

COVID-19 AND ANALYSIS OF NEEDS OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ONLINE-SCHOOLING IN IRAN

COVID-19 E ANÁLISE DE NECESSIDADES DOS PROFESSORES DE ESCOLA PRIMÁRIA NO ENSINO ONLINE NO IRÃ

COVID-19 Y ANÁLISIS DE NECESIDADES DE MAESTROS DE ESCUELA PRIMARIA EN ESCUELA EN LÍNEA EN IRÁN

Maria SHOBEIRY¹

ABSTRACT: This study is a basic qualitative research design in which 48 primary school teachers voluntarily attended a guided focus-group interview in Google Meet platform in April 2021. To design an effective focus group 4 interviews were made with 12 teachers in each. The whole interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded based on the needs and issues mentioned by the teachers. Five problems were highlighted: 1) unfit teaching materials for online schooling, 2) communication issues with their students from the distance, 3) the need for teacher training courses on various aspects of online assessment methods, 4) the need for teacher training courses on various teaching methods in the e-learning platforms, and 5) long hours of preparation for their online classes. The results point the need of preparation of prospective and practice for teachers on online schooling system, abording various aspects of e-learning instructional strategies, classroom management, and assessment methods.

KEYWORDS: Teachers' needs analysis. E-learning programs. Primary school online schooling. Online material production.

RESUMO: *Este estudo é um desenho de pesquisa qualitativa básica em que 48 professores do ensino fundamental participaram voluntariamente de uma entrevista guiada de grupo focal na plataforma Google Meet em abril de 2021. Para projetar um grupo focal eficaz foram feitas 4 entrevistas com 12 professores em cada. Todas as entrevistas foram gravadas em áudio, transcritas e codificadas com base nas necessidades e questões mencionadas pelos professores. Cinco problemas foram destacados: 1) materiais didáticos inadequados para o ensino online, 2) problemas de comunicação com seus alunos a distância, 3) a necessidade de cursos de formação de professores em vários aspectos dos métodos de avaliação online, 4) a necessidade de cursos de formação de professores sobre vários métodos de ensino nas plataformas de e-learning, e 5) longas horas de preparação para aulas online. Os resultados apontam a necessidade de preparação de prospectiva e prática para professores do sistema de ensino online, abordando vários aspectos das estratégias instrucionais de e-learning, gestão de sala de aula e métodos de avaliação.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Análise das necessidades dos professores. Programas de e-learning; Escolaridade online da escola primária. Produção de material online.*

¹ University of Tehran, Tehran – Iran. PhD Candidate, Department of Applied Linguistics. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2499-0366>. E-mail: maria.shobeiry@ut.ac.ir

RESUMEN: Este estudio es un diseño de investigación cualitativo básico en el que 48 docentes de primaria asistieron voluntariamente a una entrevista de grupo focal guiada en la plataforma Google Meet en abril de 2021. Para diseñar un grupo focal efectivo se realizaron 4 entrevistas con 12 docentes en cada una. Todas las entrevistas fueron grabadas en audio, transcritas y codificadas en función de las necesidades y problemas mencionados por los docentes. Se destacaron cinco problemas: 1) materiales didácticos no aptos para la educación en línea, 2) problemas de comunicación con sus estudiantes a distancia, 3) la necesidad de cursos de formación docente sobre diversos aspectos de los métodos de evaluación en línea, 4) la necesidad de cursos de formación docente sobre diversos métodos de enseñanza en las plataformas de e-learning, y 5) largas horas de preparación para sus clases en línea. Los resultados apuntan la necesidad de preparación de prospectiva y práctica para profesores en el sistema de educación en línea, abordando varios aspectos de las estrategias de instrucción de e-learning, gestión del aula y métodos de evaluación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Análisis de las necesidades de los docentes; Programas de aprendizaje electrónico; Educación primaria en línea; producción de material en línea.

Introduction

Online teaching and learning were not of crucial importance in the education system of Iran before the COVID-19 pandemic; however, when the whole country went into a long-term lockdown due to the outbreak of the Corona virus, the ministry of education and the ministry of science and research in Iran decided to hold all classes online for primary, high school, and tertiary students.

This rapid switch from real classroom environments to online schooling systems was not convenient for neither students nor teachers. Teachers had responsibilities and experiences that were not easily transferable from an in-class learning environments to online classrooms (DIXON; KIRMES, 2020). Therefore, it is completely understandable that distance teaching was a challenging issue and a burden to most of the teachers in Iran.

This negative emotional feeling of burden toward online education in teachers could be due to the lack of previous trainings on required technological issues, classroom management techniques, and required instructional strategies for e-learning programs (QUADRI *et al.*, 2017). Although the national education system of Iran tried to compensate for the flaws of distance learning by introducing and providing online applications appropriate for children, TV teaching programs, and offline methods including uploading recorded instructional materials on social networks, teachers were still not satisfied with the quality of the online teaching-learning environments in comparison to the real classroom teaching settings. They report a lot of problems with their classroom management, the quality of the internet to support the educational procedure, the technical problems with the appropriate

apps provided by the ministry of education, and the lack of motivational facilities to engage the primary students in the learning procedure.

Since there is no disciplined academic study in the realm of education to investigate the needs of the Iranian primary school teachers in online schooling system, this study is an attempt to fill this gap in the literature and shed light on the proper solutions to these needs and provide some potential insights to the Iranian ministry of education to act on the proposed solutions and improve the quality of online education at the primary level.

Review of the related literature

To make the process of online teaching continue successfully, teachers need to keep their students motivated and emotionally and cognitively engaged with the teaching materials (RHINI, 2018). This is a demanding task for teachers which includes applying dialogic teaching methods and acceptable level of technical skills in conveying conceptual knowledge from the distance (HADIJAH; SHALAWATI, 2017). Moreover, teachers' conceptual framework and attitude toward e-learning programs are also determining factors in the success of their distance teaching practice (RHINI, 2018). If teachers are not willing to switch to the e-learning platforms, the level of practicality and success of their career will be affected accordingly (HADIJAH; SHALAWATI, 2017; RHINI, 2018).

Another challenge that teachers are facing in online schooling systems is the lack of required communicative skills to help them play the role of learning facilitator in their distance classes where they are required to record audio/video files of the lessons and upload them for their distant students which itself needs a certain level of communicative skills to make the recording emotionally and cognitively engaging for the students (ZIAUL HOQ, 2020). This issue is remarkable since the emotional interaction that occurs in face-to-face teaching is never comparable with the offline audio/video teaching materials (BINGIMALS, 2009). This is not the only problem teachers face in preparing online teaching materials. They also need to put much more amount of time and energy into preparing online instructional materials compared to their preparation time for the regular classroom teaching system (HADIJAH; SHALAWATI, 2017).

The lack of technological support from the education institutions is another issue that teachers face in their preparation procedure for their online classes (BINGIMALS, 2009). All of these problems can make teachers less confident in the e-learning programs compared to the real classroom settings (RASMITADILA *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, teachers knowledge

and experiences which are not transferable from the classroom teaching system into the online schooling system could be another source of their decrease of confidence and motivation in the online schooling system (RHINI, 2018; RASMITADILA *et al.*, 2020); besides, the inconformity between E-learning capacities and fair-minded student assessment methods is another issue that teachers have to cope with in the distance education and assessment system (HADIJAH; SHALAWATI, 2017).

Such problems, insecurities, and general attitudes of teachers toward online schooling system in Iran were explored in the survey study of Malekolkalami (2020) through applying an online questionnaire, including only 5 general questions, to 214 Iranian teachers. She showed that, for the most Iranian teachers, preparing teaching materials for online classes and their low level of digital knowledge were the most challenging problems. Since the results of this study were based on the analysis of responses to only 5 general questions about the Iranian teachers' perceptions of e-learning programs, they do not provide us with detailed and comprehensive information about the teachers' needs in the online education programs. Similar to the study of Malekolkalami (2020) the attitude of Indonesian teachers toward online schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic has been investigated by Lemay and Doleck (2020) with a focus on four issues of teacher, school, curriculum, and students. Their results accentuated the influential effect of students' low level of digital literacy as a barrier to the e-learning programs. Also, they showed a strong positive correlation between school-related problems and curricular-related barriers in the Indonesian e-learning systems.

Speaking of barriers in the e-learning programs, Miguel and Abulon (2016) identified four main categories of students, instructors, technology, and institutional management as the most affecting barriers in the e-learning systems. Using this framework, Quadri, Muhammed, Sanober, and Shah (2017) investigated the various barriers that negatively could affect the successful implementation of e-learning programs in Saudi Arabian Universities. They performed a survey study on 257 university staff members and showed that infrastructure and technology dimensions were the most significant barriers that negatively influenced the participants' perceptions toward online programs.

Another study which explored the teachers' opinion toward essential factors in a successful e-learning program was performed in Saudi Arabia by Alhabeeb and Rowley (2018) on the teaching staff of the King Saud University. They compared the attitude of the teaching staff with that of the university students through administering a survey questionnaire. Their results revealed that the most influential factors for the success of an e-

learning program included student characteristics, instructor characteristics, ease of access to the e-learning platforms, technical support, and teacher training plans.

About the factors affecting teachers' satisfaction of the quality of distance learning courses, a survey study was performed by Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) at a research university in the United States. They illustrated that three main factors of student-related features, instructor-related features, and institution-related features were the most determining factors that influenced the level of teaching faculty's satisfaction in an online teaching program. Also, regarding the student-related features their results showed that teaching staff preferred online teaching programs because they could access more diverse student population from all over the world. This could make the whole teaching practice more motivational and inspirational in so many ways. E-learning platforms were perceived by the teaching staff as interesting environments which could engage students much more than the traditional formal classroom environments. Also, the participant teachers expressed that the load of work in the online programs should be considered by the institutions as an immense barrier in that they perceived the workload of online teaching considerably higher than the workload of traditional classroom settings. And finally, in terms of the instructor-related features, Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) showed that the faculty satisfaction is positively influenced when they believed they could promote their students' outcome. When we look at similar studies in different places in the world, we can see somehow a similar trend in the teachers' perceptions toward e-learning programs. For example, a survey study on teachers' preferences towards various aspects of e-learning education on different platforms in Indonesia showed that most of the teachers held positive opinion toward distance teaching in general in that they felt satisfied when they helped students from distant places achieve their academic goals (MAILIZAR *et al.*, 2020).

However, teachers' main complaints in online pedagogical programs were about the lack of time to prepare for lessons, inadequate professional technological knowledge, limited physical resources, and limited access to technical support (DIXON; KIRMES, 2020).

Regarding the discussed literature, the following research questions are proposed to fill the gap in the literature:

Research questions

- What are the Iranian primary school teachers' needs in online schooling systems?
- What should the in-service training programs on the e-learning issues include regarding the need analysis of the primary school teachers?

Methodology

This study is a basic qualitative research design in which the data were collected through a guided focus-group interview with 48 primary school teachers in Iran from Tehran, Kermanshah, and Alborz provinces. They majored in Persian literature, physics, mathematics, psychology, chemistry, history, and arts at the Bachelors' level with the age range of 27 to 52 years old. They voluntarily attended an online meeting session with me on the Google Meet platform in 4 separate groups comprised of 12 individuals in each group.

All the interviews were held in Persian which were guided through some main questions regarding the teachers' needs and problems in their online schooling programs. The interviews were revolving around nine constructs of 1) satisfaction with the online schooling in general; 2) motivation in the online program; 3) time-management for preparation, 4) technological problems; 5) online assessment issues; 6) need for in-service training programs; 7) self-confidence in classroom management; 8) self-confidence in instructional strategies; and 9) student engagement issues.

Each meeting session lasted for at least two hours which were all recorded, transcribed, and coded as the data in this study.

The main questions asked in the focus group interviews included:

- What are the main difficulties you faced in the online schooling system?
- Were you willing to switch to the online schooling at all?
- What is your general attitude toward e-learning?
- Are you happy with the quality of your own work in the online schooling in comparison with the classroom teaching system?
- How is your self-confidence affected by the online schooling?
- Do you feel that the online schooling affected your classroom management?
- Are you less or more motivated in the online schooling? Why?
- Are you satisfied with your job as a primary school teacher in the online schooling?

- Are you happy with the level of students' engagement in the online classes?
- Are you happy with the assessment system in the online programs?
- Do you suggest a preparation program for prospective teachers about various aspects of online schooling?
- Do you suggest in-service teacher training courses for you to improve your confidence and online-communication qualities with your distant students?
- What do you prefer to include in the in-service courses for teachers regarding the current problems of Iran's online schooling system?

The transcribed data were coded based on the coding scheme that will be discussed in the following section.

Coding system

The first coding scheme that I employed on my data was based on the four main category of barriers to the e-learning programs proposed by Miguel and Abulon (2016), reported by teachers, including barriers related to 1) students, 2) instructors, 3) infrastructure and technology, and 4) institutional management.

After this stage, I expanded my coding scheme based on the main points that I found in the participants' answers to the focus-group interview questions. Then, I code the whole transcribed data for the second time based on the expanded coding scheme which included the following parts:

1. Teachers' problems related to the internet and technology
2. Teachers' problems with students regarding communication issues in the distance learning
3. Teachers' lack of confidence in holding online classes
4. Motivation reduction in teachers due to switching habits
5. Improper and unfit teaching materials for online teaching
6. Long hours of preparation for classes
7. The need for teacher training courses on classroom management in online schooling
8. The need for teacher training courses on instructional strategies which fit the online classes the best
9. The need for teacher training courses on online testing/assessment methods

Results

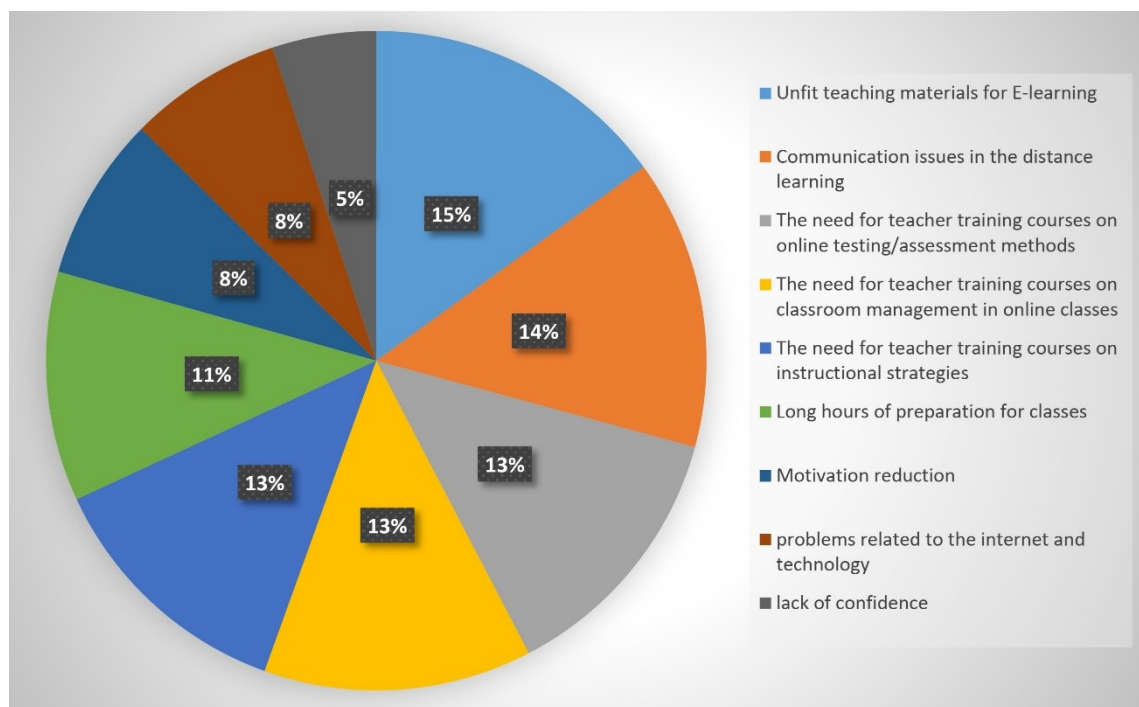
The coded data were categorized based on the frequency of occurrence of each code as a sign of emphasis that the participants put on each problem/need during the interview sessions. Table 1 illustrates the main codes found in the data set and the frequency of occurrence of each of them during the conversations.

Table 1 – Teachers' needs/problems found in the data set

Teachers' needs/problems	Number of occurrences in the 4 interviews
Unfit teaching materials for e-learning	56
Communication issues in the distance learning	53
The need for teacher training courses on online testing/assessment methods	49
The need for teacher training courses on classroom management in online schooling	49
The need for teacher training courses on instructional strategies	47
Long hours of preparation for classes	42
Motivation reduction in the teachers due to switching habits	30
Teachers' problems related to the internet and technology	28
Teachers' lack of confidence in holding online classes	19
Total	373

Source: Devised by the author

Figure1 – The frequency of occurrence of each code



Source: Devised by the author

As the Table 1 and Figure 1 present, the main emphasis of the participants was on the five problems: 1) unfit teaching materials for e-learning; 2) communication issues with their students in the distance learning; 3) the need for having some teacher training courses on various aspects of online assessment methods; 4) the need for teacher training courses on various teaching methods in the e-learning programs; and 5) long hours of preparation for online classes. Lack of motivation, problems regarding the internet and technology, and decreased confidence in the participants were found to be the least frequently stated problems in this data set.

Discussion

This study aimed at exploring the perception of the Iranian primary school teachers on various aspects of distance teaching and the challenges they faced during the sudden shift of education system from in person face to face classes to an e-learning program due to COVID-19 pandemic. This study revealed that teachers expressed that they need to be educated by some in-service teacher training programs to cover various issues on how to make effective communication with the children under 12 years old in their online classes. Also, they stated that they need to be trained on various suitable online assessment strategies and proper teaching methodology to overcome the barrier of shifting from the traditional teaching system to the online schooling system. These parts of the results were in line with the results of Quadri *et al.* (2017) who revealed that in general e-learning programs teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills of psychology of distance communication and proper methods of teaching and assessment in distance teaching.

Furthermore, since the major problem that the participants of my study referred to was the unfit teaching materials for the e-learning program, training primary school teachers to create emotionally and cognitively engaging audio-visual materials could be an immense help in increasing the performance of the teachers. This result converges with the result of Juliane, Arman, Sastramihardja and Supriana (2017) who demonstrated that the most helpful way to support teachers in online teaching is to educate them, through some webinars and online workshops, to create video clips and lesson plans to engage the learners the most effectively.

The results of Lapada (2020) support the result of this study in terms of the problems of lack of suitable online teaching materials and long hours of teachers' preparation for their online classes. His results also included the suggestion of crating suitable e-learning materials by the scholars to reduce the burden of material making from the teachers' responsibilities and

elevate the quality of education in the online schooling programs. Furthermore, Bozkurt (2019) agrees with the results of this study on the teachers' need for having some teacher training courses on online classroom management and instructional strategies in the e-learning programs.

Unlike the results of Malekolkalami (2020) on Iranian online tutors and Lemay and Doleck (2020) on the Indonesian online tutors who mainly put emphasis on the teachers' digital literacy as the main issue that the teachers face in the e-learning programs, the results of this study found issues in: 1) suitable teaching materials; 2) proper online assessment methods; 3) effective instructional strategies for distance teaching as the main problems of the primary school teachers in the online schooling system. Teachers' digital knowledge was not mentioned by the participants as one of the main categories of their needs. In general, the results of this study are in line with the findings of Alhabeeb and Rowley (2018) who demonstrated that the most influential factors for the success in an e-learning program include attending to the students and instructors' needs and problems and provide them with institutional support and suitable teacher training plans.

Conclusion and implications of the results

The results of this study included the main categories of the issues and needs that the primary school teachers stated as the barriers of success in the online schooling system in Iran. These barriers encompassed: 1) unfit teaching materials for the e-learning courses; 2) communication issues that they experienced with the students in distance education; 3) the need for some teacher training courses on various aspects of online assessment methods; 4) the need for teacher training courses on various teaching methods in the e-learning platforms; and 5) teachers' long hours of preparation for their online classes. Furthermore, the primary school teachers reported some issues with their level of motivation and confidence in the e-learning program compared to the traditional classroom system. They also stated that problems regarding internet and technology reduced the quality of their teaching; but, they did not address these issues as the main problems that they faced in the online schooling.

The results have implication for scholar material producers and Iranian ministry of education to consider providing the primary school teachers with suitable e-learning teaching materials. Also, teacher educators are to prospective prepare teachers for online schooling system by educating them on various aspects of e-learning instructional strategies, classroom management, and assessment methods.

REFERENCES

- ALHABEED, A.; ROWLEY, J. E-learning critical success factors: Comparing perspectives from academic staff and students. **Computers & Education**, v. 127, p. 1-12, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.08.007>
- BINGIMLAS, K. A. Barriers to the successful integration of ICT in teaching and learning environment: A review of the literature **Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education**, v. 5, n. 3, p. 235-245, 2009. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12973/ejmste/75275>
- BOLLIGER, D. U.; WASILIK, O. Factors influencing faculty satisfaction with online teaching and learning in higher education. **Distance Education**, v. 30, n. 1, p. 103-116, 2009. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587910902845949>
- BOZKURT, A. From distance education to open and distance learning. *In*: SISMAN-UGUR, S.; KURUBACAK, G. **Handbook of research on learning in the age of transhumanism**. Hershey, USA: IGI Global, 2019. p. 252-273. ISBN: 9781522584315. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-8431-5.ch016>
- DIXON, B. M.; KIRMES, J. L. **Remote learning recommendations during Covid-19 emergency**. 2020. Available: <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/covid19.aspx>. Access: 02 May 2020.
- HADIJAH, S.; SHALAWATI, S. Investigating Teacher 'Barrier to ICT (Information Communication Technology) Integration in Teaching English at Senior High School in Pekanbaru. *In*: INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING, 5., 2017, Padang. **Proceedings** [...]. Padang, Indonesia: ISELT FBS Universitas Negeri Padang, 2017. p. 302-310.
- JULIANE, C.; ARMAN, A. A.; SASTRAMIHARDJA, H. S.; SUPRIANA, I. Digital Teaching Learning for Digital Native; Tantangan dan Peluang. **Jurnal Ilmiah Rekayasa dan Manajemen Sistem Informasi**, v. 3, n. 2, p. 29-35, 2020.
- LAPADA, A. Teachers' Covid-19 Awareness, Distance Learning Education Experiences and Perceptions towards Institutional Readiness and Challenges. **International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research**, v. 19, n. 1, p. 21-37, 2020.
- LEMAY, D. J.; DOLECK, T. Online Learning Communities in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Social Learning Network Analysis of Twitter during the Shutdown. **International Journal of Learning Analytics and Artificial Intelligence for Education (IJAI)**, v. 2, n. 1, p. 85, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijai.v2i1.15427>
- MAILIZAR, M. *et al.* Secondary-school-mathematics-teachers-views-on-e-learning-implementation-barriers-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-the-case-of-indonesia. **Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education**, v. 16, n. 1, p. 56-72, 2020.
- MALEKOLKALAMI, M. The Perception of Iranian Teachers on Online Teaching Using Digital Carrier during the COVID-19 Pandemic. **International Journal of Digital Content Management**, v. 1, n. 1, p. 109-126, 2020. DOI: 10.22054/dcm.2020.56288.1007

MIGUEL, F.; ABULON, E. L. R. Teacher-Parent Collaborative Efforts in Facilitating Students' Homework. **The Normal Lights- Journal on Teachers Education Special**, p. 18–32, 2016.

QUADRI, N. N. *et al.* Barriers Effecting Successful Implementation of E-Learning in Saudi Arabian Universities. **International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)**, v. 12, n. 06, p. 94, 2017. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v12i06.7003>

RASMITADILA, R. *et al.* The Perceptions of Primary School Teachers of Online Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic Period: A Case Study in Indonesia. **Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies**, v. 7, n. 2, p. 90-109, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/388>

RHINI, F. Teaching Practice in Distance Education Context. **SHS Web of Conferences**, v. 42, p. 1-7, 2018. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184200099>

ZIAUL HOQ, M. "E-Learning during the Period of Pandemic (COVID-19) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Empirical Study." **American Journal of Educational Research**, v. 8, n. 7, p. 457-464, 2020. DOI: <https://doi.10.12691/education-8-7-2>

How to reference this article

SHOBEIRY, M. Covid-19 and analysis of needs of the primary school teachers in online-schooling in Iran. **Revista online de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 26, n. esp. 2, e022050, Mar. 2022. e-ISSN: 1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v26iesp.2.16545>

Submitted: 01/11/2021

Required revisions: 20/12/2021

Approved: 17/02/2022

Published: 31/03/2022