

Mariam Mesrobyan

American University of Armenia

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Capstone

**Teachers' Perspective on Online Learning process during
COVID-19 pandemic in Armenia: Factors and Methods that Fostered
the Online Learning Process and Students' Academic Performance**

Instructor: Dr. Michael Smith

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Abstract

This project's focus is to analyze the strategies that teachers used to improve students' academic performances during COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges associated with online learning environment, factors which were beneficial for the learning process and limitations which caused failure and need to be improved after the fast shift from face-to-face traditional learning to remote interactions. This capstone is based on the teachers' perspectives from the interviews taken from 10 different teachers working in 10 different schools in Armenia.

Introduction

During COVID-19 pandemic there was a total shift from face-to-face traditional learning to online learning worldwide, including Armenia. The shift from in-person classroom to online classrooms happened almost in one day, assuming that it will take a few days or weeks, lasting over one year. There was no prior experience of online learning and teachers in Armenia were not prepared and trained for online teaching. As a result, teachers, instructors, students and parents were facing major challenges and difficulties in adaptation in this new era, difficulties in academic performance, disruptions in engagement and lack of concentration. Teachers and instructors had to quickly design new strategies for explaining the material in an online platform and ensure that students' academic performance is not affected by the unpredicted transition from offline to online learning. Students in middle schools, especially those students who were in 6, 7 and 8 grade struggled from the new subjects that the education system prepared for them to introduce. Students faced challenges in learning language or history studies which include the subjects Armenian History, World History and Armenian Literature and Armenian Language.

These subjects require group discussions, engagement, explanations and deep analysis. The lack of in-person interaction and new online learning environment made it difficult for students to show engagement and have good academic performance. As during that period, teachers were mostly working based on their own strategies and ways of teaching and there was no control or instructions from any institution on the learning process. So, these strategies vary from one teacher to another. The aim of this capstone is to collect all these experiences, strategies and challenges that teachers faced and analyze how each of them helped the primary and middle school students to improve their academic performance, grades, engagement and concentration during the classes. All these strategies and methods that the teachers have used can become the key components for further training programs which will prepare teachers to be fully prepared and trained for online teaching and learning environment. There was a lack of support and instruction from the Ministry of Education and teachers were using their own strategies and methods for explaining the material to the students and engaging students in the learning process which would lead to the improvement of their academic performance. This capstone combines and analyzes all the strategies used by 10 Armenian middle school teachers who teach social study subjects. While there were disruptions and a decrease in the quality of education during the online learning process in 2020, teachers have obtained experience based on their own designed strategies improving students' academic performance which The Ministry of Education should consider as a base and key components for a practical training program devoted to teaching and both online and in-person learning process. According to the experiences of the teachers who participated in the interviews for this research, the factors which helped to foster and enhance students' academic performance should be collected and shared during practical training sessions and the limitations which caused failures and challenges should be taken into consideration and

resolved by the Government of Armenia, the Ministry of Education and high institutions of the country to create a better quality education and more skilled teaching system for future generations both in online and in-person learning environments.

Literature Review

Online learning during COVID-19 pandemic is a weakly researched topic in Armenia and there are few local authors who discussed this topic. The contribution to the field that this capstone aims to make is to fill in the gaps which exist in the research of how teachers organized their classes, how they structured the class throughout the week, how they ensured that the students were learning, participating and critically thinking during the learning process, what level of preparations teachers had during the transition from offline to online environment, what strategies they had for improving students' academic performances, grades, engagement, concentration during the class. The uniqueness of this capstone is that it analyzes specifically the middle school students (6, 7 and 8 graders), and teachers' perspectives on the challenges they faced while studying social study subjects such as Armenian History, World History and Armenian Literature which were new subjects for them. As there was no prior experience of online teaching, the strategies and methods that each teacher used during that period can become absolute new techniques for future cases where there can be another major shift from traditional face-to-face classes to online classes.

Going back to March 2020, the institution which took control over the online learning process was The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia. The Ministry made a declaration of launching an online training course for teachers which was called

"Skills for Organization of Distance Learning". More than 4000 teachers had applied for that course and 420 teachers participated in the first course (Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, 2020). The National Center for Educational Technologies of the RA MoESCS conducted these courses several times. The official website of the Ministry of Education announced all the information and updates connected to distance learning in 2020. All these courses included instructions about the online tools, how to use them, how to grade students, how to use some online platforms for meeting with students and conducting the classes. There was no training in the structure of the classes, the content and explanation methods, during the online class and no detailed information about teaching strategies. These courses were more technical rather than content vice informational and helpful for them to organize the classes in order to positively affect students' knowledge, academic achievement and lack of disruption in the learning process. So, in this part of the learning process, teachers were mostly on their own using and creating their own new methods during the online classes.

The official website of The Ministry of Education which had the separate section for distance education and all the announcements about it, made an announcement that there is an online course by Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University (HBMSU) which is called "How to become an online instructor in 24 hours" available in Russian for all the teachers from Commonwealth of Independent States (Ministry of Education, 2020). The course was to help teachers who have less experience in online learning and teach them how to use digital tools. This announcement is another basis for the assumption that there was a lack of full control and organization in education during that period. Taking an online post and an online video lecture from foreign country's university which are not available in Armenian and making it an

announcement for a governmental institution's website shows the low level of participation of the ministry in the learning process.

The article by Arusyak Harutyunyan which is called "*First Initiative of Higher Education Digitization in Armenia: Issues and Challenges*" focuses on advantages and disadvantages of digitization of higher education in Armenia. The main problem that the author discusses is the prevention of cheating and plagiarizing during online learning. It discusses asynchronous and synchronous learning in Armenia as well. It talks about the need and necessity of creative and well-informed tutors in this process. Video lectures are effective so there is also a need for uploading video lectures lasting at least 7-20 minutes. The number of graded assignments also plays a huge role (Harutyunyan, 2019, p. 2). This is one of the few articles and research that have been done in this field. However, it concentrates on higher education rather than schools. But the key findings helped to construct some questions for middle school teachers and compare the author's recommendations with the strategies that the interviewed teachers used.

The report from UNICEF Armenia also focuses on online learning in Armenia during COVID-19 pandemic. The key findings of this report are that there were national policy measures done to give opportunity to the students to be able to join the online classes and continue their learning. About 80% of schoolchildren in primary and secondary schools were able to continue their learning in spring 2020 after these measures. During this period, there was a huge digital divide which is the lack of access to the Internet and lack of necessary equipment in most of the families. So, students faced challenges and difficulties not only connected to learning, engagement, academic performance and grades but also there was a huge digital divide which didn't allow some children to be present during the online classes. This capstone also aims to analyze teachers' perspectives on how the Ministry of Education, or any other institution handled

this problem for their schools and what was the number of students not being able to join the classes because of lack of Internet or devices. According to the report, “About 80% of schoolchildren in primary and secondary schools were able to continue their learning in spring 2020 after these measures” (UNICEF Armenia, 2022).

The presence of instructors is essential for all the types and models of online learning. According to the instructors who were interviewed for the study called *“Instructors’ Perceptions of Instructor Presence in Online Learning Environments”* by Jennifer C. Richardson, Erin Besser, Adrie Koehler, JiEun Lim, and Marquette Strait, instructor presence is very important for online learning environments. During this research, 13 instructors were interviewed who were teaching an online program at Midwestern public university. This research uses an explanatory multiple-case approach which will be helpful for my project as the methodology of my research is also going to be based on interviews from Armenian middle school teachers. The instructors in the mentioned research talked about the strategies taken by them to enhance communication and interaction with students. One of the strategies discussed by the instructors was feedback and that relates to my project as I consider teachers’ strategies as well. They discussed the importance of giving feedback and the types of feedback. Many of them consider feedback as a form of communication. Feedback should include not just grades but also comments which can be both positive and negative, pointing out the weaknesses and strengths of the completed assignment (Richardson et al., 2016). Feedback is one of the strategies that was common in the responses of the interviewed instructor. Similarly, this capstone project aims to combine all common strategies that the teachers have used and analyze their effectiveness.

Another study related to instructor-student interaction in an online learning which also discusses the importance of instructor presence and frequency of the feedback is the research called

“Strategies for Virtual Learning Environments: Focusing on Teaching Presence and Teaching Immediacy” by Misha Chakraborty (Texas A&M University) and Fredrick Muyia Nafukho (Texas A&M University). This source and the above source are connected to each other and share the concepts related to the feedback and instructor presence. However, this research’s methodology and approach is different. This study is an overview of previously conducted research and a combination of the factors that positively influence students’ engagement in online learning environments. The authors’ focus is on teachers’ presence and immediacy importance. However, this research had a lot of limitations and gaps, for instance, age, school vs university students’ results, which I am going to discuss in my capstone. This source had a combination of many other sources related to this topic, which helped me to go deeper into the analysis of various authors’ perceptions about types and frequency of student-instructor interaction. My capstone is specifically about Armenian middle schools and how teachers who teach social study subjects interacted with their students, what ways of communication did they use and how they tried to engage students in the class discussions and whether there were class discussions during the class or not.

In the report by Tatevik Gharibyan which was posted in the website of European Association for International Education, there is a quote stating that “Many of the teachers who will be tasked with developing and delivering online education have no prior training in using these digital tools” (Gharibyan, 2020, par. 7). This report is informational and includes detailed analysis of the ongoing situation but mainly focuses on higher education. However, the author discusses the short-term solutions that were created during that time and also the digital platforms that the government and The Ministry of Education suggested teachers to use such as “Zoom, Moodle, Blackboard, Google Hangouts, and WhatsApp; and integrating materials from MOOCs via

Coursera” (Gharibyan, 2020, par. 11). The report also supports the argument that the instructors, teachers and professors had only technical support but not detailed information about scheduling the course content, structuring the course and the semester, methods and practices for preventing students’ academic progress and performance from declining.

Research Question

There are several questions that this capstone aims to answer. The most important and main question is: What are the factors that were beneficial for the learning process and what are the limitations which created disruptions? What specific strategies and methods did teachers use to affect positively on students’ academic performance and better studying? How did they change their explanation methods and the structure of the class? Were there any instructions and control from The Ministry of Education or any other institution over these strategies and methods? What specific challenges did both the teachers and student face while teaching or learning social study subjects? Some questions that this research will include are: What online tools or sources were effective for teachers to teach primary and middle school students? What strategies did the teachers use to have more students engaged in the class and how the class discussions were organized? What are the strategies that the teachers obtained during the online learning process and continue to use? What should be changed and what gaps should be filled in in order to be fully ready for a possible second transition?

Methodology

This capstone is qualitative research which is based on different teachers' experiences and perspectives. It has a case study approach as it focuses on each teacher's personal experience and strategies for the specific case which is the online learning process during COVID-19. The primary research method for this capstone is interviews. The interviews have been face-to-face or online meetings with teachers. The type of interviews is semi-structured with predesigned questions and follow-up questions based on the responses. The interviews included interactive discussions and conversations between the interviewer and the interviewees, who were the teachers. All the teachers have agreed to participate in this research and have given their consent to record the interviews and share them.

Taking interviews is the best option and most suitable for this research because, as mentioned above, during the COVID-19 pandemic teachers were mostly on their own and had to create their own methods and strategies for the new online learning environment. So, each teacher had their own ways and methods. To combine, compare and analyze these methods, it is essential to meet and talk with each of them. The sample size for this research includes 10 teachers from 10 different schools and is focused on their experiences. 10 interviews were enough to make conclusions for this phenomenological research and choosing participants from 10 different schools made the research diverse. Purposive and convenience samplings were used to select participants for the research. Choosing a purposive sampling method helped to select teachers with at least 6 years of teaching experience including teaching in 2020 as the online learning process started in March of 2020 in Armenia. This approach ensured that the participants are

relevant to the topic and have the characteristics and experience connected to the study they can share. Convenience sampling was also part of the selection process as the participants showed their willingness to be part of the research and share their perspective. This approach ensured the creation of a safe space and freedom of expression during the recorded interview. Participants in this research were chosen based on the following criteria: 1. Teachers working in primary and secondary schools, 2. Teachers working in public and private schools, 3. Teachers teaching Humanities subjects such as languages and literature.

The interview questions were created based on the literature review to fill in the gaps of the field and explore and support the argument of this research further. Also, a small group of three teachers was pre-interviewed as an experimental test for refining and formulating the final questions.

The first and introductory question for the interview is to talk about the teachers' teaching background and what subject exactly do they teach. As the research is specifically based on teachers who teach social studies, all the interviewed teachers teach one of these subjects. The next question concentrates on what grades they were teaching during the pandemic. Then coming to the focus of the research, the next question will be about their original and first reaction to the news about the transition from offline to online learning. Questions include reflections on their thoughts and concerns connected to teaching online and the level of their preparation to this transition and fully online environment.

One of the main discussion questions is reflection on the support that they got from their school or from any other institution. Separate questions for discussion are about the involvement of the Ministry of Education in the learning process and the methods and strategies that were suggested

by them connected to the content of the classes, explanation tips for online environment which can improve students' academic performance and prevent it from declining. Then teachers reflect on the reaction of middle school students to online learning and shift of interaction from face-to-face to fully digital. Teachers talk about their own perspective on challenges and difficulties that the students struggled during this period. They talk about students' engagement during online learning specifically about whether they were more or less engaged. Moreover, they talk about the connection between students' academic performance and engagement whether the engagement affects positively on their performance, grades and overall concentration during the class. As there were training courses organized by The Ministry of Education, teachers will answer if they were included in these courses or how many of their colleagues have participated in these courses, how effective these courses were for them.

Focusing on the main topic of the research, teachers talk about the biggest challenges that they faced during that period and while teaching students remotely. They focus and reflect on how independent they were while teaching online and whether they had specific instructions and methods to use while sharing their knowledge and explaining the material to the students. The most important question and the answer for the research is about the methods, strategies and small nuances that helped teachers to engage more students and help them study better. They reflect on their grading methods and criteria they used to grade students. They talk about the digital tools that they used and how much they mastered these technologies while starting to use them and teach online. Further questions include reflection on how they made sure that students were learning, listening to the explanation, being attentive and active during the class.

Eventually, teachers reflect on the question whether there was a decline or increase in students' grades and academic performance during this time, whether specifically the subjects Armenian

Language, Armenian Literature and Armenian History hard to study or teach online during the distance learning. They talk about the limitations that disrupted them from teaching or students to attend the class or participate. They talk about some strategies that should be saved and improved for the use of future cases of online learning. Teachers suggest some recommendations to policymakers, other teachers and schools in case of future disruptions in face-to-face traditional classrooms and learning.

The interviews lasted around 30-60 minutes. Face-to-face meetings were audio-recorded and the online meetings via Zoom were audio and screen-recorded. All the interviews have been manually transcribed. All the participants signed a consent form before the interview in which they agreed to voluntarily participate in this research, they gave their consent to record and store the interviews. The participants also gave their verbal consent right before starting to record the interviews. They also acknowledged that they could ask to stop the interview or the recording process any time during the interview. All the participants agreed to use their real names, the school names and locations, so no pseudonyms were used during the interviews and transcriptions.

In order to avoid biases, the interviewer asked the questions in a way that would not influence the response, the questions were short and open-minded, and the participants could elaborate on their own responses. The research's focus is based on teachers' personal experiences and their own perspectives, strategies and methods. So, the limitation of this research could be that it is more subjective rather than objective. However, the small sample size which is diverse is efficient to make conclusions based on the most common and repeated responses for this capstone.

Summaries and Main Points Discussed during the Interviews

Interview 1 | Sose Chakhalyan

Sose Chakhalyan is a primary and middle school teacher working in Quantum College in Armenia since 2015. Before 2015, she worked in different public schools for 4 years. Sose teaches Armenian language, Armenian literature and Environmental studies to primary school students. She also teaches Math to some groups. Sose also works online and has online students with whom she works both individually and in groups and teaches Armenian language. She has worked both with schoolchildren aged 6+ and adults.

First, she introduced her methods of organizing each class that she teaches right now. One of her principles to start the class is to start it with some friendly questions about their wellbeing, their previous day and she sets the friendly tone of the class. She thinks that this is one way to engage students in the class. Then she starts to check homework and tries to reach out to every student and see if they completed their homework correctly. She thinks that giving detailed feedback to each student increases their progress and it is possible to do it in small classrooms with small number of students. If there is a common mistake that the majority of the class made, then she explains the topic one more time to the whole class. If there are few students who made some mistakes, then she gives a task to others and pays separate attention to each student's case. She uses a lot of card games during the class. She distributes cards to the class which have questions regarding the current topic and some other questions reviewing the previous topics that they have covered. The most important part of the class is the Q&A part where students answer questions

and after that she decides to move on to the next topic or to devote another class time to the current topic. She does the transition from one topic to the next topic slowly and step by step with questions and hints. She asks interactive and relevant questions about the next topic, so the students automatically explain it to each other with their own words and understanding. After that she defines and explains the topic in more detail. Next, she assigns homework to the class and explains it with similar examples, so the students do not have a hard time doing it at home.

During the literature classes, especially when they are covering a novel, she distributes roles to the students, and they start to present and play their roles according to the plot. Students are more engaged in the class in this way and always come to the class ready and usually do the readings.

In 2020, when there was an unexpected shift to an online learning environment, all the teachers at Quantum College got support from the administration. The administration successfully managed to help the teachers and the students and provided digital devices if they needed. The shift from face-to-face classes to online classes also changed her methods of organizing the class and explaining the topics to the students. She created animations on her own, where a figure of a teacher was speaking and explaining the topic with her voice. She shared her screen during the online class and showed the animation.

Sose mentioned that teachers started to cooperate with each other and share the slides and animations with each other. So, they were able to improve teamwork. That also helped to save time. While creating all the slides, the animations and the material alone could take around 3-4 hours, doing it with teams or groups and sharing the material between each other lasted less than two hours. Teamwork helped to avoid monotony during the classes as different methods were exchanged and used.

The participation of the parents also increased during the online learning process and communication between the teacher and the parent improved during this period. As Sose mentioned, it would be impossible to organize classes without the help of the parents because they were doing a huge job during that time. Many teachers and students who struggled to join the classes, who had lack of experience in technology were getting help from many parents. During the online classes, parents were present during the classes and were part of it. So, during this time they could see what the weaknesses and strengths of their child for the particular class are and could work on it and find solutions. Usually, during face-to-face traditional classes parents did not have the opportunity to be present in every class and had a lot of complaints about the teacher and the quality of the teaching method. However, during online period the number of these complaints decreased. The participation of parents in the learning process helped to improve the students' academic performance and overall, their grades. Now, when they are back to the face-to-face traditional learning process, they do not meet or talk with parents for weeks, even for months. As a result, Sose noticed that students' academic performance is negatively affected.

One of the negative sides of online learning is lack of students' attention. During face-to-face classes, communication between the student and the teacher is more interactive and if the student struggles on some topic or a small part of it, she can quickly direct them and help with the topic. However, explaining the same topic in online platform is harder and sometimes makes students more confused on that topic. Also, students' vision suffers a lot while learning online. So, she does some eye exercises to let students rest and relax their eyes. She has created also some exercises for attention which consist of some gestures and games and help people to focus. These

methods help her a lot but take class time. For face-to-face classes there is no need to use them, and she uses that time on explaining more material related to the class topic.

All the tools and nuances that she used during online learning process, she discovered herself. If she needed some help, her brother helped her with the tools, or anything related to the computer or the Internet. Also, people from the school administration and some parents voluntarily helped the teachers and students. She mentioned that her colleagues and she did not get any support from the government or any institution. During the first months of the pandemic and online learning process, they were joining the classes via Zoom. Then, the administration team of the Quantum College created their own digital platform and website which was their main meeting place during the whole time. Some teachers, who did not have any experience with computers or any kind of technology (usually people who were aged 50+), held the classes via Viber or WhatsApp calls. They used to take pictures or record videos of themselves explaining the material and then send them to group chats including the students and their parents.

She mentioned that she hasn't participated in any course or training organized by any governmental institution which could help her to organize classes. She did not have any information if there were any. None of her colleagues participated in such training as well. So, as she mentioned, they were on their own and used their own sources and methods to try to overcome that hard time. In her opinion, Armenia is not ready for another transition to online learning process.

She mentioned that after the pandemic, Quantum College is equipped with modern devices and students can still join the face-to-face class online from home if they have problems with health

and cannot be physically present to the class. That is one of the advantages from the online learning process that the school has acquired.

The college is considered a private school, so some of the methods, tools, and devices that it has, are only typical for this college. Public schools which are financed by the government do not have the same opportunities.

Even if there are some trainings, these training courses are only theoretical but never practical. She mentioned that any information should be practiced, otherwise it will be forgotten and never used. However, the training courses that take place once every 5 years do not include much information about learning process and the structure or methods of organizing classes digitally.

Interview 2 | Gayane Arakelyan

Gayane Arakelyan is a middle school teacher and has worked in school after Victor Hambardzumyan since 2006. Now she works in school number 154. She teaches Armenian Language and Literature to 5-9th graders.

The interview started with discussing her methods of teaching in face-to-face traditional classes and then she explained how she changed these methods and designed for online learning process. She mentioned that very few interactive methods work for language and literature classes. If she has a chance and time, she tries to include some interactive activities, but her classes mostly consist of traditional methods without games or any entertaining games. She explained that students are less likely to engage in games or pay attention. So, she never uses games in order to

educate students, but she sometimes uses games to entertain or refresh them. She brought an example of a game where she distributes some cards to students which included words in it and students should explain the definition of each word. Instead of working in groups and learning all the words for the assigned group, each student learnt only one word that he or she had on the card. Instead, she uses the “hat method”. Sometimes she brings hats with different colors to the literature class and each hat has a hidden question in it. Each student should pick a hat and then answer the question. This method ensures that all the students do all the reading so they can answer the pop-up questions. She uses these creative methods mostly for literature class. She starts the language classes by checking homework and answering students’ questions. She tries to work with each student individually on the whiteboard, so that students can learn from each other’s mistakes and discuss all the unclear parts of homework or from the recently covered topic. She devotes time to asking questions on how students got each answer to make sure that they did not use any outside help such as AI or someone else who could write instead of them.

She comes to the new topic step-by-step with questions and hints and logical connections with the previous topic. Students start to explain the topic themselves without even realizing that. She does a lot of strengthening and reinforcing exercises after explaining the new topic. When she assigns homework, she pays attention to each question and explains them with examples. She starts the literature classes usually with music connected to the current work or the author or with a recitation. She mentioned that it would be much better if the school’s classrooms had an opportunity to show visuals via projector or some devices. She would like to show some slides, films or images to students which would reinforce the lesson. She tries to do it with her phone or tablet, but these are very small for a large class consisting of 30-40 students. Also, the games or activities are inefficient mostly because of the large number of students. She mentioned that

classes would be more informative and efficient if there were small groups of students. However, while teaching online she could organize games and activities which were informative for the class. While teaching online, she could also share her screen and show students some extra material which she can't do now because of lack of digital devices in the classroom. To obtain these devices there are a lot of financial nuances which teachers cannot handle themselves. She realized that the literature classes are more informative and benefit the students' performance when there are also visuals supporting verbal explanation of the topic. Students learn better when they see rather than listen according to Gayane.

Gayane mentioned that she assigns poems to students to learn by heart. She thinks that assigning them to do so ensures that they will learn it and will be ready for the class. Sometimes she calls students to the blackboard and asks them to tell the readings that they have done in front of their peers. In this way she makes sure that the students will learn it knowing that the teacher will call them and ask questions, otherwise they will not read and learn it at all. However, that is not the main part of her class. She pays attention to the open discussions, debates and analysis of the work of the authors. Right now, there are a lot of brochures which have written analysis of authors' works but she never lets her students use them and learn the analysis written by another person. She devotes most of her class to analyzing each character of the poem, novel or any kind of work.

When talking about the online learning process during the pandemic, in the beginning of the discussion, she described that time as a "complete disaster" and a bad experience. She mentioned that the experience would be better if there were smaller groups of students, for instance there could be 10 people per group instead of 30 or more. Online learning is good for individual approach or with small groups of students. It was hard to control 30-40 people in terms of

turning the cameras on or not doing something else during the class. So, groups of 10 people would be easier to control, also smaller groups will not affect students' attention and participation negatively.

She shared that online learning has a lot of convenient tools such as sharing screens and creating breakout rooms. As mentioned earlier, she had the opportunity to share her screen and show some visuals with slides or videos and animations. Breakout rooms were good for debates and discussions. From this period, she started to create a lot of debate and discussion activities for the classes. She added that games or interactive activities are more suitable for online learning process and are more informative.

She separately talked about the parents' participation as a huge support to the online learning process. The involvement of the parents in the learning process and being continuously in contact with them helped to keep students learning, participating, and even making progress. After this experience, she started to give huge importance to primary contact with a parent and constantly discussing the learning outcomes, giving feedback and working on the gaps which they need to improve.

Gayane mentioned that after the declaration of transition to an online learning environment, she got some technical support from the school administration. But as the teachers and classrooms were a lot and the administration staff consisted of 3-4 people, it was impossible to reach out to everyone. So, there were teachers, especially teachers aged 45-50 needed more support which they got from the parents of the students, from their family members or managed to do everything on their own.

She added that there were some failed classes, confusion and chaos but they were able to overcome it over time. The main reason for the confusion was the lack of experience, otherwise online learning is a great opportunity to have informative and successfully organized classes. One thing that helped her to quickly adjust to changes was that she had already the good structured and designed “kernel”. As no one knew how much the process would last, they imagined that they still were in the classroom, and they knew the right order of actions during the class. So, the classes were the same as they used to be in face-to-face environments, the only difference was that they were at home and in front of the computer/phone.

Gayane also mentioned that in primary school and in 5-6th grade the Armenian literature and language are combined in one subject which is called “Մայրենի” (Mayreni) which means “Native language”. She thinks that this type of mixture of subjects is not efficient because the subjects are very different from each other and explaining the topics of literature and language in one class is possible but not effective. Starting from 7th grade the subject starts to be distinct from each other. While teaching online, she used to teach students these subjects separately even for “Mayreni”. The introduction of Armenian language and literature to 7th graders while transitioning to online environment was not a challenge but a good experience. Teaching them separately was easier and understandable for students.

Some of the suggestions that Gayane made were: (1) decreasing the number of students in the classroom and creating small groups of students with at most 10-12 students both in online and face-to-face traditional classrooms, (2) in order to be ready for a possible second change to online learning, it would be better to add introductory and detailed courses for teachers

She mentioned that there are training courses which occur once every 5 years but are less informative and not practical and the topics which are discussed take a couple of minutes, which is not enough.

Interview 3 | Alla Badalyan

Alla Badalyan is a middle school teacher and has worked as a teacher since 1997. She is currently working at school number 130. She teaches Armenian Language and Literature, History of Armenian Church. She mentioned that she has voluntarily participated in various training courses which have equipped her with a lot of modern teaching methods. These training courses and programs were organized by Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, it was not organized by the government.

One of the methods that she constantly uses both in online and face-to-face classrooms is that she engages the students in the class with questions and even the explanation of a new topic is done by students. She uses hints and questions and reaches the point that students define the new concept by themselves with their own words. Eventually she defines and explains the topics based on the definition of the textbook. She started using this method mostly during the online period. She finishes the class with questions such as: (1) mention 3 new things that you have learned today, (2) mention 3 things that is unclear for you and you would like to discuss them next time, (3) retell what we have discussed in 3 sentences. She starts the lesson with the question: What did we discuss last time?

Alla mentioned that all the methods that she uses in face-to-face classrooms are applicable to online classrooms. However, in the beginning of the online learning process, she could not use her method because of lack of experience and not mastering the online tools. She mentioned that sometimes online teaching can be more effective, and it could be effective in 2020 if teachers had enough experience and practice. So, she did her own research and find out applicable and comfortable tools and apps for her to teach the material.

Interview 4 | Gohar Adamyan

Gohar Adamyan is a middle school teacher and works in an Armenian secondary school number 19. She teaches Armenian Language and Literature to 6-9th graders.

She mentioned that the shift from traditional classes to online classes was unexpected and challenging. At first, she thought that it would be impossible to conduct classes online and teach a language or literature class online. She could not imagine a literature class without face-to-face interaction, seeing the students' facial expressions and a language class without working together on the exercises in the textbook and calling the students to the whiteboard. She was not a master in online tools and did not have prior online teaching experience. So, she cancelled all the classes of the first week and spent that time learning about online teaching and the necessary tools for conducting the class. After a week she started teaching online via Zoom, uploading some materials and video lessons in Google Classroom. Her primary problem was creating some ways and methods for teaching in an interactive way so that the students do not lose interest in the subject and do not treat the class as something mandatory that they must do. During the face-to-face classes, she mentioned that her classes were “alive”, very fun and engaging. The students

were not waiting in line to express their opinion and to participate in discussions and were disappointed when hearing the school bell.

She introduced her methods of teaching during the online process. She used to create some activities for language classes. Middle school students primarily study orthography and grammar for Armenian Language. So, she was creating texts and intentionally making some errors. The task was to find the errors and correct the text. During the class, she was sharing her screen, and the students were reading the text one by one. This way she made sure that students read more attentively and participated. For the literature classes, she spent some class time on quizzes via Kahoot because she noticed that the students actively participated in these activities because they liked to compete and see who will get the highest point. So, all students joined the class ready with all the readings done. Some of her classes were conducted in the form of an interview. She mentioned that the opportunity of creating breakout rooms in the online classroom was also handy. She used to divide them into pairs and put them into breakout rooms. One of the students was the interviewer and the other student got the role of one of the current readings characters. During the interview they were able to analyze the character, understand the moral of the story and the author's message. Sometimes she asked the students to record themselves while reciting a poem and send them to her. She realized that when they record and listen to themselves, they start to work on their mistakes and do it better next time or record it again and send the better version. In the traditional face-to-face classes, they did not use this method and did not have the opportunity to listen to themselves and see their own gaps. She mentioned that she created all these methods and activities herself. She learned about all the tools that she used during her classes via YouTube tutorials from Russian sources.

Some of the main challenges were lack of devices or the Internet. Some students were missing the classes just because of technical issues. If there were 2-3 or more schoolchildren of different ages in one family and they had classes at the same time, they did not have enough devices or space to join the classes. Sometimes parents were not able to help because of work or they did not have enough knowledge and experience in computers or other devices either.

So, the difficulties or negative factors were mostly technical. Putting that aside, the quality of the learning process was overall the same as the traditional face-to-face classes.

She mentioned that if there is another shift now, we will be more ready than we were back then, but we are not completely ready for another shift or another online experience. There is still a lack of devices or the Internet in many families. Classrooms that have more than 30 people in them are very hard to control and conduct a class in an online meeting. Many teachers do not have experience in online teaching, not just the technical part but also skills and strategies of conducting and organizing a class online.

Interview 5 | Lusine Sarukhanyan

Lusine Sarukhanyan teaches Armenian Literature to 6-9th graders at basic school number 90 after Vahan Zatikyan.

Before the shift from face-to-face classes to online classes, Lusine had basic knowledge in technologies. She was aware of Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint, she knew how to write an email and use documents, how to make slideshows and presentations but she did not know anything about Google Classrooms, Google Meet or Zoom. She mentioned that she used Skype

for video calls for a while but did not have an online class or online teaching experience. So, she did her own research by just clicking the buttons, as she mentioned in the interview, and seeing what function each button has and what are the main tools that she can use during the class.

Lusine said that their Informatics teacher used to organize meetings with the teachers and teach them everything step by step. She even met individually if someone needed support. Sometimes she joined other teachers' classes and helped both the teachers and the students. Also, the teachers were always in contact and helping each other, sharing their experiences and methods that they use both for technical cases and for pedagogical cases. There was a lot of support from the parents as well. Lusine mentioned that there were parents who were helping their children's classmates and even the teachers.

She had some effective strategies to keep students learning the same way that they used to during face-to-face classes or even learn better and have progress. She divided the class into small and rapidly changing stages: the first 5-10 minutes going over the topic that was explained last time, 10-15 minutes checking home tasks, 10-15 minutes discussions or some activity/debates based on the readings, the last 10-15 minutes explanation of the next topic. She mentioned that she gave importance to creative tasks. For example, when they were covering a novel or a story, she gave a task to write a letter to one of the characters or to keep a diary of one of the characters' life for one week and share it with the classmates. Sometimes she asked the students to change the conclusion of the story or write a continuation and create their own story based on the story that they have in the textbook. This way she made sure that the students read the story from the textbook and analyzed it. After checking the written task, she usually gave written feedback and tried to include inspiring, motivating or at least some positive sentences in it. If the student's work was incomplete or full of errors, then she tried to meet individually or ask them to stay in

the meeting after the class and discuss it with them. Besides that, she organized extra meetings scheduled once or twice a week, everyone could attend these meetings for Q&A sessions or if there was something they would like to discuss. These sessions were more productive than the actual class because at most 7-8 people were attending each meeting and she realized that small groups are more effective than larger ones.

Interview 6 | Hasmik Manukyan

Hasmik Manukyan is a history teacher and teaches Armenian and World History to 6-9 graders at basic school number 116.

Hasmik introduced the new strategies that she used after the shift from face-to-face classes to online classes. First, she had the opportunity to share her screen and show a historical documentary film about the topic of the current day if there was a relevant movie or film. If not, then she was making animations with dates and events matching each other. Students are always interested in visual elements, so the classes which included a video, movie or presentation were more productive and more students were engaged. For the maps and explanation of territories she started to use Google Earth and Google Maps. Students loved the “online excursions”, and they were travelling to different places during the class. During the face-to-face classes she was not creating slides and presentations to explain topics, as the classrooms did not even have a projector and a computer to share in the classroom. However, she created slides and presentations for each topic during the online learning process because she could share her

screen and show it to her students. She realized that students need to see something on the screen during the online class otherwise they can be easily disturbed by anything.

During that period, she used to assign to create an online calendar, and students could be as creative as they wanted. They could create it on a piece of paper and then take a picture and send it to her, or they could create it with slides or even with a calendar app. The task was to choose a specific historical period and create an order of dates and short summaries of events. Students made it more creative and included pictures and even drew them themselves. She conducted the classes mostly with discussions and explaining the topics with engagement of students. She told the historical facts with one missing component such as a name or a date and randomly picked a student to fill in the missing component. This method helped her to increase students' attention and active participation throughout the whole class.

Hasmik mentioned that she got technical support from her daughter, but the school administration was also there for any issue. She was not aware of any training for teachers and has not heard about it at all which could be helpful for the online teaching process. All the tools that she used were with the help of her daughter and all the strategies that she used for teaching history online she found out from the Internet or created herself. She mentioned that there are two-day training courses for teachers once every 5 months. She thinks that it would be better to have more training courses which would be more informative, practical and frequent.

Interview 7 | Anush Ghazaryan

Anush Ghazaryan is an Armenian Language and Literature teacher and teaches 6-9 graders at Global Bridge Educational Complex which is considered a private school in Armenia.

During the interview Anush mentioned that the shift from the face-to-face traditional classes to online classes was unexpected but the schools' staff and administration team worked operatively to organize the online process and continue regular classes. The teachers did not have online teaching experience, and the students did not have online learning experience either. However, they already had an online platform where the teachers used to upload home assignments, materials, videos and students always had assignments and projects which they uploaded online for checking. Their grading system was also online, and parents were checking their children's grades via an online platform. After the transition from face-to-face classes to an online learning process, the only difference was that they were joining the classes from home. The classrooms consist of at most 10 people in their school. So, the online meetings also consisted of 10 students at most. Anush mentioned that the classes were conducted the same way as they used to be. Also, the teachers got accounts from the school administration with the unlimited access for Zoom because the 40-minute limit sometimes could be disturbing and inconvenient. The school administration offered support for those who had problems with their computers or any other technical issue. They also offered devices for those who needed them. Anush mentioned that, fortunately, all the teachers and the students did not have problems or lack of Internet access or devices. The first week was unexpected and shocking but they managed to continue their regular class routine online. The administration team organized meetings with the teachers and showed all the tools that they might need for the online class and uploaded the recordings of the meeting on their online platform so they could use it anytime. Also, the school administration team

uploaded daily updates and tips for the teachers to use it for the online learning process. Parents were also involved in the learning process, and they had constant contact with each other. The parental meetings which were conducted during the face-to-face classes were still being conducted online and the parents always got feedback about their children from the teachers.

Anush introduced her methods and strategies for teaching and mentioned that these methods are mainly the same for both the face-to-face and online classes. She mentioned that they have a projector, a computer and all the necessary tools for showing students a presentation, a movie, a short video or any other type of visuals. So, for online classes instead of the computer and a projector, they had the screen sharing opportunity. She said that almost everything was the same, so the projects, exams and all the graded assignments were not cancelled. She believes that the students learn and pay attention if they have an upcoming graded assignment. So, as the exams were not cancelled, they were learning the same way that they used to in order to success during the exams. She said that people are paying for education and do not want to waste that money, so the students do not want to disappoint their parents with their bad grades or bad performance at school. To make sure that the students do not cheat during the online exam, they decided to have individual online meetings with each student and have an oral exam which was fully applicable for a language or a literature class. As each class had only 8-10 students, this concept was fully applicable and possible. Meeting with 8 to 10 people in one day and organizing an exam was not difficult, Anush mentioned during the interview.

Interview 8 | Zaruhi Niazyan

Zaruhi Niazyan is teaching Armenian Language and Literature at school number 116. Her students are mainly 6-9 graders (middle school students).

Zaruhi mentioned that there were a lot of cancelled classes, and the quality of students' education suffered during the online learning process. Many students did not join the classes even if they had the opportunity and all the necessary devices. Many teachers failed to organize online meetings with students. She was able to organize it but few students joined the class and sometimes she was not able to contact the students and their parents to find out the reason of not joining the classes. There was a parent in one of her 7th grade classes who helped and organized the whole process. Zaruhi mentioned that that parent used to call all the students one by one, explain and help them with any technical problem, she even called the teachers and helped them to organize and start the class. During this chaotic situation, the only thing that she could do was sending assignments to the group chat via Viber. Some of the students completed those assignments and sent them back to the group chat. The teachers and the students did not get any support from any governmental organizations and from the school administration either. The school administration did not have enough resources and team members to be able to help. So, the teachers were trying to organize the online learning process on their own. Zaruhi said that they tried to do their best to overcome this period. In her opinion they failed to organize and continue the learning process. She mentioned that she has a lot of methods for making the class informative and interactive for the face-to-face traditional classroom. Unfortunately, she could not apply them online as there was no cooperation between the teachers, the students and the parents during the pandemic when the classes were shifted to online platforms.

Interview 9 | Karine Vardanyan

Karine Vardanyan is a history teacher at basic school number 166 after Artem Mikoyan. She teaches Armenian and World History to 5-9th graders.

The interview with Karine started with an introduction of her methods of conducting classes in traditional face-to-face classrooms. She uses the first 5-10 minutes of the class for reviewing the important parts of the assigned reading by asking questions to the class. Then she calls 2-3 students one by one to the whiteboard to individually answer her questions so she can grade them. She spends the rest of the class explaining the next topic and a small in-class discussion or group work. She creates weekly graded quizzes for the students and monthly tests to review the covered topics and grade them.

The first few days after the shift to online learning were a little bit chaotic because she was fully unaware of computers and any digital tools. Fortunately, her family members helped her. She explained that she belongs to an older generation in their school and was 51 years old at that time. So, she and her colleagues who were 50+ years old had a lot of difficulties because of lack of computer knowledge. She did not get technical support from anywhere but from her family members. When all the technical issues were solved, she was able to organize her classes the same way that she did before. The support from the parents was huge. She mentioned that some parents allowed small groups of students to gather at their houses and join the class from one computer. So, the students who did not have Internet access joined the classes from their classmates' houses and tried not to miss the classes. So, Karine conducted her classes the same way as she used to.

Interview 10 | Lala Mekbekyan

Lala Mekbekyan is a history teacher working at Muratsan basic school number 18. She teaches Armenian History to 5-9th graders and World History to 6-9th graders.

Lala mainly conducted the classes via Viber or WhatsApp because not all the students were able to join online meetings. She used to record herself explaining the topic and sending the recording to the group chats for each class. She was assigning daily readings from the textbook and creating a Word document for the additional material and sending them to the group chats. There were some groups of students that were able to join the Zoom meetings. During the online meetings she was conducting her traditional class. She learnt about all the Zoom tools from YouTube tutorials or Google search. She used to spend half of the class on Q&A sessions and the other half on explaining the next lesson. For homework, she usually used to send each student a list of questions which they should answer by video recording. She mentioned that there were students who did not even have the chance to participate in the learning process via group chats. She used to make phone calls with each of them and at least try to involve them in the learning process by assigning them homework and checking it by phone. She mentioned that this was a very hard time for the whole country and any method would be acceptable if that benefited the students.

Key Findings from the Interviews

Analyzing the interviews with 10 teachers, clear and perceptible differences came into view between private and public schools according to their response and actions after the shift from face-to-face traditional classes to online learning process. The responses of the interviews revealed that private schools organized the online classes and adapted to them more successfully and straightforwardly compared to public schools in Armenia during the pandemic. There are several reasons creating this disparity between public schools and private schools which are connected to some financial factors, inequalities in support, experience and preparation.

The interviews with private school teachers with Sose Chakhalyan and Anush Ghazaryan showed that private schools already had some level of preparedness and experience with online learning environments, online platforms and tools. Both private schools, Quantum College and Global Bridge Educational Complex, had already structured online platforms prior to the pandemic and the teachers had prior experience in online communication with students and parents. These digital platforms and websites were originally created to support in-person learning but were more beneficial during the online learning process. As both teachers mentioned, the classes were organized via Zoom, but then they had their own platform and meeting place in their schools' websites. These platforms and technical tools were created and supported by the schools' administration and financed by the schools' own funds. Hence, the teachers and the students in private schools were not starting the process from zero due to the prior experience in digital platforms. So, the transition from in-person learning to online learning was smoother and easier in private schools as the teachers and the students knew how to navigate through digital platforms and tools.

However, public schools met with substantial difficulties after the shift from in-person learning to online learning from the very beginning. The teachers did not have prior experience in online teaching and online learning environments. Most of the teachers did not have computer knowledge and had to do their research and learn about tools, systems and applications such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classrooms without having a support from their schools' administration, as mentioned multiple times during the interviews with Hasmik Manukyan, Lusine Sarukhanyan, Alla Badalyan, Gohar Adamyan.

The technical support was a major issue and difference that the interviews indicated. Teachers from private schools often received support from administration teams and had training sessions organized by the school administration, as well as technical support with equipment such as computers or devices if needed. However, public schools mostly did not have this opportunity. Many of the teachers were getting support from their family members or any other source (Zaruhi Niazyan, Lala Mekbekyan). There were some public schools which had knowledgeable equipped administration or IT teams with informatics teachers who supported the teachers (according to the interviews with Hasmik Manukyan, Lusine Sarukhanyan). The teachers were mainly navigating through the challenges on their own. Many of them were using outdated devices with lack of opportunities and had lack of Internet access sometimes because of financial issues as Alla Badalyan has mentioned during the interview. Some public schools failed to organize the online learning process and many of the teachers were teaching via mobile phones or apps, and the students were sending homework in group chats as Lala Mekbekyan and Zaruhi Niazyan have mentioned in their interviews.

The financial factor also plays a significant role which is another key difference between private and public schools. Private schools usually have students from financially stable families which

have access to computers, devices and the Internet. However, public schools have more students from low-income families which lack resources and have no access to the Internet. As the education in private schools is paid and parents pay for their children's education, private schools are more financed and are more likely to create a better online learning environment due to their opportunities compared to public schools.

Another finding that emerged from the interviews is the influence of the number of students in the class on the effectiveness of the learning environment. There is a consistent difference between the classes with large groups of students and small groups of students and the productivity of those classes. Teachers working with small groups of students managed to organize the classes more successfully compared to the teachers who worked with large groups of students. Larger groups of students, which include 30-40 students in a classroom, were hardly manageable and the classes were less effective in an online learning process.

In large groups, teachers had a hard time controlling students' participation and addressing students individually. Teachers teaching large groups of students (Gayane Arakelyan, Lusine Sarukhanyan) mentioned that the online classes would be more effective and productive if the classes had at most 10 students. Teachers who worked with classrooms who had a small number of students (Sose Chakhalyan, Anus Ghazaryan) mentioned that it is easier to work with small classrooms and more productive because they manage to address all the students one by one. As Anush Ghazaryan mentioned, it was fully possible and applicable to organize one-by-one meetings and exams with 10 people individually. Also, as Lusine Sarukhanyan mentioned during the interview, she organized extra sessions once or twice a week to address the questions of the students and those sessions were more productive and informative than the actual class because 7-8 people were joining the meetings. Hence, she realized that smaller classrooms or groups of

students are more effective in terms of teaching and learning than the larger classrooms which include more than 25 people.

In online environments, large classrooms were hard to maintain order and to take control of them because many students joined the classes with their cameras off and microphones muted even if they were asked to unmute themselves and answer questions. Because of this, it was hard to make sure if the students understood the material, took part in the class or listened to the teacher. For large classrooms, especially in an online learning process, it was hard to ensure all the students' participation in class discussions and other activities. In contrast, small classrooms which have a smaller number of students which can be mostly seen in private schools, are more manageable and as Sose Chakhalyan and Anush Ghazaryan mentioned they continued their regular in-person classes in an online platform the same way. For smaller groups, it was easier to check on each student and see their progress. Students' participation or absence was more noticeable in small groups and everyone in the class took part in class discussions with their cameras on and microphones on when needed. Hence, students' academic performance and progress did not struggle or decrease in small groups of classrooms in an online learning process. However, the classes which included 30-40 people in them, were more "chaotic" and hardly manageable which affected students' academic performance and progress negatively.

Another research shows that small groups and discussions led in smaller groups even in a large class gives students an opportunity to students to equally participate in discussions and have positive impact on higher-order thinking and learning outcomes (Pollocl, Hamman, Wilson, 2011, p. 10). This article also supports the idea of having smaller groups in classrooms fosters students' better learning which also is implied from the interviews in this capstone.

Another finding from the interviews is the role of the support and participation of parents and the communication between parents and teachers. There is a consistent pattern between the classes where the parents actively participated in the learning process and those classes where the parents did not. As Sose Chakhalyan mentioned during the interview it would be impossible to organize classes without the help of the parents because they were doing a huge job during that time. Many teachers and students who struggled to join the classes, who had lack of experience in technology were getting help from many parents. During the online classes, parents were present during the classes and were part of it. So, the parents were supportive, and communication increased between the parents and teachers, and parents stayed in contact with teachers. As a result, classes were more productive and effective, and students learned and performed better. The quality of the students' education did not suffer or decrease.

Gayane Arakelyan also mentioned the good influence of parents' participation on students' academic performance and progress in grades. After this experience, she started to give huge importance to primary contact with a parent and constantly discussing the learning outcomes, giving feedback and working on the gaps which they need to improve.

There were teachers, especially teachers aged 45-50 needed more support, which they got from the parents of the students. Lusine Sarukhanyan mentioned that there were parents who were helping their children's classmates and even the teachers. According to Anush Ghazaryan, parents were involved in the learning process, and they had constant contact with each other. The parental meetings which were conducted during the face-to-face classes were still being conducted online and the parents always got feedback about their children from the teachers.

Before the pandemic, most of the parents at schools were not involved in the learning process during the in-person traditional classes. After the shift to the online learning process, parental interference was needed and beneficial for the learning process. So, the classes where parental interference was present were more productive and organized compared to the ones where parents' participation was absent.

During the online learning process, parents were present during the classes and could see their children's weaknesses and strengths during the class and could work on them afterwards. Parents helped to set up the classes, made sure that their children joined the classes and some parents even took care of their children's classmates. As Karine Vardanyan mentioned, some parents allowed small groups of students to gather at their houses and join the class from one computer. According to Zaruhi Niazyan, there was a parent in one of her 7th grade classes who helped and organized the whole process. Zaruhi mentioned that that parent used to call all the students one by one, explain and help them with any technical problem, she even called the teachers and helped them to organize and start the class. So, these efforts from the parents made a big difference and benefited students' learning and academic performance, the classes were not interrupted, and the children's education quality did not struggle.

There was a positive change during the online learning process according to the teachers. Some parents who did not participate in face-to-face classes started to participate in their children's learning process during the online learning period and they started to keep in contact with the teachers more regularly. So, when the teachers and the parents kept their regular communication via phone calls, messages or online meetings, students were able to avoid falling behind and parents were able to keep their children on track. Teachers could quickly contact the parents and let them know about their child's progress or inform the parents about their child's absences,

missing classes, low participation or any other difficulty. Also, in the classes where the parents took part in their children's learning process, the students had more responsibility to participate in class discussions, learn better and complete all the assignments. Hence, parental participation during the online learning process played a huge role in student's better learning and good progress.

Another significant finding which is common for all 10 interviews and all 10 teachers mentioned in their interviews is the lack of practical training courses for teachers. Especially, during COVID-19, after the shift to online learning process, many teachers struggled from lack of experience, training and knowledge of tools.

Interviews with teachers showed that there are many teachers who use outdated methods which were not applicable in an online learning process. These methods mainly included lecture-based lessons, calling students to the whiteboard and examining them or asking questions needing face-to-face communication.

As all the teachers mentioned there are training courses which occur once in every 5 years in Armenia. These are outdated and not practical anymore. Also, after the shift to online classes there were no official training sessions for the teachers according to the interviews. The transition to a new environment happened in one night and teachers had to deal with different challenges on their own.

Conclusion

Analyzing the interviews which were conducted several key findings were revealed. These findings show the successes and failures of the online learning process but also relate to the quality of education now.

One of the findings - the significant differences between private and public schools – private schools having more privileges and opportunities and succeeding online learning process compared to public schools should be addressed by the Government of Armenia or by the Ministry of Education. All the lack of opportunities that public schools have are mainly connected to financial issues, outdated technologies and less experienced teachers.

Another major finding is that the class size has an impact on the productivity and efficiency of classes both in online and in-person learning. The classrooms, which include a small number of students, are more manageable, and students' academic performance and participation have positive progress. So, this fosters the idea of creating small size classrooms including at most 10 people per classroom.

The interviews indicated that parental involvement is one of the key factors for success in the learning process, especially in an online platform. Having continuous contact with parents has a noticeable positive impact on students' better learning, being organized and taking studying more seriously. So, this reinforces the concept of parents being involved in their children's learning process and teachers keeping communication with parents.

One of the most important issues identified during the interviews is that teachers did not get any technical support or official training sessions from the Government of Armenia or the Ministry of Education. Teachers always deal with challenges and difficulties on their own and do their

own research to find out new methods and strategies. Instead of having only one training course for teachers every 5 years, there should be more frequent and practical ones addressing all the current problems and challenges. Some institutions organize voluntary programs for teachers which are not mandatory for all of them. However, the programs should be organized by the government and be mandatory for all the teachers.

The online learning period during the COVID-19 pandemic was taken for this research as a turning point or a divide between in-person learning and online learning. The period shows which factors, methods and strategies helped the teachers to reinforce students' academic performance and avoid falling behind. The period also shows the factors which caused failure and should be considered by the Ministry of Education and addressed. Some of these factors include outdated methods and financial problems mainly, as public schools are currently facing lack of control from the government and the schools' administrations do not have the authority and power to address these issues.

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