STRATEGIES OF ONLINE MUSIC TEACHING: THE STORY OF EIGHT CASES DURING THE COVID – 19 LOCKDOWN IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

In the subject areas of performing and visual arts, most teaching and learning take place in the traditional classroom, with face-to-face instruction methods but as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the University of Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA) promptly moved the delivery of all of its undergraduate courses to an online format. During the COVID-19 period, the UVPA, like other Sri Lankan universities, began to use emerging technologies and tools such as Zoom and a Learning Management System (LMS) for pedagogical intent. The goal of this study is to find out what teaching strategies can be applied to improve music teaching and learning in an online environment and how faculty staff experienced teaching music online. This research is designed as a Multiple Case Study. Depending on the purpose of the research, structured interviews were conducted to collect feedback from randomly selected faculty members. The participants were eight faculty members from the Faculty of Music engaged in teaching during the 2018/2019 academic year. Previously, the Faculty of Music has underutilized e-learning and the use of an LMS. However, the recent COVID-19 outbreak has forced them to rely on e-learning/online learning in order to ensure the continuity of educating the students enrolled in the degree programmes offered by the faculty. The results revealed that most of the teaching staff were new to teaching music online; however, they learned how to teach online given the circumstances which had left them with no other feasible solution. According to this study, the online music teaching activities utilized have improved teaching performance and technological skills and abilities, saved time, allowed participants to complete tasks more quickly, enhanced productivity of work, and increased educational values.

Introduction

The University of the Visual and Performing Arts (UVPA) is the country's only institution dedicated solely to offering honours degree programmes in the disciplines of visual and performing arts. Graduate studies, Dance & Drama, Music, and Visual Arts are the four faculties that make up the university. In the discipline areas of performing and visual arts, most teaching and learning take place in traditional classroom settings, with face-to-face instruction. The UVPA promptly moved all of its undergraduate courses to

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an online delivery format as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Samarasinghe & Nethsinghe, 2022), in a context whereby the worldwide pandemic had had a huge impact on music education (Joseph & Lennox, 2021).

The value of online learning is growing as the digital era keeps evolving. Online learning is a solution that allows people to get quality education at their own pace and at times that are convenient for them. A big change in education arose as a result of the rapid spread of COVID-19, mainly in terms of pedagogy (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Combining synchronous (live learning in which students and the teacher are present at the same time) and asynchronous (in which students learn on their own at various times) techniques is a common practice in distance learning (Fabriz et al., 2021; Hrastinski, 2008). During the COVID-19 period, the UVPA, like other Sri Lankan universities, began to use emerging technologies such as Zoom and Learning Management System (LMS) to teach and learn online.
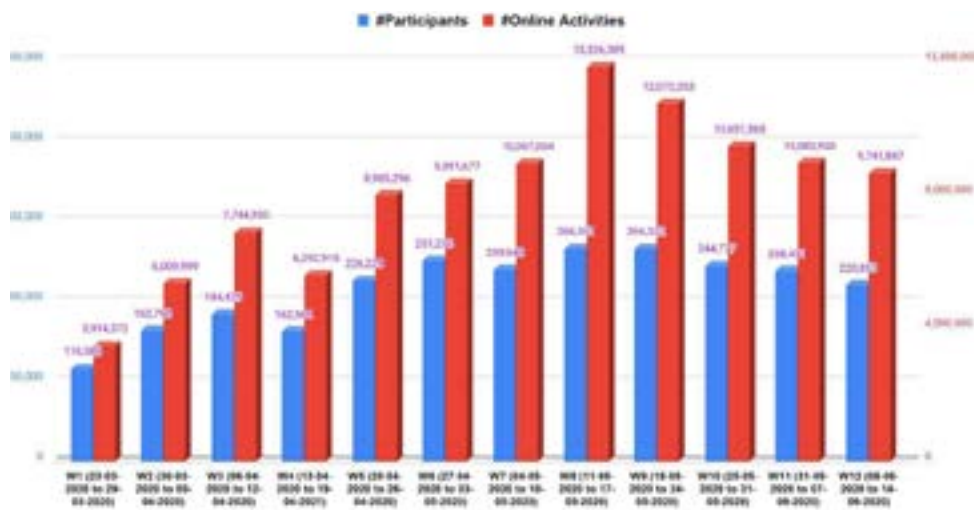
As Figure 1 indicates, LMS access within the Sri Lankan state universities from the 23rd of March 2020 to the 14th of June 2020.[2]
   As Figure 1 indicates, LMS access within the Sri Lankan state universities from the 23rd of March 2020 to the 14th of June 2020, it can be noted that LMS access has increased rapidly during this period.
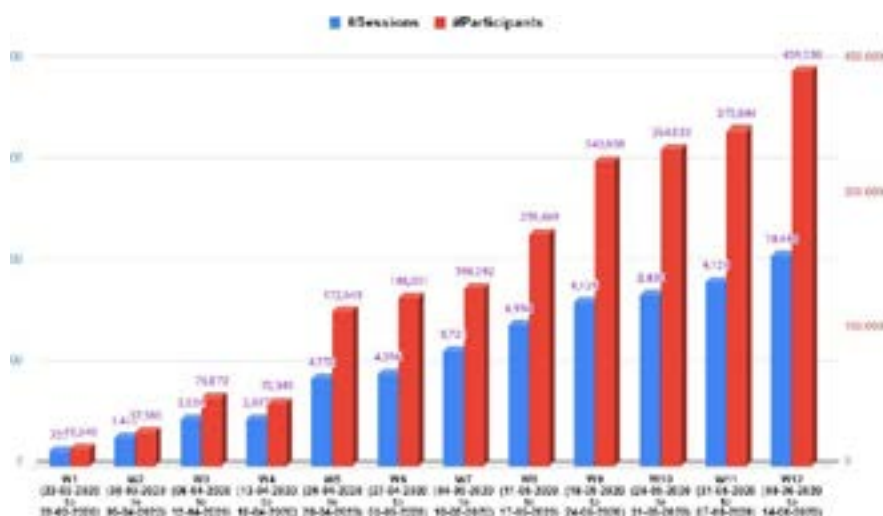

Figure 2: Sri Lankan State Universities' synchronous online activities (LEARN.zoom.us) from 23 March, 2020 to 14 June, 2020.[3]

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2. According to open source: Online Teaching and Learning Activities of State Universities Under the UGC, by LEARN, 2020, p. 1. Copyright 2020 by Lanka Education and Research Network (LEARN).

As Figure 2 depicts, based on the Zoom activities within Sri Lankan state universities from the 23rd of March 2020 to the 14th of June 2020, the total number of sessions per week and weekly participants for such sessions had notably increased over the last twelve weeks.

Due to various internet-related delays, faculty and students have discovered that conducting online practical classes for performing arts subjects, particularly music and dance which include collaborative activities, is an extremely difficult task. These issues affect both faculty and students directly and indirectly. Although many universities have had firsthand experience with online delivery before the pandemic, for the UVPA staff this was the first encounter. Therefore, it was important to explore the teaching staff online teaching experience during the period of COVID 19 for several reasons including the need to identify the extent of the support required.

This study aims to find out in what ways improvement of teaching strategies can be done with regard to the delivery of practical music subjects in an online environment. Especially, it seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What teaching strategies can be applied during the teaching and learning of music in an online environment?

2. How do faculty teaching staff members experience music teaching and learning online?

3. How effective are the strategies used for teaching and learning music online?

Literature Review

Both learners and teachers may experience a completely different learning environment when switching from traditional face-to-face learning to online learning, yet they are forced to adapt because there are only a few or no other options. Using a variety of online platforms and learning management systems, instructors have accepted this situation referred to as "Education in Emergency" which had forced them to use a system for which they were not ready (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). When making plans for distance learning, flexibility is essential because context matters. How a teacher is finally able to meet a student's learning needs will depend on a variety of things. The goal is to make sure both students and instructors have the tools they need to do their jobs well—the resources, expertise, infrastructure, and support they need to educate. Posting courses online is not an easy process. The best tools for their students' learning and pedagogical practice should be considered by teachers as they decide how to implement a blended learning approach (Doucet et al., 2020). Furthermore, Doucet et al., (2020) mention that distance learning is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor.

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3. According to open source: Online Teaching and Learning Activities of State Universities Under the UGC, by LEARN, 2020, p. 2. Copyright 2020 by Lanka Education and Research Network (LEARN).
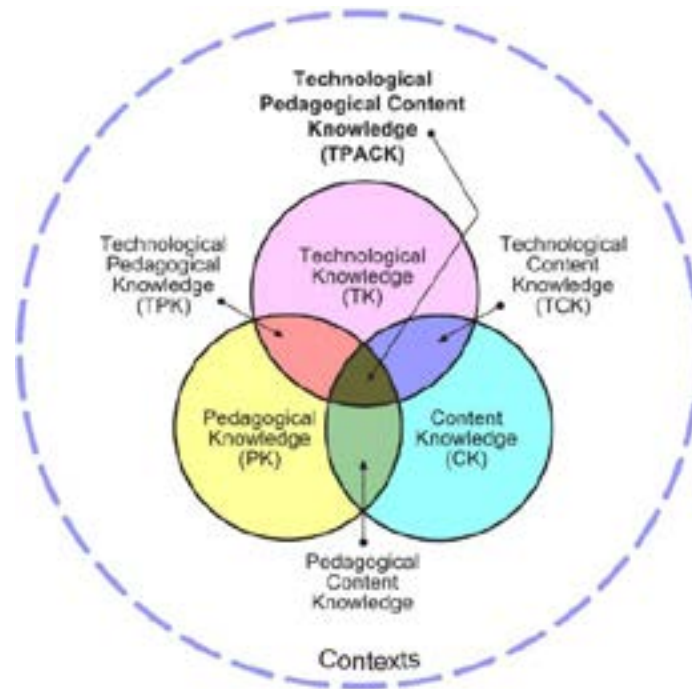
Figure 3: The TPACK Framework and Its Knowledge Components.[4]

Diverse methods of distance learning are needed for various courses due to a wide range of topics with different requirements and age groups. For most stakeholders in the arts, online creative activities including teaching and learning have been of interest for many years. This has been an organic and developing process in which people explore how real-time online practices can create new opportunities and new ways of accessing arts activities. Adedoyin & Soykan (2020) claims that because online learning depends entirely on technology and the internet, instructors, and students with poor internet connections may not be able to access it. The article published by Trinity College (Trinity, 2020) mentioned that due to various delays in equipment, the strength of the internet connection, and the bandwidth of the Wi-Fi teaching music online has been highly difficult. The time lag/delay makes it difficult for musicians to play together online, making it impossible to synchronize the music especially in terms of rhythmic timing. Due to factors such as live streaming delays, low audio and video quality, and weak internet connections, educators have found that providing Creative Arts workshops online is challenging (Joseph et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to discuss and plan other alternative approaches as solutions to minimize these issues found and improve teaching and learning music online.

In 2006, Mishra and Koehler introduced the TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, Content Knowledge) framework, which explains the complex relationship between content, pedagogy, and technology knowledge, as well as how these knowledge domains intersect to create the new types of knowledge required to support online teaching and learning. TPACK is used as the theoretical framework of this study. framework, which explains the complex relationship between content, pedagogy, and technology knowledge, as well as how these knowledge domains intersect to create the new types of knowledge required to support online teaching and learning. TPACK is used as the theoretical framework of this study.

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4. According to open source: TPACK framework. Adapted from "What is technological pedagogical content knowledge?, "by M. Koehler and P. Mishra, 2009, p.63.

Figure 3 shows the TPACK framework and its knowledge components. Online teaching and learning necessitate a certain level of TPACK, which is mainly concerned with designing and organizing better learning experiences and creating distinct learning environments through the use of digital technologies. The TPACK framework attempts to explore the nature of the know-how required by teachers to integrate technology into their teaching by addressing the complex, multifaceted, and situational nature of teaching knowledge.

Significant disparities were observed in terms of gender, professional seniority, and the type of school they worked at in a research by Kibici and Sarkaya (2021), which assessed the preparation of music teachers for online learning during the COVID-19 process. Kibici and Sarkaya (2021) also states that there are problems with music teachers' readiness to learn online tools in general. It was observed that the level of readiness for online learning is low, especially for music teachers who are females, have high professional seniority, and/or work in state schools. This study has the potential to create a positive technological change in music education and online learning experts over time because it is an essential item in 21st century teaching and learning.

De Bruin (2021) examines instrumental music teachers' reflections on their practice to understand how they support learning and engaging in online activities. This study demonstrated that the fulfillment of four interpersonal qualities; namely, recognition, insightfulness, relatedness and responsiveness promote a connection with the teacher and music learning. Current technology enables synchronous connections between digital or MIDI-enabled acoustic pianos over the Internet, producing quality instrumental audio independent of the video-conferencing platform. A pedagogy student's experience of taking synchronous online piano lessons was examined in Pike's (2020) case study, which also identifies the pedagogical abilities required to make the shift to online instruction. This study found advantages of synchronous online learning during the piano study.

Methodology

This research is designed as a Multiple Case Study. The case study method "explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Depending on the purpose of the research structured interviews were conducted to gather feedback from purposively selected faculty members. It is important to select a group of people who are best equipped to discuss what researchers want to explore (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008). Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that qualitative researchers use to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation (Campbell et al., 2020). This method is used to elicit opinions, feelings, and experiences from staff. Participants of this research were eight faculty members at the Faculty of Music teaching in the 2018/2019 academic year, at the UVPA. These faculty members represented several disciplines including ethnomusicology, instrumental music (sitar, flute, piano, violin), and vocal music. Interview data were analyzed descriptively, case by case.

Result and Discussion

Previous studies bear sufficient testimony to prove that using pre-recorded (video and audio) lesson materials can minimize the various internet-related delays (Samarasinghe & Nethsinghe, 2021). Bergman and Sams (2012) have introduced the flipped classroom method adhering to the notion that learning can be flipped before coming to the class. This means providing learning materials to students before the session for preparations. This method can be adopted for online teaching as well, especially when using an LMS to provide required content for learning beforehand. Flipping materials help students to explore and study the content before coming to the online class (Nethsinghe et al., 2022). Recent research on the flipped classroom and medical education has suggested that knowledge, skills, and behavior change with the flipped classroom curriculum (Goldberg, 2014; Persky & McLaughlin, 2017). Therefore, the faculty decided to create pre-recorded (video and audio) lesson materials for selected subjects from their

homes. These materials were uploaded to YouTube as there was not sufficient space in the university servers. Only the links were placed on the relevant course pages in the LMS. The government of Sri Lanka whitelisted the LMS servers of government universities but students complained about data charges for streaming and downloading as they had to view learning materials through YouTube. Therefore, the UVPA decided to increase server capacities and upload learning materials directly into the LMS. The faculty members were offered training to implement the solution through Zoom. It should be noted that due to low-quality resources available at home in addition to the disturbances, the faculty members were not able to develop quality learning materials. To minimize this, the UVPA started to provide resources at the university and invited small groups for on-campus activities. To create easily accessible audio and video files, the faculty maintained a clip size of fewer than 3 minutes. After implementing all these steps and providing professional development/learning, a structured interview was conducted to gather information about their opinions from randomly selected faculty members. This method assisted in understanding what effect this change has made.

Faculty Case 1

A senior faculty member with 39 years of experience teaching at a university is the first case. Currently, he is a professor at the Department of Ethnomusicology, Faculty of Music. In addition to teaching theory subjects relating to music, he conducts research writing classes. Even though he had many years of experience teaching at the university level, he commented that he had had no experience applying eLearning before the onset of COVID-19. He mentioned the difficulties and challenges in adjusting to the sudden shift in pedagogy from traditional to online teaching. In addition to participating in online teaching during the pandemic period, this participant attended online training workshops. The participant used Zoom and the Moodle Learning Management System. His teaching materials were prepared by himself at home, he said, and he prepared six to ten materials. During the process of preparing teaching materials, this participant faced difficulties typing in Sinhala.

The most important fact and finding, in this case, is the transformation of his pedagogical practice of face-to-face delivery to online pedagogy.

Faculty Case 2

The next faculty member teaches sitar in the Department of North Indian Music. Despite having 31 years of teaching experience in the higher education sector, this senior faculty member had no experience with eLearning. The participants noted that teaching sitar alap via Zoom is difficult. This faculty member used some strategies to overcome obstacles when teaching sitar online due to delays. This faculty member instructed students to mute the zoom environment and play the sitar. She expressed this by observing students' hand movements in the muted zoom environment and knowing how they are playing. After gaining experience in online teaching, this participant is now teaching sitar exclusively online for international students as well.

After analyzing this case, it was discovered that while participants' abilities to teach online improved with time and experience, more influence was required to improve their practical experience on how to teach music in the online environment.

Faculty Case 3

In this case, the faculty member teaches North Indian Flute at the Department of North Indian Music. This member has been teaching at higher education institutions for more than 25 years. Also, this member has been a flutist for more than 30 years and has experience performing locally and internationally. Furthermore, this senior member has no online teaching experience before COVID-19. This faculty

member also taught flute classes online through Zoom and LMS. With his limited facilities, the participant said he was unable to develop good-quality teaching materials at home. In a virtual setting, with the delays caused by the internet, it is very difficult to play and teach the tone quality and color of the flute. This member pointed out that teaching had to be only limited to teaching basic skills and simple tunes as students complained that high notes were difficult to hear. Feelings, eye contact, actions, emotional state, and rasaya have also been very challenging to teach in a virtual environment like this.

After reviewing this case, this participant concluded that the online environment was not ideal for teaching musical instruments such as the flute, but he expressed his willingness to look for ways to improve students' music learning experience.

Faculty Case 4

In this fourth case, the faculty member teaches piano at the Department of Western Music. The participant has been teaching piano for more than 25 years, including 16 years at the university. As with other participants, this member also had had no experience with online teaching before the pandemic. She expressed that with the limited facilities and the sudden transformation from face-to-face to online, they faced difficulties in conducting online classes at the beginning but were now more confident to do so. According to the participant, these online teaching activities improve teaching performance, and technological skills, save time, enable the participant to accomplish tasks more quickly, allow the participant to accomplish more work, and boost educational values.

In conclusion, this case demonstrated that teaching piano online was possible, but that it was more difficult and took a longer time to create an excellent performer through online teaching.

Faculty Case 5

This participant teaches North Indian classical music theory, practical, instrument violin, and audiovisual media studies. Participant is attached to the Department of Applied Music and Mass Communication and has 24 years of higher education teaching experience. Before the forced transition from face-to-face to the online mode, the participant had been teaching audiovisual media studies with the use of technology but no online teaching activities had been done. The participant pointed out that his experience in the use of ICT is high but that he had very little experience in online teaching. The participant prepared and used his own teaching materials for online teaching. The participant has used different teaching approaches and strategies to teach raga. He reported that he faced difficulties while teaching violin online but had adapted quickly to the new situation and managed to achieve the learning outcomes. The findings from this scenario is that the participant has acquired technological abilities connected to the translation of a task from a traditional teaching style to an online one.

Faculty Case 6

This case member belongs to the Department of South Indian Music and has moderate experience in teaching Carnatic music, music history, and culture. On the plus side, the participant reported that the abrupt shift to an online pedagogy altered the participant's pedagogical practices. He also reported that another advantage of the shift to online instruction had been the opportunity for him to improve his ICT-related knowledge.

It was found that another benefit obtained by the faculty during the online teaching period included enhanced ICT proficiency.

Faculty Case 7

The seventh case is a prominent performer and teacher of Tabla in the Department of North Indian Music. This participant highlighted the difficulties encountered when teaching and learning to play the

instrument, along with performing in classical or semi-classical styles as a solo or in groups. Due to the various delays, it had been extremely difficult to observe the teacher in terms of how he or she holds a musical instrument and the correct method of producing sound, as well as the finger movement techniques required for a better understanding of the Tabla instrument playing. As an alternative and to minimize these gaps, participants had to use recorded lessons.

According to the case's conclusion, the face-to-face environment enabled better personal contact and ease of direct communication, allowing the development of more advanced playing concepts.

Faculty Case 8

This faculty participant is a junior member attached to the Department of Western Music and teaches Western Vocal. This case had moderate experience in eLearning. On the plus side, this participant notes that the Zoom breakout rooms feature allows him to divide students into small groups, which provides important opportunities for active learning and keeping students engaged.

The findings gathered as a result of interviewing this participant further strengthens the claim that each faculty member's online teaching experience has been unique.

Implications and Conclusions

The curriculum at the UVPA's Faculty of Music features both theoretical subjects that are studied in large classes and practical subjects that can be studied either individually (teacher-student), in small groups (chamber music with 2–5 instrumentalists), or in class settings of any size (orchestra, choral ensemble). Previously, the Faculty of Music underutilized e-learning and the use of a Learning Management System. The recent COVID-19 outbreak, however, has forced the faculty us to rely on it. The summary of each case was coded to identify the major themes as described by Saldana (2021).

Overview

Codes	Themes
Transformation of pedagogical practice	Pedagogical value
Teaching online improved	
Testing and using different teaching approaches and strategies to teach music online	
Facing difficulties in conducting online classes at the beginning but feeling more confident with time	
Improving teaching performance	
Boosting educational values	Technical value
Obtaining a unique online teaching experience	
Improving technological skills	
Enhancing ICT proficiency	
Never using Zoom and the LMS before but learning to do so during emergency remote teaching	

Identified Codes and Themes: shows a summary of each case analysis and the coding process applied. Two major themes were identified from the categorized codes of eight Case Studies conducted for this

research. After analyzing all cases it can be concluded that the majority of the teaching staff were new to teaching online, but participants had learned how to teach online in general and improve their technical skills and pedagogical skills that can be identified as elements of TPACK. The faculty has gained valuable online teaching and learning experiences as a result of the forced transition. The COVID-19 crisis has heightened attention to education technologies and faculty members have familiarized themselves with the technology which will help them to be as effective as possible in the future. However, the limitation was real-time interaction between students and faculty in an online environment. Real-time interaction is necessary to develop advanced solo, and ensemble performance skills and engagement in live music and stage performances. Some courses can simply be adapted for use at home or online. However, music education courses with a significant practical component and call for specialized equipment are not as easily recreated outside the university's physical grounds.

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged and which could be addressed in future research. As the sample size is small, a test with a larger sample size would be beneficial. It would be useful to test the use of online applications in achieving more complex learning outcomes, and the academic performance of the students following performing arts (music) courses. Teaching, learning, and assessing performing arts-related subjects such as vocal music and instrument teaching including practicing or rehearsing using online means can be not as effective as with theory-based subjects since delays could occur when streaming video and audio content due to transmission issues. Furthermore, the curricula for most of the degree programs offered at the UVPA have not taken into account the possibility of incorporating well-designed methods for e-learning. Therefore, such considerations must be made when developing learning outcomes, material, activities, and assignments. As such, if blended learning is to be proposed, there is a need to reconsider the proper integration of educational technologies during all the stages in the curriculum development process to produce professional performance-based music graduates. In practical subjects such as vocal music and instrumental music, there is a lot of teacher imitation involved. This is very challenging in an online learning context. Moreover, with practical subjects such as instrumental music, most students do not have musical instruments at home. Therefore, when it comes to practicing in a remote learning context, they face many difficulties as a result of the lack of resources. According to this study, online teaching activities improve teaching performance and technological abilities, save time, allow participants to complete tasks more quickly, allow them to do more work, and increase educational values. However, for both teachers and learners, there are issues with when using technology for online teaching, learning, and assessment as revealed by this study. If the UVPA wants to keep using blended learning in the future, faculty members will need professional development to plan online learning for their students and manage the technical aspects of online learning. The UVPA will need to develop a long-term plan that pairs technology experts with teachers who are unfamiliar with or lacking the necessary skills. This study also recommends that other universities that offer Music and Performing Arts Education in Sri Lanka and beyond collaborate in enhancing practices and sharing the knowledge with stakeholders.

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