

# Perceptions and Difficulties of Distance Learning Among Beginning Teachers and Kindergarten Educators During the Covid-19 Pandemic Period

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*Exploring the perceptions and challenges faced by beginning teachers and kindergarten teachers in the realm of distance learning reveals critical insights into the evolving landscape of early education in a digital age. The present study explored the challenges and difficulties experienced by beginning teachers and kindergarten educators in the context of distance learning. Qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews involving 254 novice teachers and kindergarten educators. The findings revealed a range of difficulties new teachers face in the distance learning environment. These included challenges in conveying educational content, issues with Wi-Fi and internet connectivity, a lack of resources and technological tools, difficulties in engaging students in Zoom meetings, poor communication between teachers and students, insufficient preparation and training for distance teaching, inadequate digital skills, and a lack of experience among parents with the new method of learning. Understanding the challenges and difficulties that novice teachers encounter, particularly during their initial professional years and in exceptional circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic, is crucial. This understanding not only aids in addressing and surmounting these challenges but also contributes to the enhancement and development of current distance teaching models. Such improvements should consider the specific needs and challenges of new teachers.*

*L'étude des perceptions et des difficultés rencontrées par les enseignants débutants et les enseignants de maternelle dans le domaine de l'enseignement à distance révèle des informations essentielles sur l'évolution du paysage de l'éducation préscolaire à l'ère numérique. La présente étude a exploré les défis et les difficultés rencontrés par les enseignants débutants et les enseignants de maternelle dans le contexte de l'enseignement à distance. La recherche qualitative a été menée par le biais d'entrevues semi-structurées auxquelles ont participé 254 enseignants débutants et éducateurs de maternelle. Les résultats ont révélé une série de difficultés auxquelles les nouveaux enseignants sont confrontés dans le milieu de l'enseignement à distance. Il s'agit notamment des difficultés à transmettre le contenu éducatif, des problèmes de connexion Wi-Fi et Internet, du manque de ressources et d'outils technologiques, des difficultés à faire participer les élèves aux réunions Zoom, de la mauvaise communication entre les enseignants et les élèves, du manque de préparation et de formation à l'enseignement à distance, des compétences numériques inadéquates et du manque d'expérience des parents en ce qui concerne cette nouvelle méthode d'apprentissage. Il est essentiel de comprendre les défis et les difficultés que rencontrent les enseignants débutants, en particulier au cours de leurs premières années professionnelles et dans des circonstances exceptionnelles telles que la pandémie de COVID-19. Cette compréhension*

*permet non seulement d'aborder et de surmonter ces défis, mais aussi de contribuer à l'amélioration et au développement des modèles actuels d'enseignement à distance. Ces améliorations devraient prendre en compte les besoins et les défis spécifiques des nouveaux enseignants.*

At the beginning of 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) spread globally, instigating a crisis of unprecedented scale. This global health crisis led to significant disruptions in educational systems worldwide, resulting in widespread school closures and compelling thousands of teachers and parents to pivot to remote teaching (Baral et al., 2024; Zedan, 2024).

In response to this emergent situation, schools were forced to transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to emergency remote teaching (ERT; Yang & Huang, 2021). The abrupt adoption of distance learning methods, a necessity borne out of the coronavirus pandemic, occurred without prior preparation (Baral, 2023). This rapid shift to distance education was implemented as a contingency plan to address the emergency situation (Belamghari, 2023).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (from March 2020 to August 2021), Israel's education system was not mandated to implement a comprehensive distance learning system for all students nationwide. In an effort to contain the spread of the virus, similar to actions taken globally, Israeli educational institutions closed in March 2020. This led to 1.87 million students transitioning to remote learning for a prolonged period of 81 days during a complete lockdown. During this period, the education system operated exclusively through distance learning, followed by an additional 128 days of hybrid learning, involving both in-person and remote education. It is notable that 49% of teachers reported not receiving professional development in distance education in the preceding two years, facing significant challenges despite various supports provided, including infrastructure, budgets, digital content, professional development, learning content creation, professional and emotional support, focus groups, and mapping of end equipment and infrastructure. Furthermore, an additional 2,200 schools received computers and other peripherals, with lending libraries for portable computers established in schools to assist students without access. Subsequently, around 150,000 peripherals (primarily computers and tablets) were distributed to more students. The scarcity of essential technological resources was particularly pronounced in many localities, especially among families from socio-economically and culturally peripheral backgrounds. These families often struggled financially and could not afford a computer, had to share one computer among the family, or lacked reliable internet access. Notably, 55% to 80% of students reported not engaging with the provided content (RAMA, 2021).

In this situation and period, teachers faced the imperative task of acquiring new skills, notably in the utilization of digital technologies for creating educational resources (Demeshkant et al., 2022). The necessity for alterations in teaching strategies led teachers to encounter unprecedented challenges and difficulties (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Besides the inherent challenges of adopting new teaching methods without prior preparation, novice teachers encounter numerous difficulties in typical settings, such as discipline problems in the classroom, lack of motivation and interest among the students, adaptation of the study material and teaching methods to the different levels of students, many demands of the system and more (Ilaiyan, 2013; Jomud et al., 2017; Yilmazel, 2023). These challenges and difficulties are further compounded by the extraordinary emergency conditions of the pandemic, particularly for those without previous experience in teaching and distance learning (Cao, 2023). It is important to emphasize that beginning years in teaching can be daunting for novice teachers, often described as a “sink or

swim” experience. This phase is crucial for mastering the teaching profession.

The imposition of the distance learning method was abrupt and affected teachers, students, and families alike. This sudden shift required extensive preparation, which was not feasible at the time, leading to significant challenges for all involved (Zedan, 2024). This situation was particularly challenging for new teachers, who, even under normal circumstances, encounter considerable difficulties and challenges.

This study focused on the difficulties and challenges faced by beginning teachers and kindergarten educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically highlighting the abrupt and unprepared transition to distance teaching methods. The aim was to uncover the unique challenges experienced by novice teachers in the distance-learning context and explore their coping strategies in this unprecedented emergency, compounded by their inexperience as novice educators. The central research question posed is: What difficulties and challenges do beginning teachers and kindergarten teachers encounter in distance learning, and how do they manage these challenges?

## **Distance Learning**

Distance learning, also known as online learning, is an educational method where the teacher and students are in remote places. It is characterized by the use of technology, including audio, video, and internet tools, to facilitate learning (Amrane-Cooper et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). This internet-based approach connects students across diverse and remote locations (Littlefield et al., 2019). Characterized by its flexibility, distance learning serves individual students' needs and ability levels, fostering enhanced interaction and feedback between teachers and students (Barari et al., 2020). It often provides access to an extended collection of materials, including videos, images, and e-books. Additionally, teachers can incorporate various formats like forums or discussions to enrich their lessons (Ng, 2019).

The concept of *distance education* is not limited to a particular technology; rather, it refers to a method of learning that extends beyond the traditional classroom setting (Amrane-Cooper et al., 2023). This method fosters a dynamic and adaptable educational experience (Heeks, 2020). It encompasses three models: synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, and hybrid learning. Synchronous learning involves simultaneous engagement, typically through live online communication or telephone conference calls, requiring presence in a virtual classroom (Barari et al., 2020). Asynchronous learning, in contrast, allows for interactions not at the same time with limited live meetings, featuring programs with numerous assignments and projects. This model provides learners ample time to focus on their work (Amrane-Cooper et al., 2023). Hybrid learning merges these approaches, combining the structured timing of synchronous learning with the flexibility of asynchronous learning, requiring students to meet at specified times while completing other work at their own pace (Saavedra, 2020).

Studies by Amrane-Cooper et al., 2023; Bouchrika, 2024; Yang et al., 2023; and Yusupova and Mukhhamadieva, 2021 have identified various advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. Among the advantages are: the flexibility to choose the time and place of study; access to educational materials via the internet during the learning process; the ability to engage in activities other than learning; and savings in costs, time, and effort traveling to school. However, there are also notable disadvantages: the absence of human physical closeness leading to a less emotive connection; the necessity of purchasing personal computers with cameras and microphones and ensuring stable internet access; challenges in verifying the identity of

individuals completing assignments and teaching tasks; and the significant effort and time required for lesson preparation.

### **Beginning Teacher Difficulties**

New teachers encounter numerous challenges, especially in their first year of teaching. A survey by Ilayan (2013), involving 130 beginning teachers from elementary and middle schools within the Arab society in Israel, highlighted several difficulties: discipline issues in the classroom; low student motivation and interest; variability and individual differences among students in cognitive and academic levels; challenges in communicating with students, parents, and school staff; difficulties in locating knowledge sources, curricula, teacher's guides, and study materials; adapting to the school's organizational climate and culture; teaching workload overload; lack of didactic and disciplinary knowledge; unmet expectations and dissatisfaction; and a lack of support. It is also noteworthy to mention a mixed-method study by Luft (2014), which included 95 first-year science teachers. Luft's study aimed to understand how their initial years impact their development as teachers. It was found that support, guidance, and training play a crucial and significant role in the success, integration, and ability of new teachers to handle the numerous challenges they encounter.

Another study by Jomoad et al. (2017), which involved 105 beginning teachers from Philippine public secondary schools, identified several workload challenges encountered by newly-hired teachers. These included managing extensive assignments, becoming weary from non-instructional duties, preparing administrative paperwork and reports, dedicating excessive time to extracurricular activities, experiencing sleepless nights due to time-consuming work, and spending personal time assessing papers and students' writings.

The study also revealed instructional challenges faced by these new teachers: grappling with curriculum complexities, indecision regarding essential teaching content, difficulties in setting course objectives, challenges in selecting appropriate methods and techniques, issues in implementing planned activities, insufficient knowledge in using teaching strategies, struggles in engaging students in lesson activities, and hardships in utilizing instructional materials.

Comparable findings emerged from the qualitative study by Yilmazel (2023), involving six newly-hired English teachers in Turkey. This study underscored retention and consistency in the challenges faced by beginning teachers. The results indicated that new teachers grapple with a variety of difficulties, including class and lesson management, the classroom environment, communication with school management, and workload.

Moreover, Estrera's (2019) study on challenges faced by new teachers in primary and secondary schools, which included 115 teachers and 16 school principals, revealed that planning and evaluating lessons pose significant challenges for teachers. Similarly, a study by Faisal & Hussien (2023) conducted among 58 newly-hired teachers in the rural Tagoloan District of Lanao del Norte (Philippines) found that most of the new teachers reported facing substantial challenges related to workload, classroom management, teaching management, and the school environment.

As noted by Gaikhorst et al. (2017), this period is marked by mixed feelings of helplessness and isolation, and a lack of support and guidance. In a qualitative study involving 71 Slovenian primary school teachers, Mlinar & Peček (2023) conducted semi-structured interviews to explore the organizational and practical aspects of distance education. They found that beginning teachers often feel ill-prepared to handle various challenges they encounter such as classroom discipline, communication with the parents, and relationships with colleagues and administrators. Kearney

et al. (2012) identified additional burdens such as clerical work, inadequate training and support, and a high workload, as highlighted by Abbott et al. (2014). Poth (2013) pointed out difficulties in creatively improvising and applying knowledge in teaching.

Beginning teachers, already navigating the normal known challenges of their early careers, encountered heightened difficulties with the abrupt transition to remote learning. This shift, imposed without significant preparation, required them to adapt to teaching remotely, facing a myriad of new challenges and complexities.

### **Difficulties of Beginning Teachers with Distance Learning**

Implementing online education presents significant challenges for teachers due to various barriers (Yang et al., 2024). The primary challenge identified by teachers in distance learning is classroom management (Barari et al., 2020). Other challenges and difficulties faced by educators during distance learning include concerns about student engagement and retention (Harrison, 2021). Additional difficulties include limited teacher-student communication, challenges in engaging students and attracting their attention, monitoring student progress, and ensuring inclusive participation (Sari & Nayır, 2020). Beyond didactic pedagogical challenges, structural and organizational issues also pose significant hurdles. Burns (2023) and Heeks (2020) classified these as infrastructure-related, encompassing internet access, proficiency in digital tools, content adaptation, implementation issues, slow internet, frequent disconnections. Barari et al. (2020) and Ng (2019) classified other technical problems.

Sari and Nayır (2020) highlighted limited internet access and inadequate infrastructure as serious concerns. These limitations are particularly pronounced in rural areas and are compounded by a lack of technological resources, as stated by teachers and students (Littlefield et al., 2019). However, the major issue is the lack of preparedness for distance learning among teachers and students, leading to difficulties in system usage and lesson engagement. This is because teachers were neither trained for this, nor did they assume they would have to go through such an experience (Barari et al., 2020). This unpreparedness also fosters negative attitudes and prejudices, further complicating the distance learning process (Heeks, 2020). Hilli (2020) observed that teachers untrained in distance learning methodologies are perceived as less effective.

In response, teachers reported that they have adapted their lesson management strategies to deal with the new change (Heeks, 2020). These adaptations include modifying lesson plans, utilizing more engaging materials (Barari et al., 2020), providing verbal motivational feedback (Zedan, 2021a), and creating additional activities (Heeks, 2020). Furthermore, attendance monitoring has been employed to encourage student participation. Seeking support and assistance from colleagues, family members, online platforms, and technology experts has also been a key strategy (Barari et al., 2020; Ng, 2019). Another strategy used by the teachers is involving parents and maintaining direct communication through various channels (e.g., email, telephone, WhatsApp). This strategy has been pivotal in enhancing the virtual classroom environment (Zedan, 2021b).

The diversity among students necessitates making online learning more inclusive, addressing an urgent need to cater to a broad spectrum of learners. However, implementing a universally applicable model of online education presents a significant challenge for teachers, compounded by various barriers (Yang et al., 2024).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The study focused on beginning teachers in the first to third year of their profession within the Israeli education system, focusing on their experience with distance learning during 2020-2021. A purposive sample comprised of 254 beginning teachers, with 74% being teachers and 26% kindergarten educators, was selected from 67 schools across Israel. The sample represented diverse educational levels, the teachers employed in elementary schools (63% of participants), middle schools (32%), and high schools (5%), with a female representation of 81%. These educators were actively involved in implementing distance learning primarily via Zoom.

Participants selection occurred during a coordinated meeting with principals from various schools, a comprehensive explanation of the research and its objectives was provided. Subsequently, the principals were requested to nominate beginning teachers from their institutions. These teachers, possessing one to three years of professional experience, were then identified, with each school contributing a maximum of five teacher names. A contact and an appeal was made by the researcher to the new teachers nominated to participate in the study, who appear in the list provided by the school principals, with a request to participate in the research interview, while promising to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, and maintaining their right to withdraw from the study at any stage they wish or not to participate at all.

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews, comprising open-ended questions, facilitated “rich, full, and complex accounts” of participant experiences (Magnusson & Maracek, 2015, p. 47), aligning well with the subjective and transactional nature of this research. Open-ended questions were employed to enable participants to fully articulate their responses. Creswell & Creswell (2017) advocate for the use of open-ended questions, noting that such a format fosters creativity in participants' statements. Example questions included: “How do you define distance learning, and what are your thoughts on it?”; “What challenges and difficulties have you encountered as a beginning teacher during distance learning?”; “What do you perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning?”; “How do you, as a beginning teacher, manage these challenges and difficulties?”; “How does the school principal support you in addressing the difficulties and challenges you mentioned?”; “In what ways do other teachers and educational staff assist you in overcoming the difficulties and challenges you have faced?”; “How can the school or the Ministry of Education provide assistance in addressing these challenges and difficulties?”.

The contact details of the selected teachers were provided by the principals, and contact via telephone was made with the teachers who agreed to participate in interviews.

Appointments were scheduled with each of the teachers who expressed consent to participate in the interview, ensuring that interviews with teachers from the same school were conducted on the same day. The interviews, which were held in a side room at the respective schools or via Zoom video conferencing, varied in duration from 20 to 30 minutes, with an average length of approximately 25 minutes. The first interview was conducted in December 2020. To ensure accuracy and participant validation, each interview was recorded and subsequently presented to the participants for confirmation of their responses. The complete dataset comprised all

conducted interviews. The researcher, along with a group of research assistants who were trained for the task, conducted the interviews individually with each of the participants. To organize the interviews, a data collection protocol was established. Appropriate notification procedures were also implemented to ensure robust participation for the research.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the interview texts (data) was conducted using qualitative content analysis principles. The technique of inductive category formation was employed, whereby categories were determined based on the content of the text, as described by Mayring (2014).

This process commenced with a thorough reading of the interviewees' responses. Initially, the analysis involved specifying and determining codes and keywords. The next step focused on identifying themes, followed by a meticulous examination of the research data to detect similarities and differences. This analysis facilitated the identification of important themes and foci recurring in the interviewees' responses. Categories were then established based on these themes. Additionally, the interviews were precisely reviewed to thematize pertinent passages with relevant theories. Subsequently, these categories were refined into major categories.

A color-coding process, also known as lean coding, was employed to facilitate data categorization (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Finally, utilizing Saldana's (2021) codeweaving technique, narrative vignettes were generated. This involved the integration of categories and codes to form coherent textual representations, providing a rich narrative account of the findings.

### **Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness**

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data collected in this study, Creswell & Creswell's (2017) six-step model was employed. This model includes developing the research paradigm, choosing sampling techniques; selecting participants; and collecting data through various means such as interviews, observations, recordings; and transcribing field notes involving parents and school personnel.

In my role during this study, I aimed to maintain fairness, support, and impartiality, consciously striving to mitigate any implicit or explicit biases in my capacity as an educator. This effort was focused on objectively and fairly considering all participants' perspectives. Despite the acknowledged difficulties and challenges faced by teachers, particularly novices, I was committed to providing these educators with a platform to share their personal and professional experiences as new teachers, especially in the context of implementing distance teaching during the challenging period of the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Research Ethics**

The present study adhered to a qualitative research paradigm. Throughout the study, several key ethical considerations were addressed adequately. Firstly, informed consent was obtained—all participants were fully informed about the study's nature, and their involvement was entirely voluntary. Secondly, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained to protect the identity of the participants, thereby safeguarding them from any potential embarrassment or harm that could arise from the disclosure of the information collected. All of the participant names mentioned below are pseudonyms. Thirdly, respect for the participants was a cornerstone of our

approach. Participants were treated with respect and provided with transparent, truthful explanations about the research. All procedures were conducted in coordination with, and with explicit consent from, the participants. Lastly, loyalty to the findings was ensured; the results were reported honestly and accurately, reflecting a true and faithful representation of the data collected. Additionally, this study was reviewed and granted ethical approval by the ethics committee of the academic Arab college for education in Israel prior to data collection. Since most of the participants were teachers, their consent was given verbally and not in writing.

## **Findings**

Analyzing the data in relation to the interview questions and research objectives demonstrated two primary categories. The first category focuses on beginning teachers' perceptions of distance learning and the difficulties they encounter. The second category centers on the strategies these teachers employ to cope with these challenges.

The teachers' perceptions encompass both the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. Key challenges identified include difficulties in conveying educational content, issues with internet connection and communication, resource limitations, and obstacles in engaging students in Zoom classes. Additionally, there are concerns about ineffective teacher-student communication during classes, inadequate preparation and training for distance learning, limited digital skill acquisition, and a lack of experience among parents in supporting their children's distance learning.

In response to these challenges, beginning teachers have adopted various strategies. These include maintaining consistent contact with parents, seeking assistance and guidance from the school's technical staff or more experienced colleagues, participating in professional development courses specific to distance teaching, and acquiring necessary equipment.

Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the identified categories and subcategories emerging from the interview analysis.

### **Beginning Teachers' General Perceptions of Distance Learning During the Pandemic**

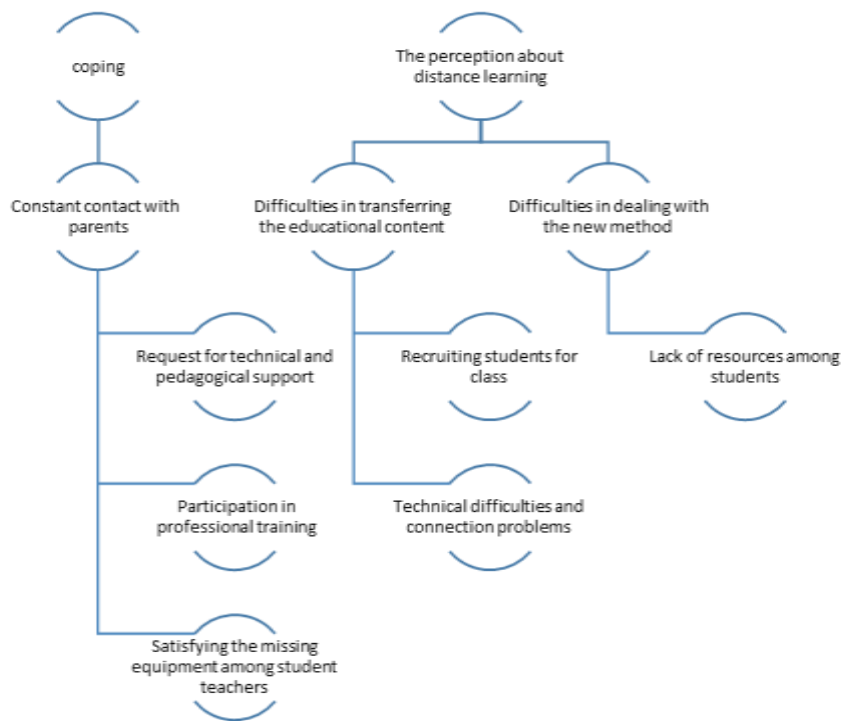
The initial perception of beginning teachers regarding distance learning was primarily shaped during the COVID-19 pandemic. From conducted interviews, it was evident that these teachers viewed distance learning as the most viable solution under pandemic restrictions and as the only alternative to traditional classroom instruction. However, they concurrently acknowledged its limitations, particularly in failing to adequately address students' academic and emotional needs. As expressed by teacher Abeer,

I think that distance learning is not effective enough; it does not allow closeness with children, especially those in compulsory and pre-compulsory kindergartens. It precludes hugs, warmth, and face-to-face relationships. However, distance learning is an emergency solution when maintaining in-person learning is not possible.

It is important to understand that teachers adopted this method primarily due to the lockdown imposed during the COVID-19 period. They recognized its role in maintaining minimal contact and preserving a structured routine to prevent disconnection and loss. As Sami and other teachers



Figure 1  
*Perception of Distance Learning and Coping Strategies*



explained, distance learning significantly contributed to “ensuring that school days were not wasted,” and “children maintained a routine, waking up at a fixed time and understanding their schedules.”

### ***Advantages of Distance Learning***

The teachers recognized distance learning as a plausible solution for maintaining contact with students during emergencies, offering several advantages, including time savings in organization, preparation, and travel. This mode of learning was noted for its diversity and the integration of various technological and digital tools, as well as facilitating learning in small groups, enhancing individualized instruction. As one teacher highlighted, “The great advantage of distance learning is that it allows the class to be divided into small groups, and to hold individual lessons. I can attest to students reporting a good understanding of the material” (Rina).

However, the teachers saw the primary benefit of distance learning as its role in sustaining the teacher-student relationship, offering flexibility, allowing children and their parents to independently choose their engagement times and activities, including visiting designated websites “to complete assignments or educational activities” (Rina).

### ***Disadvantages of Distance Learning***

One teacher, referred to as Hala, mentioned that distance learning is not conducive to accommodating the varied Levels, abilities, and preferences of students. Hala observed, “There

are children who are unable to sit in front of the screen for a long time. Also, some children learn well through senses like touch and smell, not just sight, making learning less effective for some.” Another teacher, Badera, detailed further disadvantages, particularly in the context of kindergarteners,

With this method (distance learning), there is less personal attention. Children need physical contact for feeling and warmth. When learning takes place behind a screen, there is less personal engagement, less closeness, less eye contact, and less emotion. The direct relationship between teacher and student is eliminated in distance learning. I do not see the students, I can't identify their difficulties, and neither can the students spontaneously approach me at the end of class and talk to me.

**Internet Connection Issues.** The teachers reported encountering multiple challenges with internet connection, including frequent disconnections experienced both by themselves and their students. This issue necessitated both teachers and students' parents to upgrade their internet packages, imposing a financial burden. The frequent disconnections and connectivity issues disrupted the course of the lessons, caused significant disturbances, and presented challenges in re-engaging students in the class. Teacher Lama noted, “The large number of disconnections made it difficult to convey the academic content effectively, disrupting the continuity of the educational process”.

**Difficulties in Conveying Educational Content.** Beginner teachers reported experiencing difficulties in transmitting educational content, a challenge particularly pronounced for kindergarten children. These children typically benefit from tangible, sensory-based learning tools for concept internalization. Additionally, many teachers faced challenges with in-class writing tasks, notably in composing scientific formulas and creating graphs and illustrations. Thus, this limitation hindered their ability to explain mathematical processes, often resulting in a reliance on presenting pre-prepared formulas and solutions. Teacher Alham highlighted the issue, stating, “The main difficulty was conveying educational content to young children, especially those in kindergarten, as they prefer to engage with objects through tactile and olfactory senses”.

**Challenges in Engaging Students in Zoom Classes.** The challenge of recruiting students for Zoom classes was a significant concern raised by the teachers. They noted difficulties in persuading students to join these online classes. Many students were initially reluctant to engage through a virtual link, and some would leave the class upon experiencing disconnections, making it challenging to reintegrate them into the lesson. One teacher, referred to as Carma, highlighted a key issue: “Students lack the willingness to participate in distance learning. This reluctance extended to their disinclination to turn on their cameras or actively contribute to class discussions”.

**Difficulties in Relationships and Interpersonal Communication.** Teachers reported that their relationships with students were poor, loose, and overly formal, posing significant challenges in managing learning effectively. The lack of interpersonal interaction emerged as a critical obstacle, hindering teachers' ability to convey educational material and manage learning processes. For instance, teacher Warda commented, “The relationships between the students were loose; there were no partnerships or friendships, leading to disconnection.” Similarly, teacher Fawzeya highlighted additional challenges, she said, “Conducting successful lessons through Zoom presented numerous difficulties. Despite making contact with each student and giving individual attention—crucial for first graders as they acquire language and arithmetic skills—it was challenging to strengthen the ties between us.”

**Technological Resource Limitations Among Students.** A serious challenge encountered in distance learning was the lack of technological resources among students. This deficiency in equipment and devices significantly hindered the learning process. When students lacked essential technology such as computers, the teaching methods had to be adapted, often leading to less efficient learning outcomes. The teachers reported specific instances where the absence of basic technological tools, like speakers, headphones, or cameras, posed difficulties in engaging students effectively. For instance, teacher Ebrahim said, “I ran into technical difficulties, as not all children had the necessary equipment at home. Sometimes, I wanted to play an audio clip for the children, or I needed them to use a camera, but they didn't have one.”

Similarly, teacher Manal emphasized multiple issues, including a scarcity of computers and tablets for students, compounded by a lack of digital skills among parents, leading to technical problems. Manal commented, “The main difficulty arose from the lack of computers and tablets available for some of the students.”

### **Coping With Distance Learning Difficulties**

In addressing the challenges of distance learning, teachers have developed various strategies for coping effectively. A key strategy identified is the cultivation and strengthening of relationships with parents.

### ***Cultivating and Strengthening the Relationship With Parents***

Teachers emphasized that consistent engagement with parents significantly benefits both beginning teachers and kindergarteners in navigating the complexities of distance education. Enhanced parental involvement was found to be instrumental in surmounting numerous obstacles, notably in the dissemination of educational materials and communication with students, as well as in monitoring, supervising, and motivating student participation in classes. For instance, one teacher, referred to as Basim, highlighted the pivotal role of parental cooperation. Basim noted,

In my opinion, the important thing in distance learning is the parent-teacher relationship. Active parental involvement—ensuring children attend classes, assisting them with technology, and overseeing their participation—markedly improves the learning experience. It enables children to engage more earnestly and learn with greater enjoyment and ease. Conversely, lack of parental support can hinder a child's ability to independently navigate and participate in online platforms like Zoom. Additionally, parental skepticism towards distance learning can lead to communication breakdowns with teachers, potentially resulting in significant disparities in educational attainment within the same classroom.

### ***Request for Technical and Pedagogical Support***

The support provided by skilled and experienced educational staff was pivotal for beginning teachers and kindergarteners in navigating the challenges of distance learning effectively. These teachers often sought assistance from their more experienced peers, and some even reached out to technical support staff for guidance. Participation in ICT training was a common approach to learn how to integrate technology into teaching. For instance, Teacher Katrin shared her

experience: “I asked for help from the ICT center, searched for instructional videos online, and quickly learned to adapt to and manage the changes that were taking place.”

### ***Participation in Training for Distance Teaching***

Participation in training and professional development for distance learning is essential for beginning teachers to effectively navigate the challenges they encounter. These skills are typically acquired through training courses and professional development programs. For instance, teacher Mary noted, “I’m trying to learn the software Zoom, and I’m trying to bring new and exciting things that will catch the interest of the students. I get a lot of help from the computer teacher at school.” Similarly, another teacher emphasized the benefits of ICT training, stating, “I always participated in ICT training. I learned how to integrate technology in teaching, which greatly streamlined my work.” However, teacher Naela highlighted the importance of peer support, saying, “I don’t hesitate to ask for help and guidance from another teacher who is more expert than me.”

### ***Provision of Necessary Equipment***

In the context of distance learning, the provision of necessary equipment for both teachers and students is crucial. Interviews revealed that equipping teachers and students with the necessary tools significantly enhances the efficacy of beginning teachers in managing the challenges of distance learning. Teachers emphasized the importance of having access to a personal computer, comprehensive tutorials, and a reliable internet connection. Additionally, participating in training programs for distance learning tools was deemed essential for improving connectivity and preventing disconnections. Ensuring that every child and staff member has access to a personal computer is a critical success factor.

Particularly in the Arab society, there are families unable to provide computers for their children, highlighting a gap in resources. As teacher Saeed pointed out,

Children in the Arab community must receive appropriate equipment. This requires not only improving infrastructure in villages and peripheral areas but also support from schools, local education departments, and primarily, the Ministry of Education. These bodies play a significant role in distributing computers to children who are in need, thereby bridging the digital divide and facilitating equitable access to distance learning.

Teachers often grapple with challenges related to the absence of necessary devices and tools and have to adapt to unforeseen circumstances such as Internet outages. For instance, one teacher described their experience:

One of the challenges I face is the lack of computers or supplementary tools, which compels me to alter my lesson plans. Consequently, I resort to sending activities via WhatsApp to students’ families and replacing pre-planned, more interactive educational activities with less effective ones. These substitutes might include reading a text and answering questions, as opposed to engaging in a class discussion, or drawing and coloring a picture to represent a specific concept, or even recording audio and sending it via WhatsApp.

## Discussion

The current study focused on the perceptions, attitudes, and difficulties encountered by beginning teachers and kindergarteners during distance learning, along with strategies for coping with these challenges. The findings indicated that teachers recognize both advantages and disadvantages of the distance learning method. They pointed out various difficulties in the distance learning process, such as sharing educational content, Wi-Fi and internet connection problems, lack of resources, equipment, and instruments, difficulty in engaging students in Zoom classes, poor communication with students, inadequate preparation and training for distance learning, lack of digital skills, and inexperience among parents with distance learning methods. Additionally, issues like disconnection, loose relationships between students, and lack of cooperation were highlighted.

These findings are corroborated by research conducted globally. Kim and Park (2023) noted that teachers identified a range of difficulties and challenges, including budget constraints, lack of institutional support, technical issues, limited knowledge of online platforms, and diminished motivation among both teachers and students. Similarly, studies from East Asia (Ghimire et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2022; Thaheem et al., 2022) have documented that teachers faced numerous challenges and had to navigate them during the unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These findings align with Burns (2023), who identified main difficulties such as unstable infrastructure, interrupted Internet access and its slowness, untrained human resources, challenges in sharing educational content online, and implementation problems. Heeks (2020) also emphasized the issue of internet disconnections as a significant difficulty, a finding echoed by Barari et al. (2020), where teachers and students reported slow internet and frequent disconnections.

Furthermore, this study reported the lack of necessary equipment, such as speakers and cameras, as a major challenge, disrupting the flow of lessons and impeding the delivery of planned content. Similar findings were reported by Ng (2019), who noted that video and audio problems present significant challenges for teachers. Additionally, this study found that certain localities, particularly in the Negev region, struggle with poor infrastructure and lack of internet access, posing a significant barrier to learning. This is consistent with Littlefield et al. (2019), who reported similar issues in rural areas, including inadequate technological equipment and internet access. It is noteworthy that in the Negev region, particularly in remote settlements without state recognition and infrastructure, there was virtually no learning during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis for the reasons mentioned above.

The present study reported challenges in attracting students' attention, monitoring student development, and utilizing tools and materials effectively to convey educational content in the virtual classroom environment. Teachers indicated an inability to communicate face-to-face with students, leading to uncertainties about student engagement and attention during lessons. Supporting these findings, Sari and Nayır (2020) noted that distance learning makes it difficult to track student progress and participation, especially when students do not turn on their cameras or when they mute their speakers.

A significant challenge identified was the lack of preparation and training for teachers in distance learning. Both teachers and students, along with their parents, were found to be unprepared for the sudden shift to this mode of education. Barari et al. (2020) also observed difficulties teachers encountered in using the distance learning systems, affecting their ability to conduct lessons effectively. Supporting this, Chan et al. (2022) conducted research among

teachers in Hong Kong and Australia and found a significant correlation between the perceived usefulness of distance learning and ease of implementation, and their experiences of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study further revealed that the absence of prior exposure to distance learning methodologies posed a major problem. The abrupt implementation of these methods, without adequate training, led to negative attitudes, prejudices, and preconceptions about distance learning. These factors, as Heeks (2020) suggested, not only created emotional barriers but also delayed and hindered the effective adoption of distance learning practices. These observations are corroborated by Hilli (2020), who found that unprepared teachers tend to be less satisfied and encounter numerous challenges during the implementation of distance learning. Similarly, in the United States, Shin and Hickey (2021) reported teachers' negative attitudes when dealing with challenges such as motivational constraints, connectivity issues, increased workload, and lack of interaction and feedback.

The teachers identified a key advantage of distance learning as the establishment of a uniform and common agenda for all students, facilitated by a virtual school day with a fixed schedule. This structure is believed to enhance responsibility and autonomy among both teachers and students. Heeks (2020) also emphasized that online learning promotes the development of an independent, efficient, and effective learner. The availability of the virtual classroom anywhere with an Internet connection, coupled with its flexibility, allows for a personalized learning experience. Moreover, online education is often more cost-effective and can provide a dynamic, tailored educational experience.

In addressing the difficulties encountered in distance learning, beginning teachers emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships with parents, seeking support from experts, colleagues, and professionals, and engaging in professional training about distance learning. They also noted the effectiveness of equipping both teachers and students with the necessary technological tools as a strategy to overcome these challenges.

Particularly, the strategy of fostering relationships with parents was seen as pivotal. Teachers believed that this would aid in recruiting students for Zoom meetings, ensuring active participation, and encouraging parents to provide necessary technological equipment and a conducive learning environment. Consequently, they maintained constant contact with parents through various means such as WhatsApp, email, and phone calls. This approach aligns with findings from Zedan (2024) and Barari et al. (2020), who observed the positive impact of teacher-parent collaboration on student learning.

The other coping strategy, which involved seeking support from colleagues or expert professionals, was essential for teachers in managing their virtual classrooms effectively and integrating technological tools into their teaching. Many teachers readily sought help, guidance, and support from more experienced colleagues or technology experts. This finding is supported by Ng (2019), who reported similar benefits from such collaborations among teachers.

Teachers indicated actively participating in professional training on distance learning to address the challenges they face. These continuing education courses equip beginning teachers with the necessary skills for distance learning, addressing their initial unpreparedness and lack of experience in this method. The need for such training arises from their insufficient knowledge about the operation and application of distance learning process. Without this training, effective implementation of the process would be challenging. This perspective is supported by findings from Littlefield et al. (2019), who suggested that teachers often enter remote teaching processes unprepared, lacking the necessary knowledge and skills. They also identified a need for

professional training in technology use and distance teaching for teachers, administrators, and educational staff. Without firsthand experience or training, teachers struggle to manage the distance learning process and develop solutions. Thus, acquiring technological assistance and planning appropriate strategies for distance learning becomes essential.

Furthermore, equipping both teachers and students with necessary technology is recognized as an effective strategy to facilitate distance teaching. Proper equipment ensures the proper implementation of distance learning, as the lack of technological devices or related equipment can hinder the management and maintenance of distance education. This finding aligns with a study by Littlefield et al. (2019), which highlighted similar initiatives. For instance, in Ankara, a campaign by the municipality and educational institutions to donate computers to students lacking them facilitated the implementation of distance learning. Similarly, in Israel, local authorities and schools provided computers to students in need, significantly enhancing the effectiveness of the distance teaching-learning process.

### **Conclusions, Practical Implications, and Recommendations**

The issue of challenges faced by beginning teachers is a significant concern within the education system. Efforts were made to identify these difficulties and the strategies teachers employ to address them. The findings of this study highlighted challenges in various areas, including sharing educational content, internet connection issues, resource limitations, difficulties in engaging students in Zoom classes, inadequate teacher-student communication, lack of preparation and training for distance teaching, poor digital skills, and inexperience among teachers, students, and parents. Teachers identified effective coping strategies, such as establishing constant contact with parents, seeking support from expert technological teams and colleagues, participating in professional training for distance teaching, and addressing the lack of technological equipment for both teachers and students. These recommendations also align with Zedan (2024), which examined parental involvement in their children's distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Distance learning presents a unique opportunity due to its inherent flexibility and the potential for integrating technological tools that can enhance learning. Therefore, it is crucial to implement the distance teaching method effectively and meaningfully to minimize the difficulties and challenges that may disrupt the teaching-learning process. There is an urgent need to prepare and train teachers, particularly beginning teachers and those working with kindergarteners, in innovative teaching methods, with a specific focus on distance teaching and learning. Training should encompass acquiring digital skills and managing a digital classroom. Furthermore, institutions must provide the necessary technological resources for both teachers and students. Similar implications and recommendations have been identified in various other studies (Baral et al., 2024; Demeshkant et al., 2022; Faisal & Hussien, 2023), conducted among new teachers from several countries globally.

The basic contribution of this research lies in presenting decision-makers and educational leaders, both in Israel and globally, with a detailed account of the difficulties and challenges encountered. This information can serve as a foundation for enhancing the educational experience, focusing on preemptive teacher preparation, ensuring the availability of appropriate equipment, and involving parents to mitigate some challenges. Essentially, the aim is to devise solutions for new teachers who find themselves navigating both the usual and additional pandemic-related challenges.

An additional contribution of the current study could be the refinement and advancement of existing distance teaching models, taking into account the challenges and difficulties inherent in the models currently utilized by educators. In addition, the research was conducted among a specific population characterized by unique socioeconomic attributes and working conditions, as an ethnic minority, which differ from those of the dominant majority.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Although the findings of this study offer valuable insights into the challenges and coping strategies of teachers and kindergarten teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of distance learning, two key limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study lacked longitudinal follow-up, continuity, and repeated measurements across different stages of the quarantine period and the implementation of the distance learning method. It is plausible that the challenges and coping mechanisms evolved over the many months of the study period. Second, the study's participants were mainly from a homogeneous group of beginning teachers and kindergarteners in Arab-Israeli schools. Therefore, to broaden the applicability of these findings, future research should consider exploring diverse sectors, groups, ethnicities, or types of schools. This expansion would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the distance learning experience across different educational contexts.

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