



Received: 03-11-2022

Accepted: 13-12-2022

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Preparedness of the Support Staff for Online Teaching in the New Normal: A Case Study

Diyabedanage Nilmini

University of Vocational Technology, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka

Corresponding Author: **Diyabedanage Nilmini**

Abstract

In light of current developments on both the global and local levels, particularly due to the impact of Covid- 19 Global Pandemic situation which forced the entire world to, minimize social contacts wherever possible has become the norm of the day. This situation has caused numerous issues for many establishments, including the universities and educational Institutes across the world. Many activities that were previously carried out with close human contact, such as teaching, field work, laboratory practical and examinations, must now be carried out using the much-discussed 'on line' methods. Since any activity that can be done online should be done so, a comprehensive study

should be conducted to assess the readiness of universities, particularly the University of Vocational Technology of Sri Lanka, to embark on such a project. Although the Academic Staff is equipped with these skills, they cannot be replicated. It is not possible to conduct the affairs of the University only the teachers or academia. The capacity of handling online business of the supportive staff too required to University activities. The purpose of this study was to reveal the capacity of the supportive staff ensure smooth functioning of the University. It was observed that some of them were able to shift their paradigm from hardcopies to digital while some were found difficulties due to various factors.

Keywords: Academic Staff, Education, Online Methods, Supportive Staff, Usage of ICT, Vocational

1. Introduction

In light of current developments on both the global and local levels, particularly the peculiar situation arose due to Covid -19 global pandemic situation, which minimized social contacts wherever possible has become the norm of the day. This situation has caused numerous issues for many establishments, Educational Institutes including the universities and other Higher Educational Institutes across the World. Many activities that were previously carried out with close human contact, such as teaching, field work, and examinations, must now be carried out using the much-discussed 'on line' methods. Since any activity that can be done online should be done so, a comprehensive study should be conducted to assess the readiness of universities, particularly the University of Vocational Technology, of Sri Lanka to embark on such a project. Although the Academic Staff is equipped with these skills, they cannot be replicated with the duties of supportive staff.

The aim of this research is to evaluate capacity of the staffs who do not directly participate in teaching or disseminating knowledge but whose ancillary support is much required to ensure the smooth function of the Academic Staff. Especially at a University established for Vocational Technology which is more focused to vocations and industry than other conventional University which is focused to Academic activities through lecturing, research and references. The staff of the University of Vocational Technology of Sri Lanka was considered as the sample. According to the findings it would be possible to improve mechanism or strategies to conduct the affairs of Vocational and Technology University virtually in future without any hindrance.

1.1 Scope of research

This study focused on the challenges and obstacles encountered during the current global pandemic, as well as the potential facilities and solutions that can be provided to address these issues in the future. The current study is significant because it investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the supportive staff. The post-Covid-19 crisis will take the form of a dangerous change in all societal institutions, particularly the educational sector. These changes necessitate wise leaders developing guidelines for reshaping the future of all sectors. Higher education will play a critical role in this process, beginning with education and progressing to healthcare, economics, and sports. Otherwise, an unguided strategy will result in failure and confusion. It has been observed that the extraordinary responses and efforts.

The entire world was close down other than the hospitals as per the advices of Medical Professionals. The decision taken to shut down schools, colleges, universities and all other educational institutes was helpful to control the pandemic situation and spread of the disease. Some nations switched to online teaching quickly as they were already prepared.

There are some benefits and drawbacks to online learning. The ability to access online education globally, as well as save time, money, and effort, are benefits of online learning. The Teachers are thoroughly reviewing and preparing for recording, which improves teaching strategies and methods. But the supportive staff was not ready with knowledge, equipment and access to deliver their service similar to performing their duties being at the office. Some difficulties were encountered in English language skills and such as writing, speaking, and reading challenges. Not everyone has reliable internet access. Some staff experienced network issues.

1.2 Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to find out whether the University of Vocational Technology is well equipped to cater to the requirement that accompany the exercise of on-line teaching and its related activities with the aid of current work force of the University. Objectives of this research are to what extent they can be motivated to get them involved in the project, to fill the gaps created by the inadequacies witnessed in the services provided by the support staff and to identify the training needs of such staff.

2. Literature review

Because of the rapid advancements in technology, the education is needed to be updated simultaneously. In order to succeed, it is required to learn irrespective to the time and location living (Wolfinger, 2016) [6]. Over the last twenty years, some global institutes have implemented online learning. However, many secondary and tertiary educational institutes had not been used this mode of education and their staff is unaware of what it entails. The study conducted by (Pelin, *et al.*, 2020) [5] previous analysis of Turkey and other countries in the last five 5 years have been considered in order to determine the current trends in Educational Technology Research Studies. It was discovered that the most highlighted issue within the scope of the research area is the capability of applying Educational Technologies. The study of (Dhawan, 2020) [2] comprises the importance of online learning and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Challenges analysis of e-learning modes in the time of pandemic. Further, the analysis put some light on the growth of Education Technology Start-ups during the time of Covid 19 and focus on suggestions for academic institutions to how to deal with challenges associated with online learning. Descriptive analytical approach was used by (Maatuk, *et al.*, 2022) [4] to identify the possibilities, challenges facing learning activities using and implementing e-learning systems students and teaching staff in the Information Technology (IT) faculty at the University of Benghazi.

3. Research methodology

The selected topic is essentially an issue that might be facing in the process of implementing the on-line teaching and other related activities. The techniques used to test the hypothesis developed according to the topic should be more

or less to deal with the parties involved. Therefore, collecting information through questionnaires and interviews were used for data collection. The collection of relevant data is the base of any substantive research. Hence plan to collect data using both historical and current aspects. Both descriptive casual data collection types are useful in a study like this since the data collection will be of descriptive in nature. Casual data surveying can be adopted in case of applying personal interviews since such applications tend to proceed by way of casual conversations but eliciting important information from the person being interviewed.

A questionnaire prepared giving the option of selecting the most suitable choice according to the respondent's preference. This is designed in a way that the person responding to a particular question may go for the potions either on the positives or negatives in a given scale. Accordingly, each response will be assigned a suitable weight which will be used at the analyzing stage to get them tested against the hypothesis already developed.

Personal interviews conducted using both face to face and via telephone will give the true picture of what is in respondents mind and his honest views of the subject matter. Convenient sampling method was used to select the sample from supporting staff.

4. Results

The study adopted descriptive research methods for the analysis of the obtained data, and its findings focus on four main factors such as the supporting tools used during online delivery of services, the challenges and obstacles encountered during online delivery, support Staff satisfaction with face-to-face and online delivery of Services during lockdown period, and facilities available to access Internet and other IT facilities.

The first research question was about the support staff ability to use systems and tools to facilitate to perform online learning activities.

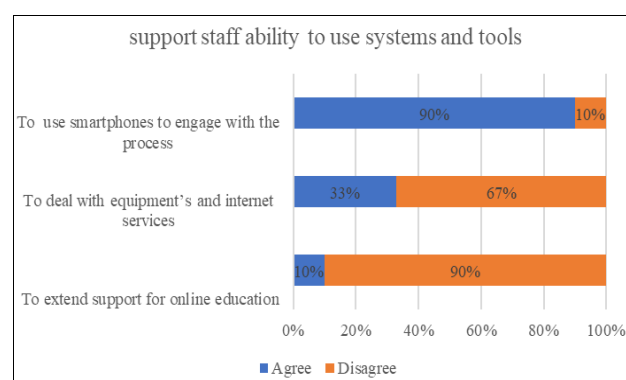


Fig 1

The results revealed that 90% was not sure about their abilities to extend support for online education. About 67% of Support staff is also handicapped with equipment's and internet services hampering their attempts to support online education of UoVT. Of course, nearly 90% of the staff is in possession of smart phones and they got engaged with the process through apps like WhatsApp.

Therefore, most of their support for online education has been more about taking pictures of documents and sending those through WhatsApp to relevant parties.

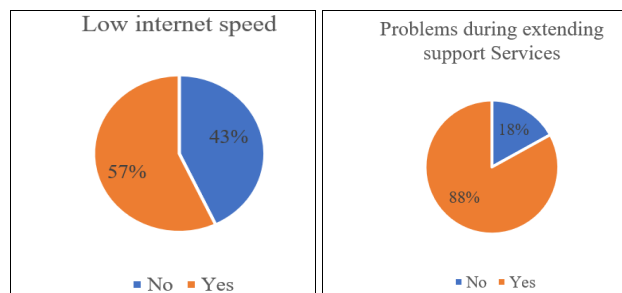


Fig 2

Out of reported challenges and obstacles; the first issue is internet speed, where about 57% of support staff face this problem. The staff who did not encounter any problem during extending support service is 18%.

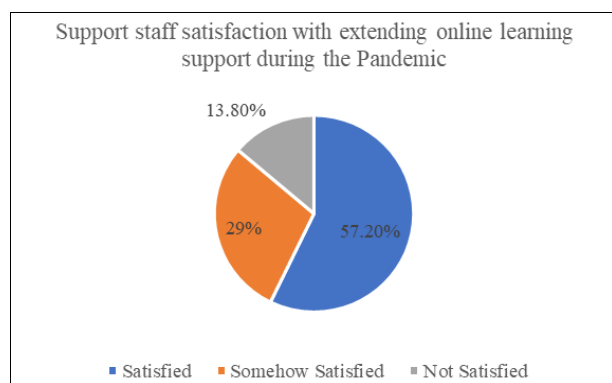


Fig 3

Support staff satisfaction with extending online learning support during the pandemic is about 57.2%. Whereas 29% were somehow satisfied with some preservations. 13.8% of staff were not happy online supporting.

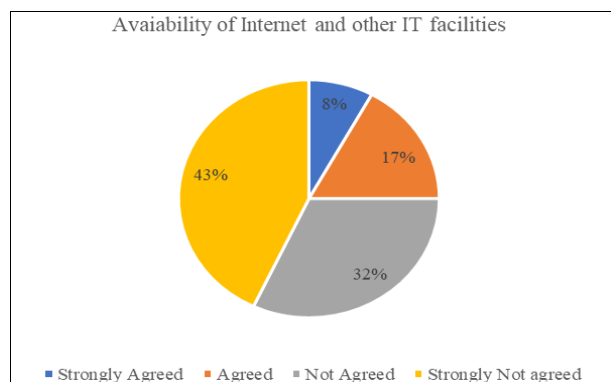


Fig 4

Most of the staff providing supportive services were not in possession of uninterrupted IT facilities. They had been relied on obtaining data on casual basis. According to the above chart most of Staff members did not agree that they enjoyed sufficient data and internet facilities while only 8% agreed that they possessed adequate facilities.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

- Supportive staff did not believe in delivering services from brick and mortar to click online. It was a novel

experience in their career.

- Doubt about accuracy of information and responsibility of delivering services, different levels of authorities and approvals etc.
- They were not equipped with simple IT tools to deliver services online than sending documents as pictures.
- They were not capable of arranging meeting using apps like Zoom or Teams, online sharing documents etc.

6. Suggestions for development

The Director Staff Development Centre (SDC) to arrange a suitable training program to empower supportive staff with simple IT tools to deliver service online without obstacles and efficiently, to deliver parallel support to academic staff when they attend on line academic activities such as teaching, seminars and examinations etc.

7. References

- Daisy Mwanza YE. Managing content in e-learning environments. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. 2005; 36(3):453-463.
- Dhawan S. Online Learning: A Panacea in the Time of COVID-19 Crisis. *Journal of Education Technology Systems*. 2020; 49.
- Julie Coiro MKCLDJL, *Handbook of Research on New Literacies*. 1st Edition ed. New York, 2008. Routledge.
- Maatuk, Abdelsalam M, *et al.* The COVID-19 pandemic and E-learning: challenges and opportunities from the perspective of students and instructors. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*. 2022; 34(1):21-38.
- Pelin E, Metin C, Ayse A. Current Trends in Education Technologies Research Worldwide: Meta-Analysis of Studies between 2015-2020. *ERIC*, 2020, 191-206.
- Wolfinger S. An Exploratory Case Study of Middle School Student Academic Achievement in a Fully Online Virtual School. *ERIC*, 2016, p242.