Challenges to online Learning in the Time of COVID-19:
A National-Level Survey of Undergraduates of Management Faculties of State Universities in Sri Lanka

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In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all Sri Lankan state universities to stop face-to-face teaching and learning activities and abruptly shift to online teaching. Given this situation, this study aims to identify the challenges faced by undergraduate students in the management faculties of state universities in Sri Lanka during this teaching-learning process. The authors shared a Google® Form among undergraduates of management faculties of state universities in Sri Lanka through email and social media platforms for data collection. The questionnaire comprised a combination of multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions, with the expectation of obtaining demographic information and information about access to technological resources, study habits, living conditions, self-assessment of capacity for online learning, and perceived barriers to online learning. The study was undertaken as a survey, and the authors collected 822 responses. Descriptive statistics are used for the analysis of data. Among the 822 respondents, 65% owned at least one device, and 56% of the sample were using pre-paid mobile data to access online resources and attend lectures. Out of the respondents, only 27% had been in the highest 27%. Furthermore, the results indicated that the students were able to survive at this level because 58% of them have had some form of financial scholarship. Challenges experienced by students in the online learning process could be classified under five categories: technological, individual, domestic, institutional, and community barriers. The findings of this study are significant for all state universities (undergraduates, academic, and administrative staff) and all government institutions responsible for higher education for their future decision-making related to online teaching and learning in any situation beyond the pandemic of COVID-19. Based on the findings of this study, a strategic plan could be developed for the successful implementation of e-learning and view technology as a positive step towards evolution and change, irrespective of whether there is a pandemic or not.

Keywords: COVID-19, Management Undergraduates, Online Learning, Online Learning Barriers

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