual platform in the primary and secondary education system in Sri Lanka. The findings highlighted the importance of developing



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1. Introduction

The number of COVID-19 cases and deaths is still being continuously counted around the world. Over 4.5 million cases and over 15,000 deaths were reported during the week of 18 through 24 April 2022. The cumulative number of confirmed cases reported globally is over 500 million as of 24 April 2022, and the cumulative number of deaths is about 6 million (WHO, 2022). Due to this pandemic condition, various social and economic issues have arisen, which need to be addressed without delay. Following this scenario, many countries imposed a number of precautions to minimize disease transmission as an immediate action.

The closure of the school is one of the measures followed concerning the health guidelines. Over 1.5 billion children, representing 91% of the world's school population, had their education hampered as a result of the school closures (Supporting learning recovery one year into COVID-19, 2021). Beneath this pandemic situation, educating children is a hard nut to crack. As an urgent response, the UNESCO also has encouraged "distance learning" worldwide to ensure the continuation of education (UNESCO, 2021). Along with this, many countries in the world initiated or expanded the virtual learning model to continue the education of their young population more safely (Dhawan, 2020). While converting traditional on-site classes to virtual learning is intended to be a temporary solution, it is critical to continue childrens' education as the pandemic continues (Abrahamsson and López, 2021). Rather than that, more responsibilities also come to the parents as homeschooling becomes vital to educate their teenagers (De Jong *et al.*, 2022).

The term "distance learning" can be recognized as any educational or learning process or system in which the teacher or instructor is separated from the students physically or in which the students are separated from the teacher or instructor, other students or educational resources (Masić *et al.*, 2006). Today, distance learning essentially conducts as a form of online learning or computer-aided learning (Al-Balas *et al.*, 2020; Dhawan, 2020), while "homeschooling" is regarded to be parents educating their children the way they understood what the younger ones should know. This is also a traditional practice, initiated before the establishment of a formal education system (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021).

2. Homeschooling and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic

Several studies have highlighted many advantages over traditional on-site classes (Keis *et al.*, 2017; Dost *et al.*, 2020; Kamal and Illiyan, 2021); however, the rapid transition of the learning style from face-to-face to virtual learning is challenging to all the parties in the educational process including parents, teachers and school administrators owing to the lack of experience and training (Chaabane *et al.*, 2021; Abuhammad, 2020; Hayashi *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, there is a varying degree of adoption of new methods among students, teachers and parents due to the fixed mindset, social background, technology availability and living settings (Pokhrel and Chhetri, 2021; Chadda and Kaur, 2021).

A number of studies have shown that parental support has a tremendous impact on the student's achievement in a distance learning environment (Garbe *et al.*, 2020; Davis *et al.*, 2021). Concepts of "work from home" and lockdown bring parents to spend much time at home, and they are now the ones who assist learners in developing digital skills, as well as understanding how to balance children's study with other daily tasks (Daniela *et al.*, 2021; Poulain *et al.*, 2021). In addition, parents also could be under tremendous depression due to

social isolation, fear of getting an infection, losing their employment or lowering monthly income, extra expenses for better food and treatments and depleted savings, etc. and could not be mentally fixed to support their children's education process (Brooks *et al.*, 2020; Engzell *et al.*, 2021; Benalcázar *et al.*, 2022).

Today, many regions in the world with access to vaccines revoke restrictions and give the impression of coming out of the pandemic COVID-19; however, it endures to present a considerable number of issues throughout the globe in education as aforesaid. The pandemic led to lengthy school closures. For instance, in South Asia the learning-adjusted year of schooling is reported as 55%, which has been reported as the longest closure in the Asian region (Asian Development Bank, 2021). According to a UNICEF report, more than 400 million South Asian children have been affected by school closures, extending into the second year in some countries during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, 2020).

Among the seven South Asian countries, Sri Lanka is the largest island nation in the Indian Ocean with a population of 21 million (Liyanage *et al.*, 2021). On January 27, 2020, Sri Lanka reported its first COVID-19 patient: a Chinese visitor from Hubei Province. Later, on March 11, 2020, the first local case of COVID-19 was identified; since then, Sri Lanka has responded to the epidemic effectively. Immediate action with the lockdown of the country facilitated to further stop the spreading of the disease; however along with undermining the implemented rules, the disease started to spread more rapidly (Arambepola *et al.*, 2021). The elevated incidents were reported in the country's third wave of the pandemic. Thus, Sri Lanka found more victims than other countries in the region during the third wave of COVID-19 in the first month that began in April 2021. A total of 522,002 positive cases and about 13,142 deaths were reported as of 4th of October 2021 – at the later part of the third wave (Health Promotion Bureau, 2021). Hospitals were overwhelmed in both public and private sectors, also strengthening the barriers to public movements. It was reported that during this phase, schools in Sri Lanka also experienced longer closures than those in the Maldives.

Due to the third wave's continuation, the schools had to be closed for yet another long period of time, which had a drastic impact on student education. Thus, 10,245 government and private schools were further closed from 12 March 2020, resulting in 4,199,915 students (Annual School Census of Sri Lanka, 2020) staying at home. There were more than 200 days of complete school closure and more than 100 days of partial school closure in Sri Lanka (Asian Development Bank, 2021). As a matter of fact, Sri Lanka had implemented distance learning activities (fully virtual mode) and recommendations have been given on homeschooling practices. During the period when the research was carried out, Sri Lanka was one of the countries among several others, which still did not open schools and depended mainly on distance learning. Several studies (Hayashi *et al.*, 2020; Ilankoon *et al.*, 2020; Sandeepani *et al.*, 2021) evaluated the impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lankan students' education, though not concerning the parent, particularly having school children. Therefore, to overcome the shortcomings of previous studies outlined above, the present study aimed to explore the parental perception of homeschooling and distance learning on children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sri Lanka. In detail, the researchers have constructed the questionnaire on (1) understanding the impact of distance learning on children's education during the COVID-19, (2) success of distance learning, (3) parents' involvement in children's homeschooling, (4) challenges faced by the parents in educating their children and (5) mental health of the parents due to the current situation. Furthermore, the study attempted to evaluate the possible suggestions for better homeschooling when it is required in the future.

3. Methodology

The data were collected during the third wave of COVID-19 in Sri Lanka from July to August 2021. During the data collection period, the country was partially on lockdown and schools

were fully closed, restricting the public gathering and also the movement of people and employees in the workplace. Data collection was completed within two months and a half, throughout the island. Parents or guardians of having at least one child who attended pre-school or school (government/private) were selected for this study. In compliance with the General Data Protection Requirements, the study took into account all ethical research standards. The questionnaire was completely anonymous, and participation was voluntary.

The quantitative research approach was used in this study. Initially, a pilot study was conducted to improve the designed questionnaire by giving primarily developed questionnaires to eight respondents, including experts (three) from the field of study. The pilot study data were not considered for the final analysis. The questionnaire consists of 20 fixed-alternative questions and three open-ended questions to allow parents to further express their personal feelings, experiences and trouble-mitigating strategies for educating their children during COVID-19. The survey included questions on the demographic information of the respondents, the number of children in the family and the grade of study, the rationale of the study, engagement of the studying system, comfortability and perception of distance learning, challenges, frame of mind, etc. In addition the, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-8 depression module was adapted to assess the parent's mental health/depression (Kroenke *et al.*, 2001, 2009).

The data were collected in trilingual (Sinhala, Tamil and English) via Google Forms, distributed through personal mail and social media, initially among the personally known respondents. Secondly, the authors have requested from the initial correspondents to share the Google Forms. Thus, the snowball non-probability sampling technique was used to collect the data. The respondents appear to grow in a non-random manner. Altogether 602 responses were received and 15 responses were not accounted for due to contradictory responses. The statistical analysis was done using a number of models in order to allow for different, though the important, interpretations of the results, namely, descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, MANOVA and related samples Wilcoxon signed-rank test. All the statistical analyses were performed by using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software package.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic information

Of the 587 participants, about 94% were parents ($n = 553$) and the rest 6% are the guardians of children (Table 1). As the majority of respondents came from the parents, we have frequently used the word parent, which represents both parent and guardians. In addition, nearly half of the respondents were mothers. The majority, 32.7% of respondents, have senior secondary education. The majority of respondents were self-employed. The lower range of monthly household earnings (<SLR. 25,000) is by 36.6% of respondents, which is the majority of the respondents. The respondents from the highest range of monthly income were less than 9% according to the collected data. Note that, in Sri Lanka, the average monthly household income is SLR. 43,320 (Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2016). In addition, the majority of children are from grades 1–5 and 6–9.

4.2 Parental perception of children's education during COVID-19

With the long closure of the school, many respondents mentioned that their children have not spent much time on studies, though on other irreverent activities (Figure 1). In fact, the sudden transmission of children into distance learning and permitting them to get more attached to information technology (IT) devices like smartphones also became a threat to

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Age</i>		
20–30 years	52	8.9
31–40 years	168	28.6
41–50 years	231	39.4
51–60 years	120	20.4
Above 60 years	16	2.7
<i>Relation to child</i>		
Father	284	48.4
Mother	269	45.8
Guardian	34	5.8
<i>Highest educational qualification</i>		
No formal education	2	–
Grade 1–5	19	3.2
Grade 6–10	64	10.9
O/L*	145	24.7
A/L**	192	32.7
Graduate	98	16.7
Postgraduate	55	9.4
Others (doctoral, other national-level certificate courses)	12	2
<i>Occupation</i>		
Government	223	38
Private	78	13.3
Self-employed	132	22.5
NGOs	09	1.5
Daily wage	62	1.6
Others (homemaker housemaid)	83	14.1
<i>Household income (SLR)</i>		
Less than 25,000	215	36.6
25,000–50,000	210	35.8
50,001–75,000	71	12.1
75,001–100,000	38	6.5
Above 100,000	53	9
<i>Nature of the residential place</i>		
Urban	150	25.6
Semi-urban	185	31.5
Rural	252	42.9
<i>Number of children who attend school per household</i>		
One	697	80.6
Two	127	14.7
Three	26	3.0
Four	13	1.5
Five	2	0.2
<i>Grade levels of children who attend school</i>		
Pre-school/nursery	65	7.5
Grade 1–5	211	24.4
Grade 6–9	229	26.5
Grade 10 and 11	164	19.0
Grade 12 and 13	196	22.7
<i>Affected with COVID-19</i>		
Yes	41	7
No	546	93

Note(s): *General Certificate of Education (G.C.E) Ordinary Level (at grade 11), **G.C.E Advanced Level (at grade 13). Note that, after one year of pre-schooling, the majority of children are supposed to be adapted into the formal Sri Lankan free education system, which consists of 13 years (grade 1 to 13) of compulsory education

Table 1.
Demographic and
background
information of
respondents (*n* = 587)

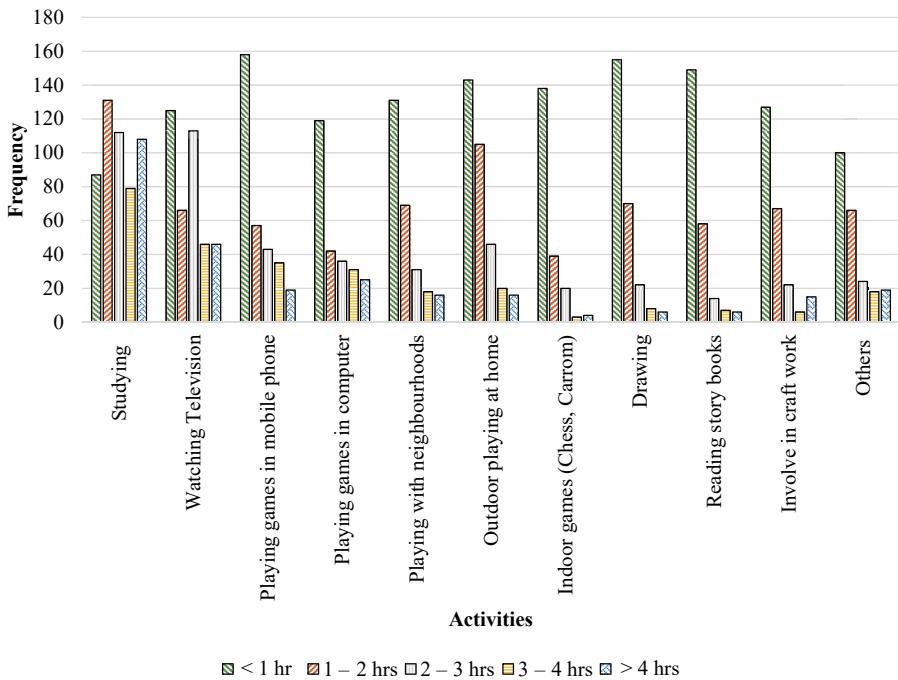


Figure 1. Children engage their time with various activities per day on average during COVID-19

their studies. In a previous study, [Martin and Ertzberger \(2013\)](#) reported that mobile phones used by the majority of students are not considered as a learning tool and are mostly used for talking over the phone, texting, listening to music, Internet browsing, etc. The majority of participants in the present study are also worrying that their children mostly use mobile phones to play games and not for learning activities. Many parents reported that they are observing their children become ‘smartphone addicts’.

4.3 Students’ distance learning activities and interactions

While accounting for the distance learning activities, comparatively many children attend live classes, multiple times a day ([Table 2](#)). The live classes conducted by the schoolteachers

Learning activities and interaction	Never	Frequency			
		Once a week	2 or 3 times a week	Once a day	Multiple times a day
Attending to live classes	17.4	16.5	18.4	15.8	31.9
Watching recorded lessons	24.0	30.3	15.8	18.4	11.4
Using social media apps (WhatsApp, Viber, Imo, etc.)	17.2	20.6	15.3	17.5	29.3
Requirement of parent to present during class time	25.7	20.4	13.1	13.6	27.1
Child interacting with teacher	21.3	26.9	19.6	16.0	16.2
Parent interacting with teacher	27.6	39.0	16.7	11.1	5.6

Table 2. Students’ distance learning activities and interactions

generally vary from 40 min to two hours depending on the teacher's willingness as well as the children's capacity. Some children attend live classes only two or three times a week, once a week and once a day. Unfortunately, there are a number of students who have never attended a single live class. Many children are also not familiar with watching recorded lessons as the majority of them are watching those only once a week, and also a considerable number of children never watch recorded lessons. The use of social media apps such as WhatsApp, Viber, Imo, etc. among the children is higher at about 82.8%, and children use those at least once a week to communicate with teachers and classmates, to get notes and to clear doubts. However, the rest never used such apps to support their learning activities. Children interacting with teachers online is also not an appreciated level in general. There are huge chances for children to directly communicate with their teachers via online and solve their questions, though the majority of them never do so or just maybe once a week. The majority of parents interacted with teachers once a week and several times per week and once a day. Some of the parents interacted multiple times a day with teachers. Parents of kindergarten and primary education students are expected to present during the classes with their children multiple times a day and when it comes to students of secondary and senior secondary education, many of the parents never. Parents' engagement is higher, who have nursery or scholarship children. Similarly, the frequencies of interaction between parents and teachers are also higher. Parents also need to be at the students' side during distance learning to support their children, especially for the aforementioned grades/levels.

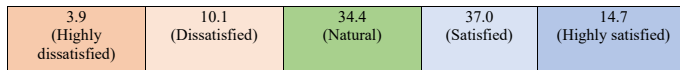
Work assigned by the teachers varied, and at the level of pre-schooling, 20% of respondents mentioned that their children received more than six tasks per week (Table 3). As well, an equal number of parents responded that the teachers of their children assigned no tasks at all. In grades 1 to 5, the majority of teachers gave three or four tasks to complete, similarly in grades 6 to 9. However, it is not surprising that the majority of children of ordinary level (O/L) and advanced level (A/L) classes receive many assignments per week as they are getting ready for the upcoming competitive examinations.

4.4 Parental view of distance learning practices during COVID-19

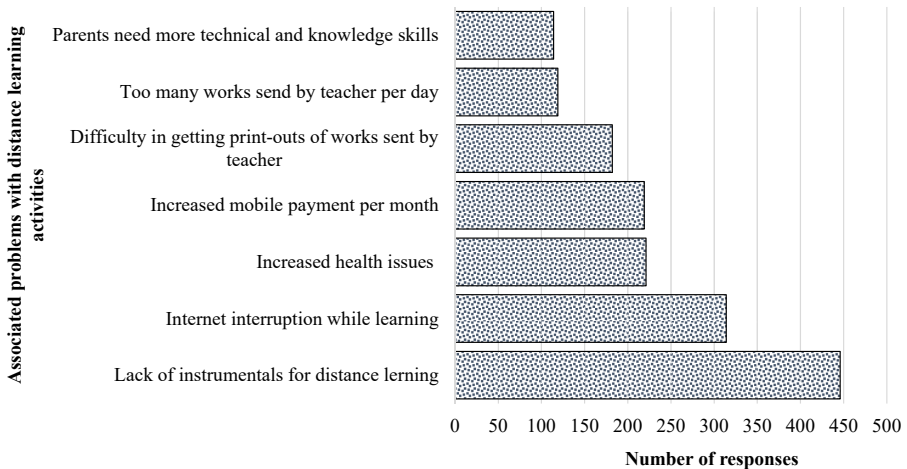
Regardless of their children's studying grade ($p = 0.288$), the majority (37%) of parents and guardians are satisfied with the distance learning activities of their children during COVID-19, while 14.7% are highly satisfied; however, 14% are not satisfied with the current learning activities (Figure 2a). The topmost challenge faced by parents regarding distance learning is the lack of devices such as smartphones/laptops/desktops to allow their children for online classes. Secondly, the most commonly recorded difficulty is the unstable Internet connections, which equally increased health issues such as headache, backache, eye problem and neck ache of their children due to the longer duration attending the classes. The high cost of data is the third most frequently reported problem (Figure 2b).

Grade of children	None	1 or 2	Tasks a week		
			3 or 4	5 or 6	>6
Pre-school/nursery	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0	20.0
Grade 1–5	10.5	27.6	30.9	25.4	5.5
Grade 6–9	4.3	23.2	31.9	13.0	27.6
Grade 10 and 11	7.1	10.6	26.5	24.8	31.0
Grade 12 and 13	9.3	13.2	23.8	23.2	30.5

Table 3. Percentage of tasks assigned by the teachers per week



(a)



(b)

Figure 2. (a) Parental satisfactory level (%) of distance learning and (b) associated problems experienced/observed by the parents

4.5 Role of parents in teaching their children

About three-quarters of respondents are engaged in teaching their children, while the responsibilities are mostly fallen to mothers, which account for 54.1% of the population. In comparison, fathers are rather less actively participating in teaching their children, which is only 19.2%. In addition, 14.8% have respondents' statues that siblings are engaged to teach their school children, while about 8% commented that other caregivers, private tutors and elders are educating their children (Table 4). Unfortunately, about 4% of respondents stated that nobody is there to teach their children at home and distance learning delivered by the school is the only way to assist their children's education.

Among the parents/guardians who are teaching to their children, the majority (29.4%) of them do so for two to three hours daily on average. Equally, many of the other parents/guardians managed to teach about one to two hours, while about 17% teach three to four

Table 4. Household teaching to children other than distance learning

Relationship	<i>n</i>	%
Mother	374	54.1
Father	133	19.2
Sister/brother	102	14.8
Guardian	19	2.7
None	26	3.8
Grandmother	20	2.9
Others	17	2.5

Note(s): Sometimes, both parents as well as the other family members teach their children; therefore; *n* = 691

hours. While about 11% of them engage in teaching activities for less than an hour, a small percentage of parents participated in longer periods of teaching as well.

In this study, researchers have also observed that even though the parents are engaged with teaching, as they have no other choice, the majority feel at least some sort of discomfort in teaching their children (Figure 3a). However, there is no significant difference between ($p = 0.327$) levels of comfortability of parents in homeschooling their children as many are also comfortable in teaching. Difficult in teaching at home, mainly associated with distractions by other family members while teaching, increased stress and difficulties in concentrating teaching children, difficulty in balancing working from home and teaching and unfamiliar with subject or teaching methods, particularly the subjects such as English, Maths and Science (Figure 3b).

4.6 Parental depression during COVID-19

To understand the depression of the parents during the COVID-19, a questionnaire was given to the participants as “Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?” Factors considered in such assessments include the parent’s feelings such as the meaning of their life, difficulties with concentrating on work, thinking bad about themselves, poor appetite and overeating, feeling tired, spending too much time on the bed, hopelessness and little interest to do the things. According to the PHQ-8 criteria, results show that 41.7% of respondents are having moderate depression under the pandemic condition, whilst the other 33.2% are having a mild level of depression. Overall, 19.1% are suffering from moderate to severe depression, while 6% are having a severe level of mental depression (Figure 4). When it was checked through the cross-tabulation, those who do not have a permanent income and those with less or no formal education have suffered because of this virtual learning.

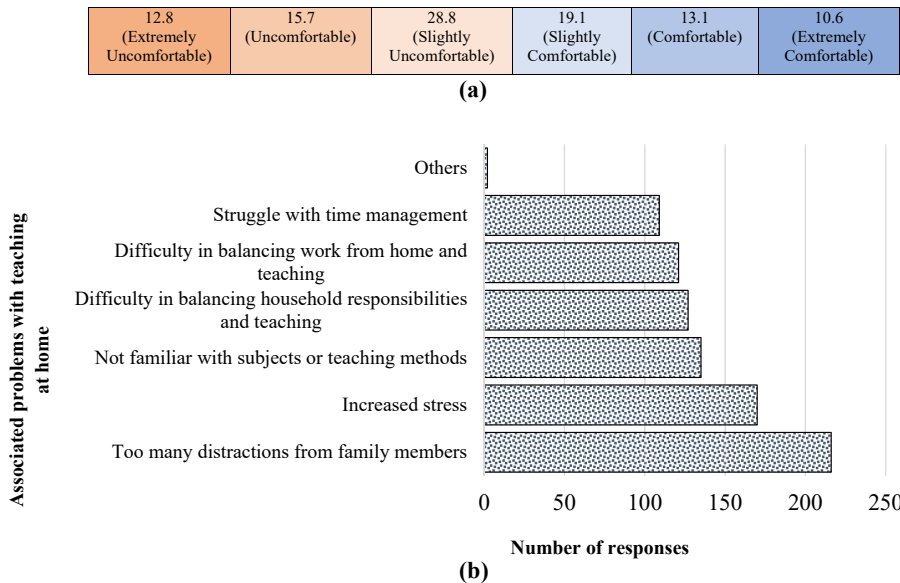


Figure 3. (a) Parent’s comfortability of teaching (%) their children at home during COVID-19 and (b) associated problems. Majority of parents are facing one or more of the aforementioned issues

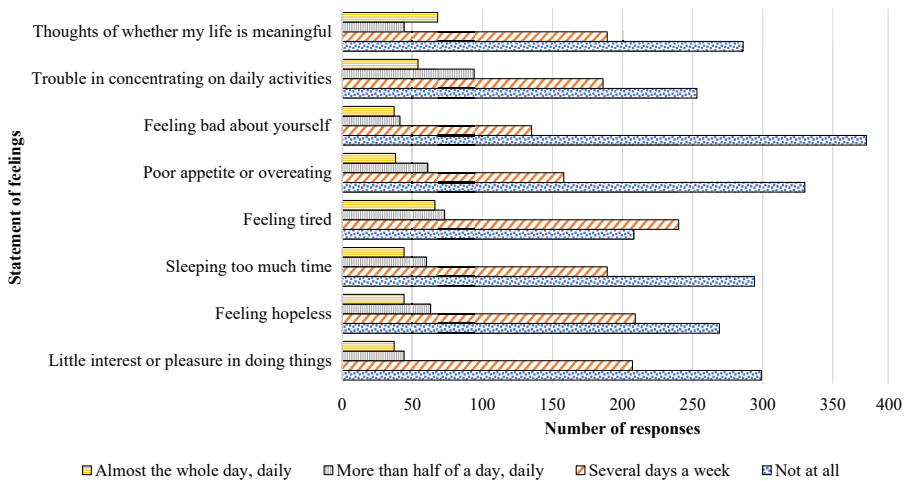


Figure 4.
Parents experience of
depression levels
during COVID-19

5. Discussion

The fanatical blow of COVID-19 has had a drastic impact worldwide, including on the education system. Schooling is the most important stage in a person's life where a disruption in education can lead to both short- and long-term consequences. Many studies have been conducted to understand the impact of COVID-19 on children's education, though the point of parental view does not seem to be adequately discussed (DesRoches *et al.*, 2021; Lee *et al.*, 2021; Luijten *et al.*, 2021; Roe *et al.*, 2021; Girard and Prado, 2022). This study takes into account how parents experienced distance learning activities and homeschooling during COVID-19 and also the challenges faced during the third wave of the pandemic, where the pandemic crisis mounted by a number of deaths and infected patients in the emerging nation of Sri Lanka, into account. In fact, according to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study in Sri Lanka to explore the parental perception of distance learning and homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic via an island-wide survey.

At the time the study was conducted, several attempts have been made by the government to reopen the schools, though they could not continue due to the prevalence of COVID-19; thus, the pandemic forced educational administrators to completely close all schools in the island and mobilize students and staff to cope with the new virtual teaching and learning systems. Along with that, there is a monumental change in the Sri Lankan educational system, challenging all the parties to continue the student's education at home confinement. On this account, schoolchildren who are expecting to sit down for the forthcoming two most competitive examinations O/L and A/L are under more pressure. Grade 5 scholarship is another examination to be conducted, which is notable and considered among parents an examination due to the extreme competency to put their children to a popular school.

In the current study, many respondents have expressed that their children become apathetic towards their studies. However, according to some respondents, children show slight movement towards self-studies, particularly those who are studying grades 10–13, compared to before the pandemic. This could be a great move since it emphasizes the need for children to take an active role in setting objectives, planning how they will accomplish them, scheduling and organizing their studies (Barbosa *et al.*, 2017). However, considering the primary level, especially grade 1 students, their interest in education is weakening. According to recent studies, parents, on the other hand, lose the need or desire for cooperation when they

believe the school is not helpful and responsive to their children's needs in their teaching and collaboration with parents (Griffith, 2020).

A myriad of respondents mentioned that children are attending a number of virtual classes every day, morning to evening, and receiving too many assignments/tasks to complete, burdening their children and making them hesitant to attend the online classes. The increase in digital screen time that leads to myopia progression has been linked in previous studies (Lanca and Saw, 2020; Wong *et al.*, 2021), and many parents of this study reported that their children are suffering from eye pain. In line with the findings of this study, previous commentaries (Pandya and Lodha, 2021; Wagner *et al.*, 2021) also reported other physical pains due to the longer digital screen time. Apart from this, a number of parents have mentioned that the way of delivering the lectures to their children and handling them during the classes cannot be appreciated. One possible explanation for such negative expression is the behaviour of the county's education culture, as it dominated the teacher-centred learning strategy and not be in line with the virtual classes thus not attracting the children.

According to the results of our survey, many respondents look at distance learning as an additional expense, as in Sri Lanka, there is a higher cost for Internet connection than in the neighbouring countries. Parents who lost their employment and earned little struggled a lot to manage the monthly investment for Internet connectivity. A combination of those factors could also lead to the anxiety of children and may not be expected to have real outcomes.

In spite of that, the authors have found that many children are facing difficulties in attending virtual classes, and a considerable number of them ($n = 102$) never attended virtual studies during the pandemic. Many of the respondents ($n = 446$) state that the lack of instrument facilities to attend to their children in online classes is the major issue. Difficulties/inability to catch data signals ($n = 314$), unavailability of instruments ($n = 185$) and sharing the available instrument with a family member ($n = 89$) are the other highlighted issues, which disrupted the distance learning practices. During the COVID-19 period, there are many national media telecasts where students walk far away from their homes looking for network coverage in several rock places and even making the top of roofs or trees as study places. If the rain or any bad weather conditions prevail, they could not participate in their teaching-learning activities. It was confirmed through this study also; particularly respondents living in rural settings reported that their children experienced an unstable Internet connection during the virtual classes, which led them not to apprehend all the concepts explained by the teacher.

In the current study, it was found that parents who have time, pedagogical skills and resources successfully manage their children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic, and similar findings are also seen in a recent report by Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021). An extensive study has been conducted by Dong *et al.* (2020) which reported that distance-learning activities delivered benefits to all by a continuation of students' education at most and also a relief for the majority of parents. In fact, this is true in this study as well; particularly parents who are with poor literacy and social background are struggling to teach their children and they have seen that distance learning is the only solution, and they are well satisfied with the education their children receive. In contrast, a number of respondents reported that children who are preparing for competitive examinations like O/L and A/L spend extensively due to not receiving satisfactory education.

The mental fitness of the parent is another consideration that the research attempted to study as prolonged depression may cause reduction in the quality of the family relationships and increase conflict and may ultimately affect children's education (Scaramella *et al.*, 2008). A relatively large proportion of parents in Sri Lanka also reported that they are also struggling to teach children by themselves owing to depression. Because of the cross-sectional nature of the study, it cannot be confirmed whether the depression of the parents is already there before the pandemic or not; however, it has been shown in previous studies (Spinelli *et al.*, 2020) that parental depression becomes a common issue during the COVID-19. According to the

respondents, the authors have understood that social isolation, fear of going out coupled with financial difficulties are the major concerns. There is no argument that parents' well-being is crucial at the moment, and thus, it should give immense attention to minimize it.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that the decision to close schools and keep children at home was obvious, but the ramifications for the family's well-being were rarely considered. The success of homeschooling during COVID-19 in Sri Lanka is questionable as many parents state that their children are not attending homeschooling activities at a satisfactory level. Similarly, parents also need to take care of their child(ren) while working from home. The additional load on parents to take care of their children's education during virtual teaching damaged their relationship with the children. Parents play a major role in education during this lockdown, but their levels of stress and dissatisfaction and discomfort are high when they do not have much education or enough earnings to support the devices needed for distance learning. Parents even perceived online learning as time-consuming. Therefore, it is obvious that lockdown and distance learning have created a burden to parents, and this needs to be carefully measured and well planned to support parents during future emergent situations.

6. Limitations and future direction

As the data collection of this research was carried out through an online survey, there may be difficulty for the parents to fill up the questionnaires, particularly those who are having lower-level education or lack knowledge of IT resources. The questionnaire was only available for a limited time, approximately two and a half months. Those could be the two major factors, leading to a limited number of responses. Further addressing, this survey was designed to get the maximum information with the questionnaires in order to get an increased number of responses within a short period; therefore, we were unable to address all possible factors contributing to the success of adapted learning practices.

Future studies could target the importance of blended learning practices as the majority of administrators, teachers, parents and students are familiar with it and have been practising it for over two years. This has been the objective of several studies in recent times, though not under consideration in the Sri Lankan setting. Thus, such studies could give immense support to the island administrative sector to decide on improving the education system of the country to the next level. Moreover, such a requirement is very valid not only for Sri Lanka but also for many other developing countries since these attempts are lagging behind.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Shifting into distance learning and homeschooling practices could be the best option to continue the school children's education without interrupting and also minimize the chances of infection. At the same time, the movement of children towards those practices shows both negative and positive results. There are a number of factors affecting the success of homeschooling and distance learning, while in this study, researchers have found that social setting, financial capabilities and the educational background of the family are the key factors. Even though there are several advanced distance learning platforms available, in Sri Lanka, school learning practices are majorly carried out by the Zoom platform, along with frequent use of social media like WhatsApp for communication between the teachers and students. Hence, awareness needs to be created among the teachers, students and parents with regard to the new tools available for online teaching and learning before the initiation.

Unfortunately, no free data is given by the government or any other source to concrete the distance/virtual learning practices; therefore, parents who lost their job or income due to the

COVID 19 pandemic are under tremendous pressure to spend the extra money, which ultimately impacts the children's education. A sudden change of teaching and learning practices without proper planning and implementation of the background requirements such as training of teachers on managing virtual classes, availability of devices, free data facilities and strengthening the wave band made questionable the successful delivery of the virtual learning in Sri Lanka. Hence, support such as giving devices on a loan basis and Internet facilities with a concession from the government or non-governmental organizations to the needy will greatly help during the pandemic like COVID-19, etc. Despite those facts, the lack of a proper monitoring mechanism or evaluation scheme also could lead to the lowering quality of the teaching-learning practices. For example, it was found that there is no proper duration for virtual classes or even the proper timetable to deliver the class. This ultimately led to the children's dissatisfaction with distance learning, similarly the parents. As some parents have highlighted, they are not satisfied with the delivery of sessions, which means that adapting to the new system is not yet there. For this reason, it is important to cautiously design online learning proficiencies or design some self-learning tools so that the students spend efficient time during teaching lessons without getting bored. This can be done by orienting students to be active outside of the live sessions, with interesting questions, educational games and practical assignments. Teaching in this way will not only attract the attention of children but also motivate students to take responsibility for their learning and thus knowledge construction. Blended learning activities are not new and have been practiced around the world before the pandemic, particularly the developed countries. Furthermore, in order to improve the mental health of parents, it could be suggested that doing family activities together, virtual meetings with family members and friends who are living at a distance, engaging in hobbies/exercise and moving to the religious or spiritual places also could be ideal under these conditions.

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