

The Impact of Covid-19 On Skill Development Institutions in The State of Kerala: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract:

Objective: To analyse the economic and social challenges faced by the skill development institutions in the state of Kerala due to COVID-19.

Methods: Participants in this qualitative research were owners of skill development institutions in the state of Kerala. We conducted a semi-structured interview in which they discussed their personal experiences with COVID-19 as well as the challenges they faced due to COVID-19. On the qualitative data, thematic analysis was performed.

Results: 10 skill development institutional owners participated. The qualitative analysis yielded two shared themes: economic challenges faced due to COVID-19 and the social challenges faced. Sub-themes were also developed based on the shared themes.

Conclusion: skill development institutions in Kerala have faced economic and social challenges as a result of COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19, Economic and Social challenges, Skill development institutions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its discovery, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on human mortality, morbidity, and economic well-being across the world (Islam et al., 2020). Because of its high transmission rates and comorbidity with other severe illnesses and significant mortality rates, COVID-19 is one of humanity's deadliest pandemics (WHO, 2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human existence is practically limitless (Atlam et al., 2022). During the first seven months, the virus spread to most nations; on January 30, 2020, the first COVID-19 positive case was announced in Kerala, India. By March 2020, governments all across the globe had taken steps to stop COVID-19 from spreading and having an impact, including enforcing social separation, mask-wearing, and stay-at-home orders (Butow et al., 2022). As a result, numerous countries throughout the world have implemented national and regional degrees of lockdown. Kerala's government has also declared a first-ever lockdown on March 23, 2020. While these procedures were unquestionably life-saving, they had their own psychological and physical consequences.

People's psychosocial and economic well-being was negatively impacted by the lockdown. On the one hand, the number of new cases of the virus is increasing around the world, while on the other hand, the start of the lockdown has impacted a larger number of sectors and so education, research, sports, amusement, transportation, entertainment, religion, social gatherings/interactions, economics, companies, and legislative concerns were all affected.

Various businesses have suffered huge losses as a result of the ongoing epidemic, which has caused major disruption in many industries. The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant impact on the creative industries, as well as the travel, hotel, and retail commerce sectors (Khlystova et al., 2022). The COVID-19 infection has had a severe impact on the education industry throughout the world. The COVID-19 epidemic wreaked havoc on educational systems worldwide. The steps made had a significant influence on teachers, pupils, and administrative staff. For instance, in April 2020, the epidemic caused the closure of educational institutions in 173 nations, affecting almost 1.47 billion pupils. During the lockdown period the closing of educational institutions hampered the education system and the teaching-learning process (Kapasia et al., 2020). The Covid-19 epidemic has rendered the weaker and more susceptible sections of the education sector more vulnerable, and it is threatening the entire sector by bringing it to a halt like never before (Dhanalakshmi et al., 2021).

The backbone of tomorrow's workforce is our country's skill development institutions. Vocational education promotes not only knowledge mastery but also skills mastery (Syauqi et al., 2020). Skill development training will enhance employability (Bhavani, Rajamani, et al., 2010). By producing skilled labour, enhancing industrial productivity, and improving the general quality of life, vocational education and training contribute considerably to the country's human resource development (Akshay et al., n.d.). As a result, several nations have pushed for the development of online education programs since the start of Covid-19 (Andrade-Vargas et al., 2021). Many of the typical options for mentoring and assistance were interrupted as a result of institutional responses to COVID-19 (Krier et al., 2021). E-learning is a technology-driven strategy that allows students to be taught without having to interact with them physically (Oyediran et al., 2020). A number of vocational courses that require students to be physically present are in trouble. At this stage, it's critical to determine how the pandemic might affect our entire skilling ecosystem and how to fill up the gaps left by skipped learning hours. While the whole education sector is straining to complete the procedure in the midst of the lockdown, vocational students are facing the weight of the epidemic. Application-based programs with little theoretical learning are given as part of vocational courses. This requires learners to be physically present during instruction. While many classes that rely only on students' physical presence are negatively impacted by the lockout, some have created alternatives to allow students to continue their training. By providing numerous views, an immersive environment can help students learn more effectively (Bhavani, Sheshadri, et al., 2010). Uneven access to continuing education during COVID-19 school closures and until schools reopen may increase this divide (Alban Conto et al., 2021). However, this might have harmed the owner's emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, the strengths, weaknesses, possibilities, and problems that skill development institutions encounter must be investigated. In the framework of Covid-19, it is also critical to address the possibilities and difficulties that skill development institutions confront in meeting the needs of changing economies.

2. METHODS

2.1 TENURE

From February to April of 2022, data was gathered using semi-structured telephone interviews.

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

Owners of skill development institutions in several districts throughout Kerala were the participants.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION

The researchers conducted semi-structured telephone interviews (30-40 minutes in duration) to study experiences and issues related to the pandemic COVID-19, as well as the economic and social constraints encountered by skill development organisations. Participants' demographic information, such as age, location, gender, and marital status, was also determined.

2.4 PLANNED ANALYSES

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, anonymised, uploaded to NVIVO 12 (a computer software programme that helps researchers organise, analyse, and identify insights in qualitative data), and thematically analysed using a framework analysis technique. The researchers developed a prototype coding system by coding the transcripts line by line. To summarise the data, overarching themes and sub-themes were generated.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants. Ten skill development institutional owners participated. Each participant is assigned a participant Id (Participant 1 as P-1, Participant 2 as P-2, etc.)

Table 1: Demographic Factors

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Location	Years of starting the institution	Other sources of income, if any
P-1	35	Male	Thrissur	12	Yes
P-2	53	Male	Kozhikode	25	No
P-3	38	Male	Palakkad	21	No
P-4	34	Male	Alappuzha	6	Yes
P-5	58	Male	Kollam	12	No

P-6	65	Male	Kochi	30	No
P-7	34	Male	Kottayam	10	No
P-8	40	Male	Kasaragod	8	No
P-9	36	Male	Trivandrum	4	No
P-10	39	Male	Kannur	6	No

3.1 QUALITATIVE

The qualitative analysis shared two basic themes related to the challenges due to COVID-19: economic challenges due to COVID-19 and social challenges. Based on the two themes, sub-themes were also developed: income, expenditure, children, food, family, and society to support emotionally, and family and friends to support financially and lifestyle. Below these themes are described, with characteristic quotes identified by participants. Additional quotes are mentioned in Table-2.

3.1.1 ECONOMIC CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID-19

COVID-19 and lockout have had a significant influence on many aspects of the participants' life. The majority of the participants were financially impacted. Hand sanitizer, face masks, and other detergents were used up unexpectedly during the lockdown. Staying at home with children incurs additional costs since youngsters are unable to go out, necessitating greater investments in indoor games as well as eating more food. Participants who run their institution out of a rented facility were unable to pay for their rentals, while those who have access to high-speed internet and Wi-Fi at their workplace were unable to use it but must still pay for it. The lockdown resulted in unforeseen costs. "We were in a bad economic condition and were striving to deal with it." (P-8). "Economically, we are suffering a lot. Still in the recovery stage, not yet recovered." (P-4)

3.1.2 INCOME

During the epidemic, all of the participants experienced financial hardship. None of them made any money; all of their earnings were used to cover their costs. There were also unpaid expenses. "I had a lot of unforeseen expenses, but we had no money." (P-2). "Cash flow was

abnormal; I didn't get any payments from consumers; they were financially strapped and unable to pay. Thus our payments were stopped." (P-1). "The majority of us experienced financial hardship as a result of Covid-19, as many of us were unable to migrate online and produce revenue." (P-6). "The decrease in the number of firms had an impact on revenue; income was very low, and resources were few." Overall, the revenue for us was very poor." (P-10). "I almost lost 80% of income and suffered a lot to tackle the situation. I have already taken a bank loan, and repayment of the loan was also hard for me without adequate income." (P-5).

The majority of the participants believed they had expenditures but no revenue to cover them. All the courses could not be moved on the internet, and online training was ineffective. As a reason, they were unable to earn revenue. The majority of the students came from low-income families and were unable to pay their tuition, which had a financial impact on the institution's proprietors. "Imagine having no money, nothing, but having to manage the institution and bearing all expenditures; it was a catastrophe for me" (P-4). "Income was only there to cover costs; there was no more revenue." I haven't thought about earnings in the last two years." (P-5). "Many of the students were unable to pay the fees and dropped out of the courses due to financial hardship. The number of students accepted into each course was quite low." (P-9). "The trainers' salaries were not provided. Because there was no revenue, it was impossible to pay them a salary." (P-7). The institutional owners' revenue fell to zero, and they were unable to pay their employees' salaries. Many students failed to pay their tuition and were expelled from their schools. The number of admissions was extremely low, and there were occasions when no fresh admissions were available in any of the courses. Each participant had faced financial difficulties.

3.1.3 EXPENDITURE

All the participants had experienced unplanned expenditure during covid-19. Because the present economic downturn is unprecedented, most businesses and organisations are cutting costs by laying off workers (Abumalloh et al., 2021). Expenses were increasing day by day without any adequate income. "Unfortunately, covid-19 hit us, and we were not able to start the training; the amount we spent on infrastructures and the expenses were not able to recover. We did not get any fund and was completely lost for us". (P-2). "The institution is in a rented building; I was not able to pay the rent; rent has been pending for the past 24 months." (P-2). "Our building is a rented one. For a year, I was not able to pay the rent. I had shifted all the things from the building. After lockdown, again, we placed all the machinery and stuff in the building; it was again an additional expense for us. Rent amount was increased, security amount also increased." (P-5).

"Before we went into lockdown, we intended to start a program with over 2000 associate members." We had made a financial investment for that goal. We have been unable to carry out the program since the onset of covid-19. We lost money on every single cost we incurred for the initiative." (P-9). "Everything got staggered, including employee salaries and rental bills." (P-6). The majority of the institutions are housed on rented premises. They had no money during the epidemic and were having difficulty paying the building rent. All other institution-related expenditures were also there and remained unpaid.

"An initial investment was made to supply computers to all employees, as well as training for them to provide online classes, and so on." Expenses were steadily rising, and I

considered temporarily shutting the school. But it was not practicable, and there were other requirements to complete before it could be restarted. All of the expenditures were not paid." (P-7). "Shifting training to online required an initial investment, and not all of our trainers were experienced in providing online training." Our initial duty was to provide training to our educators on how to create online classes." (P-8).

During the lockdown, online classes are the only method to continue with classes; however, this was not viable for all institutional owners because many offered practical classes that could not be delivered online. They also required an upfront expenditure to conduct online programs. All of the employees needed computers, and they received introductory instruction on how to take classes online.

3.1.4 CHILDREN

Staying at home with children entailed higher costs since children were unable to go anywhere, necessitating greater expenditure on indoor games as well as eating more food (Mulugeta et al., 2021). Participants have struggled to pay for their children's school and college tuition. Kids were kept at home for the whole year, which impacted their eating patterns and their attitudes. They were also not permitted to play outside with their peers, which changed their views. Time spent on online learning and self-study, learning medium, sleeping habits, daily fitness routine, weight, social life, and mental health are all factors to consider (Koch et al., 2021). Every child began to use their phones for extended periods. "I couldn't even pay for my daughter's schooling." (P-1). "I struggled to pay for my children's college educations. It was as if I wasn't paid for delivering online training, but I had to pay for my children's online education. Really difficult circumstances." (P-2). "When my daughter stayed at home, she began eating more junk foods and spent most of her time on her phone. Lessons were also watched on mobile phones, and after classes, relaxation time was spent on the phone, viewing YouTube and playing games." (P-4). "My girl is normally preoccupied with shopping. She was unable to go shopping because of the lockdown. She began buying on the internet." (P-8). "My kid enjoys being at home and coming out with us; she constantly goes shopping, and everything has changed." She began making adjustments for me." (P-10). The buying habits of children have shifted. Most of them used to shop a lot before the epidemic, but that has changed now. Also, online shopping has increased.

3.1.5 FOOD

The outbreak has damaged the whole food supply chain, making it vulnerable. Due to border closures, trade restrictions, and confinement measures, farmers and agricultural workers were unable to access markets, including to obtain inputs and sell their commodities, disrupting domestic and international food supply chains and restricting access to healthy, safe, and diverse meals. As part of the government of India's initial campaign against COVID-19, the food corporation of India has awarded 12.96 lakh metric tonnes of food grains under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) (Gopalan & Misra, 2020).

"It even changed my food habits. I am a person who eats only non-vegetarian; in that situation, I was not able to afford that. So, I started eating vegetarian food, started farming vegetables in my home." (P-2). "My food habits were even changed, if we were happy and staying at home then we will be having cravings for foods, will try different types of foods,

try cooking and do lots of stuff like that. But here my situation was worst.” (P-3) “Restaurants and hotels were closed, was not possible to have food from restaurants. It was good sometimes. Started eating more homely food and maintaining a strict diet.” (P-7).

Table-2

Additional quotes as per the theme

1. Income	2. Expenditure	3. Children	4. Food
<p>“Salary for the trainers was not given. It was not possible to give them a salary because there was no revenue. I had no other income; I am fully dependent on this particular one. It was really difficult for me.” (P-3)</p> <p>“It was difficult to run the institution, no revenue at</p>	<p>“I am running my institution in a rented building. The rent for the building was also not able to afford by me in that situation.” (P-3)</p> <p>“Many of our trainers had quit their job, we were not able to give them the full amount of salary. They were not willing to work without salary. We lost many of our trainers.” (P-4)</p>	<p>“My kid’s food habits had changed.” (P-7)</p> <p>“Their classes were online. Usage of laptops and mobile phones had increased.” (P-9)</p> <p>“Her shopping habits had changed, also started more online shopping.</p>	<p>“Staying at home for 24 hours had changed my food habits. I always prefer non-vegetarian foods, and I would not be at home all the time; I used to have my lunch at hotels most of the time. Sometimes I could not have my food on time. But now I used to have my food on time and full of homely meals.” (P-1)</p>

all, expenses are increasing day by day." (P-4)		There were many offers and discounts online, which made her shop very often." (P-8)	
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3.2 SOCIAL CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID-19

Due to covid-19, all of the participants developed social difficulties. Covid-19 isn't merely a medical emergency. It's a calamity on a humanitarian, economic, and sociological level. Because they lack the means to earn a living, many people cannot feed themselves and their families during lockdowns. For the vast majority, a lack of money means no food, or at the very least, less wholesome meals.

3.2.1 LIFESTYLE

All the participants had responded that covid-19 had made some changes in their lifestyles. Due to covid-19, a shift in lifestyle behaviour was seen. Psychosocial or other types of mental stress were common among the subjects. There was also a weight increase and a decrease in physical activity. Covid-19 has been discovered to alter not just the amount but also the quality of sleep.

"Spending more time at home and consuming unhealthy meals contributed to my weight increase." I was not engaging in any physical activity. "There was no sufficient nutrition." (P-10). "Sitting at home in front of laptops, without getting out, there are numerous health risks." It also interfered with my sleep. I couldn't sleep properly." (P-9). "To an extent, my lifestyle was also altered. I used to travel a lot, but I haven't been to any destinations in the last couple of years. "In the past, I used to spend more time with my family" (P-2). "Everything was there: movement limits, social distance." This had practically had an impact on everyone's lifestyle. I was at home for the entire time. Everything changed because there was no job, no official meetings.

"My lifestyle changed as well; I stopped buying and went out less, and I spent more time with my family." I assumed that mall closures, movie theatre closures, and hotel closures were half-measures since I couldn't afford them all if they were open." (P-1). Almost everyone has been affected by the lockdown, social isolation, and movement limitations. The majority of interviewees said they now had more time to spend with their families. "My way of life altered as well; we eliminated all except the most basic items." During the lockdown, clothing shopping was completely unavailable. We didn't need any new items because we already

have all we needed." (P-3). "Life was entirely different for every one of us at the time of COVID-19." (P-7). Every participant felt that their life had changed a lot because of covid-19.

3.2.2 FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND SOCIETY TO HELP EMOTIONALLY.

Having a strong social network of family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers improves one's ability to cope with life's stressors of their own. Family ties can give resources that can assist a person in managing stress, engaging in healthy behaviours, and boosting self-esteem, which all promote improved well-being. "It was really a stressful situation for a person like me, my family and friends were of great support for me. Mentally and financially, they supported me." (P-1). "We were in a hypothetic situation, had no idea what to do! No one knows when everything gets open. My family has supported me a lot; they limited their needs and cooperated with me for all the changes." (P-2). "My family and friends have supported me. They helped me in sharing my emotions." (P-7). "Before the pandemic, I used to travel for official purposes, but no one is allowed to travel when there are movement restrictions. I started spending more time with my family, and I really enjoyed spending more time with them. Relationship with friends and other relatives had become stronger." (P-10). "All this had affected my family life too; I was really stressed. I have to run the institution without any income and too much expenditure. There was no other way for me. Family-wise, I got more time to spend with them. But we were not happy because all those stresses were bothering all of us. My daughter and my wife really supported me; they had limited many of their needs. They literally adjusted for me." (P-8). "I've spent enough time with my family." For me, that would be a plus. My children are young. Every day, I used to play with them, which helped me relax." (P-4). The majority of the participants had an opinion that they got more time to spend with their family. Spending time with their family and friends helped them in reducing their stress. Their families had supported them emotionally to cope with the situation

3.2.3 FAMILY AND FRIENDS TO HELP FINANCIALLY

Borrowing money from friends and family carries the advantage of a lower interest rate. As a result, the debt burden will be decreased. Borrowing from a relative may provide some emergency finances while avoiding high-interest loans. The majority of those in attendance had financial assistance from family and friends. They have already borrowed money from banks and other financial entities. Without revenue, it was impossible to repay the debt. So, they could not take another loan from banks. The only relief was the financial borrowings from their friends and families. "I got financial support from my friends and family. Unfortunately, I did not get any financial support from Banks." (P-2). "I borrowed money from my friends to pay my trainers' salaries and make other institution-related obligations." (P-3). "My father-in-law helped me financially. He was psychologically and financially supportive of me." (P-8).

"My wife handed her gold, and she was quite helpful in that scenario." She recognized my predicament and offered both financial and emotional help." (P-4). "I was unable to cover any of the expenditures, including building rent, broadband and WI-FI rates, and current invoices. Prior to Covid-19, I took out a bank loan, and repaying the loan was tough for me in that scenario. My family and friends were the only people who could help me financially. My

overseas friends had stepped up to help me financially. They gave me money on the condition that my wife supported me in whatever manner she could." (P-1). Participants have had to overcome problems brought on by a shortage of funds. They began to have financial difficulties. The bulk of the participants had no other means of income. They are financially completely reliant on the other and have received financial assistance from their friends and relatives. It was quite beneficial in such challenging conditions.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

4.1 DISCUSSION

This is one of the studies looking into the issues of various owners of skill development institutes in Kerala dealing with the COVID-19 epidemic and it highlights that all the skill development institutional owners, including their families, have faced many COVID-19 challenges. All the owners faced both economic and social challenges due to the pandemic.

A strong theme that emerged from the data was the compounding impact of COVID-19 and the economic and social challenges faced by the skill development institutional owners. Vocational training and skill development are connected to both economic productivity and social wellbeing (Babu et al., 2018). All the participants had faced unplanned expenditure, reduction in income, zero revenue, changes in lifestyle, food habits, and their family life had also affected. "We did not have adequate revenue. All our incomes were not enough to meet the expenses. We could not even think of any profits during the past two years." (P-7). "Overall, there were so much of additional expenses, but no revenue at all. Many unplanned expenses were there, in order to maintain a well-secured working environment for the staffs." (P-8). "It was difficult to run the institution, no revenue at all, expenses are increasing day by day." (P-4).

They had experienced various social issues as well as economic challenges as a result of the pandemic Covid-19 isn't merely a health hazard. It's a calamity on all fronts: humanitarian, economic, and social. Due to a shortage of resources, many people are unable to feed themselves and their families during lockdowns. Covid-19 has caused some lifestyle adjustments in all the individuals. Covid-19 caused a shift in lifestyle behaviour. Individuals were found to have a high prevalence of psychosocial or any sort of mental stress. There was also a weight increase and a decrease in physical activity. Covid-19 has been discovered to alter not just sleep quantity but also sleep quality. Having a strong socioeconomic network of family, friends, neighbours, and co-workers helps people cope with their difficulties. Family connections offer tools that can help individuals handle stress, participate in healthy behaviours, and boost self-esteem, which all contribute to increased well-being. "For someone like me, it was a really stressful scenario, but my family and friends were quite supportive." Mentally and financially, they supported me." (P-1). "We were in a hypothetical situation, had no idea what to do! No one knows when everything gets open. My family has supported me a lot; they limited their needs and cooperated with me for all the changes." (P-2).

There were several limitations to this investigation. Because the sample size was determined by the qualitative technique, more research is needed to determine the generalizability of our findings. All of the individuals in our sample were men. However, there were a few benefits to the research. By including the skill development institutional owners, we were

able to capture common ideas and experiences across groups. The need for critical thinking, problem-solving, and computer literacy was also recognised in order to build a workforce that is prepared to react to future difficulties, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Miani et al., 2021).

4.2 CONCLUSION

In this study, all the skill development institutional owners experienced economic and social challenges, unplanned expenditure, decreased earnings, changes in lifestyle and food habits, and were aware of the same experience during the COVID-19 epidemic.

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