“TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER!” – VIETNAMESE AND BRAZILIAN TEACHERS’ STORIES OF DIFFICULTIES AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN ONLINE TEACHING DURING COVID-19: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

“JUNTOS SOMOS MAIS FORTES!” – HISTÓRIAS DE DIFICULDADES E OPORTUNIDADES DE APRENDIZAGEM DE PROFESSORES VIETNAMITAS E BRASILEIROS NO ENSINO ONLINE DURANTE A COVID-19: UM ESTUDO QUALITATIVO

Tú Anh Hà¹ | Giovanna Caetano-Silva²

Resumo

O presente estudo visa investigar os desafios e oportunidades de aprendizagem que os professores vivenciaram ao mudarem de aulas presenciais para aulas online durante a pandemia da covid-19. A investigação baseia-se numa perspetiva qualitativa e os dados foram recolhidos através de um inquérito a 107 educadores brasileiros e vietnamitas. A análise qualitativa de conteúdo é aplicada para analisar as respostas dos participantes. Como resultado, o estudo identifica os seguintes desafios: (i) questões mentais e emocionais, (ii) interação dentro e fora da sala de aula, (iii) falta de preparação, (iv) falta de acesso físico à tecnologia, que está ligado a (vi) desigualdade social na educação, e (vii) adaptação dos métodos de ensino. Além disso, os resultados do teste exato de Fisher mostram que os professores apresentam diferenças na descrição dos desafios enfrentados, de acordo com seus sectores e países. Em termos de oportunidades de aprendizagem, o estudo destaca: (i) o aumento da autonomia dos estudantes, (ii) a compaixão dos professores

¹ Corresponding author. PETaL EMJMD. Faculty of Education Science, Universidad de Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6450-3390 ; tuanh.ling@gmail.com

² Co-first author. PETaL EMJMD. Faculty of Education Science, Universidad de Córdoba, Córdoba, Spain.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8819-473X ; giovannapbb@gmail.com

1. "Together We Are Stronger!" – Vietnamese and Brazilian Teachers’ Stories of Difficulties and Learning Opportunities in Online Teaching During COVID-19: A Qualitative Study

2. "Juntos Somos Mais Fortes!" – Histórias de Dificuldades e Oportunidades de Aprendizagem de Professores Vietnamitas e Brasileiros no Ensino Online Durante a COVID-19: Um Estudo Qualitativo

Tú Anh Hà | Giovanna Caetano-Silva
com as dificuldades dos estudantes, (iii) a possibilidade de ligação com os estudantes, (iv) atitudes otimistas, (v) a superação das dificuldades através da aprendizagem com provas e erros, e (vii) o desenvolvimento profissional e a aprendizagem. Finalmente, mostra que a educação à distância também pode ser um terreno de oportunidades de aprendizagem em que há compaixão e oportunidades de desenvolvimento profissional, por exemplo, através da busca de formas de conexão e de ensino apesar das adversidades.

Palavras-chave  Ensino a distância, EaD, covid-19, desafios, perspetivas do professor

Abstract  The present study aims to investigate challenges and learning opportunities that teachers experienced when shifting from face-to-face to online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research is grounded on a qualitative design, and data were collected through a survey from 107 Brazilian and Vietnamese educators. Qualitative content analysis is applied to analyze participants' replies. As a result, the study identifies the following key challenges: (i) mental and emotional issues, (ii) interaction inside and outside the classroom, (iii) lack of preparation, (iv) lack of physical access to technology, which is linked to (vi) social inequality in education, and (vii) adaptation of teaching methods. In addition, results of Fisher's exact test show that teachers are significantly different in reporting their challenges, regarding their sectors and countries. In terms of learning opportunities, the study highlights: (i) increasing students' autonomy, (ii) teachers' compassion with students' difficulties, (iii) possibility of bonding with students, (iv) optimistic attitudes, (v) overcoming difficulties by learning with trials and mistakes, and (vii) professional development and learning. Finally, it showcases that DE can also be a terrain of learning opportunities in which compassion and professional development opportunities take place through, for instance, finding ways for bonding and teaching despite adversity.

Keywords  Online teaching, Distance Education, Covid-19, teachers' perspectives

1. Introduction
Starting in December 2019 in China, Coronavirus has rapidly spread all over the world and became a global pandemic, considerably impacting different aspects of humans' life, including education (Lu et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2021). As a measure to inhibit the
expansion of Coronavirus, a great number of countries have imposed the law of ‘lockdown’ and quarantine, leading to the closure of kindergartens, schools, colleges, and universities. More specifically, according to a report by UNICEF (2021), between March 2020 and February 2021, 168 million children around the world were affected by these measures (UNICEF, 2021). With that, in order to maintain education during social distance, plenty of schools and other educational centers in the world have shifted from face-to-face to online classrooms (Chang & Fang, 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Kapasia et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

Before Covid-19, even though literature brings some positive outcomes of both learning and teaching online at different contexts (Conceição, 2006; Marjanovic, 1999), it is also perceived that online modalities may require specific adaptations in comparison to face-to-face ones (Chiasson et al., 2015; Conceição, 2006). Therefore, considering this circumstance, in which a rapid shift had to be instituted characterizing what Hodges and colleagues (2020) coined as “Emergent Remote Teaching”, a variety of opportunities and challenges for both teachers and learners are expected to emerge and should be under discussion.

Covid-19 affects the whole of mankind, but children are among the most vulnerable groups. During Covid-19, teachers play an imperative role for children and young people because they not only provide education but also supply social interaction which is restrained because of the pandemic. Therefore, there is still a shortage of studies on difficulties and especially lessons learnt from conducting online education from teachers’ perspectives across different contexts. It is also necessary to hear the viewpoints of the ones who work with children at kindergartens and/or primary schools. With this, there is a necessity to fill this gap and to stand for alternatives for supporting teachers during and after the Covid-19 epidemic. With the aforementioned purpose, the research questions of the present study are the following:

- Research question 1: What are the difficulties that teachers, especially in kindergarten and primary years, faced when shifting from face-to-face to online classrooms?
• Research question 2: Are there differences between the difficulties encountered by teachers considering the sector they work, the age they attend or the country they are based at?

• Research question 3: What are the positive lessons that teachers reported when shifting from face-to-face to online classrooms?

The first two research questions aim to identify the difficulties of teachers working with different target groups and in different sectors in order to propose solutions to support them while the last research question aims to elicit teachers’ wisdom in order to share their ideas and solutions in their specific cases as the lessons that other teachers can view, reflect and apply.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Distance Education and Online Teaching

The definition of Distance Education (DE) has been evolving along with technology and society (Saykıli, 2018). It is agreed that, opposed from face-to-face, distance education is mediated through technology, it takes place within different physical spaces for teachers and learners, and eventually participants make use of it within distinct time-frames (Conceição, 2006; Garrison & Shale, 1987). After reviewing and updating some definitions, Saykıli (2018) synthesizes:

“Distance education is a form of education which brings together the physically-distant learner(s) and the facilitator(s) of the learning activity around planned and structured learning experiences via various two or multi-way mediated media channels that allow interactions between/among learners, facilitators as well as between learners and educational resources.” (p. 5)

Coming to the time of instruction, depending on the time that DE happens, two different types of collaborative technologies can be used: asynchronous and synchronous (Marjanovic, 1999). The first one is described as “any time any place” and the second “same time, same place” or “same time, any place” (Marjanovic, 1999, p. 131). Therefore,
in the asynchronous version, students and teachers are not connected all at the same time as opposed to the synchronous modality.

With this in mind, in this study, online teaching is understood as a mode of teaching which belongs to Distance Education, using technology as a tool to connect teachers or instructors and learners, and that can happen either asynchronously or synchronously.

2.2 Challenges of online education during the Covid-19 pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of studies have been carried out to investigate the challenges of online teaching and learning (Chang & Fang, 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Kapasia et al., 2020; Kaup et al., 2020; Moawad, 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Smoyer et al., 2020). The findings of those studies identify (i) difficulties that teachers and students face with distance and online education during the epidemic, (ii) the influence of Covid-19 or lockdown on students, (iii) factors causing students’ fears and anxiety when learning online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most studies were carried out in the context of universities or colleges, and there is a lack of studies on the challenges of online education for young learners, such as primary or kindergarten students.

In terms of difficulties of online teaching and learning, studies are diverse in both contexts (such as, in China, Indonesia, India or Pakistan) and participants (from kindergarten to university students). In the context of Chinese education, Chang and Fang (2020) analyze the obstacles of online teaching and learning during the Covid-19 epidemic in Chinese universities. The findings report that although the lectures are prepared very carefully, teachers still face difficulties in monitoring and changing students’ learning behaviors in a short term so as to adapt to the Covid-19 epidemic. Huang et al. (2020) summarize the challenges of online teaching including: the lack of preparation time, teacher/ student isolation, and the need for effective pedagogies. Whereas in Indonesia, Putri et al. (2020) explore the obstacles of online education during the Covid-19 in primary schools. By carrying out a semi-structured interview with 15 teachers and parents, the study identifies challenges in communication and interaction among teachers and students, more obstacles for students with specific needs, and longer screen time. Parents also found the decrease of learning discipline and lack of technology skills, while teachers found limitations in the choices of teaching methods,
less coverage of the content of the curriculum, lack of technology skills and e-resources, time-consuming, difficulties of coordination with other teachers and principals, also the increase of Internet bills. In respect to India, Kaup et al. (2020) point out challenges related to technology, student engagement, information overload, mental well-being, assessment, ophthalmology, and quality evaluation. Lastly, in Pakistan, Mukhtar et al. (2020) highlight the limitations of online learning which are related to inefficiency and difficulty in maintaining academic integrity.

Regarding the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic or lockdown on students, studies mostly report issues on mental health and human interaction. Kapasia et al. (2020), by surveying 232 undergraduate and postgraduate students in West Bengal (India), found out that among 70% of students being involved in online learning, a number of students faced depression, poor Internet connection, and unfavorable study environment at home. Also, students living in remote areas faced enormous difficulties with online learning. Smoyer et al. (2020) use a survey to investigate the experiences of remote learning during the Covid-19 of undergraduate students in the United States. The findings show the effect of the pandemic on students’ interpersonal relationships and communication which influence their sense of belonging, engagement, and learning. In addition, students are dissatisfied when they lack personal communication and interaction with instructors and peers, leading to the inhibition of students’ abilities to engage in learning. This requires the need for interactive technology in online classes. Concerning the factors causing students’ fears and anxiety when learning online during the Covid-19 pandemic, Moawad (2020) found that the primary factor causing students’ stress is their uncertainty over the final exams and assessments.

2.3. Positive aspects of online education during the Covid-19 pandemic
Up to now, there have not been many studies pointing out achievements of online learning and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, a few studies have mentioned some factors from different components contributing to creating efficient online learning experience in the epidemic time, including curriculums, stakeholders and the collaboration among stakeholders. For instance, Rasmitadila et al. (2020) pointed out some achievements in online learning in Indonesia during the pandemic, including: the national humanist curriculum, the cooperation and support from all stakeholders.
and the willingness for technology. Martin (2020) suggested that to achieve success in online education in the Covid-19 time, the following requirements should be considered and satisfied: (1) well-organized instruction; (2) high-quality content; (3) creating motivation for students; (4) paying attention to the relationship between teachers and students; and (5) concerning students’ mental health. Moore-beyioku (2021) proposes an activity through the use of Quizlet Live, bringing joy and collaboration to a task that used to be conducted face-to-face. With this, the lessons learnt from teachers during this critical situation and that prompted them to enhance online education and minimize the effects of social distancing have been seldom approached. Hence, this is one of the important gaps that this study seeks to cover.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

This present study investigates the difficulties and learning opportunities that teachers, especially those who work with kindergarten or primary school children, experienced when shifting their teachings from face-to-face to online. For that, researchers decided to ground it on a qualitative design, applying an online open-ended questionnaire. The qualitative nature allows gaining deep understandings from the perspectives of subjects from a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

3.2. Data collection

Data were collected through an ad-hoc questionnaire designed with Google forms. It was sent to a range of teachers, using both emails, social web pages (Facebook), and Whatsapp. The survey was available for two weeks, from April 15th to 30th April in 2020 and received 123 replies, out of which 107 responses referred to the selected sample: Brazilian and Vietnamese teachers. In order to protect participant’s privacy, they agreed with an informed consent provided in the beginning of the survey. In relation to the instrument used, the first block of questions aimed at retrieving background information from the professionals and their students. Following, in a second section, they were asked to reflect upon the following question “Could you describe in some sentences your experience of online teaching during the Covid-19 quarantine?”. 

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https://doi.org/10.34632/investigacaoeducacional.2021.10188
3.3. Subjects

Maximal variation sampling was adopted in this study. More specifically, researchers worked on “maximal variation sampling” in order to bring different points of view upon online teaching during Covid-19 and vary the background of participants (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, participants were encouraged to share the survey with other teachers that were going through the same situation, adding to this study a snowballing sampling strategy (Creswell, 2012).

The study decided to analyze these two different contexts (Brazil and Vietnam) due to the fact that at the time the research was being conducted (late April, 2020), Brazil and Vietnam were differently facing Covid-19 in which the pandemic was under control in Vietnam (Malhotra, 2020) while it was spreading considerably in Brazil (Ministério da Saúde, 2020). As a result, a total of 107 teachers coming from Vietnam and Brazil voluntarily participated in the study. Among them fifty-seven come from Vietnam (50 women and 7 men), and fifty (43 women and 7 men) are from Brazil.

Teachers’ ages (Table 1) range from 24 to 63, in which the number of teachers aged 41 to 50 (40 persons) accounts for nearly two-fifths (7%) of the total number of participants, making this group become the largest one. Teachers from 31 to 40 (34 persons) take up to approximately a third of the whole number of teachers. There are 28 teachers under 30, accounting for nearly 26%. The number of teachers from 51 to 60 is three, and there are two teachers over 60, taking up to nearly 5%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 to 30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26.13%</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>Semi-private</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.87%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Age groups and sectors of participants
A majority of teachers work in public schools (66 persons), accounting for 62% of the total number of teachers participating in the study (Table 1). The number of teachers working in private educational centers or schools is nearly two-thirds (⅔) of the number of teachers in public schools. With 40 teachers, the private sector accounts for 37% of the total number of teachers responding to the survey. Only one teacher works neither in the public nor private sectors.

A great percentage of teachers in the study live in urban areas (82%), with 88 persons. Fourteen people live in sub-urban areas (13%) and only five teachers inhabit rural areas (Table 2).

Table 2: Living areas of participants responding to the survey of the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40.18%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-urban areas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.54%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46.72%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The age of students to whom the teachers answering the survey are teaching ranges from one to twenty. Among them, high school students (aged 16 to 18) account for 38%, becoming the biggest group with 41 persons. Primary students (aged 7 to 11) and secondary students (aged 12 to 15) take up to nearly 50%, with 27 persons and 23 persons respectively. The number of kindergartens (aged 0 to 6) is 13, accounting for about 12%. There are only a few teachers (3 persons) teaching over eighteen-year-old students (Table 3).

Table 3: Age groups of students taught by teachers participating in the survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of persons</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten (0 to 6)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school (7 to 11)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school (12 to 15)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school (16 to 18)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and university (over 18)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To be specific, Vietnamese teachers’ age mostly ranges from 41 to 50 (23 persons, accounting for 40%). Ranking the second is the group of Vietnamese teachers aged 31 to 40 (17 teachers, nearly 30%). The number of teachers under 30 is one-fourth (¼) of the total number of Vietnamese teachers (14 teachers). There are only a few teachers over 50 years old (3 persons). A majority of Vietnamese teachers participating in the study work in public schools (77%). In addition, a large number of them (61%) teach high school students who are between the age of 16 and 18. The teachers teaching young learners (aged 7 to 11) only account for 17.5%. There are no teachers working in the field of early childhood education (for children aged 0 to 6).

Table 4: Profiles of Vietnamese teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24.57%</td>
<td>0 to 6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29.83%</td>
<td>7 to 11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 50</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40.35%</td>
<td>12 to 15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.75%</td>
<td>16 to 18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61.4%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>Over 18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to Vietnamese teachers, Brazilian teachers participating in the study mostly work with young learners (children in early childhood and primary education) with thirty persons, accounting for 60% of the total number of Brazilian teachers. The number of teachers teaching adolescents from 12 to 15 and from 16 to 18 is 20 (about 40%). More Brazilian teachers joining in the study work in private schools (28 teachers) than public schools (22 teachers). There are similar numbers of teachers in the two groups of age: 31 to 40 and 41 to 50. Each group has seventeen teachers. The number of teachers under 30 is 14. The least group is the group of teachers over 50 with only two persons.
Table 5: Profiles of Brazilian teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>0 to 6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 40</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>7 to 11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>12 to 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16 to 18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Over 18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4. Data analysis
After the data were collected, they were manually coded, following qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014, p. 175). To ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative analysis, each researcher independently coded the data, using both the deductive themes and inductive themes derived from the data, based on the two primary relationships between things: similarity and contiguity (Jakobson, 1956; Lyons, 1968; Saussure, 1986 [1916] in Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014, p. 23). Then, two researchers compared their data analysis and discussed some conflicting points to reach a consensus. In addition, descriptive analysis with frequency and Fisher’s exact test was applied with support of the software SPSS 20. The Fisher’s exact test aims to verify if there are differences between several pairs of groups, including Brazilian and Vietnamese teachers, public schools and private schools, pre-adolescents, and adolescents.

4. Results
4.1. Challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 – results from Brazil and Vietnam
4.1.1 Challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic: an overview
After analyzing teachers’ responses to the survey, the study identifies the challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic (Bar chart 1, Table 6). From Bar chart 1, the most challenging factors are (i) mental and emotional issues (N=13), (i) interaction inside and outside the classroom (N=13), (iii) lack of preparation (N=12), (iv) and...
lack of physical access to technology (N=11) which is linked to (vi) social inequality in education (N=5), and (vii) adaptation of teaching methods (N=10). On the contrary, academic performance and assessment rank the least in the list of challenges during the Covid-19. Only two teachers were worried about academic performance and the same number of teachers paid attention to assessment.

![Bar chart 1: Challenges of online teaching during COVID-19 quarantine from teachers’ perspectives](image)

**Table 6: Teachers’ comments on challenges of online teaching during Covid-19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Teachers’ comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental and emotional issues</td>
<td>“It is exhausting both mentally and emotionally…” (Teacher number 62)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Interaction inside and outside the classroom | “Not seeing the student is very difficult.”(Teacher number 28)  
“I miss the contact with the students and I think that they pay less attention, because at home they have many distractions.” (Teacher 106) |
| Lack of preparation                     | “We didn’t know anything about online teaching (technically speaking) and we had to start it suddenly.” (Teacher number 15) |
| Lack of physical access to technology   | “Some students do not have access to technology.” (Teacher number 104)             |
| Social inequality in education          | “Social inequality and access to education.” (Teacher number 25)                  |
| Adaptation of teaching methods          | “For younger children, having a ton of activities every day is not the best path to engage them in their learning, coming up with plans that help and engage them.” (Teacher number 65) |
4.1.2. Challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic: a comparison between private and public sectors

In total, twenty-six teachers teaching in private schools and twenty-eight teachers working at public schools share their difficulties in shifting to online teaching.

The bar chart 2 shows that teachers from public schools report issues on physical access to technology (N=9). Other obstacles related to the specific needs of students (N=5), adaptation of teaching methods (N=4), and interaction both inside and outside the class (N=4) rank second and third among the list of difficulties that teachers working in public schools note. Some teachers also responded that they were worried about health issues both involved in physicality (N=3) and mentality (N=3). At last, three teachers believed that they found challenges with online teaching during the epidemic because of the lack of preparation for it.

In the case of teachers working in the private sector, a higher number of challenges was pointed out, including interaction inside and outside class (N=9), lack of preparation (N=9), increase of workload and demands (N=10), health issues (especially, mental issues with 10 teachers), and adaptation of teaching methods (N=6). Among the obstacles of private teachers, health issues caused the most difficulties with 10 persons
confirming that they had mental issues and six teachers stating that they were exhausted and tired of online education.

Due to the fact that only a few Vietnamese teachers (two to three persons) reflected their difficulties per each category (such as physical access to technology, interaction inside and outside the class) with online teaching during the Covid-19 (Bar chart 3), the Fisher's exact test is applied to analyze if there is a difference between Brazilian teachers working in private sectors and Brazilian teachers teaching in public sectors in their responses to the survey. The result of the test confirms that there is a significant difference between the two groups (p=0.12). From the data of the two countries, the result of Fisher's exact test also points out a considerable difference between teachers working in private sectors and the ones teaching in public sectors.

4.1.3. Challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic: a comparison among different groups of students' age

In general, from Table 7, it can be seen that despite different ages of learners, teachers almost share the following challenges in their online teaching: (i) interaction inside and outside class, (ii) adaptation of teaching methods, (iii) attending to learners' specific needs, (iv) physical access to technology and social inequality, as well as (v) lack of preparation. However, more teachers working with young learners (pre-adolescents) reflected their emotional and mental overload as well as the increase of workload and demands from parents and schools during the Covid-19 than teachers working with juveniles aged 16 to 18. From the survey, it is noteworthy that several teachers responded that online education is against childhood development as children lack space to move and direct human interaction to develop, and they learn with the screen for a long time, which is believed unhealthy for their eyes and their body.
### Table 7: Challenges of online teaching in different groups of students' age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's age</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
<th>Group 5</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**: Challenges refer to 1: lack of preparation; 2: interaction inside and outside the classroom; 3: classroom management; 4: physical access to technology; 5: mental and emotional health; 6: physical health; 7: increase of workload and demands from the school and parents; 8: assessment; 9: social inequality; 10: adaptation of teaching methods; 11: attending specific needs of learners; 12: academic performance;

**Notes 2**: Students' age refer to G1: aged 0 to 6; G2: aged 7 to 11; G3: aged 12 to 15; G4: aged 16 to 18; G5: aged over 18

The Fisher's exact test is applied to verify if there is a difference of challenges of online teaching between a group of teachers teaching pre-adolescents (under 12 years old) and a group of teachers working with adolescents (from 13 to 20), however, the result does not show any notable differences between those groups (p=.127).

#### 4.1.4. Challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic: a comparison between Brazil and Vietnam

More Brazilian teachers find online teaching during the epidemic challenging than Vietnamese teachers (Bar chart 3). Thirty-six out of fifty Brazilian teachers reflected their difficulties with online education in the Covid-19 while the number of Vietnamese teachers sharing similar experience is eighteen out of fifty-seven teachers. As can be seen from Bar chart III, both Brazilian and Vietnamese teachers share their difficulties...
in physical access to technology, interaction inside and outside class, adaptation of teaching methods, and attending specific needs of students. While Brazilian teachers also paid attention to the increase of workload, health, and well-being and did not show that they were concerned much about students’ academic performance, most of the Vietnamese teachers participating in the study did not reflect any mental issues and a few of them did show their consideration to learners' academic performance. For Brazilian teachers, being “stressed” was often mentioned, whereas, there was only one Vietnamese teacher reporting a mental issue “pressure”.

In addition, most Vietnamese teachers having difficulties with online teaching are working with youth over 18 (N=3) and adolescents from 16 to 18 (N=13), while only two people work with juveniles aged 12 to 15. On the contrary, Brazilian teachers mostly work with very young learners at kindergartens (N=9) and primary schools (N=13), nine teachers teach juveniles from 12 to 15.
Fisher’s exact test is applied to analyze the difference between Brazilian and Vietnamese teachers in their challenges of online teaching. The result shows a significant distinction between the two groups (p=0.008).

4.2. Teachers’ achievements in online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic

4.2.1. Positive Lessons learned from the rapid shift to online teaching: an overview

After analyzing teachers’ responses to the survey, the study identifies some positive take outs from online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic which supported teachers and students throughout this difficult time. Between them there are (i) increasing students’ autonomy (N=3), (ii) teachers’ compassion with students’ difficulties (N=10), (iii) possibility of interacting and bonding with students (N=9), (iv) optimistic attitudes (N=43), (v) overcoming difficulties by learning with trials and mistakes (N=3), and (vii) professional development and learning (N=28). It can be seen that there are three main lessons that teachers mostly mentioned in their online teaching experience, they are: to be optimistic, to keep learning and improving profession, and to be empathetic.

![Barchart 4: Positive Lessons learned from the rapid shift to online teaching: an overview](image-url)
4.2.2. Increasing students’ autonomy

Only three teachers (two Brazilian teachers and one Vietnamese teacher) mentioned that online learning during the pandemic helped to increase students’ autonomy although there is a concern about the effect of students’ learning. For example:

“I like it. I think it helps students to take ownership of their own learning as they can’t fall back on simply turning up – they have to turn it in.” (Teacher number 43)

“It is different, challenging, tiring, laborious, which I think will give more autonomy to students, but I don’t know if it will be effective in student’s learning.” (Teacher number 45)

4.2.3. Teachers’ empathy towards a new reality: compassion and bonding behind screens

The findings of this study also report teachers’ feeling of empathy or compassion towards the new scenario of education provoked by Covid-19. In Brazilian teachers’ responses, more remarks (N=9) for this category were mentioned as opposed to the Vietnamese (N=1). In general, teachers demonstrated compassion through (i) worrying about unequal access/resources, (ii) caring for children’s losses in terms of social connections, and (iii) working to provide attractive materials in this new modality. With this, these teachers express their care for students’ adaptation to the new realities. As pointed out by one of the Brazilian educators:

“...We know the real need of families and we know that many of them do not have such resources. We try to welcome families with activities that can be done at home with resources available in their daily lives and no longer be a cause for concern, as everything is new and scary. Together we are stronger!” (Teacher number 52)

By the same token, participants in this study mention their attempts to make online teaching a context in which bonding and interactions are made possible. In this
sense, Brazilian teachers (N=8) have also stressed more concern about this issue than Vietnamese teachers (N=1). One of the teachers from Brazil clarifies:

“Moments of connection, support, listening, strengthening. Inequalities are being intensified in this quarantine, my students are the most affected. I try to bring meaning and pleasure to the studies, so that they may be able to fight Inequality with more force and have a dignified life...” (Teacher number 107)

4.2.4. Teachers’ optimistic attitudes

The rapid shift to online teaching has also showcased a terrain of discoveries and possibilities. More specifically, a number of remarks from teachers (N=43) were coded as an expression of teachers’ positive attitudes towards this experience. Teachers from Vietnam highlighted a greater number of comments in this code (N=33) than Brazilians (N=10). Also more specifically, two of the teachers from Vietnam says:

“Learning a lot of new things, many new teaching tools, it is a great effort of myself and my students.” (Teacher number 107)

“The experience is positive and temporarily comforts the teacher and the school community” (Teacher number 47)

4.2.5. Overcoming difficulties by learning with trials and mistakes

A few entries from teachers reported the process of learning by the many attempts they took during this process. More specifically, three Brazilian teachers reported that they overcame difficulties of online teaching by learning through trials and mistakes. Teachers based in Vietnam had no remarks in this sense. In order to illustrate, two Brazilian teachers reported:

“In the beginning it was really hard and frustrating, because we still didn't know exactly what to do or how to make learning happen. After some trials, some failures and successes, I can say that things are much better.” (Teacher number 72)
4.2.6. Professional development and learning

Overall, there are 28 teachers (12 Vietnamese teachers and 16 Brazilian teachers) reporting that they learned new things and developed their profession with online teaching during the pandemic. Their professional development includes: (i) skills of using technologies, (ii) pedagogical skills related to designing online activities to support students’ learning and engage them into the lesson. Teachers reported that they needed to find different online resources and materials to support students’ understanding and engage students in the lesson. For instance, a Brazilian teacher said:

“It’s been a good experience. I miss the contact with the students and I think that they pay less attention, because at home they have many distractions, but I search different sources to use during the classroom. It’s been new and at some point, funny to them. The class can be exhausting because of the content and they can’t talk with friends, that’s why I’m preparing classes with varieties of materials and I always give them some time to share their answers, even on-line.” (Teacher number 106)

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussing challenges of online teaching in the Covid-19 pandemic – stories of Vietnamese and Brazilian teachers

This study, among other aspects, explored the challenges related to the rapid shift to online learning in the context of Covid-19. To our knowledge, this is one of the first studies, in this context, that compares challenges and opportunities in connecting different age levels and contexts: Brazil and Vietnam. The findings of the paper support the findings of other studies on challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chang and Fang, 2020; Huang et al., 2020; Kapasia et al., 2020; Kaup et al., 2020; Moawad, 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Smoyer et al., 2020), including mental and emotional issues, physical access to technology, less disciplined
learning environment, assessment, and adaptation of teaching methods for student engagement.

This investigation also brings new knowledge to the field by identifying the different challenges between teachers working in public sectors and teachers working in private sectors in Brazil and Vietnam. Both groups of teachers share obstacles in interacting with students and adapting teaching methods. However, most teachers of public schools find it challenging because of physical access to technology. This finding agrees with Ananga and Biney’s (2017) commentary on Distance Education (DE): “personal resources are required to a level beyond the reach of those who have typically been the target of DE initiatives” (p. 173). Consequently, this data calls attention to social inequality and/or access to resources as an important barrier to Distance Education during the Covid-19 outbreak, including urban areas – as previous research had only approached difficulties in access in remote areas (Kapasia et al., 2020).

Moreover, an important finding comparing public and private sectors is that teachers of private schools reported more mental and emotional issues. Interestingly, this group has also mentioned, among the challenges, an increase of workload, lack of preparation, and difficulties in interaction. Therefore, this finding agrees with other studies which found correlations between teacher’s workload and stress (Ferguson et al., 2012; M. A. X. Smith & Bourke, 1992), greater time spent per student on online environments (Worley & Tesdell, 2009), and the necessity of varying communication tools in online teaching (Dikkers, 2015; Rovai, 2002; G. G. Smith et al., 2002). Thereupon, we speculate that the rapid change to the online modalities, associated with the lack of preparation, led to an increase of working load and mental and health issues in private teachers, also reflecting on their classroom interactions. This represents an important call for policies in the field.

The findings of the study also demonstrate the differences between teachers of the two countries (Vietnam and Brazil) in their challenges of online teaching during the Covid-19. It is noteworthy that Brazilian teachers reflected their health issues, especially the ones involved in mentality and emotions, whereas, only a few Vietnamese teachers shared the challenges in terms of physicality and there was one case reporting an emotional or mental issue. This can be explained by the Covid-19 situation in each country. At the time the study was carried out (late April 2020), Vietnam was experiencing the
The majority of Brazilians surveyed and interviewed work with young learners. They express concern about student’s autonomy and an increase in demands. This finding can be explained by the requirement of high learner’s autonomy in online education (Smith et al., 2002). Therefore, it can be challenging for teachers to work with students with specific needs or low autonomy, such as very young learners.

At last, the study also points out limitations of the current software used for online education, including Zoom and Microsoft Team (Office 365) in the way of managing the class and the time of the lecture, which requires a more upgraded version of different platforms which can support teachers and parents in observing students and classroom management, especially considering that at a young age children will need supervision.

5.2. Discussing learning opportunities from online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic from Vietnamese and Brazilian teachers’ perspectives

The findings of the present study point out that empathy or compassion is a key for strengthening the relationship between teachers and students to overcome the difficulties of the pandemic. According to the Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), the capacity of empathy is a foundation to care for and support others. Although online teaching
restricts direct human interactions, the empathy of teachers is the motivation forcing them to find solutions to connect and bond with their students to get over tough times of loss and pain. This can be seen in the sharing of two Brazilian teachers:

*It is an attempt to maintain the bond between the children and the teacher and between the children and their peers. Conversations about arts, proposals for games, music, daily routine. We propose physical activities, orality games, and mathematical games, with the material they can find at home.* (Teacher 56)

*It’s been a good experience. I miss the contact with the students and I think that they pay less attention, because at home they have many distractions, but I search for different sources to use during the classroom. It’s been new and at some point, funny to them. The class can be exhausting because of the content and they can’t talk with friends, that’s why I’m preparing classes with varieties of materials and I always give them some time to share their answers, even online.* (Teacher 105)

At the time the study was carried out, Brazilian teachers were witnessing such a chaotic period with considerably rising cases each day and the pandemic seemed to be beyond the control in Brazil (Ministério da Saúde, 2020). This can be the reason why more teachers in Brazil expressed empathy to students’ difficulties than Vietnamese teachers who did not experience such a similar painful situation. In addition, teachers’ positive attitudes and willingness to learn also contribute to improving their online teaching experience and make it more enjoyable, which is shown in teachers’ sharing. For instance, one Brazilian teacher said:

*In the beginning, it was really hard and frustrating, because we still didn’t know exactly what to do or how to make learning happen. After some trials, failures, and successes, I can say that things are much better. My students and I have adapted better to the online classes and I can now really see them working and learning, so I’m not so frustrated anymore.* (Teacher 72)
Finally, teachers’ professional improvement in both ICT competence and teaching methods is a positive achievement from this difficult time. The necessity of teachers finding ways of recreating and learning how to deal with this situation is brought up by the participants. This situation could create a jolt in enhancing teachers’ professions and changing the future of education in which teachers feel more confident about applying more online resources for their teaching; consequently, more connections in education can be established during and after the pandemic. For that, an investment in professional development for supporting the use of technology in as much as policies for access cannot be dismissed.

6. Conclusions
The present research explores the challenges and learning opportunities that teachers, especially those who work with kindergarten or primary school children, faced when shifting from face-to-face to online classrooms during the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, it has outlined contrasts found among groups of teachers teaching different age levels and coming from distinct working environments, culturally and socially speaking, since participants were both teachers based in Vietnam and Brazil. With this, the study has brought important findings to the context of Covid-19 which can be taken into account to improve educational practices during and after the pandemic.

In general, it was found that the rapid shift to online teaching has brought different challenges, categorized as: (i) lack of preparation, (ii) interaction inside and outside the classroom, (iii) classroom management, (iv) physical access to technology and (v) social inequality, (vi) mental and emotional health, (vii) physical health, (viii) increase of workload and demands from the school and parents, (ix) assessment, (x) adaptation of teaching methods, (xi) attending specific needs of learners, (xii) and academic performance. Taking this into account, for Distance Education to be meaningful, it should be cautiously considered according to students’ and teachers’ possibilities on both skills and access to technology. In terms of the age level, it has been found that small children need more support in the use of technologies, which might be reflected by the teacher’s increase of workload and difficulties in classroom management as well as the necessity of other stakeholders’ help. Additionally, findings from Brazil reported more mental and emotional health challenges as opposed to the Vietnamese teachers. These
teachers had not only gone through a severe epidemic but also found themselves having to adapt their teaching through screens attending majorly to small children’s demands. DE, especially under such circumstances, should provide adequate resources and support for all involved, and although it is a solution to maintain education for children, it cannot replace face-to-face education for this target group.

On the other side, a series of stories of learning opportunities have brought light to the power of DE. In this perspective, different categories emerged: (i) increasing students’ autonomy, (ii) teachers’ compassion with students’ difficulties, (iii) possibility of interacting and bonding with students, (iv) optimistic attitudes, (v) overcoming difficulties by learning with trials and mistakes, and (vii) professional development and learning. Teachers centered their opinions on the feeling of compassion which is believed essential to strengthen students-teachers relationship during the shift to online learning. Also, a significant number focused on the positive attitudes and found in this experience an opportunity for learning and challenging themselves towards “new” forms of teaching and engaging with their students. Finally, this opened a door for opportunities to further develop themselves as professionals beyond this punctual moment in history.

The present study is not without limitations, and this is where implications for future research can be drawn. Firstly, the number of participants is not big enough to become a representative sample of teachers in each country. Hence, even though this propitiated a deep analysis of their different impressions upon their teaching, generalizations should be avoided. Furthermore, further work could focus on exploring the specific challenges related to synchronous and asynchronous teaching, since here teachers were not asked to differentiate between them. At last, it would be interesting to elicit parents’ and/or children’s perspectives upon the challenges and learning opportunities observed in their shift to DE. This would support the current claims and bring light to the discussion of DE.

Finally, in terms of practice, the research calls our attention to aspects related to both teachers and learners that have to be taken into account in case Distance Education is implemented. In terms of students: (i) access to resources and technology and (ii) age level. In relation to teachers, it is clear that there is a need of providing (i) technological support/training, (ii) training on online teaching methods with sharing experience webinars, and (iii) emotional support especially in times where there are no other alternatives for human interaction and face-to-face connections but online teaching.
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