

PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS OF ONLINE LEARNING DUE TO ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SRI LANKA: A STUDY BASED ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN GALLE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT: Current Sri Lanka has been hit by the worst economic crisis in the history. Due to the economic crisis of country the government of Sri Lanka has decided to close all the schools considering the difficulties of students and teachers coming to schools due to the shortage of fuel. As a remedy, they have introduced the online system. This research was conducted to identify what kind of experience secondary school students had when they were educated through the online system that was introduced in the wake of the economic crisis. For that purpose, this research has been conducted based on five main schools in the Galle district of the southern province. The data collected from the students revealed that the online system was not new to them. That is, during the Covid-19 period, the students were taught through the online system, so the research has revealed that even though they have some knowledge about the online system, it has become difficult for the students to carry out their education in the face of the economic crisis. The most important thing revealed by the research is that only a limited number of people have expressed their interest in the online system. All the rest have revealed their dissatisfaction with the online system. For the welfare of the students, the government should immediately abolish the online system and switch to the face-to-face teaching-learning process.

Key Words: Sri Lanka, Crisis, Economic, Education, Online, Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a recent example of a country that has collapsed economically. When compared against other countries in the south Asian region, Sri Lanka recorded the highest inflation rate in the month of February 2022 (Source: Public Finance). Headline inflation, as measured by the year-on-year (Y-o-Y) change in the Colombo Consumer Price Index (CCPI, 2013=100) increased to 54.6% in June 2022 from 39.1% in May 2022. (Report: Central Bank of Sri Lanka) To overcome this crisis, the Sri Lankan government must act with foresight and clarity of vision.

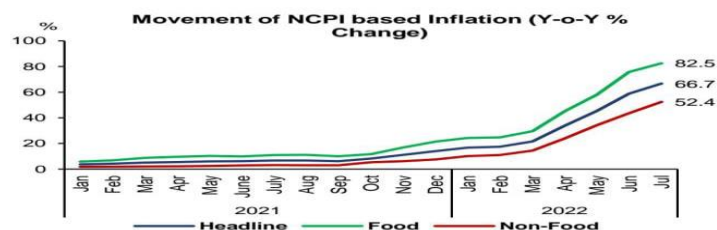


Figure 1: Source – CBSL 2022 Report

Since ancient times, Sri Lankans have been known for their fertility. As a result, Sri Lanka has had to submit to various states as a colonial state for centuries in order to gain the attention of various states. Following that, a war broke out within the country after many struggles for independence from those states. It's because minorities accuse them of not having the same rights as the rest of the country, demand their rights, and demand their own country. Hundreds of thousands of young Sri Lankans were killed during the thirty-year battle fought inland. Despite efforts to end the conflict and bring peace to the country, many politicians refused. They wanted to spread racism and religiosity in Sri Lanka so that they could achieve their political goals and create unrest in the country, ensuring their political future. Sri Lanka has now fallen into an irreversible economic abyss as a result of such political agendas that have plagued the country for decades. Today, the world considers Sri Lanka to be just another bankrupt country. It is unfortunate that a country like Sri Lanka, which once shone brightly around the world, now finds itself in this position. Following independence in 1948, Sri Lankan politicians established a dictatorial executive presidency through constitutional amendments. They then competed for the position of executive president. These executive presidents were encouraged to implement various projects and programs in the name of development in order to gain public acceptance. Due to a lack of financial resources, large loans from developed countries were required for these development projects.

The situation in Sri Lanka today is one of being stuck in a debt trap that cannot be lifted. At the same time, Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves are declining and there is a shortage of dollars. The Sri Lankan government claims it does not even have the funds to complete the remaining week's work in Sri Lanka. Monthly loan repayments in Sri Lanka have risen to \$7 billion. At the same time, the country is experiencing a shortage of goods due to a lack of dollars. As a result, the country is experiencing a severe economic downturn. Commodity prices have increased dramatically. There is insufficient supply to meet the market's demand. Milk powder, gas, rice, medicine, petrol and diesel, for example, are all in short supply. People have also had to wait in queues for many days to obtain such necessities for daily life. People who have been waiting in queues for essential items can be seeming despair. Despite having money of goods, people who are unable to meet their basic needs and are oppressed are demanding a solution to the crisis and expressing their dissatisfaction through protest and anti-government rallies.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said he is forced to print money to pay salaries for government employees. In the first quarter of 2022, the nation printed 588 billion rupees (Hazra, 2022). This action will further depreciate the rupee and push Sri Lanka deeper into the economic abyss. People are now agitating for a solution to this economic crisis and behaving artistically. Many say that the politicians who are currently ruling Sri Lanka will not be able to save Sri Lanka from this situation and that it is important that economic experts intervene. Many sectors in Sri Lanka have been disrupted as a result of the crisis, including the educational sector. The government has closed all schools and directed all students to an online education system in order to reduce school costs and avoid road congestion for teachers and students as a result of the on-going oil crisis. Students have been severely affected at this time due to the economic difficulties caused by the shortage of goods in Sri Lanka, the inability to pay

attention to lessons when studying through the online education system, students missing out on the experience with school friends, and so on. This research is being conducted to determine the difficulties that students face in directing them to an online system in the face of the economic crisis, as well as the factors that affect them.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The covid-19 pandemic has caused various sectors to collapse in many countries. Developing countries like Sri Lanka were also affected by it. As a result, Sri Lanka is facing a major economic crisis in the year 2022. The research problem of this study is observing the problems faced by Sri Lankan secondary school students in distance education during the period of economic crisis.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There are two objectives that are aimed to be fulfilled through this research. They are as follows;

- To evaluate the effects of economic crisis to the school education sector in Sri Lanka
- To identify what kind of problems the students faced due to the crisis.

4. METHODOLOGY

The children in Sri Lanka who are concerned about the future are the focus of this study. This study aims to learn what the students think of the online education system that was implemented in the wake of the financial crisis. This research has included students from all urban and rural schools in the Southern Province's Galle district. This study is aimed at secondary school students in the Galle district. A questionnaire is distributed to the 150 students in order to collect data from them. Galle Education Zone was chosen because it has students from both rural and urban areas. When an area around Colombo is used for research, rural students are excluded because only urban students are present. As a result, this region was chosen in a way that is beneficial to both parties. This study employed qualitative methodology. Simultaneously, quantitative methodology has been combined and applied. The primary reason for using qualitative methodology is that the goal of our research is to determine the students' interest in online education methodology in the face of economic crisis. As a result, qualitative methodology is best suited for this. All demographic groups, including adults, children, school children, young women, etc. have been equally impacted by the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, and the lives of all people, including the poor, the wealthy, and people in the middle class, have turned into tragedies as a result. The students' condition has gotten worse in this scenario. Uncertainly, Because of the power-hungry actions of politicians, they lack even educational facilities in the face of a future.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

The economic crisis that has developed in Sri Lanka has had a significant impact on the general populace. The students have suffered the most because all the schools have been closed, disrupting their educational activities. Our study's focus is on how the introduction of an online education system during Sri Lanka's economic crisis has changed children's attitudes toward education. For that, a literature review has been conducted on a number of studies about the online education system that have been conducted in Sri Lanka and other nations.

Shibly, M.A. (2022) corresponding author of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, has conducted a research under the title Economic crisis and its impact on economic development. The purpose of that study is to find the cause of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. This research has focused on recovery methods to reduce the impact of the economic crisis on Sri Lanka's crisis and Sri Lanka's future growth. The methodology used for the research is the quantitative methodology. As it is a qualitative research, data has been collected from articles, books and online resources. The results of the research are that there is no universal recipe for all types of crises, not only for Sri Lanka, but also for all countries in a particular crisis and the best way to cope with such events. The research finding that the strategy is to use optimal adverse effects on the combination of policy ingredients that reduce the economy. These researchers recommend that Sri Lanka should focus on preventing increasing and possibly unsustainable deficits and counter the policy of crisis-affected developed economies. It reveals that interest rates should be slightly increased to keep inflation low. Rather than curing this crisis, prevention is the right decision. Research has revealed that the best solution is to create a new/alternative economic model that distributes the benefits of economic development to all instead of concentrating it on a few.

According to a research done by Monali (2022) Sri Lanka is facing a severe economic crisis as a result of the depletion of the country's foreign reserves, resulting in a shortage of food, fuel, medicine, cement and other necessary products in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is in the midst of a severe economic crisis as a result of the depletion of foreign reserves leading to shortages of food, petrol, medicine, cement and other essential supplies. Economists hope that as a result of the policy initiatives taken so far and the improvement of the Covid-19 situation, the Sri Lankan government will resolve this crisis soon. While the situation on the ground and analysis of the government's policy actions suggest that Sri Lankans will not see economic relief anytime soon, global geo-political-economic trends, especially in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, suggest otherwise. In Sri Lanka, public protest against the government's handling of the matter is steadily growing. Declining economic growth has been the subject of this research study. For that, graphs have been taken and how Sri Lanka's economic recession happened step by step and necessary recommendations for building the economy have also been provided

Stephen Paul Heyneman (1990) has written a journal under the title of economic crisis and the quality of education. According to that journal, the economic crisis in

developing countries has severely damaged the quality of education of students. Due to lack of stationery, books, etc., which are required for education, students have been severely affected and it has adversely affected their education. Countries around the world are trying to adjust their education systems to control the impact of the economic crisis, but the policy changes they make are not practical. However, the financial crisis can also have some positive results. It can increase the professional ability to manage the education system based on what is feasible rather than precedent, and with it, than otherwise exists in the field of education. The problem may require multilateral solutions based on new international agreements on the need for basic education. Although a discussion of new solutions may make sense, the story should begin where it began - at the time of hope and quantitative expansion. This journal is aimed at developing countries.

Online education in Sri Lanka was first introduced in the face of COVID 19. One of the main factors in Sri Lanka's economic crisis was covid 19. During the period of covid, students were severely affected by online education. This study also used a research showing how students were affected by Covid for this literature review. According to a research by Rameez, Fawsar & Lumna (2020) on the topic of "impact of covid 19 on higher education sectors in Sri Lanka", The following are the findings of the study conducted by the students of South Eastern University of Sri Lanka: With covid 19 activating the world, modern scientific and technological changes have made online education an integral part of the education system in the contemporary world. Although an online learning system existed in Sri Lanka prior to the Covid-19 outbreak and the quarantine that followed, the online education system has become an unavoidable part of the teaching and learning process in higher education. Covid-19 As the traditional higher education system has been challenged; there has been a worldwide need for every government to incorporate online education into their higher education system. Prior to Covid-19, however, online education was not given much weight in the field of higher education in Sri Lanka. The closure of universities due to Covid-19, on the other hand, was a crisis, prompting the Sri Lankan government to promote the online education system as an alternative solution to allow students to pursue higher education activities without disrupting their education. As a result, online education has become an essential component of higher education in Sri Lanka today. However, there are numerous obstacles and challenges in higher education, particularly in Sri Lankan universities, for the success of online education. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on the teaching and learning processes at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, as well as the challenges the University faced in maintaining the online education system during the Covid-19 period. According to the study's findings, the university faced a number of challenges in terms of online distribution, practical issues with test preparation, assessment, analysis, and doctoral thesis monitoring. This study also highlights the lack of an online teaching and learning environment, as well as online teaching and learning skills among staff and students, both of which are critical to the smooth operation of the teaching and learning process at South-eastern University of Sri Lanka during the Covid-19 period. Because of the widespread epidemic, they are also concerned about how long it will take to complete the online study. According to the study, the university should focus on a hybrid education system that addresses the issues of online education that staff and

students face in order to improve the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

An another research was conducted by Roy Harrod (1962) Economic Co-operation and development says accordingly that school closures affect over 421 million children in 39 countries, with 22 countries resorting to partial "localized" closures. One of the most important shifts in education is the resultant largest "online movement" in educational history. These, and other subsequent changes, provide us with a glimpse into the future of education, which many experts predict will usher in a new normal in learning. Among university students, there has been a lot of interest in online learning readiness over the years. Hung et al presented and validated a conceptual framework based on previous research by other researchers. The study looked at students' readiness for online learning. The three SDL factors were found to have a positive relationship with computer use and individual learning, but a negative relationship with language learning anxiety, with the desire for learning having the strongest association with computer use. Gender and age differences did not play a significant role in the use of computers for SDL, despite the fact that older students scored higher on both desire to learn and anxiety. In terms of computer and internet efficacy, a Hong Kong study of university students discovered those students' own computer technology skills, attitudes toward it, learners' learning styles, and peer and teacher support were some of the major factors that affected technology use for learning.

How students in Asian countries perceive the online education system and the challenges it presents, how Sri Lankan students suffer in the face of online education during the covid 19 period, how students in specific campus perceive online education, or how a faculty students perceive online education in the recent COVID-19 period, like that so much research has been conducted on the problems encountered, but no research on school children has been conducted thus far. As a result, this study was conducted with a focus on schoolchildren. It will also concentrate on students in the Galle Education Zone in the Galle District of the Southern province after concluding that concentrating on a particular group of students in a particular district, specific education zone, or particular province will increase productivity. This study has a research gap in that area.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis and discussion of research data is a crucial aspect of any research project. How will the country's economic position effect students? The goal of this study was to find out what students thought about closing schools and performing education activities online, among other things. As a result, conclusions will be reached and appropriate suggestions will be made based on the replies given by the students to the questions utilized in this research.

6.1 Percentage of Students Who Participated in the Study by Gender

The study involved 150 students, 63% of whom were male and 37% of whom were female.

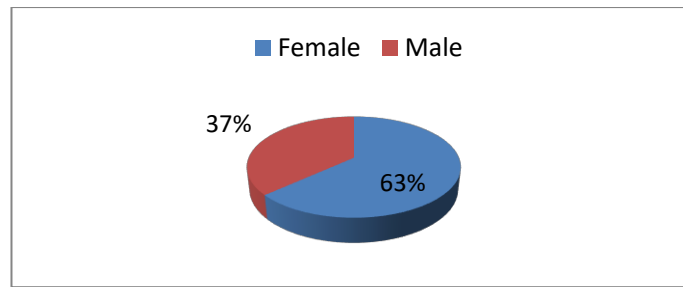


Figure 2: percentage of students by gender

6.2 Students' Grade Level of Studying

When it comes to online education, school students frequently encounter difficulties. As a result, with the exception of the primary section, we chose the secondary section of several major schools in the southern province for this research. For this study, 3% of sixth-year students, 17.6% of seventh-year students, 6.7% of eighth-year students, 9% of ninth-year students, 2% of tenth-year students, and 30% of eleventh-year students participated. In addition, 8% of 12th-year students and 23.7% of 13th-year students took part in this study.

Table 1: Students grade level

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
6	5	3
7	26	17.6
8	10	6.7
9	14	9
10	3	2
11	45	30
12	12	8
13	35	23.7
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 Research

6.3 Student's Awareness of Distance Education

In the face of Covid 19, the online education system was first introduced to Sri Lanka. Most students in Sri Lanka were unaware of the online education system at the time. Today, however, the situation is different. 90% of the students there said they were aware of the online system. Approximately 10% of students were not aware of the online education system. Students' awareness of online education has grown in the online education system that was implemented in the aftermath of the economic crisis. This has been revealed.

Table 2: Student's awareness of distance education

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	135	90
No	15	10
Total	150	100

Source- 2022 Research

6.4 Availability of Tools

Students require different equipment when participating in the online education system. Due to a lack of necessary equipment, the majority of students are unable to participate in online method. To determine whether or not a lack of equipment hinders students' education, when asked if they had the necessary equipment to participate online, approximately 83.3 students stated that they did. However, approximately 16.7% of students lacked the necessary equipment to pursue online education.

Table 3: Availability of tools

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	125	83.3
No	25	16.7
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 Research

6.5 Types of Equipment Used by Students

Students are encouraged to use whatever devices are available and effective for them when taking part in online education. The most significant finding from the students' responses to the question about the types of devices they use is that only 76.7% of them use mobile phones. 2.3% of students use a tablet computer, 10% uses a laptop, 6.1% use a desktop computer, and 3.6% use a shared device, which is a device they share with a family member. 1.3% of students don't have any equipment, so they can't participate in online learning.

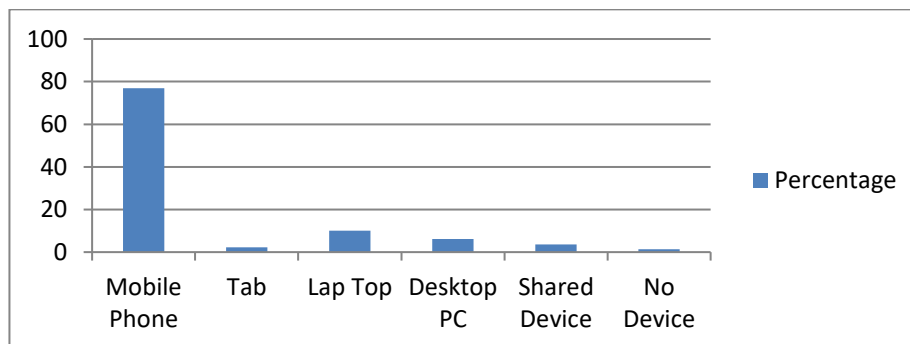


Figure 4: Types of equipment used by students

6.6 Satisfaction Level with Online Education

Many students complain that they are dissatisfied with online education due to the difficulty of the online education system. When asked about their level of satisfaction with online education, approximately 6.7% of students said it was extremely high. About 20% of those polled thought it was good, while 36.7% thought it was average. Approximately 16.7% of students are dissatisfied, and approximately 19.9% of students are completely dissatisfied. It is clear that, despite their initial dislike, the students have grown accustomed to the online education system and have developed the habit of being self-directed.

Table 4: Satisfaction level of students with online education

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very good	10	6.7
Good	30	20
Normal	55	36.7
Low	25	16.7
Not satisfied	30	19.9
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 research

6.7 Possibility to Access Internet

As internet facilities are very poor in most parts of Sri Lanka, common people have to face various difficulties when doing work through the internet. The same applies to online education. When students were asked about their ability to access the Internet, 90% said that they were able to access the Internet. The remaining 10% of students did not have the ability to access the Internet without interruption.

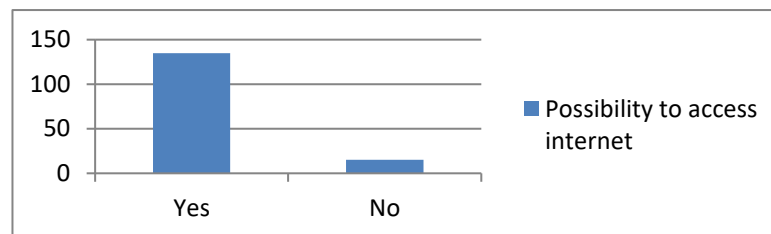


Figure 5: Possibility to access internet

6.8 Satisfaction with the Speed of Internet Connection

Due to the slow speed of internet connection, some students have to leave their sessions and in some cases students have to face problems such as skipping lessons. About 43.3% of the students who participated in this research are satisfied with the internet speed and 56.7% say that they are not satisfied with the internet connection. They are not satisfied with the speed. This makes it clear that most of the people have very low level of internet connection.

Table 5: Satisfaction with the speed of internet

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	65	43.3
No	85	56.7
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 Research

6.9 Ability to Afford the Cost of Internet Connection

Internet companies in Sri Lanka have also increased their rates at a time when everything has gone up due to the economic crisis. School students are a segment without any source of income. Such a division will not be able to bear the cost of

internet facilities at all. When asked about that, about 51% said that they have access to the Internet. About 49% say that they cannot afford the cost.

Table 6: Ability to afford the cost of internet connection

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	77	51
No	73	49
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 research

6.10 The Capacity to Afford Additional Printed Study Materials

Along with the increase in the price of goods, the price of stationary and printed study materials has doubled and tripled. At least 300 rupees will be spent to get the stationary which was bought for one hundred rupees. In such a background, when the school students of Galle district were asked about their ability to bear the cost of printed study materials and stationaries, 36.7 answered as able and the remaining students i.e. 63.3 They also said that a group of people could not afford the expenses

Table 7: The capacity to afford printed study materials

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Able	55	36.7
Not able	95	63.3
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 Research

6.11 Concerning the Impact of Sudden Power Outages on Education

The current government has failed to maintain any sector in the country due to a lack of dollars. As a result, Sri Lankans are experiencing power outages and other economic hardships. As a result, most people's work has been disrupted, and many have had to stop working entirely during the power outage. This has been a source of contention for many. The same issue has had an impact on education. When the power goes out unexpectedly, the internet goes down and the students are forced to leave their classes. When asked about it, 86.7 students said that power outages interfere with their education. Only 13.3 per cent said the power outage is not a problem for them.

Table 8: Impact of sudden power outages on education

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	130	86.7
No	20	13.3
Total	150	100

Source: 2022 Research

6. CONCLUSION

Sri Lanka's education sector has also suffered greatly during a period when all sectors have been disrupted as a result of the country's economic crisis. Although students are somewhat accustomed to the online education system, the economic crisis, unexpected power outages, and regime irregularities are wreaking havoc on their education system. This study also revealed that both ordinary people and students are equally affected. As a result, the rule that oppresses students and violates their free educational rights should be repealed as soon as possible, and an environment for students to learn should be created as soon as possible.

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