



## **E-LEARNING READINESS OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES OF DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT OFFICES IN KURUNEGALA DISTRICT**

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E-learning has revolutionized the traditional distance learning system with the development of electronic resources and accessibility to internet technologies. Heads of the Department of Sri Lanka could use e-learning facilities to train large numbers of public sector employees at a minimum cost. This research aims to assess the readiness of public sector employees for e-learning intended for their knowledge-gaining programs. The study investigates the readiness of public sector employees in divisional secretariat offices in the Kurunegala district. The data was collected through a questionnaire created using Google Forms. The survey examines technical readiness, learner characteristics, and organizational support. Those areas are covered by inquiring about the accessibility of electronic devices and internet facilities, competency levels of handling those electronic devices and internet facilities, and ways and means of resolving problems arising while handling those. Furthermore, the survey investigates information about the willingness and challenges of e-learning for public sector employees. The analysis was done gender-wise, and the research findings show that both males and females have the required technical access, software skills, and technical assistance. Additionally, they mentioned that the lack of quality technical devices, the deficiency of finances needed for internet facilities, the availability of minimum opportunities, and the lack of motivation of higher-level management are the major challenges and drawbacks faced. To address those issues, it is suggested that innovative training opportunities with quality electronic devices be created on the office premises, and heads of the departments are asked to motivate their staff. Besides that, it is suggested that a special plan for training and connecting employees through an LMS be created.

Keywords: E-learning, E-learning readiness, Public Sector Employees

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### **INTRODUCTION**

E-learning revolutionizes education by making it adaptable, reachable, and interactive for all learners. E-learning can be defined as the delivery of learning through shared electronic technology, including any combination of the Internet, Intranets, Extranets, Satellite broadcasts, Audio/video tapes, Interactive TV, and CD-ROM (Sarwar, 2015). All levels of employees in an organization can access e-learning in comparison to classroom instruction, which is why it changes the importance and visibility of training (Peak, 2006).

Compared to the private sector, continuous learning and updating of new technologies in the public sector is slow. The public sector should update their knowledge, skills, and attitude to compete with the private sector. Information, communication, and technological tools offer internet-based learning at their own pace, with better explanations and with interactive media (Raja, 2019). In one of the research done in the public banking sector in India, the researcher mentioned that e-learning systems can enhance the performance of employees of the public sector banks, and the quality of e-learning depends on its structure, content, delivery, service, and outcome. He further mentioned in the conclusion that better learning ensures that acquiring adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes of employees can improve their productivity and efficiency (Raja, 2019).

Meanwhile, the South African public sector faced some challenges in service delivery, such as a skills shortage. To overcome this challenge, they had to train public sector employees in a short period while performing day-to-day duties. The South African government has chosen e-learning by aiming to train a large number of public sector employees with minimum cost (Msomi et al. 2016). Similarly, Sri Lanka can also benefit from e-learning to train public sector employees.

Readiness for e-learning is the ability of learners to make use of e-learning resources and multimedia technologies to improve the quality of learning (Red, 2013). Tubist and Lan sari (2011) have identified the key components of e-learning readiness as technology, internet utilization, and general understanding of e-learning and culture at the institution (Atherstone, 2014). One of the most important aspects of analyzing e-learning readiness relies on access to computers and the internet. At the same time, the effectiveness and efficiency of e-learning depend on internet access and speed, as "low internet speeds and problems while e-learning can result in dissatisfaction and students dropping out of the e-learning courses. Further, there are different technologies to facilitate, support, and enhance teaching and learning such as computers, mobile phones, internet, video conferences, emails, audio/videos, and discussion forums" (Karunaratne, et al., 2020, Al-araibi et al., 2019).

There are some challenges and obstacles in e-learning for adults. Motivation to initiate, motivational changes and learner persistence, interaction during online instruction, Application and integration of content by the learner, and learner control are some areas where learners face challenges (Kim, 2004). To overcome these challenges, Kim's study provides suggestions for designing motivating, self-paced online learning environments. It suggests using animations and simulations in self-paced online learning environments to motivate learners (Kim, 2004).

When discussing the Sri Lankan context on readiness for e-learning in the public sector, there is research on "E-Learning Readiness in Central Colleges in Sri Lanka" done by Pathirathne (2014). That study investigated the preparedness of edifiers and students of ten Central



colleges within the Kegalle and Gampaha districts. That study revealed that there is a positive correlation between computer literacy and e-learning acceptance (Pathirathne, 2014).

Based on the literature review, no research has been conducted specializing in the readiness of e-learning in the public sector in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill in the gap in this research area.

## METHODOLOGY

### Aim and Objective

The main issue investigated in this study is whether public sector employees are ready for e-learning to gain knowledge on their duties. For that, public sector employees who work in Divisional Secretariat offices in Kurunegala district have been selected.

### Research Methodology

A descriptive survey was conducted among public sector employees of Divisional Secretariat offices in Kurunegala district. A questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed through the official WhatsApp groups of these offices to reach a large number of employees efficiently. Out of a total of about 9800 public sector employees in Divisional Secretariat offices in the district, 141 responded. The results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and categorized by gender. Official WhatsApp groups were chosen for distribution due to their widespread use and convenience in reaching many employees quickly and efficiently. This method ensures high engagement and prompt responses, making it an effective tool for data collection in large organizations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic profile

There are 141 public sector employees participated in the study. 72% of them are female public sector employees, and the remaining 28% are male. Most of the participants (46%) are between the age of 30 and 40 years. 40% are between 40 and 50 years. When considering the number of years of experience in public service, most of the participants (60%) are between 10 and 20 years, while 28% of participants have experience of less than 10 years. Among the participants, 71% have a degree, and 14% have a postgraduate degree. 90% of the participants are non-executive, and the remaining are executive staff.

### Considerations for Readiness

#### Technical Readiness

##### Accessibility:

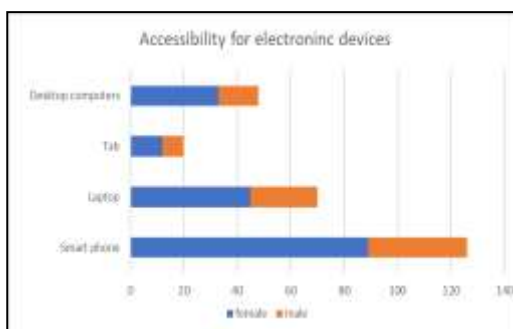


Figure 1 - Accessibility for electronic devices

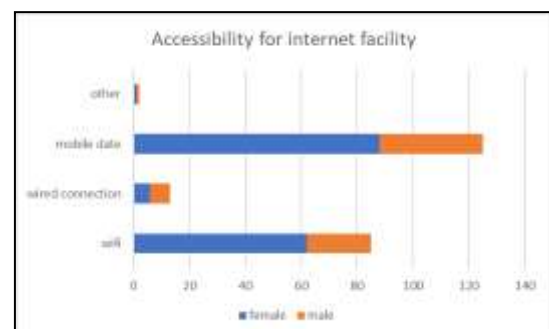


Figure 2 - Accessibility for internet facility



When analyzing the data, it is revealed that both male and female public sector employees have access to electronic devices and internet facilities privately or on office premises. It is shown that they have fulfilled the primary consideration for e-learning.

**Competency level:**

Furthermore, by analyzing the data about the competency level of utilizing electronic devices and internet facilities, it is shown that 91% of both males and females have defined that they have a competency level for handling smartphones is over 50%. For other devices, the result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Gender-wise competency levels over 50%

Device	% of Female competency levels over 50	% of male competency levels over 50
Laptop	75%	87%
Desktop	88%	85%
Tab	77%	82%

For all devices, the competency level of over 50% is in a remarkable range. When considering the handling of internet facilities in the above manner, the results can be seen that 77% of female and 79% of male public sector employees report that they have a competency level over 50%. This shows us that the selected public sector employees are capable of handling electronic devices as well as internet facilities.

**Ways and means of resolving problems arising while handling electronic devices and the internet:**

Though public sector employees have accessibility and competency, it is better to identify whether they have ways and means to resolve problems while handling those devices and internet facilities. 134 public sector employees have submitted their experience to this question, and the result shows that most of them (69%) get help from a friend to solve problems when using electronic devices and the internet. Only one female and one male said that they could not have a way to resolve problems.

**Learners' Characteristics**

**Early experiences - Electronic devices:**

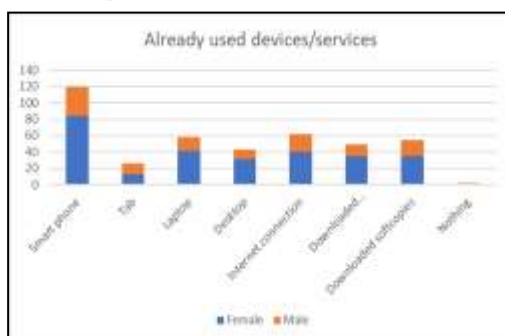


Figure 3 - Already used devices/ services

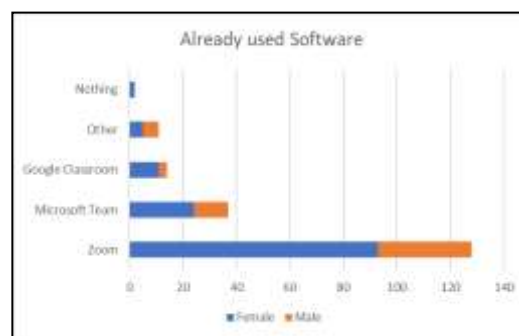


Figure 4 -Already used software

Most of the selected public sector employees possess prior experience with e-learning. Only two employees (one male and one female) lacked prior engagement in e-learning, while the remainder had utilized electronic devices for educational purposes. A significant majority (91%) reported using smartphones, and many had also accessed softcopies of documents and audio/video files. These findings indicate a high level of familiarity among public sector



employees with various devices and digital resources for learning.

*Early experiences - Software application:*

When analyzing responses, it is shown that most of the servants (97%) have experienced the software of "Zoom." Other than that, they have experienced Microsoft Team (28%) and Google Classroom (14%), and the remaining servants have experienced other applications such as Webex, ChatGPT, and some LMS.

*Willingness for learning:*

The preferred learning method was questioned in the study. For that, identified preferences such as connecting the resource person and learning materials physically, e-learning methods, and other methods are questioned. They have expressed their willingness percentage-wise.

*Physical methods:*

Table 2: Willingness for physical methods of teaching

Percentage	0%	10%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Gender						
Female	4	0	13	64	35	32
Male	0	0	5	17	8	13

45% of females and 49% of males of 124 respondents are willing (over 75%) to connect the resource person and materials physically.

*E-Learning methods:*

Table 3: Willingness of the E-learning method of teaching

Percentage	0%	10%	25%	50%	75%	100%
Gender						
Female	3	0	34	78	74	29
Male	0	0	3	30	20	19

124 respondents of public sector employees prefer e-learning methods (over 75%), 49% of female and 54% of male. Therefore, it is seen that most public sector employees use e-learning methods.

**Organizational Support**

*Challenges and obstacles:*

Identified challenges and obstacles are questioned by public sector employees. According to their responses, the main challenge (48%) is the lack of quality electronic devices. Other than that, they have faced problems with not having enough opportunities for e-learning, financial problems gaining internet facilities, and not having enough support and motivation from upper management.

**CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study has found the readiness of public sector employees for e-learning. By analyzing the data, it is seen that public sector employees are ready for e-learning since they have access to technology at home or in their offices. They have enough skills to handle electronic devices and internet facilities. Not only that, but they also have ways and means for technical support. When considering the learners' experiences, they have used electronic devices and related software and applications for the e-learning process. Additionally, some challenges and obstacles they have faced can be identified, such as not having enough opportunities for e-learning, financial problems in gaining internet facilities, and not having enough support and motivation from upper management.



Therefore, Heads of the departments have to take action to overcome those issues. Initially, Heads of such organizations should motivate their employees to e-learning. They should create some innovative training programs to provide opportunities, mainly by providing quality electronic devices even at the office premises. From the district perspective, it should be better to create a unique plan for training public sector employees about their day-to-day office work and related subjects.

In addition to the above, it is better to connect employees through an LMS, making training effective with microlearning, using gamification to create a clear path, adapting with skills assessments, and empowering aging workers with the flexibility to address the issue of e-learning.

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