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Navigating the New Covid-19 Normal: The Challenges and Attitudes of Teachers and Students during Online Learning in Qatar

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Abstract. This inquiry sought to explore the teachers' and students' challenges and attitudes concerning mandatory online instruction at the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. Using a qualitative case study, a single international school in Doha, Qatar was sampled to participate. The data was generated from interviews with seven teachers who participated in one-on-one in-depth interviews and from six groups of students who participated in focus group discussions. An inductive data analysis approach was employed to analyse the data. The findings revealed various technical, pedagogical, and social challenges experienced by both teachers and students. The participants' attitudes to online learning were mixed as others preferred this mode of learning while some preferred learning in physical classrooms. The implications point toward the need for teacher professional development that targets the use of online teaching platforms. They further point to the need for teachers and school administrators to find strategies to make online learning more interactive and to assign work that reduces the amount of time spent on the screen.

Keywords: attitudes; challenges; Covid-19; online-learning; teacher professional development

1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus of 2019 (Covid-19) first broke out in late 2019 in the city of Wuhan in China's Hubei province (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2020a). By March 2020, the WHO declared the virus to be a pandemic after it had spread to over 140 countries and territories (WHO situation report 55, 2020b). To curb the spread of the virus, social distancing and lockdown measures were undertaken and governments in over 110 countries resolved to temporarily close their schools.

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In the state of Qatar, as the number of confirmed cases rose to eighteen on the 9th March 2020, the government announced the suspension of schooling (State of Qatar Government Communications Office, 2020). Furthermore, because of the turmoil caused by the virus, the government could not say when the schools would reopen and mandated that schools go online. Other affected countries in the region like Iran and Egypt shut down their schools with no apparent plan for online education which can safely be attributed to a lack of financial backing and infrastructure. Contrarily, Qatar is the richest country in the world according to its GDP per capita (World Bank, 2022) with a population that has easy access to technology in their homes and classrooms.

Furthermore, the government views education as a powerful tool in driving social and economic changes in the country (Abou-El-Kheir, 2017).

In its vision for 2030, the government envisages that the education provided in the country will be compatible with the best education systems in the world (General Secretariat for Development Planning, 2008). Consequently, billions of dollars have been invested in various education reform programmes such as Education City (Khodr, 2011). Therefore, while the challenges experienced in other countries may include a lack of infrastructure for such endeavours, we anticipated that these would not be challenges found in Qatar.

However, while infrastructure is one thing, implementation is another. For instance, a study by Al-Jaber and Dutta (2008) which sought to investigate the implementation of the ICT Qatar government programme of 2004 revealed various difficulties with implementation. Some of the difficulties included resistance to change by parents, teachers and communities, the attitude to technology, government censorship, and a lack of trained teachers.

In the context of the pandemic, there have not been any studies focusing on both teacher and student challenges and attitudes to the mandatory emergency move to online learning. Related studies include the inquiry by Chaaban, Sawalhi and Du (2021) which sought to investigate teacher leadership during the same period. Their findings revealed that the participants were adequately supported by their schools and the Ministry of Education. Conversely, increased workloads were a hindrance to professional learning in that period. Others, including the inquiries by Newsome et al. (2022), focused on the experiences of students and lecturers in higher education. As such, little is known about the challenges and attitudes of learners and teachers in primary and secondary education at the beginning of online learning. The lack of empirical evidence from Qatar could mean that Qatari policymakers and practitioners make decisions for future planning and practices based on the experiences and attitudes of the students and teachers in other contexts. The objective of this study was therefore to bridge this gap in the literature by responding to the following research questions:

- What are the challenges experienced by teachers and students during their transition to online learning?
- What are the attitudes of teachers and students about using online learning in the future?

2. Related Work

2.1 Experiences of Teachers during the Transition to Online Learning in Other Contexts

Studies conducted in other contexts have revealed a multitude of technical and pedagogical challenges. Notably, there are technical challenges that relate to a lack of digital competency which was a major challenge in the literature reviewed (Alea, Fabrea, Roldan & Farooqi, 2020; Adenoyin & Soykan, 2021). Furthermore, the unavailability of digital devices and the lack of reliable internet connection also posed a challenge (Ferri, Grifoni & Guzzo, 2020; Ramij & Sultana, 2020).

Another common obstacle is the heavy workload and fatigue experienced by teachers (Ferri et al., 2020; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021; Adeboyin & Soykan, 2021). While this challenge was perceived negatively in many of the studies reviewed, the inquiry by Seabra et al. (2021) showed that some teachers perceived the heavy workload to be an opportunity for development. Moreover, it was found in the same study that teacher ages did not influence their attitude to online learning.

2.2 Experiences of Students during the Transition to Online Learning in Other Contexts

Research on the experiences of students during the transition indicates that a lack of proper digital devices and poor internet connection were one of the major challenges (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Famularsih, 2020). Furthermore, similarly to the teacher challenges, a lack of digital skills when it comes to participating in online classes was also an obstacle. For instance, the study by Ferri et al. (2020) found that one of the reasons for low attendance in online classes could be attributed to the students' lack of digital skills in those between the ages of 11 and 17 years old.

In addition, students also lamented their lack of motivation to carry out the assignments (Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021) along with a decreased focus and being distracted (Hussein et al., 2020). These findings are consistent with the assertion by Zhang et al. (2020) who argued in March 2020 that working from home could pose challenges as there would be plenty of distractions for students. Conversely, other students blamed increased workloads rather than their motivation to keep up with the work assigned since the transition to online learning (Famularsih, 2020; Hussein et al., 2020). Moreover, the lack of social interactions that come with studying online was also found to be a challenge by students. For example, a study by Gustiani (2020) found that despite students being motivated by wanting to pass their courses, they found online learning uninteresting because of the reduced opportunity for interaction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which accepts reality as subjective. It also relates to an understanding that what is considered true varies from one individual to the next (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, the researchers had no desire to quantify the experiences of participants or generalise

the findings to other contexts, but to have an understanding of the phenomenon as lived by the participants. From these assumptions, a qualitative case study was utilised and a single international school high school in Doha, Qatar was sampled to participate.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

Seven teachers, three male and four females, were sampled using purposive sampling to participate in the study. The criteria for sampling the teachers was that they had to be high school teachers working in the sampled Kindergarten to Year 13 (K-13) school. Knowing that age can influence one's experiences with technology (Blank & Dutton, 2012), we aimed to include teacher participants from different age groups. Thus, the participants ranged from 26 to 55 years. Their teaching subjects were not a criterion for selection, thus those who participated taught across different subjects in the school.

The student participants were also selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selection was them being in Key Stages 3 and 4 (Year 7 to 11). We chose not to include Key Stage 5 (Year 12 and 13) as we assumed that their challenges of having to take their International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and Advanced Level General Certificate of Education (A-Levels) in the same academic year of this turmoil could be better understood in a different study. Thus, a total of 94 students between the ages of 11 and 16 participated in six focus group discussions.

3.3 Data Generation Methods and Instruments

The data was generated in the second week of April 2020, three weeks after the start of online learning. The teacher data was generated through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews while the student data was generated through focus group discussions. In both instances, the data was generated virtually using the video-conferencing application, Zoom. Focus group discussions as opposed to one-on-one interviews for the students were selected with the knowledge of the power of interactions facilitated by group settings when discussing a similar lived experience. Interacting with each other allowed the participants to think, debate, reflect, and even remember details that would otherwise be forgotten or neglected, thus enhancing the validity of the findings (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Furthermore, because we sought to understand the experiences of students, we valued hearing more student voices as opposed to sampling a smaller group through focus group discussions, which therefore became the best data generation method. While some of their experiences were unique to each student, we were able to identify patterns in the responses from one focus group to the next which led to the findings. We asked standard questions which elicited the student and teacher experiences in terms of computer efficacy, prior preparedness, workload, navigation issues, and whether in the future they would prefer learning online compared to traditional classroom settings.

3.4 Data Analysis

After the completion of the documentation of the data, the inductive analysis approach was undertaken in which all data was read, collated, coded, and sorted

out into clusters, patterns and categories. This sorting led to the themes that were presented as the findings (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

3.5 Ethical considerations

Permission was sought from the principal to use the study in the research. Consent was also sought from teacher participants and granted. We also approached students in writing and verbally to explain the nature of the study and their participation. Because the students were minors, from those who showed an interest, we also sought permission from their parents.

4. Findings

The two modes of facilitating online instruction in the school during the initial online learning were Zoom and Google Classroom. The teachers also revealed that the last day of school for students was the 9th March while the first day of online classes was the 16th of the same month. The findings in response to the first research question revealed various challenges that the teachers and students encountered. The similarities and differences in the challenges experienced by the two groups are depicted in Figure 1 below.

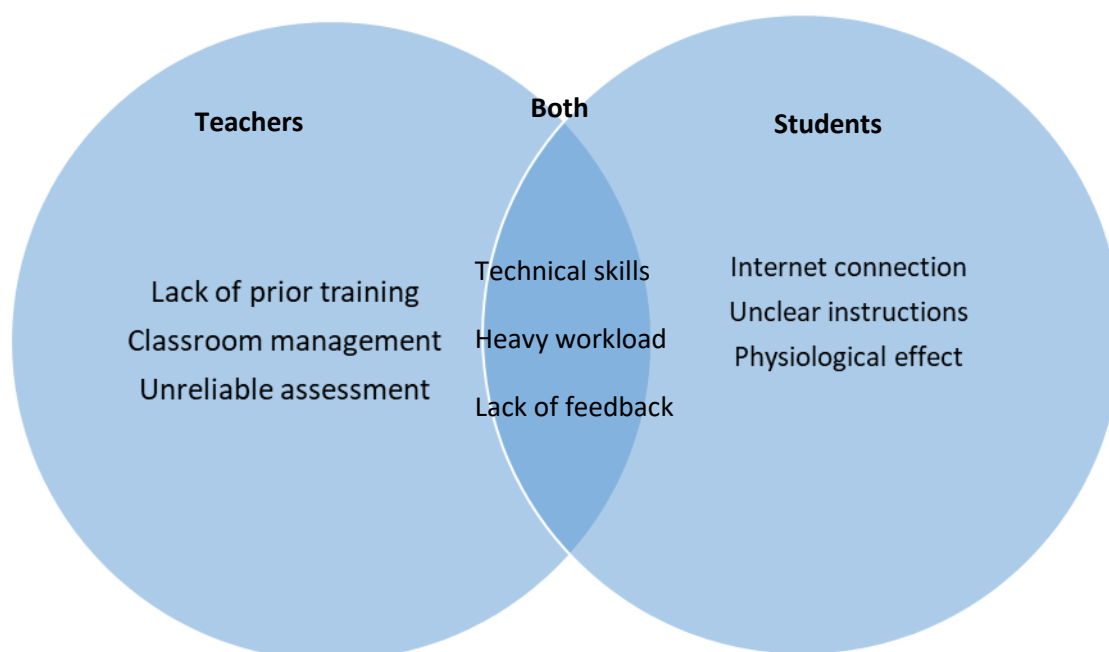


Figure 1: Teacher and student challenges at the beginning of the online learning

4.1 Teachers' Perspectives of their Challenges

4.1.1 Lack of Prior Training and Technical Skills

The teacher interviews indicated that apart from one participant who teaches ICT, the teachers had either never heard of the platforms chosen by the school to deliver the online lessons, or they had never used them before. The teachers also indicated that between the last day of the physical classes (9th March) and online classes (16th March), there had been no workshops to prepare them for the task. Rather, they had been encouraged to try out the platforms to acclimatise

themselves with them before the first day which led to various technical challenges in the implementation stage. One teacher who teaches Information Communications Technology (ICT) stated that while she was one of the lucky few who were familiar with one of the platforms, she experienced challenges still. She stated:

I was confident in using Google classroom but not so much Zoom. It was very disturbing and we have had to figure everything out ourselves and we've had some issues with inappropriate behaviour during live lessons, like a student annotating on the screen. I had one of my students write the word vagina on one of my slides and I had no idea how to remove that or disable it. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 2 also concurred, indicating:

We were ambushed and there was no transition period. I had never heard of Google Classroom. So I found that teachers like myself who had not been exposed to IT and all the gadgets struggle more. I was not aware for example, that with Zoom the recording is only 40 minutes long and I would be in the middle of my lesson when I get cut off. (Teacher 2)

However, it must be stated that while it is apparent that the teachers believe that they could have been better prepared by the school, there was an acknowledgement of the nature of the crisis and the awareness that the mitigation efforts were taken on without too much time to deliberate beforehand. While responding to the question of what the school could have done better, Teacher 5 commented:

The school did the best they could. Nobody anticipated this; they just found themselves in this situation which involves making quick decisions in a short period of time on behalf of a very large community of people. (Teacher 5)

The lack of prior training and technical skills as experienced by the teachers in this study led to a negative experience for them and their students. It can be concluded that if the teachers were better prepared, they would have had a better experience and subsequently, the students may have also had a better experience and attitude towards online learning.

4.1.2 Classroom Management

In addition to the challenge of the students writing profanities on the shared screen as indicated by Teacher 1, the other participants also indicated that they had experienced classroom management challenges, especially in the first few weeks as they were still learning how to use the platforms. For instance, two teachers commented:

I found it difficult to manage the classroom at the beginning because I didn't understand the technology. Students would talk out of place and I didn't know how to mute them. I didn't know that you could kick a student out of the class. (Teacher 3)

Students can act out because they know that there are no sanctions you can give them. You are not in school and cannot give them detention. To a certain extent, you lose authority. (Teacher 2)

4.1.3 Lack of Effective Assessment and Immediate Feedback

About the first challenge discussed, the teachers felt that the impersonal nature of the online instructions meant that the students could not always access help and the teachers could not immediately identify challenges with learning and address them right away. For example, Teacher 7 explained:

You cannot monitor students' facial expressions to see if they are following the lesson. It is only until you ask a question, which you cannot do with all of them all the time. So that means you can easily lose track of students who are not engaged in learning in a virtual classroom as opposed to a face-to-face classroom. (Teacher 7)

Similarly, Teacher 7 also stated:

What makes online teaching most difficult for me is not being able to see students' work as they are doing it and help them right there and then. (Teacher 7).

Another assessed challenge was the originality of the students' work which was experienced by most of the participants. For example, Teacher 2 asserted:

Another thing I discovered is that some parents are doing the work for their children. Actually sitting on the computer and doing the work for them. Brilliant answers that I know for a fact could not have come from the child. (Teacher 2)

4.1.4 Heavy Workload

The teachers also found that online teaching increased their workload significantly. In their perspective, online instructions meant more teacher assessments and more planning. Furthermore, the teachers indicated that they spent more time even outside of their standard working hours responding to emails from both students and parents on matters that, during face-to-face classes, could have been clarified to all students. In addition, the teachers found that marking work that had been submitted online took more time. For instance, Teacher 3 indicated:

It takes a lot longer to mark on Google Classroom than by hand, therefore increasing the amount of time I spend working. The platform does not allow annotating on the student's paper or putting ticks. So I have to record them on paper so as not to lose track of their scores. (Teacher 3)

Another aspect of online learning was where the teachers perceived that their workload had increased due to the administrative tasks and planning they had to carry out in addition to also trying to figure out the new mode of teaching. For example, Teacher 2 expressed:

I struggled in the last three weeks. There has been lots of admin work and I've never been a paperwork person so I really struggled. Plus, with virtual teaching, there is a lot more planning to do and working much later hours than before.

Moreover, due to how sudden the move to online learning was, the teachers found that the level of communication and instructions from the school administrators had increased, thus increasing their workload. For example, Teacher 2 said:

Teachers had volumes of information coming in at the same time that they had to process and implement without proper direction which normally is not the case so our workload increased significantly. (Teacher 2)

It is clear then that navigating a new system of instruction, new communication demands, and expectations from the management contributed to an increased workload for the teachers.

4.2 Students' Perspectives on their Challenges

4.2.1 Technical Problems

It is apparent from the focus group discussions that despite being commonly known as digital natives, many of the students struggled with using the platforms. For example, one student stated:

"I'm a slow typer so it takes me a very long time to finish work than I did when I was writing." (Student 1)

Connectivity to the internet was also cited by the students as one of the struggles that they experienced in their first few weeks of online learning. For example, two students indicated:

Sometimes the internet connection is really bad like exhibit A, right now I was just disconnected and had to rejoin the meeting. (Student 4)

If the internet is good, then the microphone works. However, when it is bad then the microphone does not work and I cannot participate in discussions (Student 5)

4.2.2 Heavy Workload

Similar to the teacher participants, the students also complained about the heavy workload. For example, Student 6 stated:

I see that teachers give us much more work. When we were at school we didn't have as much work. I feel that online learning has brought more pressure on us. (Student 6)

Other students also indicated that when the prospect of online learning came up, they had anticipated less work but were surprised that the teachers were assigning even more. As such, the students expressed that they were under more pressure in terms of schoolwork since moving online. Two students expressed:

When the online school started I thought teachers might be a bit lenient with the work so that's why I didn't expect much. However, I was bombarded with so much stuff that for two days I didn't know what to do. (Student 3)

Everyone thought if we start online school the pressure would drop, but I feel like it has doubled for almost every subject. Even though we are at home there are still only 24 hours. (Student 15)

4.2.3 Lack of Immediate Feedback and Clear Guidelines

Further to the two challenges alluded to above, the lack of immediate feedback and clear guidelines proved a challenge for some students. The students felt that reaching their teachers was often difficult as the teachers did not always respond promptly. This finding was thought-provoking when compared to the one determined from the data collected from the teachers stated that they found it hard to respond to the ceaseless student questions sent outside working hours. In addition, they felt that the teachers often assigned them work without clear instructions.

The voices of two students are captured below:

In normal school we had teachers explain things to us if we didn't understand. Teachers could also see our facial expressions and know that we didn't understand.
(Student 9)

Sometimes we get slides that we do not understand and when we ask some teachers questions they write a whole paragraph about how they are disappointed in us.
(Student 4).

It is clear from these findings that in addition to the lack of immediate feedback and clear guidelines, miscommunications that can be attributed to online learning also occurred. This is seen in how the teachers complained about the incessant emails adding to their workload while the students feel that the teachers were not always available to respond to their questions.

4.2.4 Adverse Physiological Effects

The complete shift from face-to-face classes to online learning has meant a change in activities such as group work, physical education, class presentations, and other classroom activities to doing most tasks on the computer. This unavoidable increase in screen time came with perceived adverse physical effects on some of the students who complained of sore eyes, headaches, and stress. For example, two students stated:

Sir, don't your eyes hurt? Mine have been hurting so much from sitting in front of the computer all day long. (Student 11)

I end up spending too much time on my laptop that it makes my eyes hurt (Student 12).

As a result of the increase in workload discussed in section 4.2.2, some of the students reportedly experienced another adverse physical effect -stress. For example, Student 4 stated:

I get more stressed now. It is difficult to get used to the amount of homework
(Student 4).

4.3 What are the Attitudes of Teachers and Students Towards Online Learning?

Based on the challenges that we anticipated the novelty of online learning would bring, we sought to understand what the teachers' and students' attitudes would be towards online learning. The word 'attitude' as understood in this study comes from the Meriam Webster Online Dictionary (2022) which defines it as "a mental position with regard to a fact or state" (4a) or "a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state" (4b). Therefore, by asking this question, we wanted to understand the emotions that the teachers and students had regarding online learning based on how they were experiencing it at that present time. Furthermore, to understand their position about whether in the future they would prefer studying online or face-to-face classrooms. Data from both students and teachers on their willingness to embrace online learning revealed mixed attitudes. It was clear that while among the two groups most found that being at home had various benefits, many also held the perception that there are important aspects of learning face-to-face that online learning cannot replace or address.

4.3.1 Teachers' Attitudes Towards Online Learning

Most of the teachers held the view that they would prefer to incorporate aspects of online learning into their teaching as they had acquired some relevant skills. However, most insisted that this would only work if it was blended with face-to-face classes rather than working completely online. Their reasons varied but some perceived online learning to work better with high ability and/or older students, as well as being impractical for some subjects, and there being the inability of online teaching to replace human interactions. For example, Teacher 5 stated:

I don't mind blended learning but now that I've had the opportunity to teach virtually, I feel like it is more suitable for older students because when you are there you can see them learning. It is also good with high-ability students. So if I were to do it I would do it with high-ability students. (Teacher 5)

Teacher 7 also stated his apprehension about teaching practical subjects like the sciences through online learning, stating:

Online learning is great for some subjects but not all, I'm sure in English it's easier to discuss works of literature with students but with mathematics, you have to show students each step as you work, it just doesn't work. (Teacher 7)

Furthermore, the lack of interaction, as discussed earlier, influenced the participants' attitudes towards online learning. The physical interactions meant that teachers could build rapport with their students which they viewed as important to teaching and learning. Physical interactions were preferred when it came to allowing the teachers to provide guidance they deemed more practical in a physical environment.

In addition, it was also evident from the findings that some teachers had fears about their privacy and online security. For example, Teacher 6 stated:

I also don't think they considered our privacy and we were a bit naïve in not considering these factors. Our videos could be circulated on the internet and we are made laughing stocks. I never take a video with my face on it because I don't want to and I have that right. (Teacher 6)

Contrary to the doubts and concerns expressed by most teachers, Teacher 4, who is also the youngest among the teacher respondents, preferred online teaching over face-to-face teaching. She stated:

The time that I save on commuting to and from work is great. The systems of submitting work are also a lot easier to manage than having students hand in work physically. (Teacher 4)

4.3.2 Students' Attitudes Towards Online Learning

Among the students, it was evident that attitudes were even more polarised than those of the teacher respondents. For those who had a positive attitude towards online learning, some felt that learning online allowed them a degree of independence and the ability to learn new skills. For instance, one stated:

Working online makes me feel almost like a businesswoman which I want to be when I grow up. It is just cool because I sit at my desk and have all my work laid out. So it brings the atmosphere of growing up closer. (Student 24)

Other students preferred working online as they felt that it allowed them to work at their own pace. Student 7 indicated:

In school, one is forced to stay there for 7.5 hours while here I can finish my work in ten or thirty minutes. But also I can go to the mall when I want to. I have more time; I'm not forced to sit in one place (Student 7)

Conversely, for those who perceived online learning negatively, it was evident that the biggest influence was human interaction. This included the interactions with their peers which they deemed important in collaborative learning and friendships. Furthermore, the students deemed interactions with their teachers to be vital to their understanding of taught content. For example, Student 16 expressed: *"I know it is my house and everything but I just feel better being with my friends"*

Another student also stated:

Studying alone is not fun. We had a lesson where a teacher said we should discuss with a partner but we were not going to do it because we can't communicate. (Student 3)

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teachers and students experienced numerous challenges in the sudden move to online instruction as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Because schools had to move online so suddenly, it is also clear from the findings that the lack of time and perhaps consideration when teachers were preparing before the first day, led to some of the negative experiences of both teachers and students. It appears that the school administrators had confidence that because the curriculum had not changed, and because teachers already had some knowledge of technology, asking them to go home and try out Google Classroom and Zoom would be sufficient. However, teachers ended up struggling with the use of both platforms. This negation of their obligation to provide teachers with effective professional development during this transition reveals a lack of effective instructional leadership (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2019; Harris & Jones, 2020). It is also evident from the findings that while the teachers did not report having connectivity problems, some of the students struggled. These findings are in line with the findings from other studies which indicate that particularly in developing countries, connectivity issues are common (Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Adnan & Anwar, 2020). As such, schools need to consider that even though the teachers may not have connectivity challenges, the students may. As such, it is vital to work with the parents to find solutions.

It is also apparent from the findings that online learning demands new classroom management strategies. It is also clear that the surge in online learning has undermined the tech companies' abilities to protect online users. For instance, teachers struggling with students speaking out of turn and others writing profanities on the screen is consistent with other studies and media reports. The video conferencing platform Zoom, for example, did not initially have security measures such as waiting rooms that would allow the meeting host to admit participants into meetings. Studies (Khan, Brohi & Zaman, 2020; Fudge & Williams, 2020) and media reports (Hodge, 2020; Navarro, 2020) have shown that

these lead to various security threats. Therefore, schools must train teachers to be proactive in their use of these platforms and come up with new rules for classroom management, as well as sanctions for the students during online learning.

Another important finding discovered by this study was that of a lack of effective assessment and immediate feedback. The teachers' perspective revealed that they feared that because learners could not be seen, some were presenting work they could not have done by themselves. Furthermore, some of the teachers also lamented not being able to help students who needed it while doing work. Similarly, findings from the student participants also indicated that they too found the lack of immediate feedback a challenge in addition to finding that some of the instructions sent were unclear. These findings are consistent with other studies suggesting that the lack of immediate feedback and interaction is perceived as a challenge by both teachers and students using online learning platforms (Gay, 2016; Kite et al, 2020). In terms of the reliability of the online assessments, teachers need to explore other ways of assessing that do not threaten the integrity of assessments. Furthermore, teachers should also seek out ways of making their online learning platforms more interactive to allow students to ask questions and gain feedback.

Another challenge experienced by both the teachers and students in this study was increased workloads. Teachers complained that the number of instructions that came in requiring action were incessant in addition to the emails from parents and students who were also evidently struggling and needing reassurance. However, while the students stated that their workload had increased, teachers also confirmed that they were assigning more work and having more marking to do. It is not clear why going online resulted in an increased number of assignments. However, these findings are consistent with other studies which showed that both students and teachers experienced an increase in their workload once online (Hussein et al., 2020; Hermanto & Srimulyani, 2021). As a result of the increase in workload, in addition to also attending lessons in front of the screen, the students spent more time online which led to adverse physiological effects such as headaches, eye strain, and stress. It is vital that moving forward, school stakeholders can work together to find ways of reducing the workload without negatively affecting the quality of teaching and learning.

When it comes to the second research question which sought to understand the attitudes to online learning, the findings showed mixed attitudes. Most teachers felt that they would incorporate some of the online learning strategies in conjunction with face-to-face classes. This attitude for most teachers was influenced by the perception that online learning is more suitable for high-ability students. This perception is consistent with the findings by Xu and Jagers (2013) who found that online learning was more suitable for academically-inclined students. In addition, other teachers feared that having their videos online could lead to an invasion of their privacy and lead to them being made a mockery of online. This insecurity could be attributed to a lack of prior training and having been threatened online before. Moreover, it was also clear that they appreciated the human interactions that come with face-to-face classrooms and that this influenced their attitude towards online learning. Only one teacher, the youngest

participant, preferred teaching online over face-to-face classes. She indicated that it meant she saved time getting ready and commuting. It is not clear if age is what is influencing her attitude as in other studies such as the one by Seabra et al. (2021) which revealed that age does not influence the attitude towards online teaching during the pandemic.

Referring now to the student participants, most also had a negative attitude towards online learning because of the experiences they had. While a few indicated that online learning provided them with the freedom to work at their own pace and the ability to finish early and do outside-of-school activities, the majority longed for human interactions which they believed supported their social and academic needs. Many studies have also indicated that one of the main challenges of online learning is lack of interaction (Gustiani, 2020; Kite et al, 2020). Despite these negative experiences, the findings also show that the participants are not completely against online learning, thus dealing with some of the limitations experienced could change their attitude towards this mode of learning.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study have revealed that the sudden migration to online instruction undermined the school's ability to train teachers to implement the move successfully. This led to challenges such as a lack of technical skills, new demands for classroom management, heavy workloads, and a lack of immediate feedback and proper assessment. The challenges for students also mirrored those of their teachers such as a lack of technical skills, a lack of feedback, and a heavy workload. In addition, the students were also challenged by problems with their internet connection and unclear instructions from the teachers. The challenges experienced by both groups influenced their attitude towards online instruction and their willingness to embrace it in the future. Some teachers felt that they would rather teach through blended methods, mostly through classroom teaching with elements of online learning such as posting assignments online. Equally, the students mostly preferred going back to school due to the perceived impersonal nature of online learning. These challenges and the subsequent negative attitude to online learning are evidence that more work needs to be done before online education is successful.

6.1 Implications of this Study

This study has resulted in multiple implications for teachers and school administrators to use to enhance the effectiveness of online learning. First, teachers must empower themselves and learn about the latest technologies used in education. This will improve their general practice as well as better prepare them to deal with the unpredictable demands of teaching in the 21st century. Secondly, it is also imperative that both teachers and school administrators find ways of making online learning more interactive for students to mitigate the loss of social interaction that occurs when schools move online. In addition, solutions must be sought regarding effective assessments in online spaces as well as finding ways of assessment that reduce the amount of screen time for students.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

This was a small-scale inquiry which sampled a single school to participate. Thus, the findings, while consistent with findings in other contexts, may not be generalisable. Furthermore, because it was conducted at the beginning of online learning, the attitudes of the teachers and students may have changed over time.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Two years have passed since the data was generated for this study. Since that time, various developments have occurred including blended learning and going back to face-to-face classes. Therefore, we encourage other researchers to study how the attitudes may have changed towards online learning once teachers and students got over the initial hurdles reported in this inquiry.

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