

Moving from Offline to Online: A Study on the Digital Education Experience in Kerala during the Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of transitioning from traditional offline education to online learning on a single family in Kerala, offering a microcosmic view of the broader societal implications. Recognizing the family as the fundamental unit of social structure, the research employs an in-depth, open-ended conversational approach to engage with each family member. Conducted in August 2021, the interviews provide a rich dataset subjected to narrative analysis, yielding nuanced insights into the family's experiences with respect to the shift from offline learning to online education. The narrative analysis unveils the multifaceted challenges and adaptations faced by the family, highlighting their struggles, resilience, and evolving dynamics during the shift. The paper delves into their anxieties, and the emotional landscape shaped by the shift to online education. By presenting detailed depictions of their lived experiences, the research contributes valuable knowledge to the discourse on educational transitions in the digital age, offering a unique lens on the social and cultural ramifications of this radical change.

Keywords : *Narrative Analysis, Offline and Online Education, Digital Divide, Family, Emotional Well-being*

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Introduction

In February 2021, the researcher engaged in a conversation with a thirteen-year-old boy from his neighborhood.[1] The boy asked the researcher if he knew when his school would start again, to which the researcher replied, "I don't know." The boy's disappointment prompted the researcher to reflect on the circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the sudden shift from offline to online education. The pandemic has radically altered nearly all socioeconomic patterns of life, forcing us to adopt new ways of living and learning to survive. Many people had no choice but to adapt, yet, unfortunately, some lacked the tools or resources to cope with these changes effectively. This paper explores the impact of transitioning from traditional offline education to online learning on a single family in Kerala, offering a microcosmic view of the broader societal implications. Through the narratives of each family member, the paper captures their worldviews, identities, and the cultural norms influencing their experiences. It delves into their anxieties, limitations, and the emotional landscape shaped by the shift to online education. By presenting detailed depictions of their lived experiences, the research contributes valuable knowledge to the discourse on educational transitions in the digital age, offering a unique lens on the social and cultural ramifications of this radical change

How COVID-19 changed the world?

The novel Corona virus disease (COVID-19) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11, 2020 (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020), and there was a sense of fear and panic all around the globe. This was an unprecedented crisis in our lifetimes. Nearly 4.5 billion people are forced to stay in their homes (AFP - Agence France Presse, 2020). Many lost their jobs due to economic and health constraints imposed by the pandemic. The pandemic has changed almost everything related to our lives - how we work, learn and interact, and do business. Social distancing guidelines have led to a more virtual existence, both personally and professionally. It presents tough choices for governments, local communities, families, and businesses.

The pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population. Researchers have highlighted the impact on the psychological well-being of the most exposed groups, including children, college students, and health workers, who are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and other symptoms of distress (WHO, 2020). Social distancing and security measures have affected relationships among people and their perception of empathy toward others.

The after-effects of COVID-19 have deeply affected workers in the informal economy and those in poorly protected, low-paid jobs, including youth, women, older workers, and migrants. The economic slowdown caused by the pandemic has significantly impacted businesses and employment. Major companies worldwide have increased their use of digital technology to respond to the crisis. However, firm sales have dropped by half during the crisis, forcing companies to reduce hours and wages. With less income, families are compelled to balance their spending and sacrifices, potentially harming health and learning outcomes for a generation.

To understand the physical and emotional burdens related to pandemics, it is crucial to grasp the specific responses of families. Their psychological and economic resources may have been compromised. Parents and children in third-world countries face various challenges that present a constellation of risks affecting their work, children's health and education, and the well-being of family, friends, and relatives outside their household (Saladino et al., 2020). These challenges include high levels of state and economic uncertainty, reduced social support, limited access to physical schooling, and decreased availability of essential clinical, community, and recreational activities, including green spaces.

The impact of COVID-19 on education

In India, 247 million students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools have been affected by the shutdown of 1.5 million schools as a result of the pandemic and lockdowns in 2020. Furthermore, before the

COVID-19 issue had started, nearly six million children were already out of school (UNICEF, 2021). With the closure of all schools on March 17 to contain COVID-19, in-person classes were no longer permitted. Many educational institutions began offering online classes, primarily through digital applications. However, online education remains inaccessible to many, especially in rural areas of the country (India Today, 2021). The transition to online teaching occurred abruptly and on an unprecedented scale, without prior testing. Not only did teaching move online, but assessments and evaluations also shifted to digital formats, resulting in significant trial, error, and uncertainty. Many examinations were canceled. This issue extends beyond the short-term, with long-term consequences for the affected communities, likely exacerbating existing inequalities in society.

The government had to implement control measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In an academic context, this meant reducing contact between children, teachers, and academic staff while maintaining safe social distancing. To achieve this, many countries have reduced class sizes. For example, the UK and France have recommended limiting primary classes to 15 students to maintain safe distances (Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children - BBC News, 2020). Looking to the next generation, girls in many countries may face increased expectations to take on healthcare-related tasks, potentially affecting their long-term engagement in education. UNESCO has projected that 11 million girls might never return to their studies following the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). Many scholars have studied how the virus outbreak has changed the daily lives of children and youth, leading to significant alterations in their routines and those of their families.

India is among the countries with the highest gender gap in access to technology (Mehrotra, 2018) The gender gap in mobile use typically exacerbates other inequalities for women, including access to education, economic opportunities, and networking. These inequalities are visible not only socio-economically but also regionally. Digital infrastructure and connectivity vary significantly between states and between urban and

rural areas. Beyond the challenges of access and affordability, students face the daunting task of keeping up with their studies and peers.

The present paper stems from the conviction that we have the responsibility to find proper solutions for these issues and to provide systematic steps to improve the quality of online classes. However, to find these solutions, we first need to have a clear understanding of the issues. But where do we find these issues? From textbooks, websites, or interviews with experts? To grasp the 'actual' concerns, we need to talk directly to children, parents, and teachers about their current experiences. Unfortunately, there are limited academic investigations in this direction. In this context, the present study, which aims to examine how a middle-class family in Kerala responds to these changes, is significant. This study is situated within the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the possibilities and challenges of moving from offline to online education by analyzing how a family responds to the changes brought about by the pandemic, specifically in our academic system.

Research Questions

The paper aims to investigate how a middle-class family in Kerala navigates the changes brought about by the adoption of online education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, and to understand the impact of transitioning from offline to online on family communication dynamics. To achieve this overarching objective, the study addresses the following specific questions:

- 1) What are the possibilities and potential benefits offered by the online mode of education?
- 2) What kinds of challenges and difficulties do students and parents encounter when the academic system incorporates digital and new media technologies for teaching and learning?
- 3) How does the transition to online education affect the communication dynamics within the family?
- 4) Does this shift raise concerns regarding the digital divide?

Research Method

The present study focuses on a single family residing in Arkannoor, Kollam district of Kerala, comprising three children enrolled in different classes. Utilizing in-depth and open interviews with each family member, the research collects data without relying on a concrete and structured questionnaire. Participants are encouraged to express themselves freely, without constraints, allowing them to compare their experiences with others or discuss any relevant topics. This approach aims to gather unbiased and comprehensive information to address the research objectives effectively. The interviews were conducted in August 2021, and the collected data underwent narrative analysis, a prominent approach in qualitative research. Narrative analysis is well-suited for studies relying on participants' narratives of their experiences, enabling a deeper understanding of their perspectives and insights.

In this analytic framework, the study investigates the living conditions of a middle-class family in Kerala confronted with the sudden shift from traditional to online education. The family members, as research participants, narrate their experiences of adapting to online education. While interpreting the conditions of a single family does not allow us to generalize these conditions across the entire social system, it is significant because the family is part of a wider society. An in-depth study focusing on a single family helps us understand the nuances of the problem under study. This approach is valuable as people frequently reveal their worldviews, identities, issues, limitations, helplessness, points of view, cultural norms, standpoints and beliefs, love, anxieties, thoughts, emotions, and all aspects of the social and cultural world around them.

This study addresses changes within the framework of the digital divide, which is hypothesized to describe differences in access to and usage of information and communication technology. Historically, the digital divide was considered a matter of having or not having access to technology. The term can refer to inequalities between countries, societies, geographic areas, demographic communities, households,

individuals, businesses, and more. There are at least three factors that contribute to digital divides:

- A. Information accessibility
- B. Information utilization
- C. Information receptiveness

These aspects of the digital divide are explicitly addressed in this study and help the researcher make informed proposals to reduce inequalities in digital accessibility and literacy.

Participants of the study

The study was conducted in a middle-class family in Arkannoor, a remote village in Kollam district, Kerala, India. The family has eight members, including three children:

1. Manoj Kumar (52)
2. Anil Kumar (46)
3. Devaki Amma (88) - Mother of Manoj Kumar and Anil Kumar.
4. Seethamma Manoj Kumar (38) - Manoj Kumar's Wife, mother of both Karthik and Kashi.
5. Nayana Anil Kumar (40) - Anil Kumar's Wife, mother of Bavin.
6. Bavin A (20) - Son of Anil Kumar and Nayana. He is the eldest son in the family, who is now pursuing graduation (B.Com) in ST. Johns College, Anchal.
7. Karthik M (13) - Son of Manoj Kumar and Seethamma, who is in 8th standard (VHSS Arkkannoor).
8. Kashinath M (11) - Son of Manoj Kumar and Seethamma, who is in 6th standard

(SSM UPS Karalikonam).

Manoj Kumar doesn't have a fixed salary; it depends on the number of days he works. During the lockdown, he averaged 15 to 20 days of work per month. Anil Kumar worked in the UAE (Dubai) before the COVID-19 pandemic, but he lost his job due to the crisis and returned

home without any savings. Devaki Amma receives a monthly welfare pension. The household has electricity, a television, and four mobile phones, including two smartphones. However, it does not have wireless internet connectivity.

The following part is devoted to discussing the themes that are emerged after analyzing the participants' narratives in detail.

Discussion and Analysis

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in August 2020, all at the respondents' home. The researcher ensured the privacy and comfort of participants, encouraging them to openly share their experiences. Throughout the interviews, both the interviewer and the interviewees wore new masks and maintained a distance of six feet to adhere to COVID-19 safety protocols. In-depth communication with the family members helped the researcher formulate additional interview questions that were most relevant to their experiences. This chapter provides a detailed and thorough description of the participants' experiences, offering insights into how the family coped with the transition from offline to online teaching and learning.

Transformation from offline to online mode in education

Bavin says:

The class was conducted regularly before the arrival of COVID-19. I was in my final year of high school then. We were very excited to enjoy the last few days of our school life. But suddenly, everything changed. The lockdown came unexpectedly. We lost some beautiful moments and memories. We had a lot of plans. I had planned a few trips with friends, but nothing happened. In an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19 immediately, most educational institutions have been closed since the end of March. It is difficult to predict when schools, colleges, and universities will reopen.

Bavin's words indicate the drastic changes that occurred when schools and our entire academic system suddenly embraced the online mode of teaching and learning. He also suggests that offline or regular classes are not only meant for learning but also for having certain experiences that we wish to cherish forever. This leads us to think that a good classroom always has some creative elements to make learning more interesting and interactive. Offline classrooms are not only academic but also social and psychological. A good classroom environment is essential for a child to become an authentic human being and a social animal.

Karthik joins the conversation and says:

When my school was shut down, I was very excited. I looked forward to being home, playing with friends, and not having any homework, assignments, or examinations - it seemed amazing. I prayed that this lockdown won't end. My senior year ended early, the exam was cancelled, and the sun was shining brightly. After a while, the reality of the situation began to haunt me. I feel bad missing my classroom and classmates.

Bavin takes Karthik's words forward and expresses similar feelings. Bavin said: "I often have nightmares and cannot sleep most nights. It's like I'm trapped, both in my house and in my own head. However, over time, I found a way to deal with the stress." He further says:

I started doing things I love. I began gaming on my phone, painting, and playing with my brothers again. I feel free for the first time in months. I started to spend more time with my family, but I realize how much I miss my friends.

Bavin and Karthik draw our attention to the emotional and other kinds of trauma created by the lockdown. They were suddenly confined to home without meeting their peers. Bavin's words also highlight the fact that people tried their best to deal with the situation. He tried to find hope in the period of frustration and utter dismay. The words of the children

indicate that they greatly missed their classes, friends, and the teaching atmosphere. They coped by finding new activities and following their passions. It happened in the initial days of the lockdown when the classes remained suspended; there were no online classes either. Then, the schools began conducting online classes, and there were classes and tutorial sessions aired on Television. Bavin says: “Due to the lack of physical classrooms and adequate digital infrastructure, both teachers and students face unprecedented challenges. We didn't even get any time for preparation.”

Bavin clearly indicates that the radical transformation of education after the pandemic came abruptly with little or no preparation plan. They were excited at the first few days of lockdown, but after three to four months, they realized that the schools would not open for a year. They were compelled to attend online classes without much excitement. Bavin said that the higher secondary classes internal assessment (C. E) comprises 20 marks for all subjects. It includes some practical content like projects, assignments, and lab work. But now there is nothing for us. He further says:

The teachers only consider the 'notes' as the tool for internal evaluation. Also, in papers like Computer Application, which carries 40 marks in the 'practical' category, most students in my class don't have computers at home, and classes have continued with great difficulties. How we are supposed to study 'Computer Application' without a computer? I don't understand the logic behind it. They already share the notes in PDF format, so why do we need to write them in a notebook? What we write in the notebooks is the same as what is in the PDF.

The children of the family are of the opinion that online classes are not suitable for science subjects since they have practical components. These words clearly illustrate that replacing face-to-face learning experiences with online classes is challenging. Compared to conventional classroom learning, online learning presents significant challenges, such as a lack of interaction, critical analysis, scientific experiments, opportunities for

collaborative learning, teacher supervision, and difficulties in understanding complex subjects like science and mathematics..

Digital learning has become the new normal. With schedules of the classes arriving on WhatsApp and students taking classes through mobile, the entire learning system is now just a click away. More and more institutions began utilizing the most effective e-learning technologies to make classes accessible to students from the safety and comfort of their homes. Karthik draws our attention to another issue.

My 7th-grade exams were cancelled last year. I was promoted to 8th without any examination. The same happened for Kashi; he was also promoted to 6th from 5th. I don't know the formula used for preparing our results. I'm unsure whether they will conduct exams this year.

Karthik, an 8th-grade student, said that in the beginning he was excited about the Kerala government's decision to cancel all board examinations up to the 9th standard. Then he became concerned about the absence of a proper evaluation mechanism. When discussing the matter of examinations with students of the family, two key considerations arise: the risk posed by the pandemic and the consequences of exam cancellations, as well as the feasibility of conducting exams online. The issue becomes more complex, particularly concerning practical classes and examinations.

Both the parents and children draw our attention to another significant issue. Seethamma says:

Initially, they had only one class in a day, which has now been elevated to four. Sometimes classes are prolonged until night, and then the children have to finish their homework. The teachers gave ten minute breaks for children to loosen up and wash their eyes. However, my children are having issues like redness around the eyes and mental stress. They often get bored with online classes. Sometimes, the children

switch off the camera and do other activities. It's like a time pass for them.

Seethamma seems very anxious about the mental and physical health of their children via online education. She is not very confident about online classes. Anil Kumar also discussed how children studying in various classes are now facing diverse physical and psychological issues due to prolonged online classes during the lockdown. He noted that whether it's physical fitness, mental well-being, or a combination of both, children have experienced their share of health challenges during this pandemic period. These issues include eyesight problems, backaches, headaches, fatigue, and insomnia. He then added that children have developed a negative attitude towards online classes and tend to skip them. He says:

Children's frame of mind towards online classes is also not very serious. There are many reasons for this. The school has a different social and cultural environment. Children want to study with their classmates. They want to interact with each other, play and jump, and share the tiffin with one another.

According to the parents, it's preferable for children to stay safe at home rather than being in close contact with their peers. However, they express concern about the lack of social interaction for children. This discussion highlights the challenges faced by students and parents in the selected family due to the sudden shift to online learning. These challenges include inadequate planning at the administrative level, the irreplaceable nature of classroom/school learning experiences, and the physical and emotional traumas experienced by students.

Digital divide

Lack of devices

This part is devoted to discussing another important theme that emerged from the data. Bavin says:

After lockdown, teachers began to send the course materials and study notes through WhatsApp. Classroom discussions were done through Google Meet. There are a few reasons why I like to take online classes in the beginning. Firstly, I can stay at home; there's no need to wake up early, which gives me more leisure time. I believe that with classes moving online, I can persuade my family to buy a new mobile phone. Additionally, online classes enable me to study independently and progress at my own pace.

However, Bavin adds that this initial enthusiasm does not last long. Karthik interjects, saying,

When the online classes began, we needed to install Google Meet and Zoom applications on our phones. Additionally, different WhatsApp groups were created for different subjects, and the same was required for my siblings. Altogether, we had nearly thirty class groups. Each group was inundated with numerous messages and documents. The smartphone we used had only 32 GB of internal storage, which was not enough for us.

Karthik points out a serious problem caused by everyone moving to online learning. In his family, they only have one smartphone, which is used for his siblings' online classes and for his parents' work and personal tasks. This situation creates numerous challenges: the children struggle to complete their schoolwork, and the parents find it difficult to manage their work and personal tasks efficiently.

Parents also faced unprecedented challenges during this transition. They discussed how their children found it nearly impossible to learn subjects through WhatsApp or other platforms. This difficulty arose because the internal memory, storage, and other specifications of their smartphones were insufficient to accommodate multiple applications like Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Edmodo, and numerous class groups on WhatsApp. Their remarks highlight the stark reality of the digital divide in India, with lower-income and middle-income families being significantly affected. Nayana shares a relevant experience. She says:

One day, Karthik told me he needed a new mobile phone because his current one couldn't handle all his classes. It's old and has limited storage capacity; he can't even save a single note on it. Plus, the camera quality isn't good either. He specifically mentioned wanting a new Redmi phone, but I'm a bit puzzled because I thought all smartphones had similar features.

The discussions with the parents also indicate that initially, they didn't consider this issue seriously. They believed their children were just trying to persuade them into buying a new smartphone for gaming. They couldn't comprehend that a mobile phone, typically used for calls and messages, could also be essential for learning. However, they slowly came to realize the significance of having a reliable smartphone for attending online classes. "People like us don't have enough money to buy advanced smartphones," Nayana said.

Bavin and Karthik discussed how it took the older members of the family some time to grasp the gravity of the situation and how they faced challenges in dealing with it. Anil Kumar mentioned that he borrowed money from someone to purchase a new phone because he didn't want his children to miss their classes. He expresses his sorrow:

The family has already experienced the burden of buying a smartphone, and now it is difficult to pay for the monthly data recharge. Now we must find around 600 rupees monthly for mobile data. Some days, we don't have money to buy groceries, and how are we going to recharge a data pack? I do not know.

Bavin, Karthik, and their parents illustrate the issues of the digital divide, which stretches across society, separating the haves from the have-nots and the tech-savvy from the technically disadvantaged. The family suggests that educational institutions or the government should provide financial relief to students and households with lower incomes. As the educational system relies entirely on digital tools and online modes of teaching and learning during the lockdown period, this family is

struggling to cope with the situation. They face new challenges with economic, technical, and socio-cultural implications. Their words highlight the seriousness of the digital divide, which significantly impacts the prospects of many students during the lockdown period.

Issues of disconnect

Karthik mentions that they have encountered numerous technical challenges due to limited internet availability. He explains that the internet connectivity in their area is quite poor, often limited to just 2G. With such a slow connection, it is challenging to accomplish even basic tasks like sending a photo to their teachers. Additionally, the electricity supply is highly unreliable, and at the slightest indication of rain, the power was cut off, leaving them waiting for hours until it was restored. Bavin continues the discussion by saying that his village is one of those places where basic communication facilities are lacking, and they have to sit on the roof of their house to get a signal on their phones. Karthik continues to express his concerns; “A high-speed internet connection is required to access course materials online. Spotty connections and constant buffering diminish our interest. We often get logged out of classes when connectivity is lost.” Kashi joins the discussion and adds:

Most often, I cannot hear the teachers well. When everyone starts to speak at once or the teacher asks me to respond, I try but in vain, and eventually, I turn off the application and leave the class. Teachers might think I’m mocking them.

Bavin, Karthik, and Kashi discussed the challenges they face with internet connectivity and poor signals. Their conversation serves as a stark reminder of the unresolved issue of the digital divide, which continues to separate the privileged from the disadvantaged. This disparity is painfully evident during the pandemic as students struggle to access online classes. Moreover, the integration of digital technologies into our society has been haphazard and unequal. Just because a household has a device or internet connectivity doesn't mean that the

connection and devices are sufficient or reliable. Their words also highlight how the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a fundamental structural imbalance between rural and urban areas, and between the rich and the poor.

Impact on peer group communication

In this section, the paper aims to explore the impact of the pandemic on peer group communication. The discussion draws from the narratives shared by both the parents and children/students in the family under study. The students/children expressed a profound longing for the moments spent face-to-face with their friends at school. Nayana, Bavin's mother, reflects:

Bavin was quite the social butterfly before the lockdown. He always relished playing football, going to the theatre, and spending ample time with friends. However, the lockdown has disrupted his social activities and connections. His world has transitioned to the online sphere, and he often experiences feelings of loneliness.

Bavin adds: "Now, we maintain our relationships only through mobile phones. We are not able to see each other. There are strict restrictions on playing outdoors or holding any kind of meetings. It's a very difficult time that we never imagined." These words indicate that the lockdown has significantly impacted peer group friendships and interactions, which play a crucial role in students' growth. "When social communications move online, only certain kinds of relationships appear to survive. We can't blame anyone for it," explains Anil Kumar. Bavin expresses that the activities he used to enjoy with his friends, like gossiping and cracking jokes, don't occur as naturally when they connect online. He believes their online relationships lack depth. Kashi appears visibly saddened when discussing the inability to meet and play with his friends in person. He articulates feelings of loneliness due to the lockdown measures preventing social gatherings. Through his words, we discern that prolonged lockdowns foster feelings of isolation, and limitations on peer-group interactions pose particular challenges for young children.

Anil Kumar also shares his perspective, emphasizing the importance of children's opportunities to engage with their friends for maintaining strong bonds. He observes that the pandemic severely restricts these opportunities. According to him, schools provide the optimal environment for children to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds, but the pandemic disrupts this possibility.

Increased social media engagement

Kashi and Karthik said that they started their social media activities after the lockdown began. They created accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube together. They also helped their mother, Seethamma, establish her online presence. Manoj Kumar says:

Instagram and YouTube are highly popular among children, emulating other media activities. They are now using these applications for many hours daily. It is a good way to kill time. Also, Karthik started his own YouTube account and began posting content. He believes that YouTube will give him money if he gets a certain number of people watching his videos.

All three children in the family said they are spending more time on YouTube and Instagram during the lockdown. Karthik (13) has a YouTube account titled 'KK Brozz' and posts videos regularly. He said he may spend hours on the application. He likes creating content for it and is now trying to increase the number of subscribers. Karthik says: "I may plan to spend around 5-10 minutes on YouTube, but once I start, I'll end up scrolling for 2 hours. I know, it's simply addicting – once we start scrolling, we just keep doing it." Similarly, Kashi (11) described feeling a bit addicted to YouTube, and Bavin said he spends approximately 2 hours a day on the platform. All three of them find YouTube very interesting during the lockdown period. They search for videos on YouTube whenever they need to find information about something.

Parents are disturbed by their children's use of new media and mention that it is becoming difficult to handle them as they are getting hooked on mobile phones to attend online classes. They said that the children are spending hours on the phone watching videos, gaming, and using social media to interact with friends. In their opinion, participating in an online lecture is entirely different from engaging in other forms of entertainment on the phone. Karthik takes the discussion to the next level. He says:

Unfortunately, our parents continuously assume that we are using mobiles just for gaming and watching videos on YouTube. However, in fact, we usually use it for chatting with our friends during our leisure time. To stay mentally healthy, we need breaks during continuous online classes. Spending time on WhatsApp or YouTube is a relief for us. There is no other way for us to feel relaxed during this lockdown period. We can't come together, sit together, or play together. So, gaming on mobile phones is the best way for us.

The parents are also aware that, with everyone locked down in their homes, it is natural for children to rely on alternative social networking platforms. So, even though they are anxious about their children spending more time on Instagram or Facebook, they do not completely dismiss the role of online technologies in maintaining relationships among children when in-person meetings are not possible.

Conclusion

This paper delves into the experience of digital education during the pandemic, focusing on a single family to explore the matter in depth. The narratives provided by the family members, including three school-going children, offer insights into the nuanced aspects of digital education. The study also investigates how the pandemic-induced changes shaped communication dynamics among family members. Data collected through in-depth interviews with the family reveal that the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges, particularly when the education system transitioned online. Educational institutions employed various applications such as Google Meet, Google Docs, Google Classroom,

Zoom, Skype, Edmodo, and SlideShare to facilitate virtual classrooms. The family initially faced difficulties due to a shortage of smartphones for their three school-going children. Even after acquiring a smartphone, the children had to share it, leading to disruptions as their classes often overlapped. The family's experience highlights the limitations of digital education, especially for the children in this household.

By listening to the children and their parents, we understand how the abrupt transition to digital learning exacerbates the digital divide. The children in the family explain that they are not able to readily adopt digital learning tools unlike some of their classmates, underscoring the gap between the privileged and the less privileged. The family members mention that those with financial resources and more privilege can easily afford the latest smartphones and have access to unlimited internet. Conversely, the children from low-income households in this study face significant challenges in attending online classes. This disparity highlights the inequities in access to digital education resources.

Children in the family have been unable to access high-speed internet during instructional hours due to the lack of mobile network availability in their village. These essential tools for participating in online learning activities have become a significant challenge for the household. Additionally, the children have expressed that their teachers did not understand their situation and blamed them for being "inactive" during classes. This underscores the need for teachers, the government, and mobile network providers to be aware of these constraints that hinder children from receiving adequate instruction during their online classes.

Parents in the family are deeply concerned about the growing screen time of their children, fearing both physical and psychological repercussions. They find it challenging to discern whether their children are spending hours in front of their mobile phones for academic activities or online gaming. However, the children dismiss their parents' anxieties as irrelevant, despite acknowledging their excessive use of social media platforms, video streaming applications, and online gaming platforms. They argue that they require breaks from continuous online lectures and

perceive these applications as tools for leisure rather than solely for academic purposes.

Both parents and children express the desire for administrators to provide the necessary digital tools to facilitate digital interactions. They believe that administrators should take steps to bridge the gap in technology accessibility, thereby assisting students from low-income households to access academic opportunities on par with their more privileged peers. The discussion with the family members highlights the need to address social, technological, and psychological barriers that hinder children from engaging in digital learning effectively. The authorities should also take necessary steps to provide adequate internet connectivity to enhance access for children in low-income households, who often face disadvantages. The study also emphasizes the importance of parents encouraging their children to cultivate both online and offline relationships. However, parents should maintain certain monitoring practices or awareness of these relationships without infringing on the children's privacy and freedom.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become indispensable in today's world. ICT plays a crucial role in addressing significant social issues, strengthening economies, democratic institutions, and local communities. However, the digital divide, or inequality in access to technology, creates a barrier that separates people and prevents certain groups from reaping its benefits. Real access to technology enables individuals to utilize it effectively, thereby improving their living conditions.

[1] The first author engaged in the conversation with the boy, which led to the development of this paper.

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