

Sustaining a Positive Virtual School Climate through Online Teaching in the Covid-19 Pandemic Context

Dr. Belle Louis Jinot

Lecturer, Academic Affairs Division,
Open University of Mauritius, Reduit Mauritius
belle@open.ac.mu

Kheeshwaree Dosieah

PhD Scholar, Open University of Mauritius
mysticruna@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The well-established standards in the education sector got ripped off with Covid-19 resulting to initial tentative fumbling to newly adapted norms worldwide, thus impacting heavily on school climate. The purpose of this study is to understand the virtual challenges faced by school leaders and teachers during the Covid-19 crisis period to sustain a positive school climate. This qualitative study considers a phenomenological approach where the personal and professional experiences of stakeholders are interpreted and analysed through thematic and content analysis. Semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis are used to encapsulate the two dimensions of school climate – teaching and learning and safety. Purposive sampling targets 42 teachers and 4 school leaders from 4 secondary schools. This study found that the initial asynchronous mode of online teaching adopted failed lamentably. The later zoom sessions with students' cameras off and muted, low attendance, delayed answers from students, parents' scrutiny, students and other members popping in and out made online teaching a challenging 'one-man show' task, more like a 'public climate' than a classroom teaching-learning climate. The reintegration into face-to-face learning witnessed oncoming challenges of sluggishness, lack of interest in studies, demotivated and unsettled spirit, increased cases of indiscipline but extra-curricular activities kindled students' enthusiasm and happiness, and teachers have become more resilient. This study raises awareness towards value system like working as an altruistic team, swift intelligent decision-making by school leaders, and strengthening of mutual dependence. All the stakeholders at the school level and the national crisis team should work in close collaboration for the successful adaptation to the new teaching and learning uncertain environment.

Keywords: *Covid-19 pandemic, Challenges School climate, Learning*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 ultimately forced abrupt but urgent changes to the daily lives of people all over the world. The World Health Organisation declared a global health emergency on 30th January 2020 (WHO, 2020) and, in Mauritius, all educational institutions were closed as from 19 March 2020 till they were re-opened on 1 July 2020. The Mauritian government passed a Bill for remote learning through digital device on 14 May 2020 so as to ensure uninterrupted learning and also avoid vulnerable groups from being penalised. We have had three lockdowns and the state mandated restrictive policies to endorse emergency remote teaching. On the one hand, the school closure has impacted more than 1.5 billion students in the world (UNESCO, 2020); but, on the other hand, the transition to emergency remote teaching and

online teaching and learning brought about uncertainties that made online teaching extremely challenging for teachers (Kim & Asbury, 2020). The Covid pandemic has had a devastating effect on school climate worldwide, disrupting the normal teaching-learning process and curbing on educational activities so as to abide by strict sanitary protocols (Mandapat & Farin, 2021).

Synchronous online classes with students and teachers working together but from different locations have been a novel 2020 experience in Mauritian secondary schools. The Covid-19 pandemic spread has been the driving force at different intervals behind such a teaching-learning mode. Oyedotun (2020) refers to the disparities, challenges and blessings witnessed by developing countries due to the abrupt drifting to online teaching with the Covid-19 pandemic and how these form part of the new norms in the academic world in developing countries. Teachers were compelled to adopt this new mode of teaching. So many years of conformed teaching practices underwent a complete metamorphosis. El-Soussi (2022) asserts that there was a changeover in the roles and practices of teachers be it in pedagogy, organizational and societal tasks, and teachers experienced a sense of insecurity in their attitudes, beliefs as conceived earlier to what had to be done in an online setting.

Navigating to remote learning or online teaching has become a recurrent practice in Mauritius owing to cyclonic weather, heavy rainfall, flooded areas besides the initial cause of Covid-19 pandemic spread. Hence, it is crucial to study the challenges faced by heads of schools and teachers to monitor remote learning. Besides, Alban Conto *et al.* (2021) stated that now that online teaching has become a frequent mode, it is possible to have progressive goals if executed with the appropriate assistance and that certain countries can lag behind if overlook quality teaching based on novelty and equity. The present study, therefore, aims at examining the challenges secondary schools faced with emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic context and analysing their bearing on the sustenance of a positive virtual school climate.

The research objective is:

To analyse the perceptions of School leaders and teachers on challenges emerging from the emergent remote teaching (ERT)

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we consider the literature that relates to the focus of the research of this paper. We intend to examine the findings from the literature on the challenges faced by schools in sustaining a positive school climate to ensure effective remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. With emergency remote teaching (ERT), which became the most essential and indispensable tool to ensure continuous education in secondary schools, the challenges were numerous. Most importantly, though teachers had a crucial role to play in providing quality learning opportunities to students (Choi *et al.*, 2021), they had to face taxing psychological challenges. Teachers faced a lack of resources to meet satisfactory and successfully the online teaching and learning requirements; they were not prepared pedagogically and technologically to shift suddenly and sustain remote teaching; and they did not get the leadership support from the school head and administration (Brooks *et al.*, 2022). They did not receive adequate support from their own school (Hodges *et al.*, 2020). With the feeling of frustration, anxiety and guilt of their inefficiency and job inefficacy, they developed a low level of resilience which leads to a low ability to cope with uncertainties and problems (Richards *et al.*, 2016). Teachers suffered from the state of emotional exhaustion due to the additional stress that arose from the additional work they had to do by adapting teaching and learning materials and giving feedback to students in the virtual learning environment (Estrella, 2022), especially the younger teachers, (Patino, 2021) and from the

fear of the unknown (FOTU) (Carleton, 2016). Indeed, Brooks *et al.*, (2022) found that the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the teaching experiences of teachers due to the excessively high demands and expectations that arise from the curriculum delivery on web-conference platforms and the necessity to maintain the learning outcomes for their students. The emotional labour of teachers has been very challenging (de Ruiter *et al.*, 2021). It is also challenging for teachers to develop and adopt a trauma-informed pedagogy that would take into consideration the intersection of online teaching and learning, remote teaching and the pandemic-induced trauma of both teachers and their students (Moser *et al.*, 2021). Teachers are often left on their own devices to develop their coping strategies without any support and that may drive their spirit and motivation low. Pettit (2020) posits that they find it challenging to remain focused and productive in their teaching tasks.

Moreover, unlike developed countries, in most developing countries, there was the inconsistency in supplying power and low internet speed due to unprecedentedly high internet demand that could not be met by the internet providers (Oyedotun, 2020). In addition to poor internet connection and technological constraints, teachers and students lacked access to electronic devices (Salayo *et al.*, 2020). This impacted the teaching and learning process and interactions between the teachers and the students and among students. It was challenging to ensure that the use of ERT was technologically and logistically viable, to maintain the academic standards of online teaching and to ensure the equity of access for all students (Kinsella, 2022), so that “No child is left behind in online teaching and learning”.

Teachers also found it challenging to organise interactions in online teaching. Online interaction takes place in three ways, namely academic, collaborative and social interaction, whereby all three are based on learning, student satisfaction and student engagement (Jung *et al.*, 2002). However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, pandemic pedagogy does not imply recording videos (Johnson *et al.*, 2020) and using quizzes (Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020), where the teacher uses a one-way transactional teaching approach and students are passively listening to the lectures. Pandemic pedagogy is transferring learning fully online, synchronously or asynchronously (Wong *et al.*, 2021), but ensuring that the curriculum design and the implantation of the pedagogical practices are aligned with online delivery (Brooks, Creely & Laletas, 2022). However, due to a lack of online pedagogical training in using the online platform for remote teaching, unstable internet connections, minimal technical skills, and a lack of school policy for online teaching and learning, there were little to no interactions in the online classes (Le *et al.*, 2022). On the other hand, students do not participate in online classes because they consider teachers to be the main provider of knowledge and they prefer clear instructions, detailed tasks for completion, specific learning outcomes and a very structured learning process (Bui, 2019). Yet, teachers struggled with their limited technological and pandemic pedagogical skills to navigate successfully the new normal of remote teaching (Rasheed *et al.*, 2020).

Previous studies found that there is a positive relationship between dialogue-rich teaching and the academic achievement and cognitive development of students (Howe & Abedin, 2013; Resnick *et al.*, 2015). However, in the context of remote teaching in secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gutentag *et al.*, (2022) found that teachers used less academically productive talks (APT) and this had a negative impact on their psychological well-being of teachers. Less APT means less classroom activities, less group work, less peer dyads and less questioning. Teachers used less APT during the COVID-19 pandemic because they were already energetically depleted on account of their anxieties related to the disease itself and the safety of their family members. Therefore, they could not make the extra effort required for APT (Muhomen *et al.*, 2021). However, those teachers who used more APT, used more interactive teaching formats, and thus, they had lower burnout, a higher level of job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Gutentag *et al.*, 2022). The need to feel connected

to their students was badly felt by teachers (White & Van Der Boor, 2020) and that challenging need could only be overcome through more APT in the online classes.

Furthermore, monitoring the student learning and the evaluating of the effectiveness of the instruction was challenging in remote teaching that takes place in the virtual learning environment. Fauzi and Sastar Khusuma (2020) found that teachers were dissatisfied with remote teaching and learning mainly on account of their inability to plan and evaluate online learning. In the same vein, Saha *et al.*, (2022) found the significant challenges in online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were the difficulty for teachers to monitor practical work, assess them and provide sufficient feedback. Doing the assessment and grading the work of students were difficult with the pandemic-based inconveniences. However, assignments were considered to be the most appropriate alternative assessment strategy than online examinations (Selvaraj *et al.*, 2021).

Another challenge for secondary school teachers in creating and sustaining a positive school climate is student disengagement in remote teaching and learning. Moser *et al.* (2021) assert that teachers find it difficult to engage students in natural conversational turn-taking and cannot support comprehensive input through body language and gestures. They also found that teachers cannot obtain the parental interaction and support that would motivate the students to be more involved in the learning process virtually. The high level of absenteeism and the high number of irregularities of the students in the virtual learning environment is also very discouraging for school and college teachers (Pal *et al.*, 2021). Without the physical presence of the teacher, students do not remain focused in remote teaching and learning (Estrella, 2021); teachers cannot force the latter to turn their cameras on and they may simply not respond to their questions (Jurez-Diaz & Perales, 2021; Tomczyk & Walker, 2021). It is, therefore obvious that teachers cannot be sure of the involvement and active engagement of students in virtual learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Hermeneutic phenomenology is suitable for this study since it gives the value of understanding to experiences lived and a richer analysis to the phenomenon under the study (Kagimu, 2019). It gives the opportunities for interpretation of the context towards the authentic existence of the teachers and school leaders (Martinkova & Parry, 2016). The current study focuses on the working experiences of teachers and school leaders after the introduction of OTL as a replacement for traditional schooling. Heidegger (2001) and Kagimu (2019) cautioned that effacing individual convictions is inconceivable in explaining the experiences of others. To mitigate the potential sources of bias, data has been recorded, transcribed and cited exactly as experienced by participants by using thick descriptions. Triangulation of data collected further ascertained the veracity of the situations lived.

A purely qualitative research design was conducted to examine the challenges faced by teachers in shifting to remote teaching and learning. This design is most appropriate for this study as it reveals what is happening in the real-life situation of people who are involved in their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2020). Moreover, it provides the opportunity to investigate the meanings that teachers attach to their personal and social problems as well as their professional problems in schools (Creswell, 2014). To achieve this, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and school leaders in selected secondary schools. An interview protocol that investigates into the challenges faced by teachers in practising online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic was used to gather information from key informants about the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis were used to encapsulate the two dimensions of school climate, namely, teaching-learning and safety.

Sampling and Data collection

This study used the purposive sampling technique as it is a widely used in qualitative research whereby those cases most likely to be information-rich, in regard to the aims of the study, are selected in an attempt to use limited resources (Patton, 2002). Indeed, informants are selected based on their particular knowledge of, and experience with the phenomenon under study (Robinson, 2014). The sample is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: School categories, population sample and research instruments

SN	School Category	Sampling Population	Research Instrument
1	Low Performing Regional secondary school	School Leader	1 Semi-Structured Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview
2	Academy	School Leader	1 Semi-Structured Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview
3	Academy	School Leader	1 Semi-Structured Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview
4	Average Performing Regional secondary school	School Leader	1 Semi-Structured Interview
		6 educators	1 Focus Group Interview

The information related to the research aims was gathered in four secondary schools as indicated in Table 1. The four research sites indicate 3 secondary school categories, namely, 2 Academies, 1 regional average performing school, 1 regional low performing school that have been selected. Four school leaders and 42 teachers formed part of the sample for the in-depth interviews. The selected teachers and school leaders needed to have a direct experience of emergency remote teaching and be available time simultaneously for a focus group interview and semi-structured interview respectively.

To maintain the anonymity of participants, abbreviations have been used; 'SL' stands for school leader and 'T' for teacher.

Pilot focus group interview at the initial stage was carried out aiming to examine the feasibility of the approach meant for the larger scale study. This exploratory phase is crucial to test the appropriateness of the questions scheduled. The Sage Handbook on Qualitative Data Collection (2017) drives home that through pre-test, the functionality of the interview questions is checked, giving space for amendments and also to crosscheck on the rational link between research questions and interview questions

Before the data collection, a letter was sent to the Ministry of Education to seek its permission for data collection from the secondary schools which operate under its aegis. Following all the sanitary protocols set by the government, as per the Quarantine Act 2020, the official letter of approval from the Ministry was presented to the gatekeeper of each

school for the purpose of having access to the research setting and the key informants. The consent of the selected participants was obtained through emails. Each of the interviews lasted for a maximum of one hour.

Data analysis

The information gathered from the individual interview with the school leaders and the focus group interview with the teachers were subject to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were identified, examined and organised; then, codes were analysed and interpreted into categories; the similar categories were grouped into subordinate and superordinate themes. The emerging themes related to the challenges faced by School Leaders and teachers in remote teaching were of interest to the data analysis and interpretation. This process helped to structure the findings of the study to answer the initial aims of the study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, a debriefing was used with the participants before the interviews and member-checking were used with the participants after the data collection and analysis and interpretation for validation purposes. Besides, thick descriptions were used in terms of verbatim statements. The findings of this study are not generalisable due to the small sample. Yet, they are transferable to the extent that the reader may find the profile of the research settings and the participants are similar to theirs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from the study are presented and discussed in this section. From the qualitative research information gathered from the teachers and the school heads, themes related to the research objective - To analyse the perceptions of School leaders and teachers on challenges emerging from the emergent remote teaching (ERT) - were obtained and they are discussed with reference to the Mauritian school context during the COVID-19 pandemic.

i. Online Teaching and Learning (OTL) invasion of schooling: A reality

The invasion of COVID-19 pandemic in the world dumped OTL as a substitute for normal teaching in school system in Mauritius. OTL brought about drastic changes in schooling causing panic and uncertainty among school leaders and teachers, given the absence of adequate resources, skills, planning and preparation. They all unanimously complained that OTL was imposed on schools. This has been elucidated by School Leader 2:

“It was a phase of panic, no planning at all. We were just given instructions to go online. And there was no guidance about the platform”.

School Leader 3 summarised this feeling of helplessness by blatantly adding:

“It was just thrust upon everyone.”

In the same vein, teachers expressed their concern over the sudden OTL unilateral decision from the Ministry of Education by stating:.

“All of a sudden we are told to do OTL. It was very difficult because we were not able to manage.” (T19). Teacher 30 categorically pointed out:

“Ministry imposed certain things on us.”

The Mauritian experience correlates with Ukraine. With sudden crash of the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers and school leaders were taken aback and was compelled to immediately seek other alternative systems (Donnelly *et al.*, 2021). Besides in-house training by ‘champion teachers’ who received training from Ministry on Microsoft 365, even new recruits, IT conversant teachers strived to support colleagues during OLT. Each stakeholder came up with his own resources, devices to monitor, conduct, and follow online teaching.

In one Academy school, with 90 % of highflyers and 80 % of the students coming from good, financially stable families with only one student facing connectivity problem which

eventually got resolved through the purchase of package reflects one extreme. On the other hand, a low performing school with many disadvantaged students, not even having access to a device and few could not follow OTL reflects another extreme. Indeed, OTL experience reflects two extremes – those economically secure and committed as opposed to those facing scarcity and low learning thrust. OTL shows a marked difference in aspects of discipline, attendance, behavior in students in different categories of schools. From the above finding, the unavoidable question would be as follows: “Was there equity in home learning climate if one learner used a laptop, the other learner fixed on a mobile screen the whole day and still another had to share with siblings in the course of the online teaching?”

ii. Nature of OTL teaching climate

From the study, it was found that OTL schooling offered a confusing, chaotic set up of ‘home in a school or school in a home’. Home teaching climate during OTL was invaded by non-student intruders harassing teachers through foul language; parents cynical remarks; intimidation caused by virtual presence of parents and siblings; and embarrassment of home visibility especially for the economically disadvantaged students. This was highlighted by the school leaders and severely criticized by teachers. School leader 3 averred:

“To intruders, password is given resulting to messages, swear words and all these things.”

Students considered the virtual OTL environment to be a platform where they were free to do anything they wished. From this perspective, School Leader 1 was very critical of the climate: *“There is probably a virtual wall between students and the educator. They thought that everything is permissible.”*

Teachers were desperate for the non-conducive teaching and learning climate. The dilemma of a male teacher whether *“Is it ethical to ask girls to switch on camera?”* (T19) was very resounding. Other teachers’ complaints were as follows:

“We have phantom students” (T17); *“I was talking to screen or to students, I don’t know”* (T10); *“I find myself engage in monologue for 1 hour”* (T4).

This finding shows that teachers had absolutely no control over the students putting to question the teaching climate phenomenon during the ERT. These numerous challenges teachers face from being under parents’ scrutiny, a switched off camera zoom meeting and lack or delayed responses from students are elements that put off the motivational level of teachers to conduct online teaching. This is consistent with the findings of Alonso-Tapia and Ruiz-Díaz (2022), which maintained that teacher’s degree of motivation could account for variations in the classroom climate. Furthermore, Chui (2021) posits that a motivational positive classroom climate as generated by the teacher can promote the psychological, emotional, cognitive development of the learner, and enhance students’ commitment, building up of skills.

In addition, the major concern of school leaders was the effectiveness of virtual teaching and learning. They voiced out their concerns in the following statements:

“Teaching is taking place but the question is – is learning taking place?” (SL 3)

“Whether we can assess if learning has taken place.” (SL4)

The Mauritian OTL experience was not the typical ‘work from home practice. This existed long back in other countries. Disturbances like kids prying and noise around do not build up the proper teaching climate. Both school leaders and teachers affirm that such home environment is not conducive for OTL and OTL interferes with the privacy of family life. This is why OTL with teachers at school and students at home in normal circumstances seems ideal for Ministry of Education, school leaders and teachers. In the practice of OLT, the marked differences between vulnerable groups and highflyers coming from the privileged home background were obvious. If OTL failed lamentably for the former, it worked

successfully for the latter, proved by their readiness for Cambridge examinations. Policy decision to extend the academic year 2022 as third term becomes justifiable. School leaders that monitored OLT, provided support, a devised mechanism for smooth integration into OLT, and prompt intervention on disciplinary matters, in such schools, teachers felt secure knowing there was a supporting pillar. However, school leaders who did simply the basic of mailing instruction, forwarding mail from Ministry without the additional touch of communicating, bonding with teachers, the latter had to struggle on their own. The actual instruction could not be monitored.

iii. Digital Revolution in pedagogy and management

The initial lack of digital expertise evolved into the exploration of innovative practices for both the school Leaders and teachers, yet many teachers did borderline efforts of passively sending notes on WhatsApp adopting the asynchronous mode of teaching at the beginning phase. Few not being techno savvy, were not prepared to make the abrupt shift to online teaching though keen to explore on technology (Alenezi *et al.*, 2022).

The initial uncertainty of school leaders and teachers was clearly observed in the statements of the two school leaders:

“Nobody knew exactly what it was all about.” (SL 2)

“Now what is online? How to go about it?” (SL 1)

However, this uncertainty and the urgent need to continue education and to prevent learning regression from the students galvanized into experimentations of modern digital devices and approaches like the School leader’s use of Google Form (a survey administration software) for overall monitoring of attendance, daily record of teacher’s online work, updating data on syllabus coverage, vaccination, option form; and the use of jitsi, a video conferencing software like zoom, Google Meet, viewed as a well-suited interface having user friendly services and high quality of video.

Zoom, Google Team, WhatsApp were the most popular applications adopted by school leaders and teachers. Communication processes evolved to the point of conducting online meetings - disciplinary Committee, PTA and teaching staff. Teachers applied all their resourcefulness to improvise through varying teaching modes and innovative practices like the assessment of students’ coursework organized by the Travel and Tourism department, as described by T 36 as follows:

“The presentation was like a guided, virtual tour, having a blend of PowerPoint and video. The difficulty of virtual exams was that all criteria cannot be met. There were many loopholes like not assessing the body language, not facing an audience.”

Other practices included a game-like approach to teaching called ‘4 pics one word’; using sketchpad under the camera lens to carry out explanations; experimenting online assessment; know-how on specific digital learning applications like flashcard applications; use of Google classroom; and online Physics practical using a particular software. Teachers showed their positive appreciation of having the opportunities to enhance the teaching and learning experiences of their students. Teacher 5 made this obvious and encouraging statement:

“Through online teaching, we can insert videos where students could see the circulation of blood. On Whiteboard it is not the same. Visualization leaves its mark”.

The education authority’s attempt to support schools through the Microsoft 365 failed since teachers found it too complex and even training at school could not help. Besides, the broadcasting TV educational programmes for lower grades was viewed as standardized and not individualised as per the teacher’s own style of teaching.

A Pilot project fully coordinated by the Ministry conducted in one school under study, tested whether in the future OTL can be conducted with teachers at school and students at home and

also OTL school management. The statement of School leader ‘s experience of remote learning illustrates the remoteness and the feeling of loneliness in an actual online class:

“I was just walking through all the corridors. I just see the educators in the empty class. She was doing online classes.”

Despite the ‘soul-less’ atmosphere of the empty classroom with only a teacher, the Pilot Testing supported by Ministry of Education proved to be a strongly meaningful OTL experience with astounding positive results – successful experience, smooth monitoring, teacher satisfaction, controlled attendance, presence of authority, availability of necessary tools, stress-free school environment.

It is evident that in the Mauritian context, the school culture got digitalized, modernized and more effective in schools with dynamic school leaders and teachers. Such schools have developed with enhanced and fast-tracked connectivity, and enriched school database. Teachers’ experience of OTL makes them more competent in online teaching delivery and little online teaching experience is related to poor performance (Martin *et al.*, 2019; Bellinger *et al.*, 2019). Some teacher’s resourcefulness bloomed through the exploration of digital applications and software and innovative pedagogical approaches. Others limited themselves to the basic digital tools just for the sake of doing online teaching.

iv. OTL side effects: Emotional shock, Impact on physical health and security

OTL during confinement and school closures was accompanied by critical, life changing incidents - death of a dear one because of Covid; deprivation of emotional support usually provided during school days by school personnel, the student care and counselling desk; provision of a daily meal, stationaries and other materials by Needy Student Committee denied; privacy of home environment of student and teachers becoming public; vulnerability of teachers’ identity. All these left their scars on the teacher and student psyche. There was a case of student suicide caused by the trauma of confinement.

The squeezed online learning timetable drove teachers to the brink of exhaustion developing health issues like severe gastric problem, eyesight getting affected and undue stress. This was highlighted lamentably by teachers:

“I started wearing glasses.” (T6)

“Because of screen focus, I had to go to the optician.” (T23)

Confinement at home was a taxing experience driving students into a vulnerable state for they would often seek the help of their teachers even calling at night, lunch time of 1st January 2021, needing a shoulder to cry. As per teachers, the break in socialization with peers impacted student personal development. Indeed, student online engagement is stimulated by peer influence and violation of privacy and security upset the participation of learners (Kim, 2020).

This study confirms that OTL created a clash in teachers’ family life and professional life. Teachers, as well as school leaders, were congruent with this disturbing disbalance in their life, as pointed out:

“We wear many hats while doing online teaching at home.” (T38)

“Teachers are parents. They have to look after children. And these days should be lived with the family also. As it is they are always with their mobile phone.” (SL 3)

From another perspective, teachers were placed in a vulnerable situation where their security was put at stake; their contact number made public; their professionalism questioned; their home privacy invaded; emotionally scarred; witnessing circulation of screened photos of some teachers. They complained about the obvious fear that they were under public scrutiny and they had the feeling of being unfairly judged by the public:

“Anybody could just do anything with teachers online. Misuse that and put it on other social platforms.” (T30)

“Nobody got into our personal rights as educators, to respect our rights that we are citizens of a democracy. Students and families can watch our teachings. To what extent have we been protected while teaching online? To what extent has our teaching been protected? We are supposed to be educating our students in class. But the same teaching could have been dispersed anywhere. This is something I personally felt, I was not protected.” (T23)

“It was a psychological scar on us.” (T34)

“Stressful, tedious, inhumane. It was sickening. It was like struggling with rough waves. If tomorrow we face a similar situation of videos being circulated on Facebook, twitter. Is there someone to protect us? Do we have to take support from police?” (T30)

There have been cases of teachers being harassed through videos in one Academy under this study and the culprits are under the disciplinary committee. The texted message of one student to teacher *“Miss, I am watching sex life now” (T4)* and teachers are subjected to humiliation with parent’s remarks *“Your teacher is funny” (T15)* are signs of undue harassment.

It was noted that in schools where dynamic school leaders intervened promptly on critical issues like student OTL attendance, teacher harassment, intruders in OTL classes, emotional support to Covid-19 personnel, these have down toned the negative effects of OTL for as teachers concurred leadership does make a difference. The element of trust exhibited by such leaders empowered the school to adjust to OTL within a week of its introduction.

v. Post OLT: A Trauma for students

Resumption of schooling did not indicate normalcy. Covid Pandemic was still there. Health, social distancing, shopping timetable, the fear of contamination and death still existed. A new nightmare started. The top-down post OTL decisions of the authorities to extend the Academic year as third term and postpone Cambridge Examinations, culminated in opposite reactions in schools.

The committed students who made constructive use of OTL classes supplemented by OL tuitions, fully ready for exams were traumatized, lost interest in learning.

The school leaders of the 2 Academies lived traumatic experiences of the post OTL as elucidated below-

“... terrible, terrible. The problem was not online teaching. The problem was post online teaching. I had 2 cases of severe breakdown that we eventually had recourse to psychiatrist. There was a potential laureate who totally collapsed. The 90% highflyers were fed up, sick. They can’t see the book anymore. They can’t see their teachers anymore. They don’t want to solve any equations. Saturation!” (SL 2)

“Students were absent, fed up of the repetitions.” (SL 3)

Students in the selected schools suffered from complete burnout and they became “unwilling students” with low spirit and motivation to learn further. School psychologist and even the aid of experts on life coaching were sought in one Academy. Laureate’s dream got shattered. The school leaders of the four research sites were of the views that all the OTL that took place more or less satisfactorily to ensure continuous learning turned to have been a waste of OTL time. This desperation was manifested in the statements of these school leaders:

“With 4 potential laureates leaving ... school may not have laureates at all.” (SL 2)

“Two potential students won’t sit for the Oct exams. This will have an impact on the result.” (SL 3)

“It was not a normal school. No assembly. Students were undisciplined a bit. They had to have support of Student Care Counselling Desk. It has been a whole roller coaster ride for us, this online managing.” (SL 3)

“Students missed this social part of school ... not very happy. Later...sought help of school psychologists and Social Worker... side effects of OTL.” (SL 1)

While this official decision became a blessing to low-performers and students indifferent to studies. To them, it was a state of breaking free from confinement, ‘Holiday Mood’ as though happy to return to friends but not learning.

The side effects of Prolonged third term were spectacularly a source of freedom and over-excitement for students to get back to the funny part of meeting their peers at school. This brought about an increasing number of cases of a lack of discipline among students. This became obvious in the stressful statements of school leaders who were overwhelmed with the management of these side effects:

“It was an explosion; students wanted to be free to do everything they wanted in school, caught outside school. We had a serious in-discipline first day. Grade 10 consuming alcohol.” (SL 1)

“Grade 13 have not been coming to school. For them it is a repetition, they needed a break, they were fed up.” (SL 3).

OTL practice was a blessing in disguise in revealing the shocking reality of vulnerable student background. These students were victimized related to syllabus coverage during online teaching, hence the repetition. Whereas this decision was disastrous for highflyers who were subjected to frustration because of inability to prove themselves in the competitive exams. This resulted in ‘hate for classrooms’. In both categories, it was problematic. It is a terrible plight for the disadvantaged students from the low performing school for many failed to attend OTL during confinement, thus all progress reached to a standstill. Studies have stressed on the detrimental effect of Covid on student attainment, widening the gap between the disadvantaged students and their peers (EEF, 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study lay the foundations for recommendations that the policy-makers and decision-makers should consider for a more effective online teaching and learning in our secondary schools. Based on their lived experiences of unpreparedness, lack of know-how, modes of handling burning issues, all school leaders unanimously support OTL to be blended with face-to-face mode as an integral part of teaching and learning for the future. Proper planning ahead, and adequate availability of resources and skills are paramount. Ongoing OTL could be incorporated for the consolidation of learning. Future education demands IT-driven schooling in pace with fast-changing trends in education technology and IT. A wide range of software and applications for teaching and educational management can be explored for integration in the education system.

A convenient model for OTL could be with teachers working from school and students learning at home. A fast-developing work culture of sharing best practices using IT should be ingrained in the school ethos. Database on online learning and related teaching materials should be created to support teacher online teaching practice and provide for extracurricular activities. Furthermore, decision makers need to consider the realities and specificities of different schools while formulating common policy decisions on OLT. Decisions should be tailor-made as per the needs and requirements of the school. OTL should cater for the different abilities and family background of the learner. Finally, more advanced technical training is imperative on Microsoft team, Google team, the making of small videos for better output. Training on trauma-informed pedagogy and exposure to crisis management skills are required to handle the critical situations efficiently. Students need to be coached in physical exercises like stretching, exercise for the eyes, sitting position to alleviate passive learning and to keep fit. They require training in the manipulation of IT devices.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed at gauging the impact of the sudden introduction of OTL in Mauritian secondary schools owing to the Covid confinement. It aimed at identifying good OTL practices, challenges and actual experiences lived by school leaders, teachers and students. There should be no oversight of the fact that OTL was shadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic and all its implications. The involvement of parents fell in the picture as OTL was conducted in the home environment. The dynamism of school leaders appeased the emerging problems of OTL through their prompt intervention and support. The conditions of OTL pointed to a lack of OTL equipment and materials, inadequate training and required skills as well as the indecisiveness like the digital tools to be used. As continuity in education is the demand, the impact of post OTL experiences could not be overlooked, especially because of the disparity between low performing to high performing schools.

All these revealed the specificity of OTL with Covid-19 pandemic in the background and recommendations for future OTL based on lived experiences of school leaders, teachers, students. The most appreciated form of OTL was a blend of face to face and online teaching as an in-built pedagogy.

REFERENCES

- Alban Conto, C. et al. (2021). Potential effects of COVID-19 school closures on foundational skills and Country responses for mitigating learning loss. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 87 (2021) 102434
- Alenezi, E. et al. (2022). The Sudden Shift to Distance Learning: Challenges Facing Teachers. *Journal of Education and Learning*. 11 (3) Canadian Center of Science and Education <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v11n3p14>
- Alonso-Tapia, J., and Ruiz-Diaz, M. (2022). Student, teacher, and school factors predicting differences in classroom climate: A multilevel analysis. *Elsevier*, 94, February 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2022.102115>
- Atmojo, A. E. P., and Nugroho, A. (2020). EFL classes must go online! Teaching activities and challenges during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. *Register Journal*, 13(1), 49-76.
- Bolliger, D. U. et al., (2019). Faculty members' perceptions of online program community and their efforts to sustain it. *British Journal of Educational Technology*. 50 (6), 3283-3299.
- Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Brooks, M., Creely, E., and Laletas, S. (2022). Coping through the unknown: school staff well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 3, 1-9.
- Bui, N. (2019). Learner autonomy in tertiary English classes in Vietnam. In J. Albright (Ed.), *English tertiary education in Vietnam*, (158-171). Routledge.
- Carleton, R. N. (2016). Fear of the unknown: one fear to rule them all? *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 41, 5-21, [10.1016/j.janxdis.2016.03.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2016.03.011).
- Chiu, T. K. F. (2021). Applying the self-determination theory (SDT) to explain student engagement in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 1-17.

- Choi, H., Chung, S. Y., and Ko, J. (2021). Rethinking teacher education policy in ICT: Lessons from emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic period in Korea. *Sustainability*, 13(10), 5480. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13105-480>.
- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method approaches* 4th ed.
- de Ruiter, J. A., Poorthuis, A. M., and Koomen, H. M. (2021). Teachers' emotional labour in response to daily events with individual students: The role of teacher-student relationship quality. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 107, Article 103467. [10.1016/j.tate.2021.103467](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103467)
- Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (2020). *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Donnelly R., Patrinos, H., and Gresham., J. (2021) The impact of Covid 19 on education – recommendation and opportunities for Ukraine. *The Mirror weekly*.
- Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). (2022). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence*. <https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/>
- El-Soussi, A. (2022). The shift from face-to-face to online teaching due to COVID-19: Its impact on higher education faculty's professional identity. *International Journal of Educational Research Open* 3 100139, Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100139>
- Estrella, F. (2021). The effectiveness of using digital platforms to practice English during the COVID-19 crisis as perceived by Ecuadorian students. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* in Press. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-05-2021-0194>.
- Estrella, F. (2022). Ecuadorian university English teachers' reflections on emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 3, 1-10.
- Gutentag, T., Orner, A., and Asterhan, C. (2022). Classroom discussion practices in online remote secondary school settings during COVID-19. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 132, 1-11.
- Heidegger, M. (2001). *Zollikon seminars: Protocols-conversations-letters*. Trans. F Mayr, and R Askay. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Hodges, C., Moore, S., Locke, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *Educause Review*.
- Howe, C., and Abedin, M. (2013). Classroom dialogue: A systematic review across four decades of research. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43(3), 325-356.
- Irena Martínková and Jim Parry (2016) Heideggerian hermeneutics and its application to sport, Sport, Ethics and Philosophy, 10(4), 364-374, DOI: [10.1080/17511321.2016.1261365](https://doi.org/10.1080/17511321.2016.1261365)
- Johnson, N., Veletsianos, G., and Seaman, J. (2020). US faculty and administrators' experiences and approaches in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Online Learning*, 24(2), 6-21. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v24i2.2285>
- Jung, I., Choi, S., Lim, C., and Leem, J. (2002). Effects of different types of interaction on learning achievement, satisfaction and participation in web-based instruction. *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*, 39(2), 153-162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290252934603>

- Kagimu, I. (2019). The role of phenomenological research methodology in management research.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338581776> The Role of Phenomenological Research Methodology in Management Research
- Kim, L. E., and Asbury, K. (2020). Like a rug had been pulled from under you: The impact of COVID-19 on teachers in England during the first six weeks of the UK lockdown. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(4), 1062-1083.
- Kim., S, S. (2020). Motivators and concerns for real-time online classes: focused on security and privacy issues. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Retrieved May 10, 2022 from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1863232>
- Kinsella, R. (2022). Universities in the post-Covid era: Crisis or catharsis? *Studies*, 109 (435), 252-265.
- Le, T. V., Nguyen, N. H., Tran, L. N., Nguyen, L. T., Nguyen, T. A., and Nguyen, M. T. (2022). The interaction patterns of pandemic-initiated online teaching: How teachers adapted. *System*, 105, 1-12.
- Mandapat, A. M., and Farin, E. N. (2021). School climate and work from home challenges of teachers during the Covid 19 pandemic in secondary schools in the Division of Zambales, Philippines. *J. Educ. Soc. Behav. Sci.* 34, 103–111. doi: 10.9734/JESBS/2021/v34i230309
- Martin, F., Budhrani, K., and Wang, C. (2019). Examining faculty perception of their readiness to teach online. *Online Learning Journal*. 23 (3), 97-119, 10.24059/olj.v23i3.1555
- Moser, K. M., Wei, T., and Brenner, D. (2021). Remote teaching during COVID-19: implications from a national survey of language educators. *System*, 97, 1-15.
- Muhomen, H., Pakarinen, E, M, Rasku-Puttonen, H., and Lerkkanen, M. K. (2021). Educational dialogue among teachers experiencing different levels of self-efficacy. *Learning Culture and Social Interaction*, 29, 100493.
- Oyedotun, T. D. (2020). Sudden change of pedagogy in education driven by COVID-19: Perspectives and evaluation from a developed country. *Research in Globalisation*, 2, 1-5, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resglo.2020.100029>.
- Pal, K. B., Basnet, B. B., Pant, R. R., Bishwakarma, K., Kafle, K., Dhimi, N., Sharma, M. L., Thapa, L. B., and Bhattarai, B. (2021). Education system of Nepal: impacts and future perspectives of COVID-19 pandemic. *Heliyon*, 7, 1-6.
- Patino, G. (2021). Niveles de ansiedad y depression en la practica docente por confinamiento (thesis). Quito: Universidad SEK.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Pettit, E. (2020). A side-effect of COVID-19 pandemic? Reading got a lot harder. <https://www.chronic.com/article/A-Side-Effect-of-the-Covid-19/248568>.
- Quarantine Act 2020. (2020). Mauritius, Centre for Human rights, 1986 – 2021: Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, South Africa
- Rasheed, R. A., Kamsin, A., and Abdullah, N. A. (2020). Challenges in the online component of blended learning: A systematic review. *Computers & Education*, 144, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.103701>

- Resnick, L. B., Asterhan, C.S.C., and Clarke, S. N. (2018). *Accountable talk: Instructional dialogue that builds the mind*. The International Academy of Education (IAE) and the International Bureau of Education (IBE) of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).
- Richards, K. A. R., Levesque-Bristol, C., Tremplin, T. J., and Graber, K. C. (2016). The impact of resilience on role stressors and burnout in elementary and secondary teachers. *Social Psychology of Education*, 19(3), 511-536. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-016-9346-x>.
- Robinson R.S. (2014) Purposive Sampling. In: Michalos A.C. (eds) Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2337
- Saha, M. S., Pranty, S. A., Rana, M. J., Islam, M. J., and Hossain, M. E. (2022). Teaching during a pandemic: Do university teachers prefer online teaching? *Heliyon*, 8, 1-9.
- Salayo, J., Fesalbon, J. E., Valerio, L. C., and Litao, R. A. (2020). Senior high school teachers' and students' engagements during the emergency remote teaching (ERT). *Studies in humanities and Education*, 1(1), 74-95. <https://doi.org/10.48185/she.v1i1.145>.
- Selvaraj, A., Vishnu, R., KA, N., Benson, N., and Mathew, A. J. (2021). Effects of pandemic based online education on teaching and learning system. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 85, 1-11.
- Tomczyk, L., and Walker, C. (2021). The emergency (CRISIS) e-learning as a challenge for teachers in Poland. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(3). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10539-7>.
- UNESCO. (2020). COVID-19: Impact on education. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>.
- White, R. G., and Van Der Boor, C. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and initial period of lockdown on the mental health and well-being of adults in the UK. *BJPsych Open*, 6(5), 1-4.
- WHO. (2020). World Health Organisation. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. <https://www.who.int>.
- Wong, K. Y., Sulaiman, T., Ibrahim, A., Mohammad, A. G. K., Hassan, O., Jaafar, W. (2021). Secondary school teachers' psychological status and competencies in e-teaching during Covid-19. *Heliyon*, 7, 1-8.