

Paradigm Shift for Online Learning: Voices of Undergraduates from a National University in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The abrupt eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic made drastic shifts in doing many things under new normal conditions. Consequently, the education sector too had a giant leap from traditional physical mode to an online learning method, giving a novel experience to students. Online learning is a form of education in which the main elements include the physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. Hence, this paper focuses on exploring problems faced by undergraduates in online learning in a national university in Sri Lanka. This is a qualitative study that used a convenient sample of 30 undergraduates who have undergone both the traditional learning mode and online learning method. Data collection was carried out through a self-administered, semi-structured questionnaire and thematic analysis was employed for the study. The study found that undergraduates are undergoing problems in online learning as; technical issues, absence of conducive learning environment, financial burden, issues encountered from lecturers, pedagogical issues, and personal issues. This study provides useful implications for both the education policy formulators and educational institutions for the improvement of their online learning methods.

Keywords: *Online Learning Problems, Undergraduates, National University*

1. Introduction

The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a game-changer for individuals and countries across the world by temporary shutting down operations of the economies for a considerable period. Yet gradual reopening of economies allowed people to begin their work under new normal conditions by adopting alternative means of operations such as work from home, virtual employment, hybrid work model, etc. Among others, education is one of the hardly interrupted sectors due to the pandemic by experiencing nationwide closure of schools and universities (OECD, 2020).

Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all has been identified as the fourth Sustainable Development Goal by the UN, as it enables upward socioeconomic mobility and is a key to escape poverty (United Nations Organization, 2020). However, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery of quality education was at a risk. Education institutions in more than 188 countries were closed for months (UNESCO, 2020), and some still remain closed due to the second and third COVID-19 waves. According to the most recent data, there are 211,161,647 affected learners, 12.1% of total enrolled learners and 25 country-wide closures all over the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). The education sector in Sri Lanka is also severely affected by COVID-19 including the state university system of the country. Just as many countries did, Sri Lanka also converted the mode of delivery of education from a traditional face to face physical system to a technology-based online learning system.

Accordingly, the university system of Sri Lanka has also fully converted the mode of education to online, with the support of several telecommunication providers of the country, to continue higher education without disruptions. According to ADB brief, a survey among

universities has found that nearly 90% of student respondents have been able to access online education, marking a compatible rate similar to developed countries like Japan. However, ADB itself mentioned that the result of this survey might overrepresent students with online access due to sampling limitations, which creates a clear gap requiring to seek out students' perspective of online education in Sri Lanka (Hayashi et al., 2020). Further, another study carried out in a national university in Sri Lanka affirmed that smooth functioning of university education is seriously suffering from issues of online teaching and learning environment and a lack of online teaching and learning skills among academic staff and students (Rameez et al., 2020). Therefore, this study intends to explore problems faced by undergraduates in online learning in a national university in Sri Lanka.

1.1 Context

With the identification of the first COVID-19 positive case in March 2020, the government of Sri Lanka has decided to close all the educational institutions, including the higher education institutions (HEI). Thus, 15 state universities and nearly 40 other state and non-state tertiary education institutions halted their operations. With the purpose of facilitating the continuity of higher education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Sri Lanka launched a Moodle-based online learning platform with the collaboration of the Lanka Educational and Research Network (LEARN).

Once the platform was ready, the UGC was concerned about maintaining equity among the students when getting access to online learning. For that purpose, the UGC initiated discussions with the government and the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka (TRCSL). The UGC and TRCSL reached an agreement with all internet service providers in Sri Lanka to provide free access for university learning management systems and remote learning facilities through the LEARN. Although it was a fruitful initiation, the agreement was only active until August 2020 (Hayashi et al., 2020). Consequently, all the HEIs opened their online learning platforms and gradually commenced teachings.

The national university selected in this study operates under the UGC unveiled its online learning platform via Zoom and MS Teams applications. For the effective implementation of the online learning method through the Learning Management System (LMS) both the lecturers and undergraduates were given the training. Undergraduates are encouraged to join online real-time lectures actively and those who are unable to join, due to various reasons are given the opportunity by uploading the recorded lecture video to LMS. All the other relevant information, lecture materials, reading resources and assignments are given to undergraduates through LMS. It is expected to continue the online learning method until the re-opening of the universities for traditional physical lectures.

2. Literature Review

Recent past trends happening in the higher education sector has indicated significant progressive changes in the system. Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, some HEIs have already been laying the groundwork for a new approach to higher education (Bonfield et al., 2020), in order to produce more skilful graduates for the industries. Such institutions were highly investing in novel educational technologies and shifting towards virtual teaching and assessments methods. This education revolution has enabled active learning away from the traditional lecture-based education system. Further, non-traditional education is contextually interpreted as distance learning, e-learning and online learning (Moore et al., 2011). Further, these different types of learning environments depend on diversified learning objectives,

target audience, access (physical, virtual and/or both), and type of content to be delivered.

2.1 Online Learning

Distance learning dates back to two centuries and often designates the effort of providing access to learning for those who are geographically distant (Moore et al., 2011). It has evolved from correspondence through postal service to modern education technologies (Spector et al., 2008). E-learning utilizes information communications technology (ICT) to promote educational interaction between students, lecturers and learning communities (Holley, 2002).

Online learning is coined as the most recent and improved version of distance learning (Moore et al., 2011), which enables access to learning experiences through technology (Carliner, 2004). Such learning experiences are non-traditional. The diversified reasons have influenced HEIs across the globe to adopt online learning. Specifically, the COVID-19 global pandemic has urged HEIs to expand their education approaches to facilitate online learning (United Nations, 2020). It impacted the way higher education has been designed, implemented and delivered. The HEIs must be structurally flexible to embrace these new capabilities to support online learning. Thus, education applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, Google classroom and Moodle have been extensively utilized. Despite this urgency, online learning has resulted in viabilities as saving time and travel costs, scalability, and convenience.

2.2 Problems Encountered in Online Learning

Although online learning promotes a higher level of connectivity, flexibility and varied interactions (Hitz & Turoff, 2005), it marginalizes certain groups of learners (OECD, 2020). Online learning offers endless opportunities for innovative teaching (Macharia & Pelsner, 2012), the success predominantly depends on the level of students' engagement. Student attitude, training and experience are important to use technology for learning (Islam et al., 2015). Despite admiring how best the education technologies are, focusing on the needs of the undergraduates to use the technology for learning is a timely requirement specifically for the HEIs in developing countries. The pandemic is widening the gap and restrain equitable access to online learning (Hicks et al., 2021).

Dhawan (2020) emphasizes that accessibility, affordability, flexibility, learning pedagogy, life-long learning, and policy are the main concerns related to online learning. Technical challenges, student characteristics, learning environment and instructor characteristics are crucial problems involved in online learning and determine the effectiveness of online learning (Bonfield et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2015). Technical challenge refers to various technical issues related to accessibility to devices, the internet, and online learning systems. These problems might have been associated with modern technology range from downloading errors, issues with installation, login problems, problems with audio and video, and etc. (Dhawan, 2020). Consideration of access to technology is an indispensable element of effective online learning (Bryson & Andres, 2020). These issues lead to poor performance and questioning the education service quality.

The second problematic factor is the student characteristics. It includes intelligence, motivation, learning styles and technical experience of undergraduates (Islam et al., 2015; Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). Online learning enables a more flexible learning process, yet learners could fail to benefit due to their characteristics. For instance, students' learning styles are different. Some learn through interacting, some prefer learning through visual

presentation, and some by listening to instructions and using written notes (Islam et al., 2015). The online learning method could restrict certain learning styles.

Retaining personal attention is also a huge issue facing online learning (Dhawan, 2020). Therefore, to perform as an independent learner, students must be competent, confident, and self-aware.

The other issue related to online learning is the learning environment of learners. A large number of students hailing from low-income backgrounds are undergoing difficulties to afford the cost of learning technologies (OECD, 2020). Further, it leads to marginalizing students. Online learning moves away from teacher-centred to self-directed learning. Thus, the learner should possess a favourable learning environment at their end. In other words, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Thus, it calls for attending live lectures, engaging in real-time interactions between educators and learners, and obtaining instant feedback. However, after the COVID-19 outbreak, a merely overnight shift of traditional physical classrooms into online learning has posed learning environment-related problems to the students.

Instructor characteristics also determine the success of online learning. To be responsive and resolve emergencies, the instructor must have the competencies to adopt the right teaching aids and mode of delivery. Instructors' role is crucial for students to become active online learners (Jo et al., 2020). In the online learning process students struggle to develop a sense of community (Tichavsky et al., 2015). Therefore, the instructor has to be the facilitator and maintain frequent communication with the learners.

Online learning facilitates teaching and learning opportunities, but there is a dire need to weigh the pros and cons of this method to harness its potentials. Therefore, it is important to study the issues of online learning from the students' perspective.

3. Research Method

This is a qualitative study conducted in a selected management faculty of a national university in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from 30 undergraduates who were studying the management degree in the second, third and final years. Since those undergraduates have undergone the traditional physical learning mode, they were able to compare it with the online learning method that they are currently experiencing. A self-administered, semi-structured survey questionnaire was distributed among the undergraduates when the selected university has re-opened for few months. The researchers used the convenient sampling method and the participation in the survey was voluntary. However, on the cover letter of the questionnaire, it was clearly stated the purpose of the research, informed consent statement, anonymity of the undergraduates in the survey, and confidentiality of the collected data. The total number of completed questionnaires received was 30. For data analysis six-phase, top-down thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used.

4. Findings and Discussions

The analysis of data collected from undergraduates has given different perspectives about the problems they are experiencing with online learning in the chosen national university in Sri Lanka. Their responses preceded us to identify emerging themes, and they are explained with excerpts in this section.

4.1 Technical Issues

Accessibility to the appropriate technology is a foremost requirement to engage in online learning. However, the undergraduates emphasized that they have faced many technical issues including unavailability of devices, internet connectivity issues, frequent power cuts or failures and inability to handle technical problems.

Although the Sri Lankan university system shifted to online learning, the readiness of the undergraduates has been affected by multiple challenges related to technology and devices.

Further, the internet service is not available in all parts of the country, especially the learners in the remote areas are highly excluded. As per the responses of undergraduates, the majority of them resides outside the town areas. Therefore, they are affected because of poor internet connection and study from home has become a hurdle. In normal times, some undergraduates have been isolated due to the non-coverage of mobile service in their residential area. All these circumstances obstruct them to access real-time information about the lecture sessions, schedules, notices, evaluations, etc. These conditions neglect them from receiving the real-time learning experience. As a result, undergraduates often miss out on the in-class assessments and continuous assessments, which again leave them in a very stressful situation. Some excerpts from the respondents were stated below.

“Usually, electricity in our area cut once within a week for numerous reasons. So, I am unable to join the online lectures on such days.” (Respondent 02)

“Major issue is connection failures. Sometimes due to power cuts we were unable to participate lectures in some days.” (Respondent 05)

Another technical issue that the undergraduates pointed out was the unavailability of devices required for online learning. Many of them do not have a laptop or computer. Instead, they solely depend on their mobile phone for online learning. Further, some mobile phones are not compatible with the requirements of online learning applications. Hence, students are unable to participate in online learning. This situation is worsening in the case of frequent failures in the supply of electricity. It has become a crucial issue for undergraduates. They have to use electronic devices with limited battery capacity, for instance, mobile phones or laptops and Wi-Fi routers that need an uninterrupted power supply to operate. Therefore, when there is a power outage, students are unable to continue their studies. It demands reworking to cover the missed sessions and interrupts their academic performance.

Moreover, several technical issues including hardware and software related problems such as ownership issues, software updates and extension requirements, storage limitations, faults and break-downs, security issues are demanding the technical know-how to sort them out on time. Thus, trouble-shooting is a competency that an undergraduate should possess to solve technical issues and errors. As per the responses, lack of technical literacy and trouble-shooting skills have become an obstacle for undergraduates to resolve the technical issues on time.

4.2 Absence of conducive learning environment

The effectiveness of online learning is greatly determined by self-directed learning rather than the teacher-guided method. Hence, a learner has to prepare a favourable learning environment to reap the benefits. However, according to the undergraduates revealed it is difficult to learn from their homes. The surrounding must be noise-free and have fewer disruptions. Conversely, a home environment for all learners is not supportive of online learning. According to the respondents, they have to deal with external disturbances and manage

interactions with family members while participating in online lectures. It is hard to focus and retain the attention for online lectures.

Apart from the external disturbances, the undergraduates are unable to keep interactions with their peers like in a traditional classroom. Although the online learning platforms enable some features for live interactions, respondents revealed that there were minimal interactions between the lecturer and undergraduates and peers during an online lecture. In the physical classroom, a variety of interactions among learners and lecturers could be observed. As per their opinion, such interactions do motivate them to engage in learning.

“In the physical classroom, we have a different learning which is not felt in online classes” (Respondent 23)

“Though the physical classroom has more interactions, it is more focused than online class” (Respondent 15)

Also, the undergraduates have to continue their studies from home and, they cannot meet their friends to discuss, learn and share. It is more of a solo engagement, which needs higher self-motivation to actively engage in the learning process. Learn from home demands for self-motivation to actively engage in the learning process.

Further, in the absence of meaningful non-verbal communication via online learning, undergraduates explained that their attention deviates often. And they were not able to take down notes as required. Also, this online learning has limited the connectivity between the teacher and learner.

“Even without other disturbances from the environment, I can’t take lecture notes properly due to losing my attention many times during the online class.” (Respondent 11)

Sometimes prevailing bad weather conditions of the country also caused severe obstacles for the online classes for undergraduates. At the time of data collection for this study, there was a rainy season in the country and many disturbances happened due to bad weather conditions. Heavy rain with thunder and storms which caused damages to the power lines and connection was frequently interrupted. As to prevent the damages happening from lightning and thunder, undergraduates have to disconnect all the electric equipment which often took them away from online lectures. When the rain continued for days, there were flooding, land sliding and many other calamities occurred in some areas where the online learning activities were badly affected. As a result, undergraduates were unable to participate regularly in online lectures.

“Some connection problems happen and because of bad weather conditions, I did not join to the lectures on that day”

(Respondent 20)

4.3 Financial Burden

One of the primary requirements for online learning is having a device with internet access. It might be a smartphone or a new generation computer. Undergraduates have to bear device purchasing and maintenance costs, data charges and electricity charges when they engage in online learning. Due to the huge demand for devices, delays in importation during the pandemic period and price hikes, purchasing costs of such devices are at a higher price, which an average or poor family is not able to afford that cost at once. Since the majority of the

undergraduates belong to average or poor families, they are facing difficulties when purchasing and maintaining such devices.

In addition to the device cost, undergraduates also have to incur the cost of internet services. To access uninterrupted internet access, the financial burden of online learning has doubled for them. Sri Lanka does not have free internet access or nationwide coverage. Therefore only those who pay would get internet access, which forces the undergraduates to use data packages offered by the mobile service providers for prepaid or postpaid mobile or Wi-Fi connections.

4.4 Issues Encountered from Lecturers

The undergraduates were concerned about the issues encountered by lecturers in the online learning process such as scheduled time of the lectures, online lecture delivery speed and audio and video quality. The majority pointed out that it is hard to concentrate during lengthy lecture hours without a break. Undergraduates suggested having morning lecture sessions than evening sessions and a break if the lecture is scheduled for more than 1.5 to 2 hours. Other than that, the speedy delivery of online lectures made undergraduates worried about grasping subject knowledge, taking down notes, and inability to meet the lecturer face to face for clarifications.

“The delivery of the lecture is very speedy and difficult to catch up” (Respondent 11)

“Some lectures are conducting the lecture in a very fast manner” (Respondent 07)

Further, the audio and video quality from the lecturer’s end has a greater impact on offering an effective online learning experience for undergraduates. The noises from the lecturer’s end cause audible difficulties for undergraduates. In addition, lecturers are required to upload the recorded lecture so that those who are unable to join the lectures can refer to that later. However, it was found that when uploading the lecture recordings, there are some missing parts in the lecture. This has become an issue for the undergraduates who refer to the lecture recording when studying.

“Sometimes online recordings are incomplete because some parts are missing in the video. Also, external noises in the recording make it irritating to listen”

(Respondent 30)

4.5 Pedagogical issues

Whenever there are online real-time assessments and presentations, undergraduates stated that they often lose marks due to connectivity issues, which lead them to stress and anxiety. They are not comfortable during the presentations or online assessments as they are unsure about the internet connection and other potential interruptions. Even if everything goes according to the plan, there may still be disruptions due to unexpected guests at home or by the surrounding noises. As a result, undergraduates have to be on alert whenever they are participating in real-time online assessments, which keep them under very stressful conditions.

“It is unfair to have online assessments for some subjects amidst all sorts of online learning difficulties. It is definitely affect the final grading of the student”

(Respondent 23)

The undergraduates in the study perceived that online learning is very ineffective for

quantitative/ analytical subjects. As management undergraduates, they are supposed to take compulsory quantitative subjects such as business mathematics and statistics, which are useful for doing research/project components in their degree programmes. However, learning quantitative subjects online does not provide a better understanding of the subject, not clear the numbers and signs displayed in the online screen, less opportunity to get clarified unclear points, led to failing such subjects. Some stated that when learning quantitative subjects online, they were unable to do the required calculations fast, which left them lagging.

“Online learning is not appropriate to study quantitative/analytical subjects such as mathematics and statistics. We missed important lessons largely.” (Respondent 14)

“Quantitative subjects were really difficult to learn since some calculations are doing for the very first time” (Respondent 22)

Further, undergraduates have expressed that they are uncomfortable with long-hour online lectures, as they have to participate in more than one lecture per day.

“It is difficult to connect online lectures for more than 2 hours” (Respondent 02)

“Some were boring because of the time slots and the duration of 2 to 3 hours per lecture” (Respondent 13)

4.6 Personal Issues

Online learning methods created not only academic-related issues. But also lead to having some personal issues, which is a serious consideration among undergraduates. Under the normal conditions, starting from the very first day at their university, undergraduates practiced learning as groups. But with the new normal conditions, they had to restrict education only to home. They have to engage in isolated learning, which was less energetic compared to their previous experiences. They have to pay more attention to catch up with the lecture, and the long-hour lectures were hard to concentrate on. Due to the deviation from the traditional learning environment, many undergraduates stated that sitting on a chair and seeing on the screen constantly feeling sleepy, bored or fed up during online lecture sessions.

Also, few undergraduates have found it very difficult to engage with online lectures as they have some health issues. Those are adversely affecting their online learning experience. For them, online learning was exhausting.

“I'm suffering from migraine, so it's difficult for me to use headphones for more than 15 minutes. I can somehow manage one lecture. But when there are subsequent lectures during the day, I am not in a position to handle it. I end up being nauseous” (Respondent 23)

Few other undergraduates missed their lectures sometimes due to family commitments. Some were helping their parents with their cultivations. And some have to extend their support for domestic chores while staying at home, which disturbs their academic concentration.

“When you are at home, you need to attend domestic work and help other works. Sometimes supporting the family being the family driver” (Respondent 28)

The above findings indicated the numerous problems faced by undergraduates while undergoing the online learning experience. All those problems are summed up in the table below.

Table 1: Thematic table on problems faced by undergraduates in online leaning

Research Objective	Themes	Sub Themes
Problems faced by undergraduates in online learning	Technical issues	Internet connectivity issues
		Mobile service issues
		Unavailability of devices
		Frequent power cuts or failures
		Trouble shooting
	Absence of conducive learning environment	External disruptions
		Less peer interactions
		Minimal interaction with lecturer
		Absence of non-verbal communication
		Weather conditions
	Financial burden	Purchase of required devices
		Internet service subscriptions
		Other supplementary expenses
	Issues encountered from Lecturers	Speedy delivery of the content
		Non-concern about break in between
		Unavailability of meet-ups beyond lecture time
		Poor audio and video quality
		Unavailability of complete content in recordings
	Pedagogical issues	Long hour lectures
		Assessment methods
		Delivery of quantitative/analytical courses
	Personal issues	Boredom and tiredness
		Difficulties in retaining attention for long hours
		Feeling isolated
		Stress and other health issues
		Family related commitments

When comparing the findings of this study with the existing empirical literature, it was found that many researchers have confirmed the similar problems undergone by the students in online learning. Islam et al. (2015) and Bonfield et al. (2020) have identified technical challenges, student characteristics, learning environment and instructor characteristics as the main problems faced by the students when engaging in online learning. The same has been emphasized by the undergraduates considered in the study under the themes of technical challenges, personal issues, no learning environment and problems encountered from the lecturers.

Under the technical issues, access to technology was considered as one of the main factors of effective online learning by Bryson & Andres (2020) and in this study, undergraduates confirmed that they are facing challenges due to no or less access to the internet and technology. The undergraduates in the study have mentioned that connectivity issues, frequent power cuts and unavailability of proper devices have minimized their access to technology, which exclude them from effective participation in the online learning process. Similarly, Dhawan (2020) also stated that downloading errors, issues with installation, login problems, problems with audio and video are major issues faced by students when studying online.

In this study, under personal issues undergraduates have stated that feeling sleepy, boredom, tiredness during online learning, made them difficult to retain attention during the lecture. However, retaining personal attention was identified as an important element by Dhawan (2020). According to Islam et al. (2015), students learn through interacting, through visual presentation, by listening to instructions and using written notes. Paulsen & McCormick (2020) have also identified learning style which affects online learning. The change of the mode of education to online have influenced the most familiar styles of learning, and as a result, undergraduates in this study pointed out that they faced difficulties when learning quantitative subjects. The reasons may be this change of learning style and their inability to retain attention in the online platform.

Many scholars have identified the issues relating to the learning environment as a key problem in online learning, which was confirmed by our study too. Singh & Thurman, (2019) have identified the importance of interact with instructors and other students. This requires attending live lectures, engaging in real-time interactions between educators and learners, and obtaining instant feedback, however, undergraduates of this study were not able to do due to the interruptions caused by the cost of online learning and connectivity issues. According to this study, no interactions, external disturbances, inability to make effective non-verbal communication have been identified as barriers to a conducive learning environment.

According to the literature, instructor characteristics also determine the success of online learning. As Tichavsky et al. (2015) and Jo et al. (2020) stated, the instructor's role is crucial in online education. This was confirmed through the findings of this study as well. Undergraduates pointed out that the problems encounter by the lecturers as a major issue in online learning. Speedy lectures and lengthy lectures, poor audio-video quality of the lecturer's send have reduced the amount of interaction and understanding of the undergraduates.

In addition to that, there was literature suggesting the cost embedded with online learning as a problematic factor in online learning. OECD, (2020) report stated that students from low-income backgrounds undergo many difficulties due to the cost involved in learning technologies. It was reflected by the current study too as device and accessories purchasing

cost and internet subscription in online learning, which consumes a huge proportion for a low-income family.

Apart from the above, the undergraduates in this study have revealed few more concerns relating to online learning including issues with online real-time assessments and issues due to bad weather conditions. Issues arising from online real-time assessments which the majority of undergraduates are suffering from mainly due to the poor connectivity problems caused by lower internet coverage in the country or strength of the technical devices used by the students. Probably they may not have financial comfort to go for expensive devices considering their family income. Further, the impact of bad weather conditions can be considered as a contextual matter that is occurring in the monsoon season. Health issues and family commitments have also been identified under the theme of personal issues, which the referred literature has not mentioned. All those problems stated in the study caused the undergraduates to feel that online learning experience is stressful and uncomfortable, especially during a pandemic period. Yet, the ultimate purpose of learning is to develop a competent individual both physically and mentally.

5. Conclusion

The transition from traditional physical learning mode to online learning method due to the COVID-19 pandemic created drastic changes in the education sector in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study intends to explore problems faced by undergraduates in online learning in a national university in Sri Lanka by gathering data from undergraduates. The findings revealed that undergraduates in the selected national university are facing different types of problems due to the online learning method. They are technical issues, absence of conducive learning environment, financial burden, issues encountered by lecturers, pedagogical issues, and personal issues. Considering the nature and ramifications of problems identified in the study, it would not suggest the higher education institutes continue the online learning method without providing sustainable solutions for those issues emphasized by undergraduates. Otherwise, it would create a huge inequity in access to education and an inevitable knowledge gap among the current generation who are pursuing studies online. Therefore, this study provides useful implications for both the education policy formulators and higher education institutions for the improvement of their online learning methods. Since Sri Lanka is implementing a free education policy up to the university level, the policy makers are required to reconsider the equity aspect in adapting island-wide online education. Also, higher education institutions are needed to concern about the appropriate delivery methods and diversity in skills among undergraduates to grasp the knowledge given through online education.

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