Impact of Covid 19 on Education in Sri Lanka: Assess the Major Challenges Faced by DSCSC Course No 16

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Abstract

The expansion of Covid 19 has caused significant disruption in human life, particularly the educational sector. It has created many unforeseen challenges on education. In Sri Lanka, several higher educational institutions, including universities, have closed, and the whole higher education sector has shifted to an online platform. However, under such conditions, the government and private educational sectors did not have significant infrastructure development to handle the enormous challenges in online learning facilities during Covid 19. Despite many challenges, Sri Lankan university authorities have been able to maintain the learning process through the use of various instruments since online education became popular during the pandemic. This study findings revealed that university students face numerous problems such as financial constraints, intermittent power failure, poor internet connections, and feelings of loneliness while taking online classes. Most importantly, most students are experiencing increased stress level as a result of their inability to complete basic needs such as laptops, smart phones, and internet connections due to financial difficulties. As a result, it is an urgent concern that the government or other responsible parties should address fairly in this juncture.

Keywords: Covid 19, higher educational sector, online learning, challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid 19 epidemic has now spread over the globe. Due to this outbreak, many lives have already been lost and a great number of individuals have been infected all over the world. As a result, several sectors in every country, including Sri Lanka, were affected. At the inception of the pandemic, the government imposed travel restrictions and limited the human gathering in order to curtail virus spread. In this nature, the education sector is the most impacted segment and inevitably disturbed its activities. According to (Haththotuwa and Rupasinghe, 2021), it is highlighted that, higher education in Sri Lanka was conducted via traditional method prior to the pandemic. There was no structured technique for online teaching among students and lecturers until they adapted to Zoom, MS Teams, Google Meetings, and other online educational apps. Because of technological advancements, many students were encountered numerous challenges throughout the pandemic. Hence, this paper focus on the issues that student officers at Defence Services Command & Staff College

(DSCSC) course number 16 encounter due to Covid 19 when adapting to online education. First, the background and impact of Covid 19 on education in the global arena will be discussed in the literature review section. Secondly, data collection method, analysis, and ethical considerations will be discussed in methodology section. Then, the discussion section will cover the findings which linked to the literature review. Finally, conclude the study by stating the research objective has been achieved and give recommendations for further studies.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

The main objectives of the study are, to observe how student officers adapted to online learning during the Covid 19 pandemic and to identify advantages and challenges faced by them in online learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In December 2019, it is observed an unidentified origin of viral pneumonia in Wuhan, China. Subsequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced the detection of a new coronavirus (Covid 19) as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (Marinoni et al., 2020). In the meantime, pandemic has spread out within the border of the South Asian region and ultimately it affected to the entire world. In particular, every developed and developing countries has taken effort to contain the pandemic and Sri Lanka also become the part of the pandemic (Chandasiri, 2020). Having examined the spread of the virus, there are many segments were affected. The education sector is one of the most affected area due to pandemic across the globe. As per the Rameez et al., (2020) findings, most of the countries were temporarily shut down the educational institutions, including schools, universities and other public and private institutions to avoid the social spread among students. Even though, students remain indoors, most of the semesters including practical sessions remain uncovered in universities due to restrictions imposed by the government against pandemic. According to (Radha et al., 2020), it is clear that, learning and molding a person into a perfect person is the foundation of education, which also serves to instill social responsibility. Correspondingly, (Rameez et al., 2020) has highlighted that Covid-19 pandemic formed enormous challenges on the traditional higher education system and every nation recognized the necessity of incorporating the online education with immediate effect. As a result, educational institutions have been shortly transformed the global education in to distance learning during the corona pandemic (Hayashi et al., 2020). Further, (Mahyoob, 2020), also highlighted that, online learning is most likely be the best answer for continue the education during pandemic, especially in university education. Similarly, (Batubara, 2021) also crystalized that, the online teaching and learning process is an effective method even though the students cannot interact each other physically.

In this context, the Sri Lankan education ministry claimed that, commencement of the online lectures for university students as a vital factor. In the meantime, student officers of DSCSC are also compulsory to connect lectures via online platform to follow the English module which is affiliated to Kotetalawala Defence University (KDU). It is observed that, most of the student officers are also facing many challenges in online learning from the beginning of the module. (Hayashi et al., 2020) also highlighted that, not only students, but also faculty members, have experienced difficulties in accessing and downloading learning materials from university web sites. They had to pay for additional charges for data while downloading some study materials from web links beyond university web servers that are connected to YouTube and digital news article websites. Having examine the feasibility to offer free data facilities, internet service providers in Sri Lanka thought that offering free internet access to university servers is a necessary first step in encouraging students to engage in online learning. On the other hand, most students from low-income families faced numerous obstacles as a result of the family's primary earner quitting or losing their primary source of income during the pandemic. Hence, it is highlighted that such students have been affected as a result of inability to join online classes during the pandemic due to a lack of essential needs such as internet access, laptops or smart phones, printers, and so on. Similarly, (Jena, 2020) also found that, some of the poor family paternities have affected to afford primary expenses of children because they have already lost their main source of income during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the government employees have not adversely affected on such issues, since they get the salary on time and able to fulfill those requirements. Further, it is also mandatory to focus on student's psychological issues that encountered due to Covid 19. In line with the same argument, (Son et al., 2020) has highlighted that researchers have revealed some evidence on psychological and mental health issues due to prevailing pandemic specially on college students called susceptible people. In contrast, (Howshigan and Nadesan, 2021) highlighted that "…..online learning provides the opportunity to continue their education by staying in their homes, which contributes to reducing the cost of living and neglect the problem of homesick (p. 53)". Hence, researcher believes that, this observation correlated with the mental and psychological aspects of student officers in positive means since they do not have to concern much on financial matters.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher uses qualitative deductive approach for the research. This study depends on primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from the student officers of DSCSC course No 16 by generating questionnaire via google form and shared on social media (i.e. WhatsApp). The survey mainly focusses on student officers of DSCSC who follow pre-sessional English module which is affiliated to KDU. The ethical consent from student officers has taken at the time of sharing questionnaire via WhatsApp by explaining the objective of the study. The selected sample size is 35. The questionnaire mainly limited to 15 close ended

questions for the convenience of the respondents. The questions mainly focuses the objectives of the study. The questionnaire contains general background of participants and close ended questions enable to measure the practical difficulties as well as satisfaction level on attending online learning. The data collection taken place between 10th November to 25th November 2021. Data analyzes from MS excel sheet and charts were used to summarize the collected data. The time horizon of the study was cross-sectional as data collection was done at one point in time to answer the research questions.
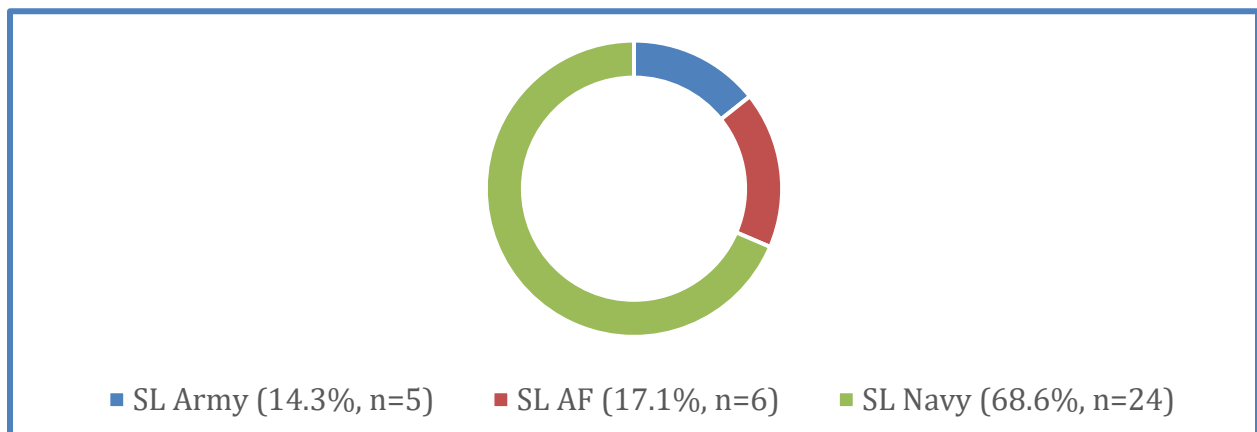
4. FINDINGS

Chart 1: Participants Demography

- SL Army (14.3%, n=5)   - SL AF (17.1%, n=6)   - SL Navy (68.6%, n=24)

It is observed student officers from SL Army (14.3%, n=5), SL Air Force (17.1%, n=6) and majority respondents from SL Navy (68.6%, n=24) have participated for the survey.
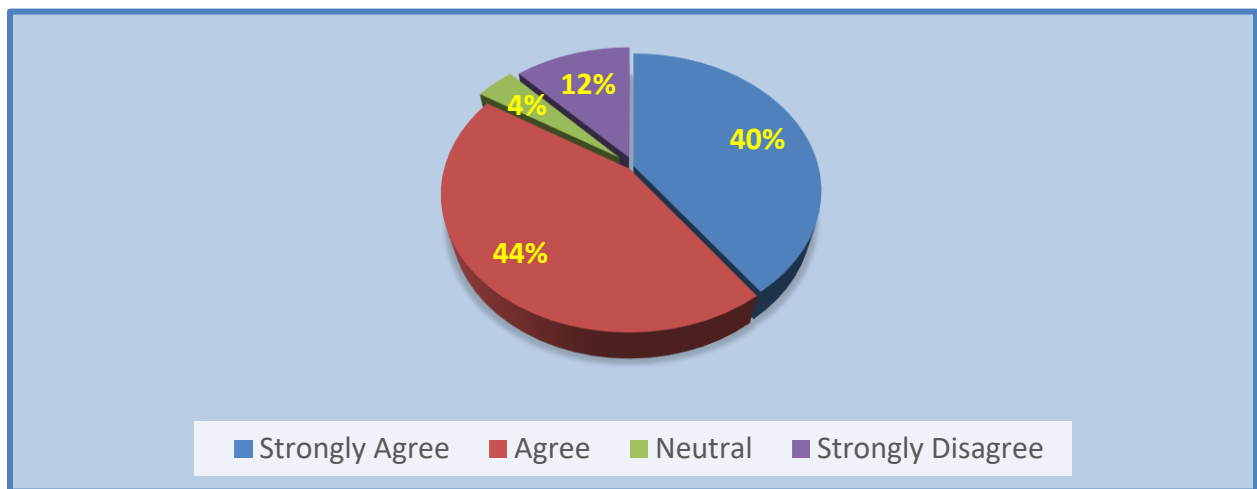

Chart 2: Online Platform Experience

- Strongly Agree   - Agree   - Neutral   - Strongly Disagree

During the prescribed period total 35 number of participants responded for the questionnaire. The study revealed that majority of the participants (84%, n=21) following lectures in online due to Covid 19 pandemic.
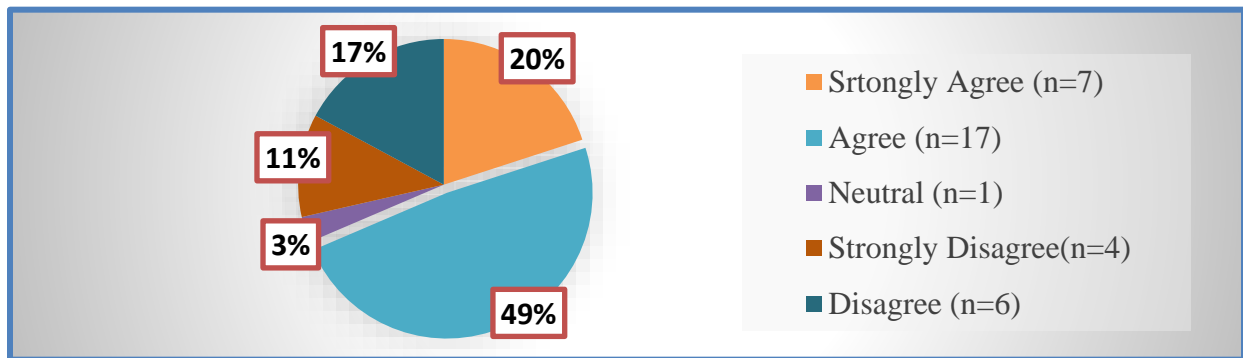
4.1 Adaptability to Online Education

Chart 3: Number of Participants Adapted to Online Education

Further, majority of the participants (69%, n=24) never had an online education experience previously and adapted to online learning due to Covid 19 pandemic. This depicts that, participants should most likely faced many challenges while using online education due to lack of experience in the field.
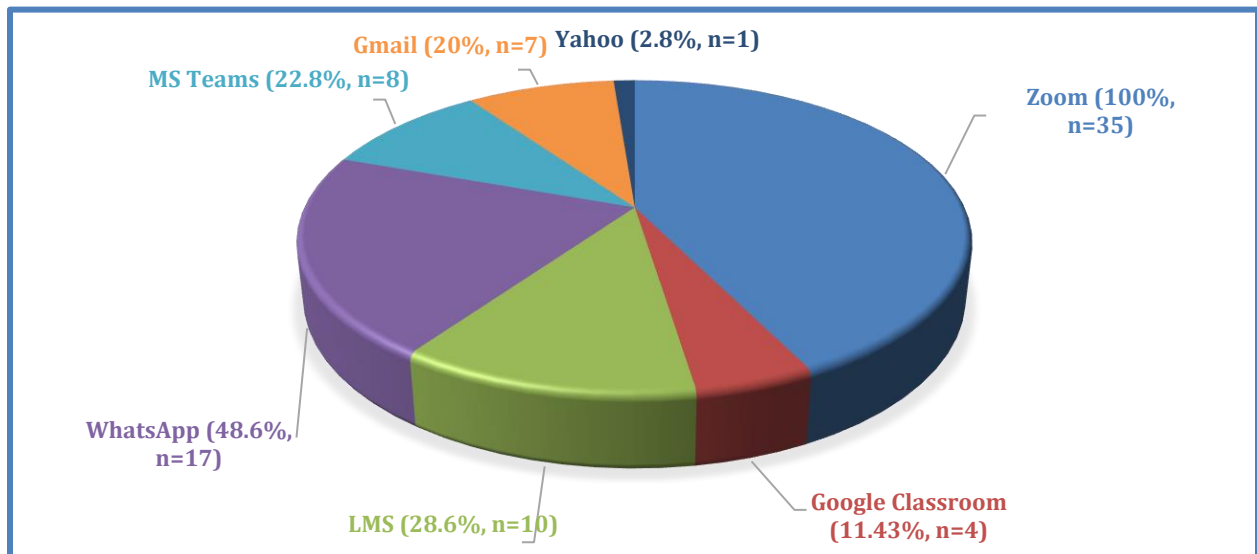
4.2 Online Application Experience

Chart 4: Number of Participants Used in Online Applications

Also, findings revealed that, majority of the students 100% (n=35) used Zoom meeting, while 20% (n=6), 26.7% (n=8), 56.7% (n=17), 13.3% (n=4), 40% (n=12) experienced on Zoom, MS Teams, LMS, WhatsApp, Google Classroom, emails for the purpose of online classes during the pandemic. It is highlighted that, Zoom meeting is the most popular method to join for the distance education during pandemic.
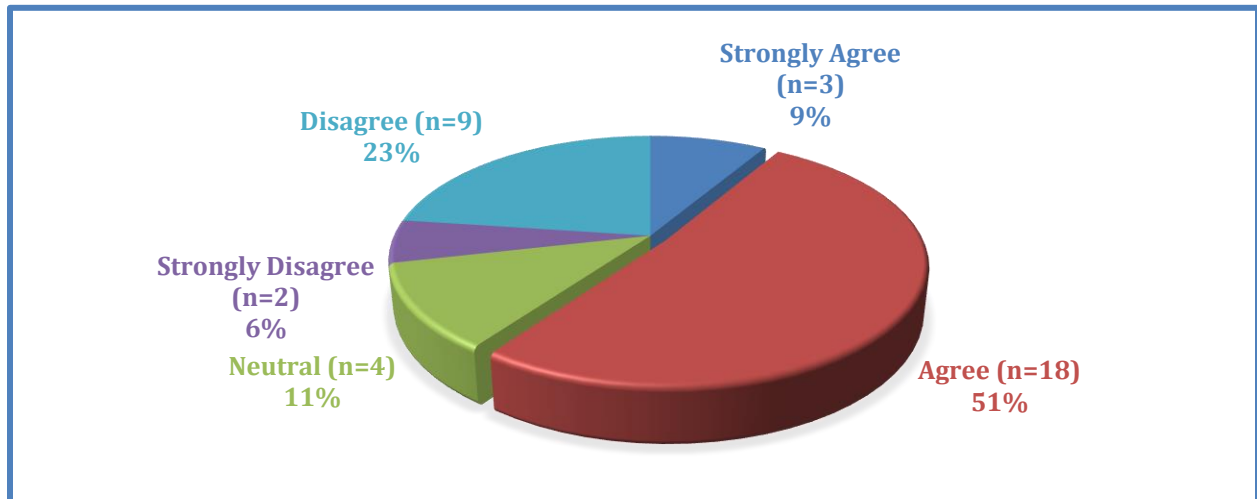
4.3 Perception of Online Learning

Chart 5: Perception of Online Education Experience During Pandemic

The perception of students in online education is found to be a positive attitude during the pandemic. The majority (60%, n=21) of the participants are prefer to continue in online education. However, 29% of students show their disagreement in online education and insignificant number of students (11%) are in a 'Neutral' mentality whether they should choose traditional education or online learning.

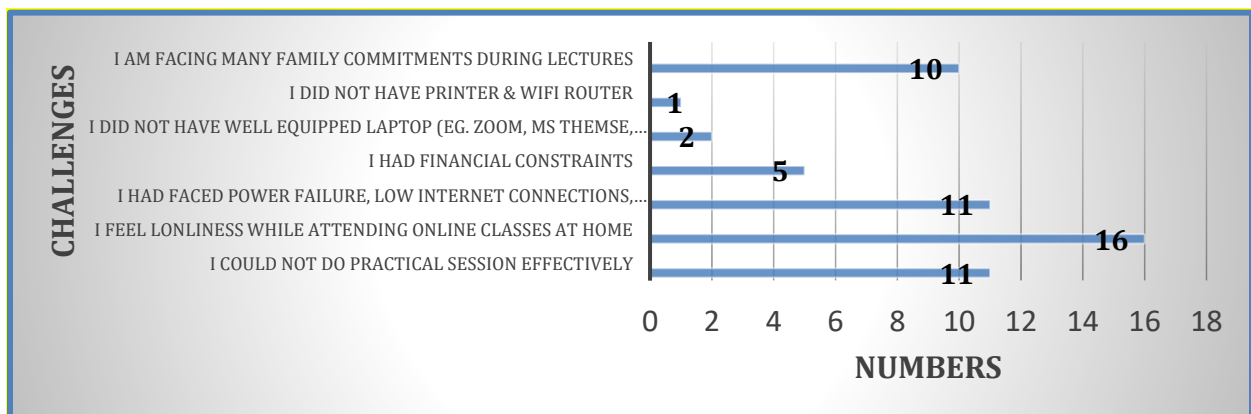## 4.4 Major Challenges Faced During Pandemic

Chart 6: Major Challenges Faced in Online Education During Covid 19

The study revealed that the majority of the participants (n=16) feel loneliness while attending online lectures at home and similar number of students (n=11) stated that they cannot do practical sessions effectively and they also have experienced with power failure, external noises and low internet connections even though they lived in urban areas. Further, n=10 numbers of participants are facing family commitments during lecture since most of them joined the lectures from home. Moreover, financial constraints, availability of printer and WiFi router and having well equipped laptop are found to be insignificant challenges since most of the student officers are working in tri-forces and having monthly income may be the reason.
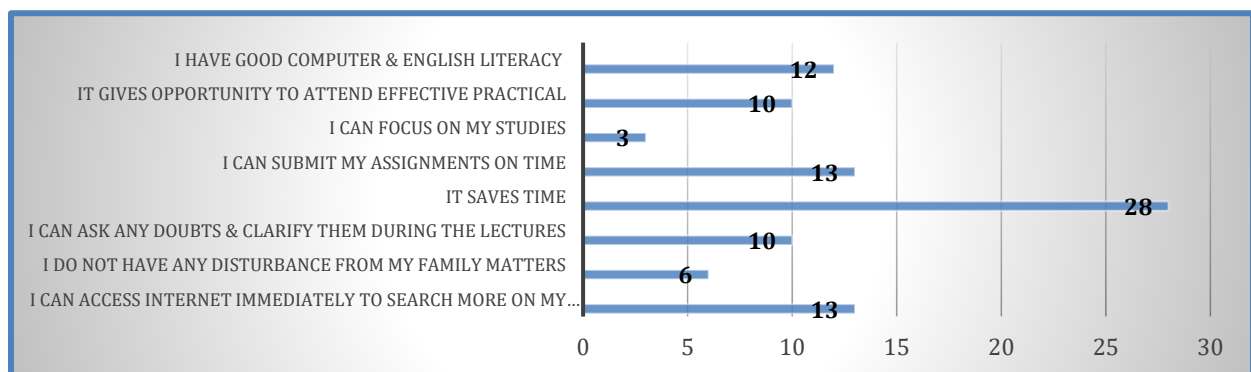

Chart 7: Student Satisfaction in Online Learning

Moreover, study revealed that, majority of students (80%, n=28) are most likely be satisfied in online education because of it saves their time. However, limited number of participants satisfied in online education not only that they can access internet at any time to search study materials but also, they can submit their assignments on time (37.1%, n=13). In addition, 28.6%, n=10 of participants satisfied about online learning since, they could be attending practical effectively and they can ask any doubts to clarify immediately during lectures. Further, researcher found that, limited amount of student officers (34.4%, n=12) satisfies in online education because they have good computer literacy and English knowledge to continue with the online education. This shows that majority of the students facing challenges in these aspects, because significant amount of students not satisfied in online education due to not fulfilling those factors.
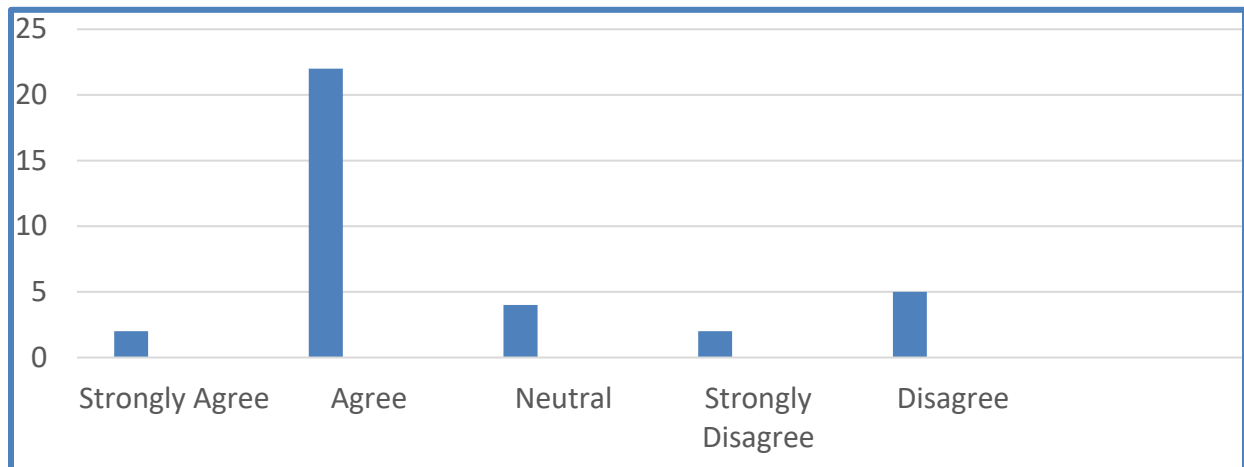
Chart 8: Mental Stress of Student Officers

The researcher questioned from participants 'whether student officers have mental stress while attending online classes or not'. The results revealed that, majority of the participants (68.6%, n=24) do not have mental stress while attending online classes.

5. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that majority of student officers experienced in online education and at the same time they prefer to continue online learning during Covid 19. As per the findings, it is observed that considerable percentage (68.6%) of student officers do not experiencing any mental stress while attending online classes during pandemic. It seems that student officers have less mental stress since, they join online from home and they do not have any other official commitments while attending classes. In contrast, (Son et al., 2020) argued that student's metal health issues should be taken into consideration in different stages, where Son's study revealed that 71% of the students indicated that their stress and anxiety level increased due to Covid 19, which is one of the major challenge faced by students in global arena. Similarly, the study revealed that, 45.7% of student officers feels loneliness while attending lectures from home which same would be leads to anxiety at the edge.

Further, significant number of student officers (80%) satisfied in online education because of "they can save time", "they can submit their assignments on time", "they can access internet to search additional materials immediately" and "they have good English and computer literacy". Similarly, (Howshigan and Nadesan, 2021), also highlighted that online education gives many advantages amidst Covid 19. Further, study revealed that most of the student officers facing difficulties such as, they faced power failure, low internet coverage, external noises and most importantly, they could not do the practical session effectively during online learning. Similarly, (Haththotuwa and Rupasinghe, 2021) also found that majority of university students face at least one of such problem (e.g. poor internet coverage,

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lack of equipment problem, financial problem etc...) during pandemic. In contrast, Batubara, (2021) believes that, the online teaching and learning process is the effective method even the students cannot interact physically. Similarly, this study revealed that 60% of participants willing to continue with online education.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, outbreak of Covid -19 pandemic has transformed the education system drastically. However, students and lecturers of universities are confronted with numerous challenges due to virtual platform. The study revealed that, student officers has adapted the online education and encountered many challenges and advantages when attending in online education amidst Covid 19. The most of the student officers have used online platform satisfactorily whereas most of them are found to be technology savvy. Further, it is observed that most of the student officers did not have financial constraints where majority of them facing online education satisfactorily. However, it is evident that most of the literatures are only focus on university education where as limited number of literatures have focus to military higher education. In this nature, same matter can be taken into consideration for future researchers. Moreover, there are limited research has done to identify the mental well-being of students and specially the research should be focus towards military students in future researchers as well.

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