



QUEEN RANIA TEACHER ACADEMY  
أكاديمية الملكة رانيا لتدريب المعلمين

# Learning Skills Gained in the Time of Covid-19

A survey of educators' responses

December 2021





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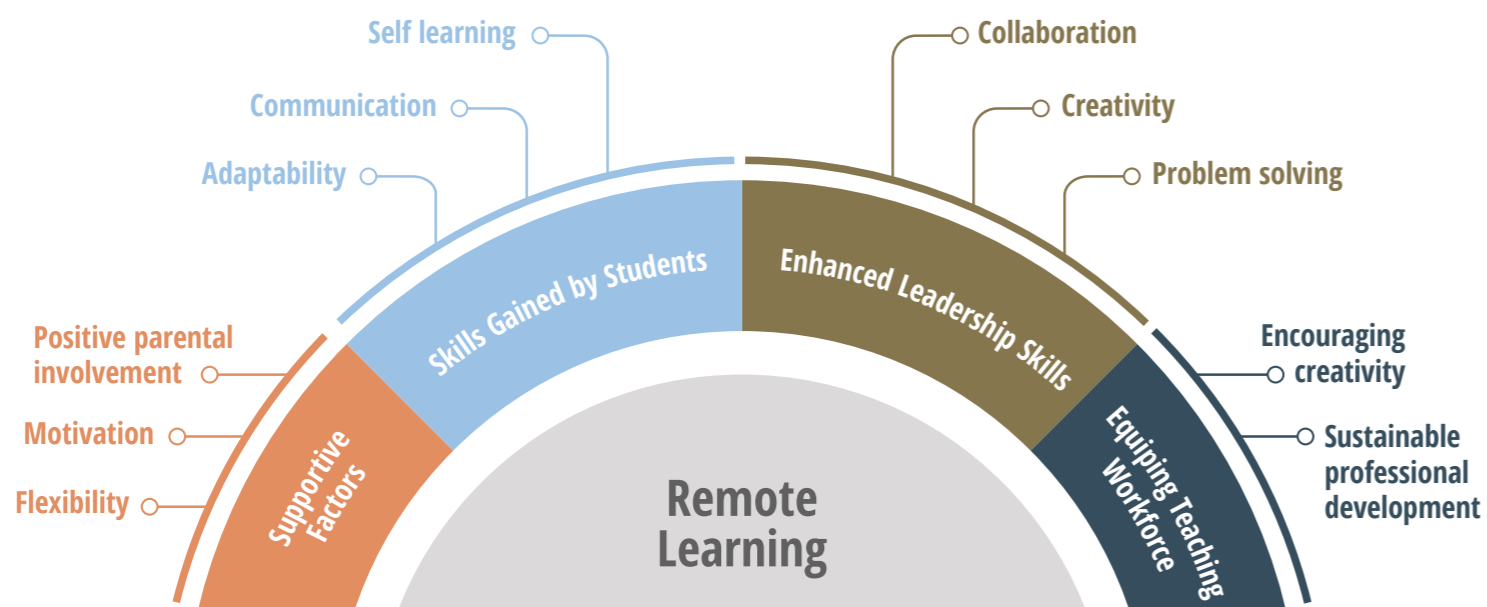
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Queen Rania Teacher Academy designed and conducted a research study to explore the skills acquired by students in Jordan through distance learning during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The emphasis of the questionnaire was on the core skills and competencies required to meet the evolving needs of learners and to prepare them for the future job market. Questionnaire aimed to deepen our understanding of how distance learning developed students' skills, what skills are considered essential and need to be integrated in education to prepare students for the future. Through closed and open questions, we have explored educators' views in Jordan of their professional experiences of distance teaching and learning and the challenges they faced in these exceptional circumstances. With 981 respondents from both, private and public schools, we have gathered a broad view of responses. The outcomes of this research will help key stakeholders support remote education and will inform policymakers, teachers, and school principals how best to support this type of learning as well as to allocate resources and adjust the system for the developments of the future.

The findings of the study have shown that distance learning facilitated the development of very valuable soft skills, such as self-learning, use of digital resources, communication, and adaptability. Remote learning developed also students' technological aptitude, although, this type of schooling was less successful in encouraging their engagement or the development of creative or critical thinking. It would be beneficial to reconsider how to enhance these competencies through remote learning, especially that the participants proposed that critical thinking and problem-solving skills, flexible mindset, and adaptability were the most necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Supporting the development of these abilities in the classrooms was obscured throughout the pandemic by the lack of time due to teachers' focus on covering the curriculum, the paperwork and administrative tasks assigned to teachers, and lack of appropriate professional development for teachers. Respondents proposed that encouraging creativity and providing sustainable professional development opportunities would help teachers integrate and apply new, including soft skills, in their practices.



# INTRODUCTION

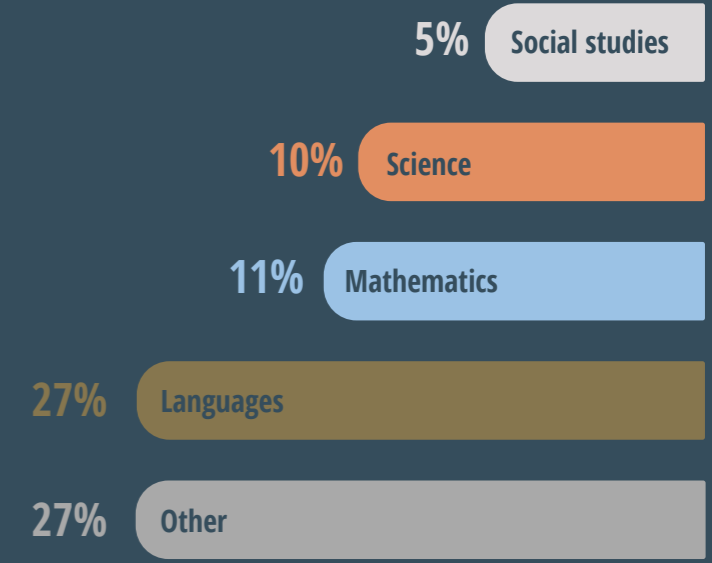
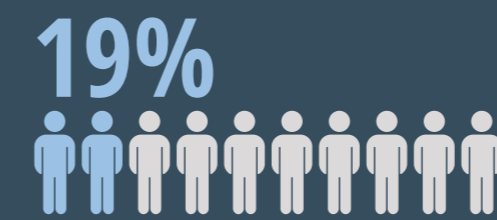
Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, schools' closure has created a rapid shift to alternative modes of educational delivery – primarily online learning and teacher-supported home-schooling. While the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the pandemic have been challenging, they have prompted students to develop and gain skills in new areas, such as self-learning, independence, resilience, patience, flexibility, adaptability, and time management. The skills obtained during these exceptional times have proven to be vital and will continue to rise in importance to serve students in their future careers. To explore educators' views of skills gained during the pandemic, QRTA conducted a survey and in this report, we will present its findings.

# METHODOLOGY

This mixed method study collected data through a questionnaire sent to a number of principals and teachers from public and private schools in Jordan. A range of questions, including multiple choice, Likert scale, as well as open-ended questions provided quantitative and qualitative data. The domains and questions included in the questionnaire were developed based on a review of existing literature in this topic, as well as QRTA's staff experience in emergency education, and education in general. These areas were also aligned with the main themes of QRTA's Forum 2021.

- Distance learning and teaching processes
- The development of students' skills through distance learning
- Students' most needed skills for the future
- Reasons for students' successes and challenges during distance learning
- The most common leadership skills educators have acquired during the pandemic

We have received full responses from 981 participants. The majority of the respondents (57%) had more than 10 years of teaching experience and only 8% have been teaching for less than three years. Sixty six percent of respondents were over 36 years old and they taught an equal spread of age groups (around 25%) with slightly more of middle grades 7-10 (35%) and less of the early childhood (4%).

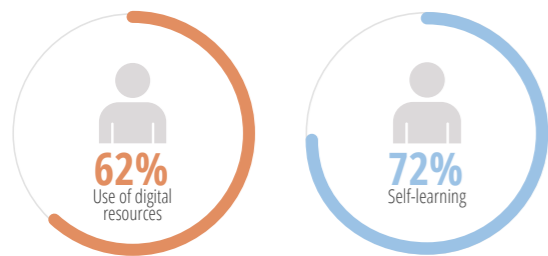


Subjects taught by the participating teachers

# FINDINGS

## Skills developed through remote learning during the pandemic

When asked about their perception of the skills developed as a result of distance learning, the most often given responses were: self-learning (72% of all participants chose this skill) and use of digital resources (62%). There was little variance between answers from principals and teachers or between educators from private and public schools. The third highest scoring skill in public schools was communication, while respondents from private schools chose adaptability.

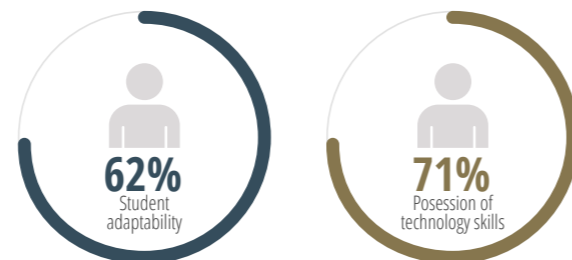


There was also agreement between respondents when it comes to skills mentioned least often and educators from both sectors identified reflective practice (11%) and teamwork (12%) as such. The third lowest scoring skills amongst participants from public schools was project-based learning, while in private schools, it was inquiry based learning.

These results point out that even though educators tried to provide best quality teaching under the circumstances, activities during which pupils needed to work in groups were notoriously difficult to facilitate and were not as effective as if undertaken face-to-face. On the other hand, this type of learning promoted students' capacity to work as independent learners and their self-learning, as well as the development of their technological and communication abilities.

## Student's learning behaviors and attitudes

Further set of questions was constructed to unravel participants views of pupils' learning behaviors and attitudes during the pandemic. Respondents gave their answers using 5-point Likert scale and in this section, we have combined responses 'strongly agree' and 'agree', as well as 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree'. There was an agreement between teachers and principals in terms of the statements they most strongly agreed with and these answers did not vary between educators from public and private schools.



The most highly agreed with statement (71% of respondents) was: Students possessed the necessary competencies to use technology effectively. Sixty two percent agreed and strongly agreed with: Distance learning enabled the students to adapt (changing old behaviors and embracing new ideas and ways of doing things), while 51% said that: Students worked hard to communicate effectively with their peers and teachers.

The majority of participants (74%) did not agree that: Students engaged better during distance learning compared to face-to-face learning, while the other two most disagreed with statements were: Students achieved the expected learning outcomes during distance learning (60%) and Students acquired higher order thinking skills such as, creative thinking and critical thinking (51%). Interestingly, for teachers from public schools, statement: 'Students worked hard to communicate effectively with their peers and teachers' was at the same time one of the most highly agreed with and disagreed with.

Least often agreed with statements	Most often agreed with statements
Students engaged better during distance learning compared to face-to-face learning	Students possessed the necessary competencies to use technology effectively
Students achieved the expected learning outcomes during distance learning	Distance learning enabled the students to adapt
Students acquired higher order thinking skills such as, creative and critical thinking	Students worked hard to communicate effectively with their peers and teachers

These results highlight the benefits and limitations of remote learning and suggest that flexibility, communication and the ability to use technologies were the key to successful engagement with education throughout this unusual time. However, the participating educators viewed remote learning as inferior because students' attainment was lower and it did not support their high level thinking skills.

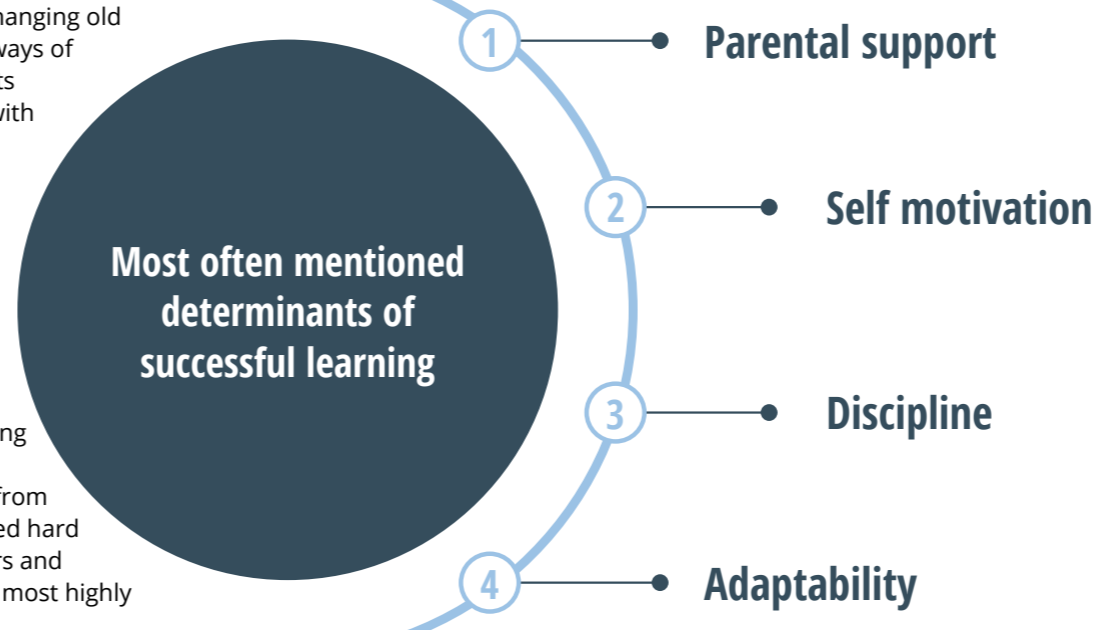
## Reasons for students' success and challenges during distance learning

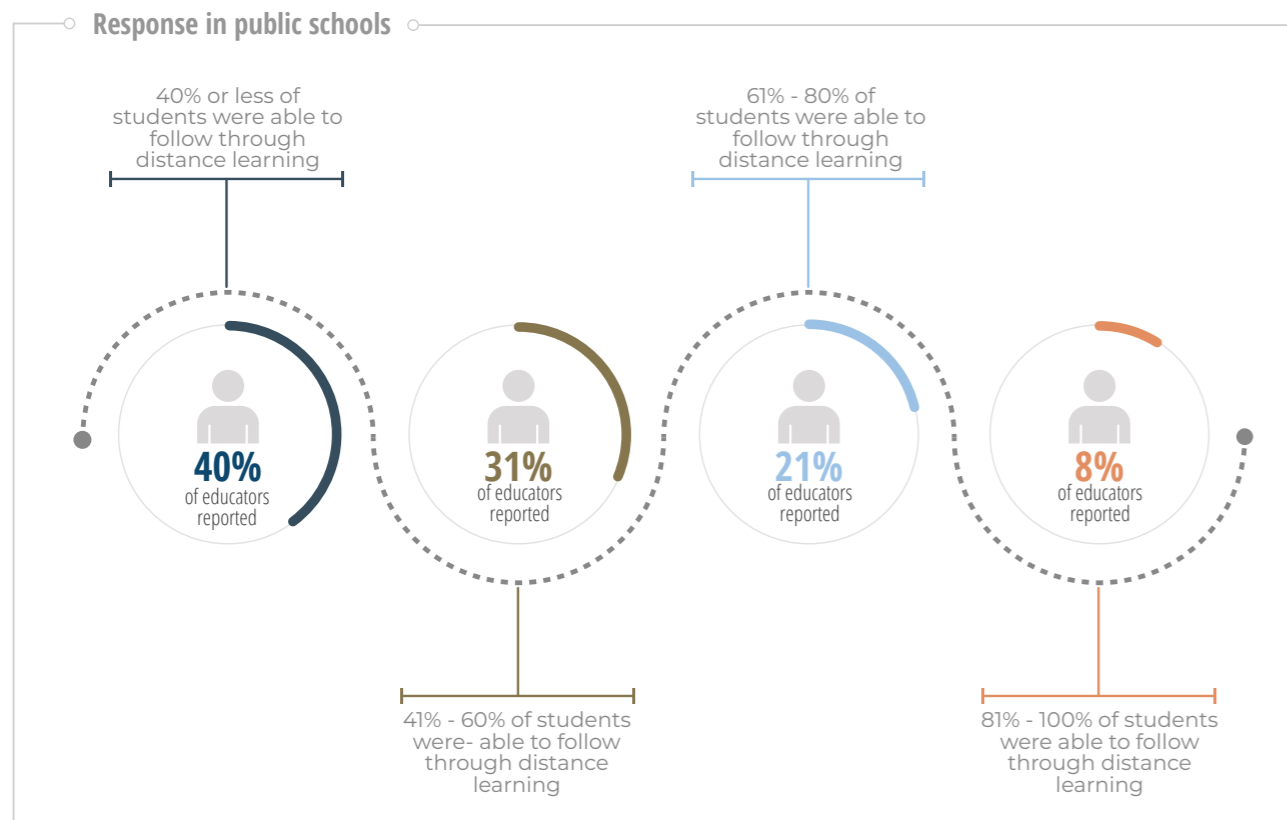
When commenting of the reasons for successes and challenges during distance learning, respondents identify a number of areas they considered important. The most often mentioned determinant of successful learning was parental support, followed by students' self motivation, discipline, and adaptability. One of the conditions for effective remote schooling is also the knowledge of and the availability of technology. Participants spoke much less about the challenges but those who did, identified lack of resources and lack of parental involvement.

## Distance learning and teaching process

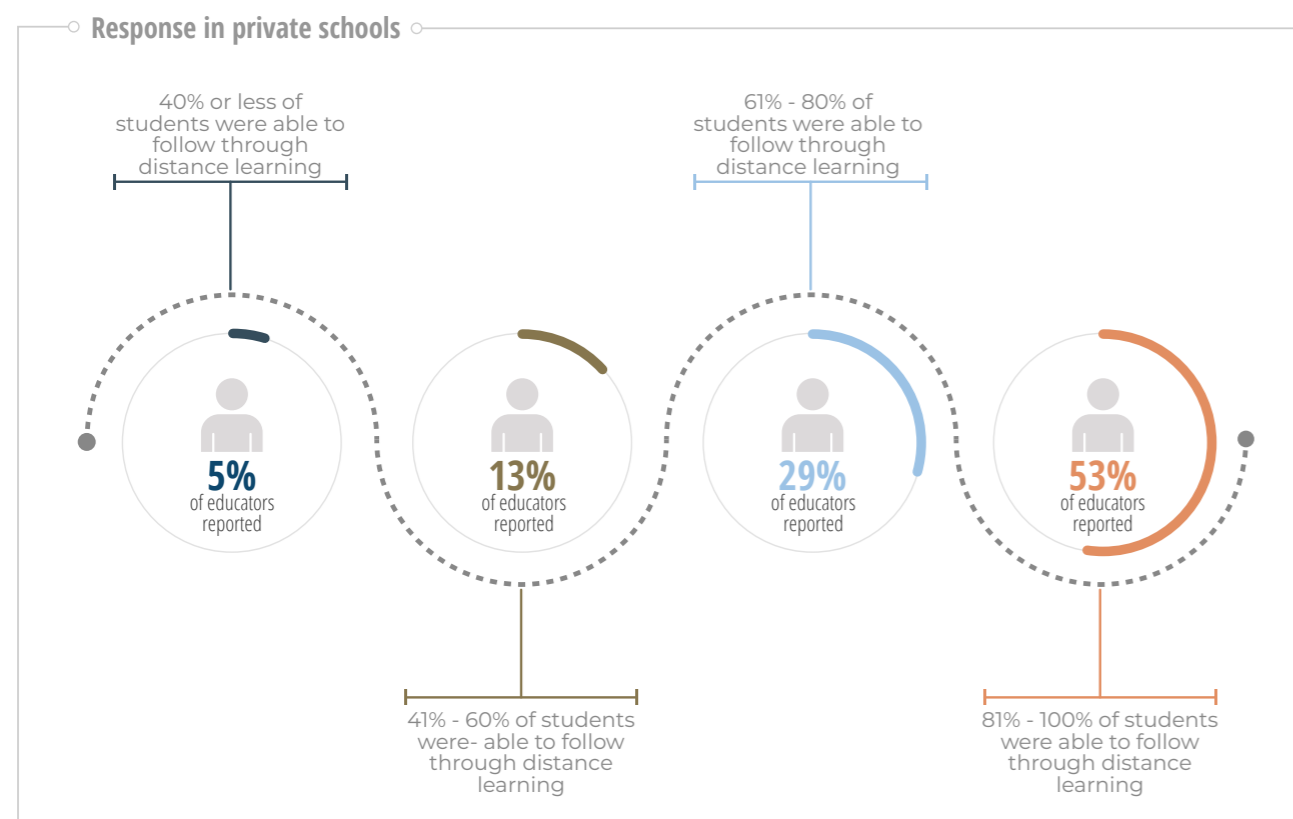
Participants were asked to estimate the percentage of students in their schools who were able to follow their lessons through distance learning during the academic year 2020-2021. The answers to this question differed significantly between the public and the private sector. As many as 40% of teachers and principals in public schools declared that less than 40% students were able to follow their lessons through distance learning during this period. Only 8% of participants from public schools felt that more than 80% of their learners were able to follow the lessons. This stands in stark contrast to the private sector, where over half of respondents (53%) proposed that over 80% of students were able to follow their lessons, and only less than a fifth (18%) estimated this to be lower than 60% of learners. This finding accentuates the differences between these two different learning environments. The challenge of distance teaching has made this gap even bigger and the need to address this is once again brought to light by the findings of this research. Details of responses from both sectors are presented in the diagrams on the next page.

There was also a big variance between public and private schools in terms of distance learning methods used widely over the school year 2020/2021. Majority of educators from the public sector (73%) said that asynchronous methods were predominant in their schools and only 25% claimed for this to be synchronous methods. This opposite took place in private schools and 93% of respondents said that they have used mostly synchronous methods. This suggests that learners in private schools spent more time under a supervision of their teachers and this might explain why a majority of these students were able to access and follow their lessons during the pandemic.





According to the respondents, neither of the methods used in distance learning did however effectively support teaching and learning and the majority of educators from both sectors saw the level of students' academic achievement decline when compared to the pre-pandemic period. This was particularly visible in answers from the public sector (78% of responses) and a little less so in private schools (57%). Only 11% of respondents from public school viewed students' achievement improve and this was similar in the private sector (18%).



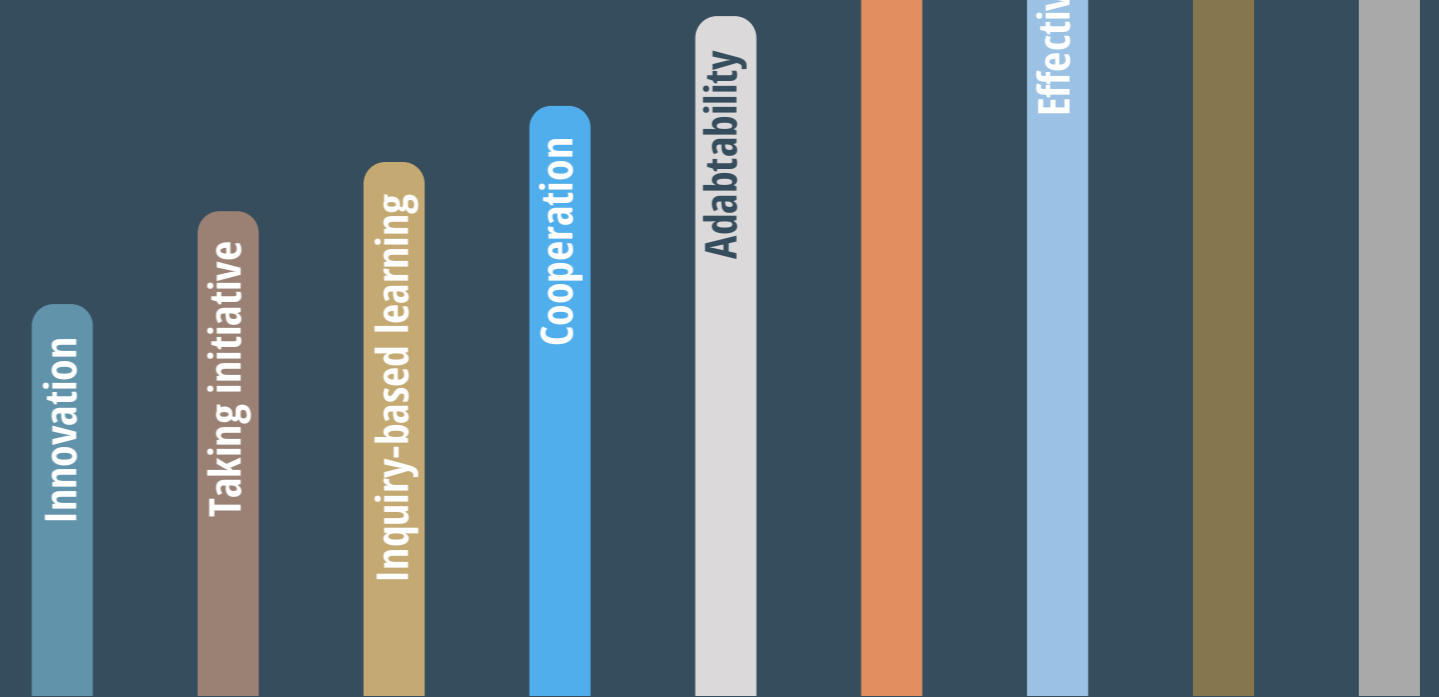
### 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

When asked about what skills will best prepare students for their future, educators across both sectors agreed that the most important skills were critical thinking and problem solving (45% of teachers and principals from public and 32% from private schools). This is a striking finding considering that over half of respondents (51%) did not agree that remote teaching during the pandemic developed these skills in learners. It is difficult to ascertain if this was the case because of the online teaching having to be implemented in a reactive way to the upcoming events, without much forward planning, or because this type of working with students is not conducive for the development of such skills. Also, it is unclear if the respondents identified this specifically in the context of the pandemic, since the development of these skills is often mentioned as a challenge in face-to-face teaching and learning.

For teachers in public (29%) and private (24%) schools, the second most prominent skill essential for students' future was effective oral and written communication, however teachers in public schools viewed working with technology as more prominent (39%). Interestingly, this was also the view of principals from both public (56% of principals chose this answer) and private (22%) schools. It may be that students in private schools are more used to using technology in learning, hence this skill is more embedded already, while communication enabled students to access content and learn effectively.

Teachers and principals from private schools identified flexible mindset as the third most important skill with 23% and 4% respectively. Considering that principals from public schools pointed to adaptability (9% of all answers), having the flexibility to adapt to circumstances is a skill considered by all as third most important.

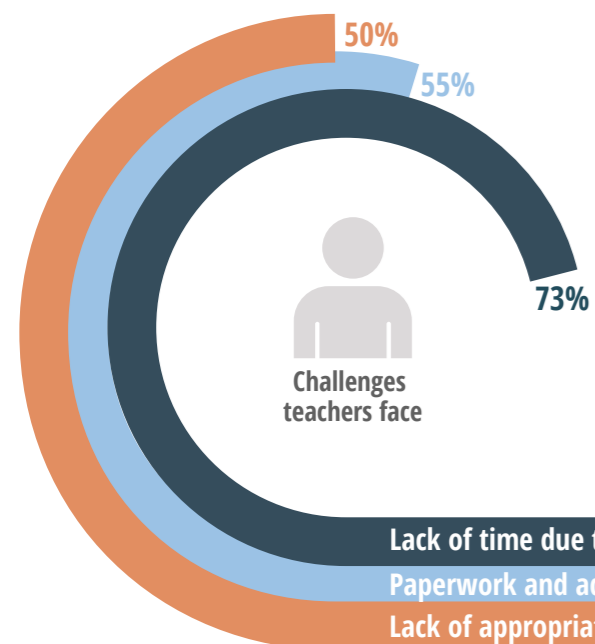
# SKILLS THAT BEST PREPARE STUDENTS FOR THEIR FUTURE



When asked about the challenges teachers face when integrating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills into everyday teaching practices, teachers and principals have agreed on the lack of time due to the focus on covering the curriculum (73% of the respondents) and the lack of appropriate professional development for teachers (50%).

The third most significant challenge for teachers was the paperwork and administrative requirements assigned to the teacher (55% of all respondents). Sixty seven percent of principals however saw this to be the lack of intrinsic motivation which is interesting as it averts focus from a challenge over which they may have control (bureaucracy). Additionally, over 72% of principals answered 'no' when asked if the lack of support from the school management might have been a challenge, although, also 70% of teachers claimed that. Even though these views were collected in a context of the pandemic, asking this question out of these exceptional circumstances would very likely bring similar results. Rushing through the curriculum and little preparation for teachers to develop these skills in their pupils are most often given as reasons for not employing inventive teaching practices and ultimately focusing on the content required for examinations rather than on soft skills.

Participants were then asked about changes they would like to see in schools to integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills into the learning and teaching environment. Teachers and principals agreed that providing sustainable professional development opportunities for teachers (65% of all respondents) and encouraging creativity (64%) are essential for extending school provision into the development of soft skills between learners. The least often chosen answer by only 42% of respondents was creating an inquiry-based environment.



Even though these skills are consistently identified as highly valued by the employers and necessary in the changing job market, education systems struggle to adapt to this need and teachers are not appropriately trained to provide opportunities for their development in their classrooms. Additionally, progression of soft skills is very difficult to measure, while heightened pressure put on educators to evidence learners' attainment means that they are focused on data obtained from tests and exams. Such environment has been made far more difficult by remote teaching and learning throughout the pandemic.

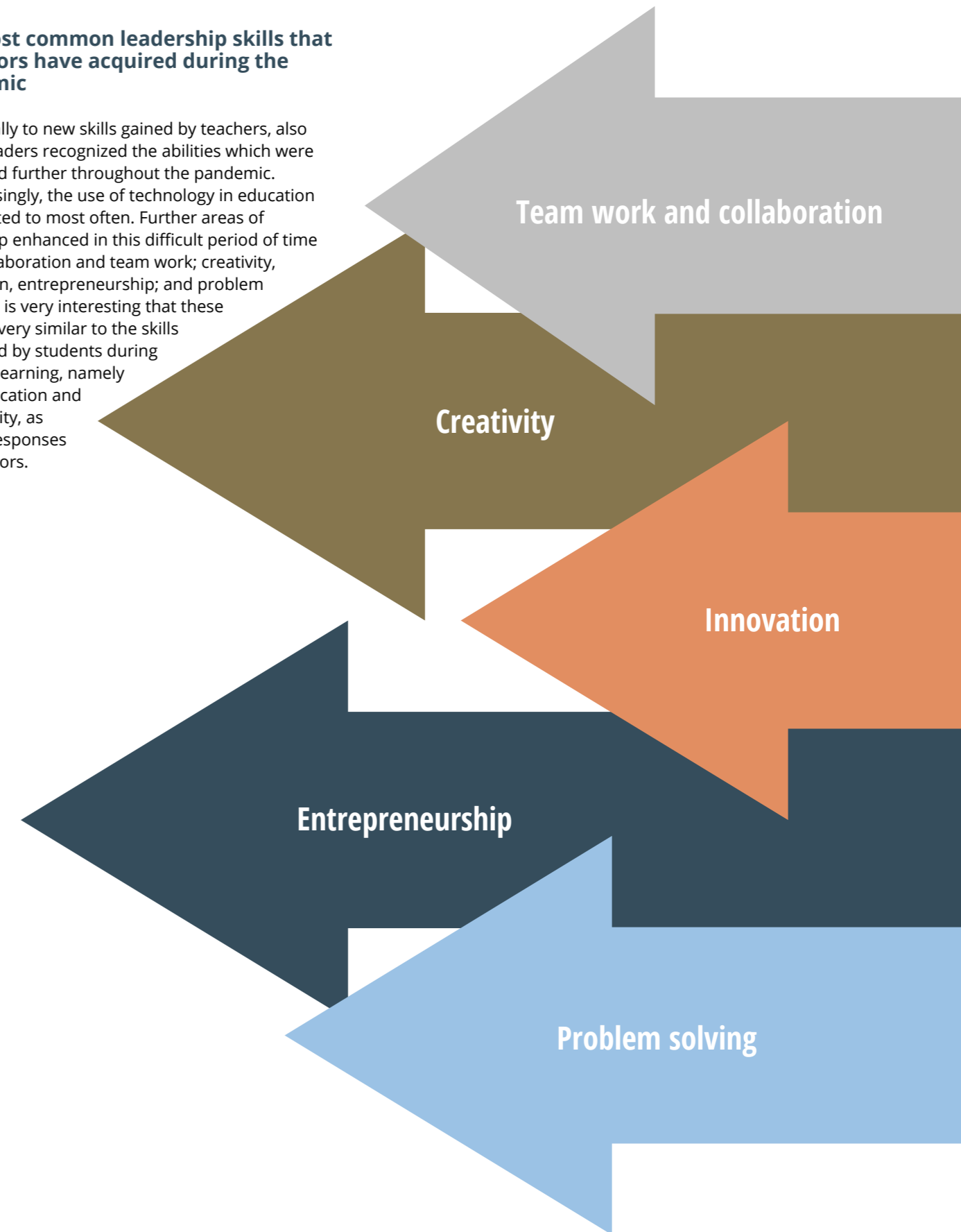
### Teachers' capacity to deliver remote learning during the pandemic and in the future

The last part of the survey contained questions about teachers' preparation and capacity to adapt to delivering teaching remotely. Principals and teachers from both sectors (84% of respondents) agreed that technological developments (such as the use of mobile devices and social media) have changed the way teachers teach. There was also an agreement between principals from both sectors and teachers from public schools (88%) that teachers need more professional development in the field of virtual classroom management, while respondents from the private schools proposed that teachers can adapt the curriculum activities to suit distance learning. Teachers agreed also that teachers can identify their professional needs to become successful in the future.

However, 48% of the participants did not agree that distance learning was successful as at this point of time, most likely because teachers were not well prepared to teach in this way. Additionally, high proportion of teachers (29%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers can apply active learning strategies during distance learning, which means that their teaching was not as effective as if done in person. This was also a view of principals from public schools. Teachers from both sectors (26%) were in agreement that it was not true that students often have a more advanced understanding of technology than teachers.

### The most common leadership skills that educators have acquired during the pandemic

Additionally to new skills gained by teachers, also school leaders recognized the abilities which were developed further throughout the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, the use of technology in education was pointed to most often. Further areas of leadership enhanced in this difficult period of time were collaboration and team work; creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship; and problem solving. It is very interesting that these skills are very similar to the skills developed by students during distance learning, namely communication and adaptability, as per the responses of educators.





# CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study lead to the following conclusions about educators' perspectives and experiences in skills gained during the pandemic:

- Despite many challenges, through distance learning students have developed a range of skills out of which most frequently reported were: self-learning, use of digital resources, communication, and adaptability.
- Respondents stated that throughout the pandemic students possessed the necessary competencies to use technology effectively and that distance learning enabled the students to adapt. Further work on remote schooling needs to be undertaken to ensure that students are engaged, achieved the expected learning outcomes, and that they acquired higher order thinking skills such as, creative thinking and critical thinking.
- The most important factors contributing to successful remote teaching were: parental support, followed by students' self motivation, discipline, and adaptability.
- Using synchronous teaching methods for distance learning was more prominent in private schools, whereas more asynchronous teaching methods were used in the public sector.
- The five most important skills, which according to the respondents, students will need for their future include were: critical thinking and problem-solving skills, working with technology, effective oral and written communication, flexible mindset, and adaptability.
- Teachers faced many challenges when integrating 21<sup>st</sup> century skills mainly including: lack of time due to teachers' focus on covering the curriculum, the paperwork and administrative tasks assigned to teachers, and lack of appropriate professional development for teachers.
- Necessary changes at schools are needed to help teachers integrate and apply new skills in their practices. Encouraging creativity and providing sustainable professional development opportunities for teachers were the most often chosen answers and providing these will enhance distance teaching and learning in the future.

## About the Queen Rania Teacher Academy

Established in 2009, Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA) is a non-profit organization committed to the vision of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of supporting and empowering educators with the skills to become creative and diligent professionals, who are well-equipped to nurture and lead future generations.

QRTA offers innovative and evidence-based professional development programs informed by international best practices and the latest research in the field. The academy has been providing valuable professional learning opportunities for teachers and school leaders since its inception, with an outreach of over 90,000 professional development opportunities in the various programs.

Whether you are an educational institution or an educator looking for high quality programs and courses, QRTA has something for you. Our team of experienced professionals has designed and delivered a wide variety of offerings, and continues to innovate new ones to meet the needs of ever-evolving generations.

