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Kishinchand Chellaram College

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Srujan

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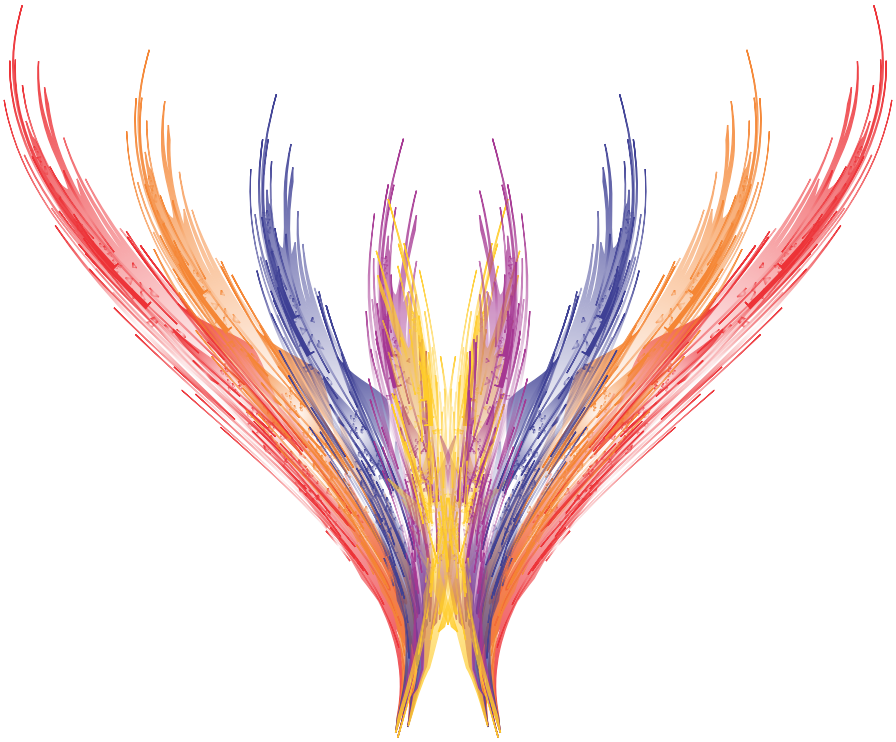

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Editorial

Dear Readers

This edition of *Srujan* locates itself in the aftermath of the disruptive phase inflicted worldwide by the two years of COVID-19 pandemic. The retreat into home spaces though imperative from health and safety point of view, had radically different implications for those engaged with pedagogy and learning. The transitioning into an online platform has set off debates on digital divides and the recalibration of institutional and faculty roles. The overwhelming challenge in front of an academic community was to learn how to be effective instructors in face of an unprecedented crisis.

The recent studies learning gap that has been evidenced at the various stages of learning is not be ignored. It is pertinent that the research papers in the compilation address issues related to the preparedness or perhaps the lack of it, in present educational systems. Disciplinary concerns of pedagogical practices, learning gaps amongst undergraduate students, the challenges of an online classroom and research strategies during the pandemic constitute significant focus of exploration. The area of research practices has also been severely impacted with lockdowns and institutional closures restricting methodological choices. In conclusion *Srujan* 2022 refers to the self-reflexive stance how has pedagogy evolved, transformational lessons for educators and responsive teaching approaches.

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A Case Study of Learners' Perception on Effectiveness of Digital Science Education in Undergraduate Classes during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract:

The Coronavirus pandemic forced the world to adapt to newer methods of functioning in the field of education. To understand teachers' perspective in continuing blended learning, the current study proposes use of simpler lab based and DIY (Do it yourself) methodologies that offer a greater flexibility of learning. It reviews the options available and selection of suitable platforms for Digital teaching, techniques utilized for generation of Online Learning Resources and improvements based on student's feedback. The methodology included making and sharing subject related lecture videos, live demonstrations of experiments via virtual platforms followed by query solving sessions. Another approach was the development of a kit that can be used by the students for carrying out practical at home. The outcome of the responses of student's survey revealed that the skill up-gradation of faculty and students helped in overall understanding of the subject through the process of blended learning.

Keywords: Digitization, Blended learning, Science Experiments

Introduction

Lockdown and social distancing measures implemented during COVID-19 pandemic brought about closures of schools, training institutions and higher education facilities in most countries. After gauging the extended existence of the virus with newer strains brewing across the continents, the educationist started looking for pedagogical tools and technologies for knowledge transfer in the educational institutes, world over. There was a paradigm shift in the way educators delivered quality education - essentially through various online platforms. Online and distance learning with continuous education became the only solution for this unprecedented global pandemic. This transition from the traditional face-to-face learning to the use of suitable and relevant pedagogy for online education, posed many challenges for the educators as well as the learners (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Some of these include among many others the expertise and exposure to information and communications technology (ICT), availability of infrastructure and continued access to the learners through use of these technologies as many learners from the urban cities preferred to return to their hometowns due to economic pressures, accessibility to these online tools as per the specifications of the learning objectives (Seale & Martyn, 2010), mental and physical ability of the educators and learners to adapt to the changing psychological, socioeconomic circumstances (Apperibai, et al., 2020) and greater support needed for the differently abled learners.

Some of the online platforms commonly used by various institutions include unified communication and collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Canvas and Blackboard, which allowed the educators to create educational resources, training and skill development programs (Petrie, 2020). The various virtual classroom platforms like video conferencing (Google Hangouts eet, Zoom, Slack, Cisco, Web-Ex) and customizable cloud-based learning management platforms such as Elias, Moodle, Big Blue Button and Skype were increasingly used to support the concept of flipped classrooms.

For a science teacher, teaching methodology involves explanation of theoretical concepts supported by practical sessions in the laboratory, which validates the reactions, processes and phenomena occurring in real life (Ka , 2012). In the process of higher education, the aid of digital platforms has opened newer ways of teaching, learning, evaluation and assessment (Mishra, et al., 2020). During the lockdown, when students couldn't come to the educational institutions, science teachers had to adopt newer methods of knowledge dissemination, wherein virtual laboratories, demonstrations with simulations proved to be effective as experienced by many educators. The simpler lab-based experiments where use of instruments was minimal, were converted into DIY (Do it yourself) at home exercises which helped students to stay connected with the subject through hands-on practice and developed confidence in their ability to learn by observations.

The current study was undertaken by the authors in the Department of Life Sciences at Kishinchand Chellaram College, HSNC University, Mumbai, during the pandemic and post pandemic times in India. The objectives of the study were three-fold. Skill development of learners in handling digital tools, understanding the requirement of learners and selecting methods using suitable tools for teaching and learning Science as a subject, which included online theory as well as practical sessions and assessment of students' perception for the effectiveness of the tools used during learning in an offline/online/blended mode. Since, blended learning would be the new normal for formal education systems in the future (Singh, et al., 2021), the outcome of this study would help to devise newer approaches of knowledge transfer in a more effective manner.

Methodology

The current research work focuses on the aspects of understanding the requirements of the students and outlines the approach of teachers in up-gradation of their knowledge base and technical capabilities to reach out to the students in a better manner during the pandemic times. Following are the targeted milestones and methodologies implemented during the research work,

Upgradation of the knowledge base for teachers and understanding of available digital tools:
The faculty members received training from the parent institution to use digital platforms and the tools available for blended learning after which few suitable methods such as Zoom, Google Meet, Google classrooms for communication and Video making tools for generation of educational videos were selected.

Understanding students' difficulties and requirements

Initial zoom sessions and one on one interactions with the students to understand the difficulties in digital literacy. Feedback reports from students at an individual level, along with the reports and scientific literature available, provided a base and rationale for the development of need based digital learning tools and alternative teaching methodologies to facilitate learning.

Development of digital learning tools and methods for the enhancement of learning

a. In addition to the online lectures, subject related lecture videos were recorded by teachers and shared on the common digital platform for students.

b. Live demonstrations of experiments from the college laboratory by faculty members to students via virtual platforms was conducted such as:

i. Histochemical localization of Alkaline Phosphatase

ii. In-vivo and In-vitro Pollen germination of *Vinca rosea*

iii. Determination of pH change using purple cabbage extract

c. Online lectures and practical demonstrations were converted to open access e-resources shared with students for repeated viewing, complemented with additional query solving sessions.

d. Development of a Kit-based experiment and DIY methodology for students to perform experiments at home. Kit also had an Instruction manual for protocol and troubleshooting.

Survey based analysis and Assessment of effectiveness of the digital teaching aids

To assess the effectiveness of the digital teaching aids by preparing a questionnaire for undergraduate classes of FY, SY and TY BSc Life Sciences students and analyzing the responses using statistical tools. The survey was conducted using Google Forms as the Platform. A total of 109 participants were part of the survey.

The results of the survey were analyzed using statistical tools available in Microsoft Excel and conclusions were drawn based on the responses. The survey included a first section of questions wherein respondents responded based on the 5-point Likert scale. One was designated as least and five was marked as the most.

Drawing conclusions based on the observations

Insights were drawn from the above analysis with future roadmap drawn for blended learning. This study was initiated with the hypothesis that when compared with the offline mode, shifting to an online/digital mode of learning in totality, may not ensure effective teaching and learning from the perspective of teachers and students.

Results and Discussion

Skill Upgradation of the faculty and students

The skill up-gradation of the educators allowed the teachers to use the latest tools and techniques. This training enabled them to understand and fulfill the requirements of the students, experiencing online learning for the first time. The tools such as Zoom, Google classrooms and Video making software were found to be the most effective ones. During the live practical demonstrations, students who connected for the online practical classes could visualize and associate their working laboratory conditions, the technical aspects of the experiment, and the step-by-step protocol could be virtually followed. Thus, the implementation of virtual lab and virtual experiments kept the students updated even when they could not physically attend the practical session for more than a year. They could see the actual results of these experiments and seek clarifications from the teachers present. A novel way of teaching and learning was implemented through 'Science Practicals at home (Do it yourself)'. The science experiments of the syllabus which did not require high end instruments, were performed by students at home using the requirements provided with the kit developed by faculty and students. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and online meeting between teacher and students helped for a better understanding and outcome of the experiment. This way students not only learnt practical

techniques but also the theoretical concepts of the same topic.

The open access e- resources provided to students were found to be helpful, especially for those who could not connect for the online classes due to connectivity or health issues. The students could learn the subject matter at their own time and pace. It was also helpful for them during their examination.

Survey Results

A total of 109 responses were received from first, second, third year students of the department and immediate Alumni of the College. Figure 1 represents the classification of the reported responses.

In the first segment of the investigation, a 5-point Likert scale was used to obtain the views of the students regarding the posed questions with 1 being the least and 5 being most. For the questions regarding 'Understanding of Basic concepts in Theory' and 'Understanding of Basic concepts in Practical' during online classes, an average response of 3.092 and 2.716 was obtained out of 5. The difference in understanding of practical concepts was found to be significantly lesser (at $P < 0.05$ using unpaired student's t - test). The results of the first segment are represented in Figure 1. Results suggest that students are unable to grasp a significant amount of information due to loss of hands-on experiential learning and loss of technical understanding of concepts which are better understood during offline sessions.

The Likert based response value of an average of 2.147 out of 5 for the question pertaining to lab-based skill development during digital learning period further signifies the point. This average includes a response of just 1 out of 5 (minimum response possible) by 44 respondents i.e., 40.04% participants. This is indeed a disturbing observation. This equates to more than 57% students being incapable of understanding and developing lab based technical skills and abilities due to non-exposure to realistic learning during the digital learning period.

Though, 'Online/ Soft skill development' and 'Preparedness of students for the use of technology for online education before online training' showed a higher response of students with an average of 3.367 and 3.376 out of 5 respectively, that translates to just above 67% students being benefited and prepared. This higher response was expected based on the efforts put in by the teaching faculties in order to facilitate learning as much as possible.

Topics of Science stream, which are significantly dependent on hands-on experiences and learning based on realistic and heuristic learning suffered the most during the pandemic online education period.

A more striking response, where 60.91% students have responded positively to the question pertaining to possible negative effects of online education on the students' skills and societal skills, suggesting a clear necessity of offline mode of education under certain conditions. The question referring to the willingness of participants to resume in-person classes received an average response of 3.642 out of 5 with 37.6% participants rating a full 5. This shows that even the students understand the necessity of resuming a complete offline mode of education. These responses indicate that the inclusion of alternative modes of teaching and learning implemented by the Department of Life Sciences was instrumental in keeping the negative effects of complete online education to a minimum.

The responses of the participants to the open-ended question on why they would prefer hybrid mode, show that students feel that hybrid mode will allow them to manage time better. Moreover, students do imply, that especially in situations wherein travel to location is not possible due to health issues etc, a hybrid mode of education can be beneficial. From the teachers' point of view though, hybrid mode is

not the best alternative as it bifurcates the attention a teacher can dedicate to an in-person class and can eventually increase the difference in knowledge obtained by offline students and their online classmates.

The Likert based questionnaire confirmed the hypotheses stated earlier by this research team, regarding the effectiveness of online/complete digital learning modes. Though, the need of the hour was to continue teaching using solely the complete online educational mode, this has severely affected students at multiple levels especially in areas of the topic wherein hands-on empirical and heuristic learning are a necessity. Moreover, the severe loss of lab-based skills reported by students and observed by faculties in the learners, in a subject majorly dependent on lab use and lab-based technologies is extremely alarming. The inclusion of DIY methodologies and videos of experiments as open access online resources coupled with the use of virtual labs provided at least a baseline support to the undergraduate students and allowed them to maintain their curiosity and interest in the subject even though hands-on physical experimentation was not possible.

The responses received for the question referring to the hurdles faced by the students during the period of complete online/ digital mode of education have been represented in Figure 2. It was observed that 70% participants suffered from connectivity issues during online mode. This number raises concern about the inability of a significant population (70%) of any class to actually capitalize on the complete advantage of learning during the lecture. 41 % of the respondents reported dealing with pandemic related health issues and 16.15% reported a complete lack of availability of resources to successfully connect to the online platform. Hence, the efforts made towards a complete digital switch to education were not successful. 57.8% of the participants reported that they experienced lack of understanding of concepts in teachings, during the online mode of education.

Though on paper, online education looks as a time saving mode of education, in reality it was reported to be quite time consuming. 48.62% participants reported that they had difficulty in time management. This can also be attributed partially to the increased duration and frequency of online events and engagements initiated by the faculty to facilitate better learning outside of regular working college hours. This, in combination with delays due to technical glitches and connectivity issues can be held responsible for these issues.

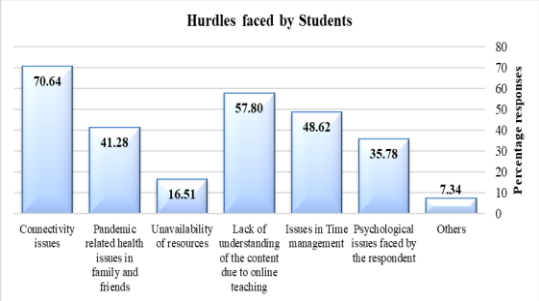

Figure 2 - Hurdles faced by Students during complete online education mode

Pandemic was not a socially positive time (Villiani, et al., 2021). This has been proven by various studies over the course of time and the psychological effects and numerous post-traumatic stress disorder incidences reported in relation to COVID 19 are well established (Bridgeland, et al., 2021) (Muthuprasad, et al., 2021). These reports in combination to the social isolation suffered by most of the students due to Online mode of education can be held as a causal factor for 35.78% of the respondents reporting psychological distress. Other hurdles reported by the participants include physical pain and vision related issues due to constant use of devices, body pain, attention span issues, social issues stemming from a lack of social interaction.

When asked if they felt isolated and not connected to their classmates and teachers as a result of complete and compulsory online mode

of education, 58.7% participants said yes, whereas 19.3% participants were unsure about it. The students were also observed to be indecisive regarding the choice of Hybrid education for the future, with 49.5% and 50.5% participants choosing a Yes and a No respectively.

But all cannot be considered as negative with reference to online education (Almahasees, et al., 2021). The results of the question pertaining to enhancements received by participants regarding digital and technical skills during complete online education has been represented in figure 3. 53.21% participants reported that they were able to learn and enhance their soft skills whereas a large number of them, 84.40% to be precise, reported an improvement in their technical-know-how about use of digital platforms. Many of the students also reportedly used platforms such as ZOOM and Google Meet for their personal and group discussions during projects and report submissions.

77.06% of the students also benefited by improvements in their presentation and data analysis abilities. As during the period of complete online education, students were taught presentation skills and were compulsorily pushed to prepare and deliver presentations in the online mode for their Practical and Internal Assignments. Though in the earlier question, 48% participants reported that they did face issues related to time management, 36.70% respondents also reported that they were able to improve their time management skills during the period of complete online education.

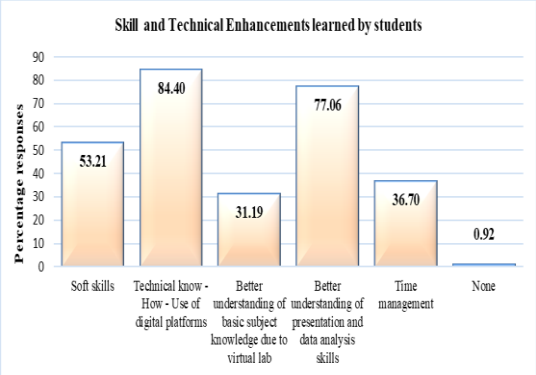

Figure 3 - Skill and Technical Enhancements learned by Students

When quizzed about the students' favorite segment from the complete online education period, 62.39% students selected Webinars, whereas 57.80% participants selected online workshops and seminars. 58.72% students also selected examinations to be the most favored segment but this can be attributed to the inclusion of MCQs and home-based examinations. The results of these questions have been represented in figure 4.

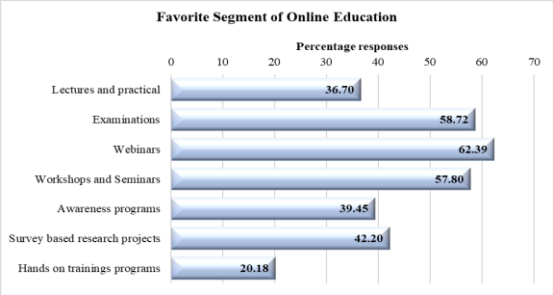

Figure 4 - Favorite Segment of Online Education

42.20% students also mentioned Survey Based Research Projects as their favorite segment. Survey based projects were implemented by many departments under various heads during the pandemic with varying degrees of success. This was done in order to maintain the scientific curiosity among students during the time of no physical interactions and lack of table work possibilities. The results support the fact that students enjoyed the implementation of survey-based projects. The inclusion of alternative modes of education via workshops, DIYs, home based experiment-based learning projects,

seminars and webinars to better explain theoretical and practical based concepts exclusively helped the students and provided the much-needed push in the experiential learning experience of the subject. This was appreciated by the students and it can be seen in the responses.

The last segment of the survey consisted of an open-ended question regarding the health issues faced by students, due to the enhanced screen time during virtual learning. The most common responses included eye strain, eye dryness and vision related troubles. Students also suffered from headaches, back ache and body ache mostly due to persistent screen time and constantly sitting in front of laptops/desktops. Few responses also mention a change in spectacle number. Students also mentioned various psychological aftereffects of online education such as anxiety issues, stress disorders, sleep deprivation and sleep disorders, lack of confidence, difficulty in concentrating, irritability and compounded frequent health issues. Recent studies do report a correlation between the above-mentioned disorders and observations with increased screen time.

Conclusion:

The study of the learner's perspective on the effectiveness of digital science education, indicated that the available pedagogical tools used for face-to-face learning were not found to be 100% effective for online learning (Muthuprasad, et al., 2021). Though a range of need-based pedagogical tools were devised for online and distance learning, faculty and students who were technologically weak required skill upgradation with ICT training in order to equip themselves with the skill sets required to adapt to the online teaching mode. Though most of them managed to cope successfully with the challenges, some studies done by other researchers mention that due to the shortage of time, the online educational process was teacher-centered rather than student-centered. (Coman, et al., 2020)

The results of the students' survey in the current research, clearly describes the pros and cons of digital education in totality with the disadvantages outweighing the benefits by a margin. The most negative aspect of online education in the initial phase was the lack of skilled workforce that led to gaps in the understanding of the subject. The disciplines involving lab/field based experimental/hands-on components of education suffered the most. Although theoretical subjects could be taught effectively in an online setup, the shortcomings of such set ups in terms of technical glitches, difficulties in expressions of hands-on topics and other socio-psychological environments of learners limited the effectiveness of learning. Another major challenge was making online teaching creative, innovative and interactive through user-friendly tools so as to ensure engaged participation in the online mode.

Thus, the studies clearly indicate that, from the student's point of view, there cannot be an alternative that is 100% effective as the offline mode of teaching and learning, especially in the Science related subjects. The authors feel that though online education did offer some level of knowledge enhancement during the lockdown period, a robust model of offline and blended mode of education is needed to strengthen the education delivery systems. Affordability, Accessibility and Accountability are the three key aspects to open the doors wider to a successful all-inclusive model of Online mode of Education. Feedback at every step, from faculty and students, becomes an essential aspect to make the process of online teaching-learning more student-centric. An equally transparent assessment system would augment the wholesomeness of this futuristic hybrid mode of learning, which now has become an integral part of our higher education systems in India. A huge scope exists for research and development in all the above fields for the researchers to evolve a better model for each of the adversities the world may face in future.

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The Online-Offline Assessment Debate from a Student's Perspective

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Abstract:

Covid 19 has led to the popularity of online assessment the effectiveness of which is dependent to a large extent on the perception towards it of the students. Thus, the current study investigated the perceived advantages and disadvantages of online assessment of Indian students based on a survey of 200 participants in the age group of 19 to 21 years. The strongest perceived advantages were found to be they were regarded as environmentally friendly, did away with the problem of illegible handwriting, reduced travel time, offered greater flexibility, were convenient and reduced examination-related stress and anxiety. The strongest perceived disadvantages were that online assessments were more prone to cheating, plagued by network issues, invaded privacy and effectiveness was hampered by the digital divide. As regards the perception regarding replacement & integrating of online assessment within the education system, 20% & 80% endorsed the same respectively. Thus, these results can aid in enhancing their effectiveness.

Keywords: Assessment, Online, Offline, Perception

Introduction

Technology-enhanced learning has been explored and implemented in educational institutions worldwide specially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Though the pandemic has shown signs of ebbing, advanced technology has become an integral part of the teaching-learning process, hence it is no longer considered as merely a pedagogical supplement. But despite the large-scale impact of technology in education, particularly in the design and delivery of curriculum, there is still a need to explore new approaches when it comes to assessment (Crisp, Guardia, and Hillier, 2016).

Assessment is one area in education where technology can be maximally integrated. Termed as e assessment it is considered as an essential component in education that promotes learning and measures expected outcomes (Clements and Cord, 2013 as cited in Crisp, Guardia, and Hillier, 2016). Online assessment or e-assessment includes a broad range of assessment activities such as online essay and computer-marked online examinations (James, 2016). Its effectiveness is stressed by Laine, et al. (2016), who states that online exams are effective for diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments and provide students with the opportunity of demonstrating performance. But for online assessments to be effective, the perception of the most important stake holders that is students towards e assessment needs to be considered.

Adanir, et al. (2020) mentioned that learner's perceptions of online exams have not been widely studied despite its potential to contribute to more effective use of online exams,

particularly among developing countries. Their work further emphasized that investigating learners' perceptions on online exams could reveal factors that would make online examinations more accurate and effective.

The same needs to be investigated within the Indian scenario as well. As India, because of its unique demography, socio-economic disparity, undue emphasis on grades by all the stake holders, and the digital divide is still in the stage of building its online learning system capability. Thus, for its online assessment to be effective the perception of its students needs to be investigated. Hence, this current study would be able to address this need by examining perceived advantages and disadvantages of online assessments in comparison to offline assessment among Indian students. The findings would give academic institutions and educators a basis for designing and administering effective online assessments which have now become an integral part of the educational system.

Review of Literature

Higher education institutions need to find ways to improve the implementation of technology as an integral part of education so that it would be viewed successfully by all its stakeholders specially the students (Aristovnik et al., 2016; Papadakis et.al., 2018). For this, students' perception which consists of the belief and thoughts of students about the technology needs to be understood as according to Abdullah, Muait and Ganefri (2019), knowing the perception of students is important because this influences their acceptance of the technology.

Adanir, et al. (2020) investigated and compared students' perceptions of online exams at state universities in Turkey and Kyrgyztan via a mixed study research design. Results of the quantitative analysis revealed that Turkish learners found online exams less stressful and more reliable than the traditional mode of taking exams while Kyrgyz learners perceived it otherwise. James (2016) revealed that many students from a regional university in Australia have encountered challenges with having to take major examinations online including technical difficulties and insufficient support. It was also found that ICT infrastructure and reliable connectivity were significant barriers to successful completion of online examinations under secure, proctored conditions. Wanner and Palmer (2015), in their study of flipped courses in a university in Australia, emphasized that attention to assessment practices must be considered to ensure that the learning experience of students is cohesive. Their results further indicated that students preferred blended learning practices over fully online ones stating that they enjoyed clearly structured assessment with wide choices.

A study by Kundu A,2021 on Indian students revealed that students' overall perception toward e-assessment was of moderate level and this perception varied depending on their gender, academic level, nature of the stream of study and their economic condition. Of the eight domains investigated, students showed better perception in the perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, compatibility, subjective norms, and self-efficacy domains, while they cut a sorry figure in domains like awareness, resource facilitation and information technology (IT) support. It became evident from their responses that COVID was instrumental in enhancing their interest in e-assessment.

Thus, a more intensive study to explore the perception of Indian students towards e assessment needs to be conducted which is the main aim of the present study.

The study

A survey was conducted to investigate the perceived advantages and disadvantages of students towards online assessment in comparison to offline assessment.

Tools

A self-formulated questionnaire consisting of twenty questions with eight questions measuring perceived advantages and eight questions measuring perceived disadvantages and two questions regarding the inclusion of online method of assessment was created and administered on the participants. A rating scale from 1 to 5 was provided for each question with 1 signifying strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Sample

The sample consisted of 200 participants who were in their undergraduate years in the age group of 19 to 21 years. Participants who were proficient in English language, were technologically well versed and had taken online assessments at least for two examinations were included in the sample.

Variables

The following perceived advantages of online assessment in comparison to offline assessment were measured namely:

1. Online assessment reduces examination stress and anxiety.
2. Online assessment accurately measures one's knowledge.
3. Online assessment is a convenient method of assessment.
4. Online assessment provides flexibility in terms of place and time for answering.
5. Online assessment saves on travel time.
6. Online assessment enhances ease of answering exams.
7. Online assessment does away with problems of illegible handwriting.
8. Online assessment generates quicker results.
9. Online assessment is environmentally friendly.

The following perceived disadvantages of online assessment in comparison to offline assessment were measured namely:

1. Online assessment is more conducive to cheating.
2. Online assessment is plagued by network issues.
3. Online assessment has the disadvantage of uploading papers.
4. Online assessment might lead to invasion of privacy as the camera is required to be switched on even when seated in a private environment like home.
5. Online assessment might sometimes lead to harassment at hands of proctor.
6. Online assessment grades are not considered valid by employers.
7. Online assessment results in a lack of study-related motivation in students.
8. Online assessment is impacted by the digital divide.

Two additional questions measured perception regarding

1. Online assessment to be made an integral part of the assessment.
2. Online assessment to replace offline assessment.

Data Analysis

The perceived advantages and disadvantages of online assessment in comparison to offline assessment were calculated based on the percentage of students giving a particular rating to each question.

Results & Discussion

The 200 participants belonged to the age group of 19 to 21 years. Out of which 70 were 19 years of age,45 were 20 years of age and 85 were 21 years of age.

Table 1: Shows the number of students who belong to each age group in the sample.

Age	19 years	20 years	21 years
Total	70	45	85

The perception of students towards online assessment were found to be as follows:

The perceived advantage of reduction **in examination related stress and anxiety** during online assessment was endorsed by **90**% of the participants. This was in line with the findings of Zheng & Bender,2019 who found that students believed that the online assessment decreased their anxiety levels. Stowell and Bennett (2010) reported that students who normally had high levels of exam anxiety in the classroom had reduced exam anxiety during online exams. Another finding stated that since online test can be taken from almost anywhere, examinee can choose their own environment which is less likely to evoke anxiety than the traditional classroom environment (Stowell & Bennett,2010) Not just that students having performance anxieties may perform better communicating through a screen as opposed to in person.

The perceived advantage of online assessment as a tool to increase **accuracy of assessment** was agreed upon by around **45%** of respondents. Thus, majority of respondents i.e., **55%** perceived that online assessment was not in any way more accurate than offline mode of assessment.

As for the perception on whether online assessment was a **convenient medium** of assessment, a large part of the participants vouched for the same. 94% percentage of participants gave a rating of 4 and 5 for this question. The next question of perception about **greater flexibility of online assessment on account of time and place** was also endorsed by **93%** of the respondents. This was in line with research conducted by Rolim & Isaias,2019 who found that the greatest advantages of online assessment were its flexibility and accessibility, and this enhanced students' learning experience. The convenience of being able to take online tests anywhere was also a favourable factor for students according to Baleni, 2015. Several studies reported many advantages of e-assessment, such as providing more accessible, flexible, efficient and convenient assessment experiences for learners, teachers and institutions (Attia, 2014; Sorensen, 2013; Pedersen *et al.*, 2012; De Villiers *et al.*, 2016; Crisp *et al.*, 2016); being fast and easy to use (Eljinini and Alsamarai, 2012); providing students more control, friendly interfaces and recreational experiences (Ridgway *et al.*, 2004; Way, 2010; Williams and Wong, 2009); providing immediate feedback compared with paper-based test that improves the learning level (Gilbert *et al.*, 2011; Way, 2010).

The perception of whether online assessment **saves travel time** as online exams can be answered from anywhere **98%** gave a rating of 4 and 5 to this question. Thus, students living in remote areas or living in large metropolitan cities where a lot of time is consumed in traveling online assessment can serve as a boon. As regards the perception of online assessment enhancing **ease of answering examinations 88 %** of students agreed to the same. Several students could be having a problem with **illegible handwriting** which was resolved in online assessment as it involves typing out answers. Thus, a huge number i.e., **97%** of respondents perceived this aspect as an advantage.

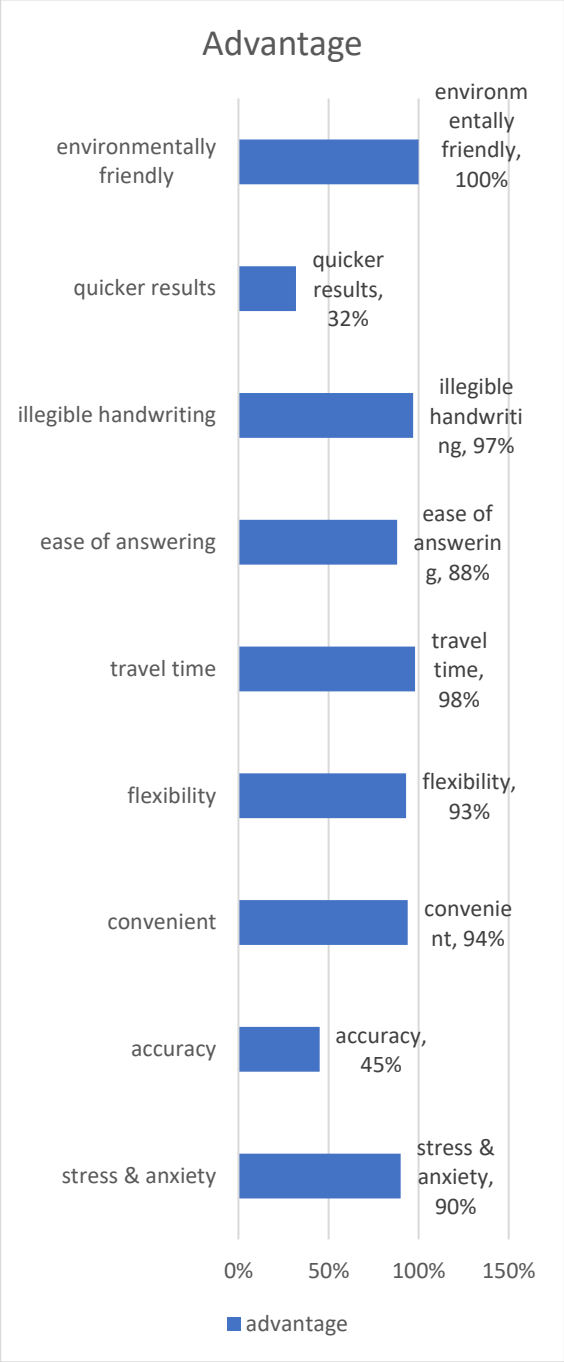
The next perceived advantage measured was whether online assessments **save time** in assessment and generate **near immediate results** which is not possible in offline assessment. This perceived advantage was endorsed by **32%** of the respondents because the faculty does face challenges in evaluating tests online, hence there is not much difference in the release of results both online and offline. But at the same time because of the automated marking and feedback, online tests are viewed as highly efficient, fast, and reliable, making them especially useful where large numbers of students are concerned. (Brady, 2005).

The perceived advantage of online assessment being **environmentall**y **friendly** were endorsed by **100%** of respondents as it does not involve the use of stationery, papers, plastic etc.

Table 2: Shows the total number and percentage of students who endorsed a perceived advantage.

Advantage	Total students giving a rating of 4 or 5	Percentage
1. Reduced examination stress and anxiety.	180	90%
2.Accurately measures one's knowledge.	90	45%
3.Online assessment is a convenient method of assessment	188	94%
4.Flexibility in terms of place and time for answering.	186	93%
5.Saves on travel time	195	98%
6.Enhances ease of answering exams	176	88%
7.Does away with problems of illegible handwriting.	194	97%
8.Generates quicker results	65	32%
9.Environmentally friendly	200	100%

Fig 1: Shows the percentage of students endorsing a particular perceived advantage.



Thus, the main perceived advantages regrading online assessment among Indian students as discerned by the survey are that online assessments are environmentally friendly, do away with problem of illegible handwriting, save travel time, are flexible convenient and reduce examination related stress and anxiety

As regards perceived disadvantages of online assessment in comparison to offline assessment, results indicated **85%** of respondents agreed with the perception that online assessment **was prone to cheating**. This has been found in several research studies which indicate numerous practices that students engage in while doing online tests that are often considered to be cheating. This includes students treating them as open book tests, which may involve using multiple computers for increasing the speed of searching for answers (Fontaine, 2012).Also both faculty and students perceive online testing to offer more cheating opportunities than in traditional, live-proctored classroom environments (Kennedy et al., 2000; Rogers, 2006; Stuber-McEwen et al., 2005, Smith, 2005; Mecum, 2006), with the main concerns being student collaboration and use of forbidden resources during the exam (Christe, 2003). Thus as the development of fully online courses is expected to continue to expand (e.g., Allen and Seaman, 2010; Johnson, 2019), faculty and administrators are faced with the challenge of developing methods to adequately assess student learning in an online environment while maintaining academic honesty.

Another major perceived disadvantage as endorsed by **87%** of the students was that online assessment was plagued by **network issues** as students living in remote areas lost out a lot of valuable exam time while answering online exams. Only **20%** of students perceived uploading of papers as a major disadvantage of online assessment as many assessment methods do not require **uploading of answer sheets**.
Invasion of privacy was perceived as a disadvantage by **82%** of respondents, as many online assessment methods required the switching on of videos which could be an invasion of privacy for the respondents.

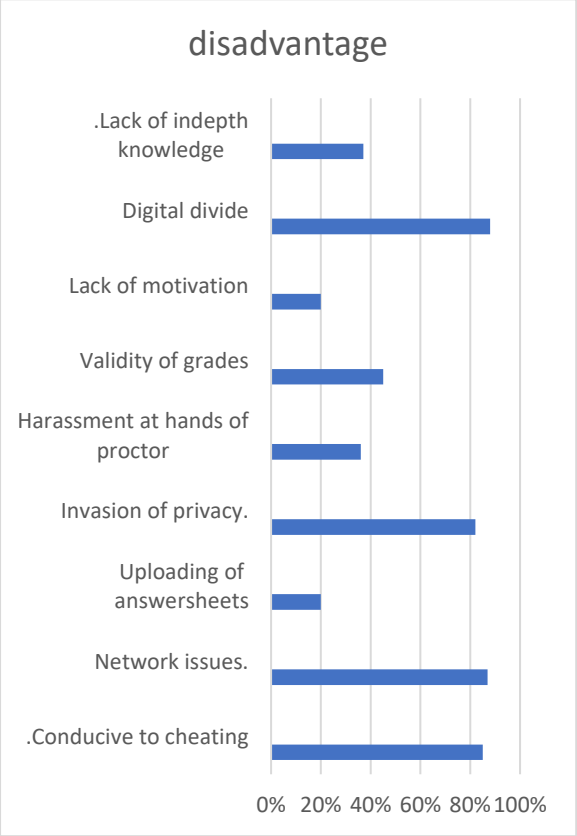
As regards perception of being subjected **to harassment by the proctor, 36%** of students vouched for the same. Again, it may be that certain online assessment interfaces do not allow direct interaction between students and supervisor hence were not perceived as a major disadvantage.

The important perceived disadvantage of **Employers not regarding grades obtained in online assessment as valid** was endorsed by **45%** of the students. This maybe because institutes aacross the globe switched to online assessment during covid pandemic. Hence these were the only grades available and hence were considered as valid.
The perceived disadvantage of online assessment resulting in **lack of motivation** to study was endorsed by only **20%** of students. A large percentage of students **88%** perceived that **digital divide** impacted performance in online assessment.

Table 3: Shows the total number and percentage of students who endorsed a perceived disadvantage

Disadvantage	Total students giving a rating of 4 or 5	Percentage
1. conducive to cheating.	170	85%
2. network issues.	174	87%
3. uploading of answer sheets	40	20%
4. Invasion of privacy.	165	82%
5. harassment at hands of proctor	72	36%
6.validity of grades	90	45%
7.lack of motivation	40	20%
8.digital divide	176	88%
9.lack of in-depth knowledge	75	37%

Fig 2: Shows the percentage of students endorsing a particular perceived disadvantage.



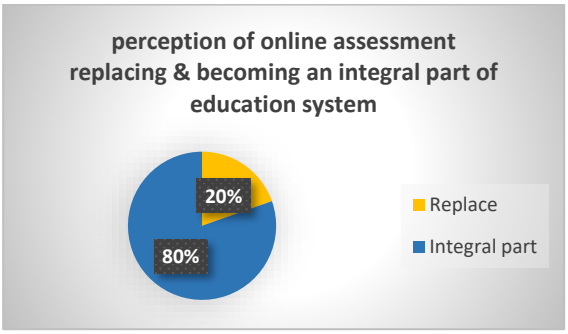
Thus, the main perceived disadvantages regarding online assessment among Indian students as found by the survey, are that online assessments are conducive to cheating, are hindered by network issues, lead to invasion of privacy and are impacted by the digital divide.

The next category of questions referred to whether online assessment should replace offline assessment and whether online assessment should be made an integral part of education. Results indicated that the perceived advantage of whether online assessment should replace offline assessment was endorsed by only 20% of respondents, whereas whether online assessment should be made an integral part of assessment was accepted by 80% of the students

Table 4: Shows the total number and percentage of students who endorsed perception regarding integration of online assessment in education.

Perception regarding online offline assessment	Total students giving a rating of 4 or 5	Percentage
Online assessment to replace offline assessment	40	20%
Online assessment to be an integral part of education system	160	80%

Fig 3: Shows the percentage of students who endorsed perception regarding integration of online assessment in education



The perceived advantage of whether online assessment should replace offline assessment was endorsed by only 20% of respondents whereas whether online assessment should be made an integral part of assessment was accepted by 80% of the students

Conclusion

The most important stake holders involved in online assessment are the students. Therefore, before designing or implementing online assessments, the perception of students regarding it needs to be investigated. Though

the results of the present study indicate that many students are open to having online assessment as an integral part of the education system, they do have their perceived advantages and disadvantages. Overall, they have positive perceptions regarding online assessment based on psychological and practical aspects. But when it comes to perceived disadvantages, copying, network issues, invasion of privacy and digital divide seem to be the main concerns which need to be addressed before implementing online assessment methods.

To do away with copying, multiple question sets, shuffling of questions so that no two students get the same paper, more emphasis upon applied knowledge rather than rote learning could help to a certain extent. As regards network issues educational institutes should invest in an excellent internet provider so as to aid students during assessment. To do away with the question of privacy, either students should be asked to give take online exams from within the Institution or a default background for all students could be made mandatory. To bridge the digital divide, sponsorship programmes, providing gadgets to needy students, providing them gadgets within the premises, special coaching for the use of technology for all students should be encouraged.

To conclude technology has become an integral part of education with students' perception also being optimistic towards it. Hence educational institutes should enhance effectiveness of technology by understanding student perception and implementing changes to enhance perceived advantages of online assessment.

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Inequalities in the Digital Age: A Case Study of Education Digitalization in India, amid COVID Era

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Abstract:

Digitalization is not a new phenomenon, but the COVID-19 epidemic has driven the globe to a point where digital technologies and access to the internet are required to survive. This epidemic not only affects people physically, but it also has a mental influence and changes people's lives dramatically. The use of the internet and digital technology has undoubtedly increased. Closing schools has had a significant impact on the quality and quantity of education in schools, colleges, and universities. Technology's enabling and equalizing impacts are well known, but it also poses a slew of obstacles for impoverished sections of society such as rural-tribal populations and India's massive urban slum populations. The paper will explore the plethora of work and literature on the digitization of education as well as the challenges faced by the education system in India on the one hand and the severe inequalities created by the digitalization of education on the other hand.

Keywords: Digitalization of Education, digital Inequalities, Digital Divide, Cultural Capital, Epidemic.

Introduction:

Digitization is a transformative feature of our life, repositioning the world with new technology, tools, applications, and so on. Digital technologies highly influence our personal and social lives and our civilization is continuously being shaped by new developments since late sixties and early seventies. Digitalization and information and communication technology advancements are alluring, and they affect and impact people's daily lives. However, the revolution of digitization has also had an adverse influence on society's institutions and agencies. In the beginning, many theorists and thinkers looked at the digital era from a developmental and modern perspective but there were few thinkers who were still skeptical and critical about the impact that it will have on society in general, but the working class in particular. In 1954, French sociologist Jacques Ellul had warned that new technologies offered unprecedented opportunities for social control that were scarcely compatible with, if not antagonistic to, democratic governance (Ellul 1967). Digitalization in itself has a discourse. A number of concepts such as the notion of 'digital capitalism' by Daniel Schiller (1999), discussion on digital epistemology by Colin Lankshear, or the concept of 'digital literacy' by Gilster Paul (1997), to name a few, have been advanced in digital era.

The integration of the education system with digitalization is needed, though this integration has led to new challenges not only for the government but also the whole education system. The learning and teaching systems are changing with new pedagogy, methods, and tools which are affecting children and adolescents. Due to restricted physical movement and activity during Covid 19 era, not

only the education sector, but also other sectors started operating in sync with the needs of the digital environment. The methods and pedagogy of teaching and learning has changed with digital tools. The whole digital education era emerged with new concepts like digital literacy, digital tools, digital divide, blended learning, mobile learning, online learning, digital citizenship, e-learning, etc. This paper will explore the plethora of work and literature on the digitization of education as well as the challenges faced by the education system in its attempts to digitize education.

Digitization of Education

We are familiar with the concept of digital technology or digitalization; yet, the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on digitalization and digital technology in many sectors, notably education. Generally, digital technology for education is defined any any process where the teacher or learner uses digital equipment such as a personal computer, a laptop, tablet, MP3 player, or console to access digital tools such as learning platforms and virtual learning environments (VLEs) to improve their knowledge and skills (Islam. & Jaha, 2018). Technology is exciting and revolutionizing the educational system, making it easier and less expensive, with increased affordability and accessibility for individuals. Students can better understand concepts and clear their doubts with the use of various technologies, tools, and applications. These technologies are extremely important in a person's sociopolitical existence. Digitalization has a revolutionary component to it, attracting the globe to use digital technology more and more, and individuals to become more reliant on it.

The digitization of education has had a significant positive impact throughout the world, but as we all know, every coin has two sides, and the digitization of education is no exception. On the one hand, digitalization changed and revolutionized education, allowing students to engage in a range of learning modalities while simultaneously emphasizing the value of new ideas and knowledge. On the other hand, digitalized education generates digital inequalities, or as we call it now a "digital divide," between pupils from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Before delving into the digital age's inequalities, it's necessary to first grasp the two important concepts around the digitalization of education. In his 1997 book "Digital Literacy," Paul Gilster coined the term "digital literacy," defining it as "the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats gathered from a wide variety of sources when presented via computers" (Gilster 1997, 1-2). Digital literacy is nothing but something in which a person has the digital skills to use and understand information and knowledge. The second most popular term is "digital divide," in general highlighting the disparities and gaps between people who have access to the internet, digital tools and other forms of information and communication technology and those who do not.

Educational Digital Inequalities in India

As a result of the pandemic, the educational system is shifting towards distance learning and remote learning. The use of technological tools and reliance on digitalization of education increased as a result of this distance learning. No doubt, this digitalization of education has a positive impact on society but also generates numerous inequalities among pupils, especially for those who belong to the marginalized sections of society. Papert (1990), who problematized the impact of new technologies in education, defines techno-centrism in education as ‘the fallacy of referring all questions to the technology’, his criticism gave the tendency to think about education from a different point of view. Digital inequality refers to differences in the material, cultural and cognitive resources required to make good use of ICT. Traditionally, research on digital inequality has focused on differences in physical access to and possession of ICT tools, while emphasizing that access is only one of the

many factors required to make good use of technology (OECD, 2015, p. 125). In terms of access to digital tools and technology, digitalization creates a hierarchy among humans. While studying digital inequalities, this study found how region, class and gender intersect in different ways to produce disabling experiences for those on the margins in terms of their access to digital technologies.

Regional Inequalities: Inequalities in education are exacerbated by "regional disparity." Geographic inequality in educational achievements has expanded day by day. The rural and tribal population has suffered tremendously, not only in the educational sector but also in other areas, and the pandemic worsened their situation. They were already dealing with a variety of issues and after COVID-19, numerous new inequalities have been added. When it comes to Online Education or E-Learning, the rural population lacks basic amenities such as high-speed internet, reliable power, and technological gadgets. In rural India, as per the report on national sample survey 2017-18, less than 15% of households have access to the internet; however, this percentage drops to as low as 9% in scheduled tribes (ST) homes (NSS 2017-18, p 47). Several students in the 34 tribal communities in Anaimalai Hills of the Western Ghats had essentially no formal education because schools were closed for over 1.5 years. Even in the few settlements that have access to electricity, there have been difficulties with mobile phone networks. It was widely reported that students took online classes by the side of the road to improve cellphone connectivity while surviving the rain and cold. (Sruti, 2021). As a result of disruptions in schooling or a lack of access to digital resources for education, students from tribal communities migrated to the informal labour market. Sengupta (2022) explored and empirically studied adolescent tribal girls migrating to the construction sector of Surat in search of work. The tribal-rural education system as a whole has improved, but they are still grappling with the concept of digitization of education, online classrooms, e-learning, and so on.

Not just the rural and tribal population, but even the urban slum population lacks access to the internet and digital technologies. These students are deprived of educational surroundings, digital tools, and internet connectivity on the one hand, and if they do have access to these things, they lack the abilities to use them for educational purposes on the other. According to 2017-18 National Sample Survey report, only 42 percent of Indian households had internet access in urban households. A recent news report stated only 12.5 percent of students had access to smartphones. (Mukhopadhyay 2020). They are familiar with smart phones and the internet, but they lack the knowledge to use them for educational purpose.

Lower income groups of the society such as urban slums, a marginalized and stratified segment of society such as rural and tribal population, is deprived or deficient in certain cultural assertions, especially the lack of digital technology which accounts for low educational attainment and educational failure. Cultural capital is linked to cultural asset in general, and digital tools and technology (such as the internet and mobile phones) in particular. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that the educational system is systematically biased in favor of the culture of dominant social class; it devalues working class (Harlambols & Holborn, 2008). Rural-tribal communities, lower-income groups, and stratified portions of society (such as females, SC, etc.) lack cultural assets such as access to the internet, and other digital tools, which leads to digital educational inequality. This is causing a cultural gap and digital gap between the capitalist and working classes, as well as the different sections of society.

Gender Inequalities: The term “digital gender divide” is frequently used to refer to these types of gender differences in resources and

capabilities to access and effectively utilize ICTs within and between countries, regions, sectors and socio-economic groups (OECD, 2018). Digital gender inequality is about much more than having access to digital tools or internet; it is also about having the skills and abilities to make meaningful or effective use of that access. Gender roles, which are founded on patriarchal culture, directly relate to and shape skills and capacities not only in rural or semi-rural areas, but also in urban ones, which directly hinder girls' education. Girls dropout rate has increased due to the pandemic. As per UNICEF (2020), 11 million girls my not go back to schools due to Covid-19. Due to the lack of access to the digital gadgets as well as socio-cultural factors, the inequalities between men and women have only increased. 16 percent of women had access to mobile internet, compared to 36 percent of men (NSS 2017-18). The internet is frequently viewed as a threat to conventional social order or as dangerous to women and girls. Many women and girls' access to electronics and the internet is controlled or restricted by male (or family/community) gatekeepers. According to the UNICEF data, several rural villages in northern India have outright barred women from using mobile phones. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reports more than 50% of the world's women are offline (ITU 2019). As a result of this pandemic, digitalized education is causing female education to suffer. The female digital illiteracy rate is increasing, which contributes to the digital disparities between males and females. The female digital illiteracy rate is contributing to the digital divide in society. To better grasp the concept of the gender digital divide, the study takes an intersectional approach. Women are disadvantaged and discriminated against not only because of their gender but also because of multiple levels of discrimination, such as race, class, or caste. Discrimination based on gender is always accompanied by other forms of discrimination. In today's society, another layer of discrimination, known as digitalization, has been added to gender discrimination.

Class Inequalities: The digital class hierarchy was constructed by capitalists, or those who own the means of production, in order to maintain a superior social standing. Individuals who own an iPhone, a Mack book, a computer, and internet access are members of the upper-class family and occupy the top of the pyramid. The upper middle class, which occupies the second position in the pyramid, is made up of people who own an Android phone, a laptop, and a computer with decent internet connectivity. The students who have android phones and limited internet access but lack the ability to effectively use them are ranked third last on the pyramid. Individuals who own phones that aren't Android-based hold the last position in the pyramid. Students who live below the poverty line and lack access to digital tools or other digitalization-related resources are excluded from the digitalize class pyramid. With the pandemic has emerged a slew of new educational applications and online courses capturing the attention of half of the world's population. This online education and the digitalization of education has resulted in the creation of two distinct groups known as "subscribers" and "un-subscribers." These apps and online courses create a digital divide among students, between haves and haves not. The cost of subscription is exorbitant, making it unaffordable for those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result of these scenarios, pupils who have cultural and social capital will be able to access higher studies and they come under the digitally literate group, while those who are on the opposite side of the digital divide will find it very difficult to fund higher education or access job opportunities in multinational companies etc. Cultural and social capital play a very crucial role in child education and socialization.

Conclusion:

Digitalization relocates over half of life from offline to online mode. This transformation

generates a number of challenges for individuals in their day-to-day lives. A plethora of literature examines digitalization or technology through a critical perspective. According to Marx, digitalization is created by the capitalist, who owns the means of production for their money-oriented profit. As Marx differentiated between the bourgeoise and the proletariat similarly digitalization leads to the formation of two unequal groups, those of subscribers and non-subscribers. Digitalization, like class hierarchy, creates a digital hierarchy. Digitalization is exclusionary as it creates a new "digital community" and the people who don't have access to the digital tools, internet, etc. are excluded from the digital community directly.

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COVID-19 & HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This is an empirical study investigating the effect of the sudden shift from face-to-face to online distance learning due to COVID-19 lockdown at some of the colleges in Mumbai. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the worldwide education community acknowledging the fact that urgent adoption of an online emergency remote teaching approach was both necessary and inevitable. The purpose of this article is to discuss the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education for which a survey was conducted to collect information. The sample comprised 20 higher secondary stage teachers and 30 students. This article aims at inspiring both researchers and practitioners with regards to future research perspectives on COVID-19 and higher education. In this context, some solution-based proposals were developed for policymakers and higher education professionals.

Keywords: COVID-19, Higher education, Hybrid Model, Lockdown, Policy makers, World Health Organisation

Introduction

The role of education in nation building is immense. Education both in its content and delivery touches every aspect of our lives. COVID-19 has dramatically reshaped the educational landscape worldwide. Millions of learners were affected by educational institution closures due to the pandemic, which resulted in the largest online movement in the history of education. With this sudden shift away from classrooms in many parts of the globe, universities had to rapidly shift to virtual and digital strategies. Many believe that the adoption of online distance learning will persist in the post pandemic era. A new hybrid model of education is expected to emerge, and, given the digital divide, these new shifts could widen the existing gaps in access to education.

While students from privileged backgrounds, supported by their parents and eager and able to learn, could find their way past closed school doors to alternative learning opportunities, those from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down. This crisis has exposed the many inadequacies and inequities in our education systems – from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education, and the supportive environments needed to focus on learning, to the mis-alignment between resources and needs. This study aimed at highlighting the impact of Covid-19 on higher education sector, throwing light on the emerging approaches to higher education and to offer some suggestions for post Covid-19 trends of HEIs.

Impact on higher education

On March 11, 2020 World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Covid-19 as a pandemic. Outbreak of Covid-19 compelled lockdown in every sector including education. Admissions, examinations, entrance tests, competitive

examinations conducted by various boards/schools/colleges/ universities were postponed. Covid-19 accelerated adoption of digital technologies to deliver education. It encouraged all teachers and students to become more technology savvy. The HEIs started conducting orientation programmes, induction meetings and counselling classes with the help of different e-conferencing tools like Google Meet, Skype, YouTube live, Facebook live, WebEx etc. to provide support services to the students. Teachers and students made increasing use of social media like WhatsApp, Google drive, Telegram, Twitter etc for sharing information. They have been sharing important documents with the group members and creating online local repositories as well. Students were advised to submit the scanned copies of the assignments to the institution through email. Institutions also started receiving internship reports and projects through email during the lockdown for Covid

Many institutions managed the internal assessments through online mode using different digital tools but the postponement of the external assessments had a direct impact on the educational and occupational future of students' life. This uncertainty created anxiety among students as they were stuck in the same grade/class. Similarly, many students who had appeared for final/board examinations suffered as there was a delay in procuring certificates leading to delays in applying to institutes of higher learning. It posed problems in terms of financial requirements as tuition fees/costs were rising at alarmingly high rates. Access to technology was limited as most of the students come from poor families and lived in country side.

Employment opportunities were impacted. Many entrance tests for job recruitments got cancelled. Fresh graduates feared withdrawal of job offers or no recruitment from corporate sectors because of the pandemic situation.

So far as impact on research goes the impact was mixed. If we take the negative side, it disabled visits to the research site for researchers. Some scientific laboratory testing/research work could not be conducted. If we look at the positive side, academicians got time to improve their theoretical research work. Academicians got acquainted with technological methods and improved their research. Webinars and e-conferences became normal methods for sharing expertise among students and academicians around the globe.

Despite the challenges, HEI's responded positively and adopted various strategies to face the crisis during the pandemic. The MHRD and University Grants Commission (UGC) launched virtual platforms with online depositories, e-books and other online teaching/learning materials, educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for students to continue their learning. Some of the digital initiatives of UGC & MHRD for higher education include (MHRD 2020)

e-GyanKosh

(http://egyankosh.ac.in/) is a National Digital Repository to store and share the digital learning resources which is developed by the Open and Distance Learning Institutions of India. Items in eGyanKosh are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). (MHRD 2020)

Gyandarshan

(http://www.ignouonline.ac.in/gyandarshan/) is a webbased TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs for Open and Distance Learner. A web-based TV channel devoted to educational and developmental needs of the society. (MHRD 2020)

Swayam

Swayam provides Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) with 140 universities approved credit transfer feature. Swayam Prabha provides high quality educational

programs through 32 DTH channels transmitting educational contents. e-PG Pathshala (https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/) is for postgraduate students. Postgraduate students can access this platform for e-books, online courses and study materials. The details of these three digital plat forms are described by the author in the previous paper. (UGC 2020)

e-Pathya

e-Pathya (Offline Access) is one the verticals of e-PG Pathshala which is software driven course/content package that facilitates students pursuing higher education (PG level) in distance learning as well as campus learning mode. It also facilitates offline access. (MHRD 2020)

National Digital Library of India (NDLI) (https://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/) is a repository of e-content on multiple disciplines for all kinds of users like students (of all levels), teachers, researchers, librarians, library users, professionals, differently-abled users and all other lifelong learners. It is designed to help students to prepare for entrance and competitive examinations, to enable people to learn and prepare from best practices from all over the world and to facilitate researchers to perform inter-linked exploration from multiple sources. It is a virtual repository of learning resources with a single-window search facility. (UGC 2020)

e-Yantra

(https://www.e-yantra.org/) provides hands on experience on embedded systems. It has about 380 Lab and made 2300+ colleges benefited. (MHRD 2020)

FOSSEE

(https://fossee.in/) is short form for Free/Libre and Open-Source Software for Education, which is developed to promote open-source software for education as well as professional use. (UGC 2020)

Virtual Labs

(http://www.vlab.co.in/) has developed web-enabled curriculum-based experiments designed for remote operation. It has over 100 Virtual Labs consisting of approximately 700+ web-enabled experiments which are designed for remote-operation. It provides remote-access to Labs in various disciplines of Science and Engineering. These Virtual Labs caters to students at the undergraduate level, post graduate level as well as to research scholars. (UGC 2020)

Shodhganga

(https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/) is a platform for research students to deposit their Ph.D. theses and make them available to the entire scholarly community in open access. The repository has the ability to capture, index, store, disseminate and preserve Electronic Theses and Dissertations submitted by the researchers. (UGC 2020)

SAKSHAT

(https://sakshat.ac.in/) is one Stop Education Portal for addressing all the education and learning related needs of students, scholars, teachers and lifelong learners. The portal provides the latest news, press releases, achievements etc related to Ministry of HRD. So one can visit SAKSHAT to know the world of online learning. (MHRD 2020)

A note on methodology

In order to gauge the nature of impact of the pandemic on education a survey was undertaken in September-October 2021. Questionnaires were distributed to collect data from a random sample of 50 respondents comprising 20 teachers and 30 students in the colleges of South Mumbai. Secondary information was collected from different authentic websites, journals and e- contents relating to impact of Covid-19 on higher educational system of India. Though the pandemic presented numerous challenges, it also enabled new ways of teaching and learning as the findings suggest.

Findings

Teachers' preparedness to support digital learning:

Teachers reported high need for training in the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). Younger teachers around 55% use technology more frequently in the classroom. This is even more important in the current context, where the COVID-19 health crisis has pushed teachers to adapt very quickly, especially in countries where they do not necessarily have the pedagogical and technical skills to integrate digital tools into learning.

Class size, a critical parameter for the reopening of schools & higher education institutions:

Teachers felt that re-opening would largely depend on how well the educational institutes could implement social distancing measures. Ensuring a minimum safety distance between pupils and staff will depend on many factors such as classroom size, room availability, and the number of students per class. To ensure all students have the opportunity to benefit from face- to-face teaching in a context of reduced class sizes, Schools & HEIs were organizing shifts to accommodate students throughout the day even when they could not accommodate them all on site.

Student Attendance may slow down:

An overwhelming majority (87 %) felt that parents may be reluctant to send their children back to schools/colleges after the end of lockdown. Some poor family parents who have lost their livelihood during the pandemic may not be able to afford the expenditure to send their children to institutions. This may lead to home education for another few months.

National and International student mobility for higher studies may be reduced

Half of the respondents (50%) were of the opinion that student safety and well- being issues are important deciding factors for students and their parents for movement to international institutions for higher study. Most of the parents will therefore prefer to find workable alternatives closer to their home. Many international universities were delivering all educational activities online. Many international conferences in higher education were cancelled or turned into a series of webinars. So, the national and international student movement was diminished.

Learning with social distancing may continue

All will maintain social distancing and avoid warm handshake, hug, personal greeting, and intimacy for a long time. Invisible restrictions may constrain the fun & joy of campus life. Sports, Gyms, tournaments may be in low gear for a longer period resulting in less physical activities of students as pointed out by 65% of student's respondents.

Educational institutions may run with different shifts per day

The need for social distancing may imply lesser students in each class. So, most of the educational institutions may work in different shifts per day which may put more pressure on the teaching and administrative staff of the institution to manage.

Teaching learning may run with technology

More and more students will depend on technology and digital solutions for teaching learning, entertainment and connecting themselves with the outside world. Students will use internet technology to communicate virtually with their teachers and fellow learners through E-mail, WhatsApp, Videoconference, Instant message, webinar or any other tool.

May widen the gap between privileged and under privileged students

Learners from low-income families and disadvantaged groups are more likely to suffer as they may not afford high-speed internet connection and required technical gadgets for online learning. It will widen the gap between privileged and under privileged learners creating inequality.

Assessment system may change

Artificial Intelligence (AI) may help teachers to deal with assessment, evaluation, preparing mark-sheets and monitoring the performance of each student easily. AI may use digital platform extensively to reduce burden of examiners in handling examination and evaluation systems.

Student debt crisis may rise

In India, lots of students or their parents take education loans for higher education. If the employment market does not pick up, student debt crises may rise and create serious issue. Students may face increased stress, anxiety and depression due to their student loans as expressed by 77% of the respondents.

Demand for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and online learning may grow:

Covid-19 has forced the human society to maintain social distancing. It has created more challenges to continue teaching learning by maintaining social distancing. To meet these challenges there is more demand for ODL and online modes of education and the same trend may continue in future also.

Recommendations/Suggestions

Immediate measures are required to lessen the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs, and research projects. If the pandemic Covid-19 continues, new approaches for academic assessment should be adopted by educational institutions. Academic assessment of the students may be done through online mode or through quizzes and small projects. Educators and learners should be trained to utilise online teaching learning process using technology. Policies should be adopted by government/educational institutions to provide free internet and free digital gadgets to all learners in order to encourage online learning as a result of which people would get engaged and remain safe during pandemic. Many online learning platforms offer multiple programmes on the same subjects with different levels of certifications, methodology and assessment parameters. The quality of programmes may differ across different online learning platforms. Therefore, establishment of quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning programmes must be developed and offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India keeping in view of rapid growth of the online learning platforms. Government should support HEIs to strengthen their resources to run virtual educational activities. Students also need to be supported with better access to internet and technology as most students are unable to afford the facilities. WHO has recently pointed out that the Covid-19 may never be eradicated and people will have to live with it. It is important to put this on the table: this virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities, and this virus may never go away. HIV has not gone away, but we have come to terms with the virus. Across the globe, Indian traditional knowledge is well known for its scientific innovations, values and benefits to develop sustainable technologies and medicines and this knowledge systems in different fields should be integrated with a present-day mainstream higher education system.

Conclusion

This study has outlined how the higher education scenario in India has been impacted by Covid-19. The recent pandemic created an opportunity for change in pedagogical approaches and introduction of virtual education in all levels of education. Though we seem to be out of the pandemic, there is a gradual move towards the online/virtual education. UGC and MHRD have launched many virtual platforms with online repositories, e-books and other online teaching/learning materials. Combination of the traditional technologies (radio, TV, landline phones) with mobile/web technologies on a single platform with all repositories would enhance accessibility and flexibility in education. This would involve upgrading the service platform to enable it to meet the required volume of educational demands of students. All service providers need to be mobilized to provide

proper access to the educational service platforms to the disadvantaged groups of population also. The post Covid-19 education seems to be an education with widely accepted online/virtual education which may perhaps be a parallel system of education.

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Challenges to Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic for MYP4 & 5 (Std.9th & 10th) International Baccalaureate (IB) board students

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Abstract:

The present study aimed at examining the challenges and obstacles confronted by middle school (MYP4 and 5) from International Baccalaureate and IB Board studying in Victorious Kidss Educares an IB World school in Pune, Maharashtra, India. The study offers the IB Learners perspective on online education and assesses the feasibility of virtual methods of learning. A survey-based e-questionnaire was used to collect data from 95 learners. The findings point towards technical, academic, and communication challenges in online education during the pandemic. The study results show that most IB learners were not satisfied with online learning, as they could not fulfill the expectations from them in academics.

Keywords: Covid-19 period, Challenges, Virtual Learning, Learning Challenges, Technology, Communication, Teaching (Academic)

Introduction:

The world has witnessed the global outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting all in almost all countries and terrains. The epidemic was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. Many public care strategies were put in place including handwashing, wearing face masks, physical/social distancing, and avoiding mass meetings and get-togethers. Lockdown and stay home strategies were put in place by the government to take precautionary measures to flatten the curve and control the transmission of the disease.

The decision to close educational institutes was taken to ensure social distancing and stop the spread of the disease. While some countries transitioned to online learning with ease since they were already prepared for online learning, in India on the other hand, where most of the schools, colleges and universities used the Blackboard/whiteboard as a tool for physical and distance education the transition to online mode was not easy.

In this research, the author focusses on challenges and obstacles faced by IB students (MYP4 and 5) Std 9 and 10th during the global pandemic and how they might be addressed to pre-empt such possibilities in future. The change of offline to online learning was the only option during COVID-19. Victorious Kidss Educares started online learning on 12th March 2020. They had experience with blended learning before COVID-19 and this facilitated the rapid transition to e-learning during the pandemic. That enabled some faculty members to have good experience in using the Whiteboard and Zam board tool in teaching online. In-house training sessions were organized for those colleagues who were not at ease about using Whiteboard, and Zam board breakouts rooms in online teaching.

This pandemic forced millions of students to study and learn from home in a virtual environment. This is not a new phenomenon because the home has long been epicentre of learning particularly as regards informal education. However, formal education from within the home became a new normal during the pandemic. While we live in post pandemic times, even today, the majority of university/college /Higher secondary students still prefer to study in the comfort of their own homes because the learners tend to have everything at their end without having to leave their chairs. On the other hand, the realities of getting formal education from home might be very challenging to many instructors, learners, and parents especially in developing countries where the convenience, accessibility, availability and use of technology in education are not prevalent. Other factors such as network issues, distractions, poor power supply, poor digital skills, unreachability, and availability can also delay and hinder smooth study from home.

The use of educational technologies, relevant e-learning facilitates with online education, which intend to student-teacher interactions, and relationships are much needed requisite. It enhances teaching and learning experiences, content creation, course sharing, assessments, and feedback. Instructors or teachers can reach and interact with their students from any location, and lectures/sessions can be fixed at any time of convenience. Educators and students can optimize these technologies to enhancement of classroom teachings, and improve their digital skills in line with emerging trends in education. More so, it is clearly visible that technological advanced knowledge of teachers' helps and generate interest, competence, confidence, creativity, employability, and output, in students which can and also prepares them for the future.

Some of the studies conducted across nations to gauge the impact of the pandemic on education point towards challenges in communications, assessment, online , technology tools, time management, anxiety, coronavirus disease stress, non-personalized user interface, lack of communication with peers, privacy for assignments, and lack of reliable internet facilities at home (Quality Education for All during Covid-19, 2022)

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to examine the challenges to teaching and learning during the pandemic especially for IB learners and understand and apply the best methods and modes to engage, motivate, and make the learning visible for learners during Virtual - learning.

Methodology

For this research, the researcher has applied a descriptive design and has collected the data using the e-questionnaire method. The study adopted a survey design. Self-prepared e-questionnaires were administered to 102 respondents that comprised IB MYP4 and 5 students selected from Victorious Kidss Educares. Secondary data was drawn from a reading of newspapers, journals and other reports. Thereafter, factorial analysis was carried out on the collected data using Google form. The Likert scale strongly agrees, agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, and strongly disagree has been used with some Yes/No/Often/regular questions for statistically significant analysis. This e-questionnaire was shared with 102 students. However, out of 102 only 60 students/ participants submitted their responses.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The e-questionnaire had thirty questions to obtain information on 'Challenges to Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Out of 102 e-questionnaires that were circulated, 60 learners filled their responses.

Figure-1
1-Grade

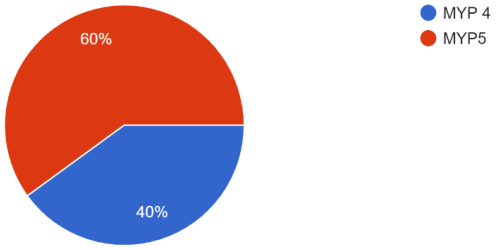


Figure-2
2-. Did you attend online classes?

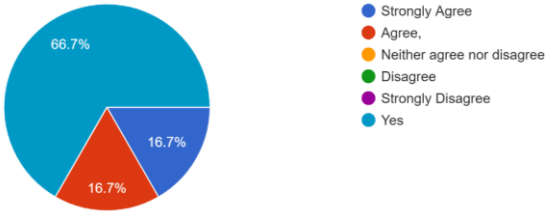


Figure-3
3-Which ICT Device did you use

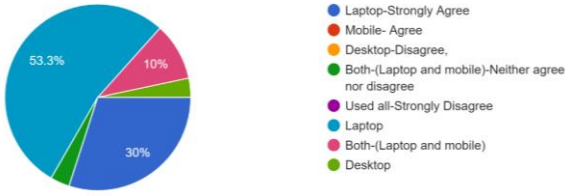


Figure-4
4-Do you think slow internet was one of the hindrances during Covid 19 to interrupting your online learning?

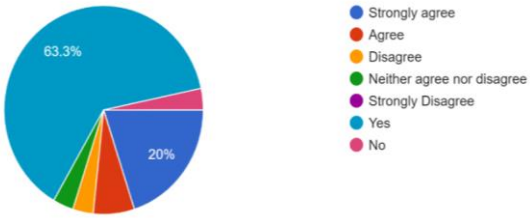


Figure-5
5-Platform used by you during Online classes, Zoom, Google meet, WhatsApp Group, Others

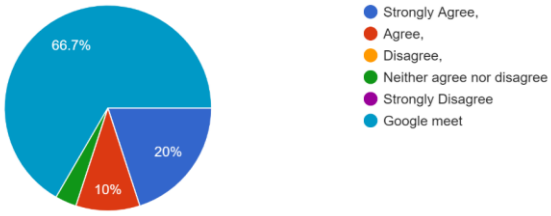


Figure-6-
6-You had a low level of motivation during online classes

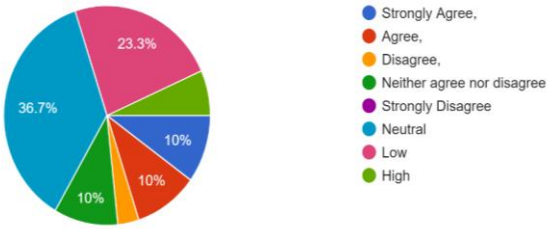


Figure-7
7-You had a low level of interaction with your teachers

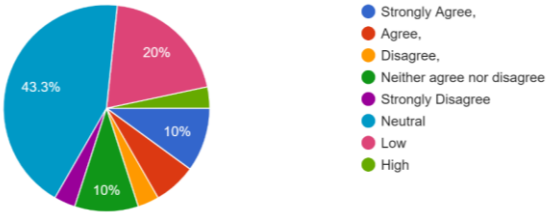


Figure-8
8-You had a low level of Interaction with your peers

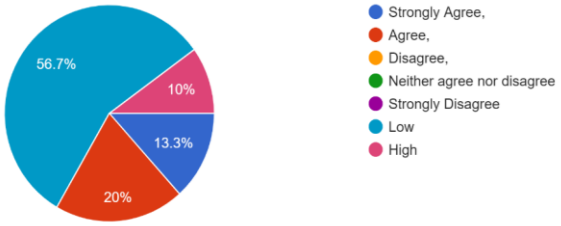


Figure-9
9-You were able to understand content and concept during online classes -at a high level;

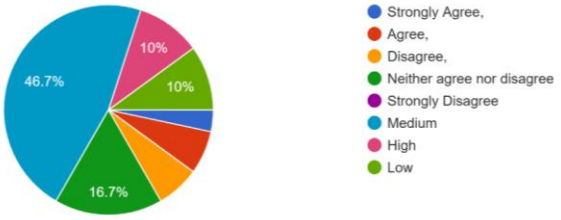


Figure-10
10-You were happy with saving your travel time by attending online classes during Covid 19

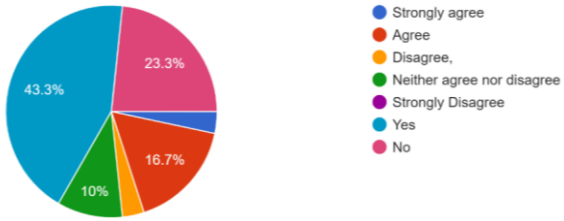


Figure-11
11-Do you think the most convenient mode of classes is Online?

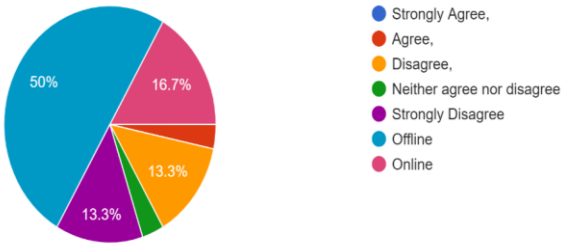


Figure-12
12-Do you agree even during online classes your Learning Outcomes met the subject objectives?

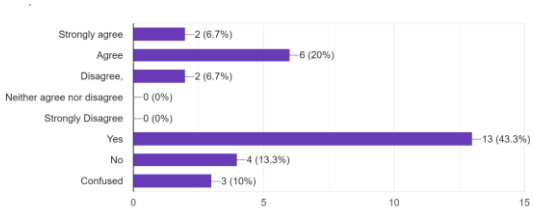


Figure 13
13-Pandemic led to lack of social contact with peers.

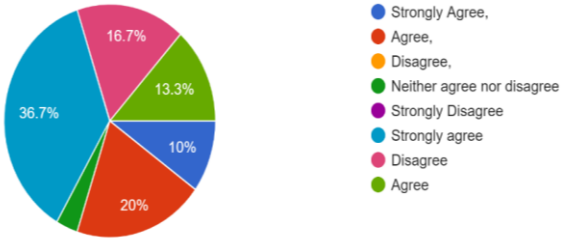


Figure-14
14-Do you agree Online Assessment helped to keep the same quality of evaluation/assessment?

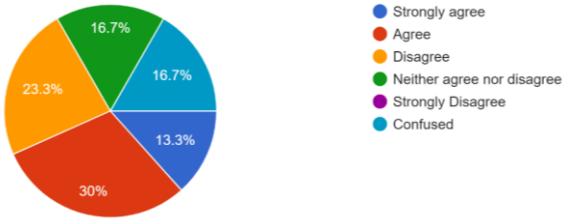


Figure-15
15-Do you think you're learning style was not satisfactory during online classes?

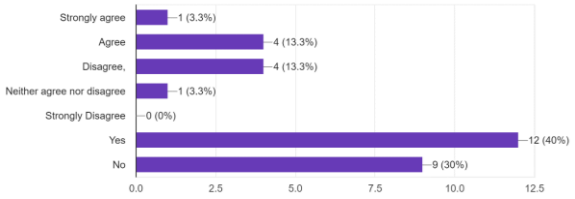


Figure-16
16-Do you agree your cognitive development got interrupted due to Covid-19?

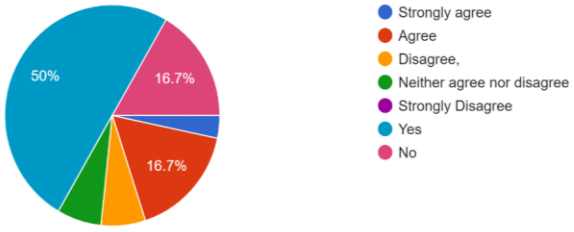


Figure-17
17- Teachers faced lots of challenges during Covid-19 teaching.

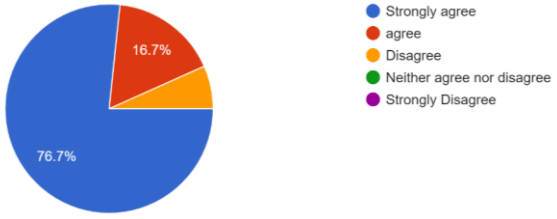


Figure-18
18-Do you agree teachers were not ready with the necessary digital tool to conduct the online classes?

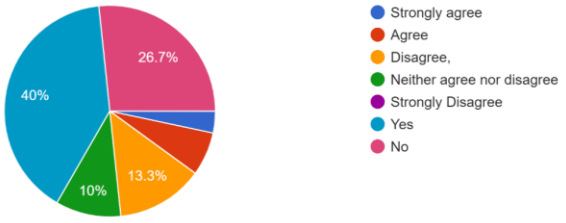


Figure-19
19- All subjects cannot be taught online-such as PHE, Lab work, etc?

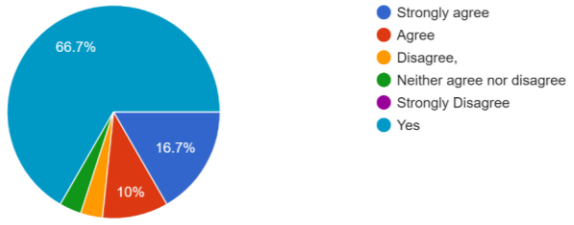


Figure-20

20-Do you think Documentation and monitoring of learning was difficult for teachers and students too?

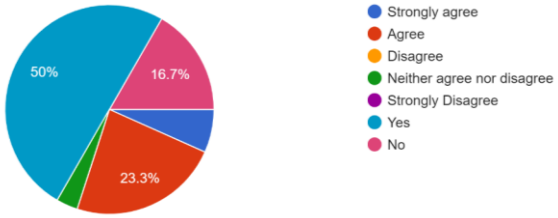


Figure-21
21- Do you agree teachers should be trained to use online software and e-content for effective teaching?

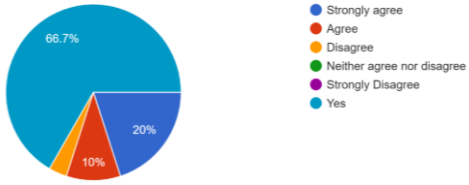


Figure-22
22-Do you agree online learning has impacted your eyesight?

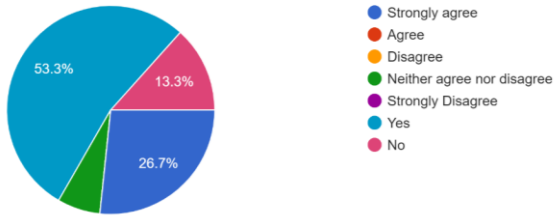


Figure-23
23-Did you experience unpleasant moments with slow internet speeds, uploading materials and files on e-learning systems and downloading them for further use?

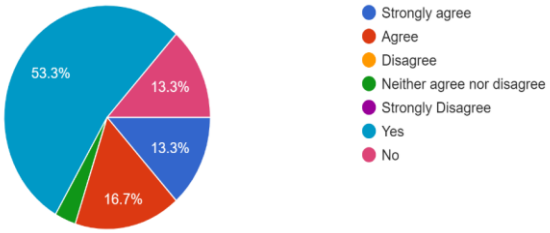
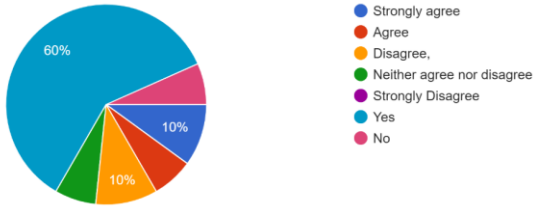


Figure-24
24- Do you agree virtual evaluation faced major challenges, such as the validity and reliability of its results?



6.0 DISCUSSION:

This study confirms the disturbing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and the barriers that hinder students' and instructors' engagements in online education during the COVID-19 lockdown. From the above, one can safely say that due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, educational activities were badly affected. Some of the identified effects include; learning disruption, limited access to learning facilities such as laboratories, unpreparedness in the education sector, increase stress amongst students', unplanned funding for education, research limitations, and loss of learning interests amongst learners. The Coronavirus pandemic created multiple problems for the education sector leading to decreased education opportunities for underprivileged learners and those in rural areas. Poor digital skills, School policies, Digital divide, Poor electricity, Unavailability and accessibility, Network issues, Lack of desired and required training, lack of funding, minimal interactions, social distancing, etc. were the major barriers for online education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amongst them, inadequate facilities, low interaction, and internet problems appeared to be the highest obstacle to online education. More than 50 % of the students agreed that online learning has impacted their eyesight and resulted in low level of peer and teacher interactions.

More than 66% of students strongly agreed that teachers should be trained to use online software and e-content for effective teaching which was the major factor that limited their engagement in online schooling. Similarly, unavailability, accessibility issues, network issues, and poor electricity service, etc. also created lots of problems and challenges for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. The result of the study shows that Coronavirus disrupted educational physical activities too (PHE and Lab work). This is in line with the assertion by (Onyema et al.) that school closure can add stressors to students who are already competing with challenges associated with urban poverty and learning disabilities. The findings also identify the need for technology in education particularly during times of emergencies. 43.3% strongly agreed they had low interaction with their teachers. The level of motivation was also very low. The response for understanding the content was medium at 46.7%. At the same time, students were happy and that they could save their travel time. The integration of emerging technologies in teaching and learning is no longer a choice, but a need for all educators and learners, considering the changing learning environment, demands for flexibility in methodology, and the need to enhance creativity and prepare our learners to adapt to 21th century innovative learning.

CONCLUSION

Coronavirus -19 pandemic has impacted all of us with an adverse effect particularly on education. COVID-19 has major effects on school education, including teaching, learning, research, academic programs, Staff professional development and jobs in the academic sector, etc. The roles of learners in physical classroom settings are often defined as teachers teaching and students learning. But in virtual/online settings, many students may not have an understanding of some specific concepts and at the same time, they are not able to express and inform their facilitator. In the classroom, teachers can better understand student queries. During virtual learning,

students were not able to get the support and learning they need.

Thus, the study acknowledges that the challenges should not force us to decide to shut down schools for Coronavirus across the world, but rather adopt new ways of teaching and learning with a more effective platform to continue education at the same pace and quality. The unprecedented school closures for Coronavirus remain a lesson and a warning to the entire educational community particularly those who are yet to embrace or adopt emerging learning technologies that support online or remote education. Stakeholders in the education sector have to develop robust strategies to deal with the post-Coronavirus era.

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Mapping the Dialogic Gap in Remote Learning Sessions

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Abstract:

Covid-19 and the subsequent global lockdown changed the way we perceive the world of work, the nature of communication and human connections. In the current age of technology arts and humanities have been placing increasing pressure to account for their worth, particularly from means-ends rationality and are often unfairly pitched in opposition to science and technology. This study assesses the dialogic deficit as a major outcome of teaching literature in remote learning sessions during a pandemic crisis. It surveys the theorization on dialogic teaching and learning, situate the idea of dialogism within the pedagogical tools of the discussion method and its visible decline in the remote learning sessions and some of the takeaways from this study as a preparation for future learning sessions which will be hybrid.

Keywords: Communication, Pedagogy, Remote Learning, Dialogic Teaching and Learning

Vashti was seized with the terrors of direct experience. She shrank back into the room and the wall closed up again.
E.M. Forster. *The Machine Stops.*

E.M. Forster's short story *The Machine Stops* written over a century ago seems prescient in anticipating the normalization of human isolation and the insidious hold of technology over human technology over human existence. In 1996 Manuel Castells in his ground breaking work in *The Rise of the Network Society* alerted about the new emerging social systems connected by information technology. In 2020 Covid -19 and the subsequent global lockdown changed the way we would perceive the nature of communication and pedagogy, the world of work and consequently human relations itself. While remote learning platforms sustained the learning cycles of the student community it became evident that numerous learning gaps grew incrementally with every passing year. This study investigates remote learning and its impact on the manner of engagement of students of a BA program with the dialogic nature of a literature course. I attempt to do so by first elucidating the idea of dialogic learning. I then situate the idea of dialogism within the pedagogical tools of the discussion method and its efficacy in the remote learning literature sessions based on my observation as an instructor as well as course feedback from a sample group of students who were the first batch of students to engage with remote learning. Finally, with the imminence of hybrid learning platforms, I share my takeaways from this study.

Learning practices from ancient civilizations show robust practices of debate and dialogue embedded within it. The interest in dialogic processes was revived by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) whose key concepts of human discourse and heteroglossia explored the dialogic and monologic nature of literature. Dialogic practices according to Bakhtin involve communication with multiple works and inform

and are continually informed by previous work. Therefore, all language or even thought processes appear dialogical. With this dynamism, language is relational and engaged in a continuous redescription of the world. Dialogic learning, therefore, is centred on polyvocality which indicates the power of many voices and emerges out of an egalitarian dialogue. It is based on claims drawn on terms of equality and not on power claims. A significant addition to understanding the importance of the dialogical process within pedagogy was made by Paulo Freire. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) Freire challenged the idea of a student being perceived as an empty repository rather than a piggy bank that needed to be filled in with knowledge. The danger with such a banking model of learning lay in the perception of students being reduced to passive listeners and blindsided by power dynamics within the learning environment. Freire posits the idea of dialogue as an understanding between different sets of people and an act of love, humility and faith. The student benefits from dialogical learning that accentuates unity, compassion, organization and cultural synthesis.

The theories of Bakhtin and Freire on the dialogical process have resonated within the scholarship of subsequent scholars working on a nuanced understanding of a dialogical stance within pedagogy. Dialogical teaching strategies are accepted practices to model and support cognitive activity, inquiry and solidarity within classrooms (Boyd &Markarian,2015). Explorations into dialogic instructional stance investigate patterns of talk (Chinn, Anderson, Waggoner, 2001; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur & Prendergast, 1997; Wells, 1993); agenda setting within pedagogical interactions (Aukerman, 2013; Boyd & Gala, 2011) and how ideas are applied into discourse (Boyd & Rubin 2006). The findings have been critical in ascertaining how instructors and students perceive knowledge and whether it is viewed as something to be deposited and consumed or as contextual anchoring for thinking and learning (Boyd & Markarian, 2015). A dialogic stance adopted by a teacher involves an ability to listen, lead and follow as well as respond concerning the deployment of various guided strategies to encourage analytical thinking among students (Alexander 2010; Burbules 1993). The existing scholarship leans in to suggest that dialogic teaching and learning "engages multiple voices and perspectives across time," and are related to communal and epistemic functions than interactional form (Boyd & Markarian, 2015).

The Discussion Method has great potential in furthering the dialogic function in pedagogical practices. In its open and participatory form as Gage and Berliner state includes the ability to listen to others, to evaluate their arguments to formulate one's views as core precepts in the Discussion method (1975). These particularly translate into learning to understand opposing viewpoints, nurture independent thinking, formulate cohesive arguments, how embrace nuance and integrate ideas from disparate perspectives and disciplines. It can be extremely versatile in classroom teaching yet Meredith Gall and Maxwell Gillett (1980)believe its potential has not been realized as teachers and students have not received proper training and encouragement in its use. The significant trait that signifies the Discussion method is its emphasis on speaking, nonverbal and listening processes. The conventional classroom is often focused on reading and writing modalities. Speaking, observing and listening skills often get side-lined due to either student reticence or teacher hesitancy about implementing the method (Gall & Gillet, 1980). As an aspect of dialogic teaching and learning the discussion method can be sustained in safe and predictable learning contexts. This paper, therefore, examines how the altered context within which discussions take place can impact the nature and quality of dialogic interactions within a classroom space.

The global lockdown starting in March 2020 severely impacted academic spaces with campuses closing down and students being asked to shelter in space. Physical learning environments turned to digital remote learning platforms to restore a continuum in academic calendars. My Literature sessions during three semesters of online teaching were witness to considerable transformation due to the altered environment. In normal times a dialogic learning space for Literature sessions entails parameters that involve focus, learner background knowledge, emphasis on understanding and learner-learner interface. Sessions within a physical classroom are vital as they build on a transdisciplinary nature, its rootedness in human experience, it's capacity to empower, and create solidarity and its significant focus on aesthetics. My survey, of course feedback and comments received on my designated WhatsApp groups for the Literature classes, indicated a significant shift in the dialogic nature within the remote learning sessions. Responses from the first batch of students who started with remote learning sessions from the first Semester demonstrated the impact of the absence of significant scaffolding techniques such as the physicality of books, writing strategies in the pen and paper method and sharing work in a space of trust in a classroom.

At the end of the fourth semester of the BA programme, students of the Literature course were asked to provide feedback on their experience of engaging with the subject. Google form links were provided to facilitate the responses from students. The students had spent a majority of their undergraduate years sheltering at home. Their orientation to literary texts, reading strategies, introduction to literary concepts and interactions had been restricted to the digital platform. Examination for every semester transitioned into a multiple choice-based questions instead of the discursive and analytical essays. In the data gleaned from the survey, 64.7 per cent of the respondents acknowledged the scope for raising questions and sustaining a discussion in the online Literature class in all four semesters while 55.9% acknowledged that there was adequate time to process the content and contribute to the discussion. While the online sessions aimed at simulating as much as the classroom space only 17.6% of the respondents felt comfortable in enabling audio and video options while discussing or responding in online sessions. According to the respondents' connectivity issues, distracting home environment, anxieties of being judged and the presence of large numbers of participants became significant barriers to contributing to the discussion in the Literature class. Connectivity issues (35.3%) and fear of being judged (32.4%) were the two significant factors limiting discussion. Despite time and opportunities within the remote learning Literature sessions, only 8.8% contributed actively to classroom interactions every Semester. Almost 52.9% contributed less than five times in initiating or participating in a discussion in a semester. Only 35.3% of the respondents felt that the online sessions had been useful in enhancing the advanced academic writing skills required for their coursework. In addition, the survey also had a scope for qualitative responses that compared online and offline learning sessions. Respondents gave decisive approval of curriculum enrichment provided through visually enhanced learning inputs primarily PowerPoint presentations, documentaries and webinars. However, there was an overwhelming acknowledgement based on their experiences once the campus sessions resumed, that classroom discussions on campus were more engaging, enriching and involved more active listening. Turn-taking skills in discussions and ideas of empathy and solidarity were attributed more to a campus environment than an interaction on an online platform. The respondents who voted in favour of online sessions did so primarily from the point of view of avoiding the strain of a peak hour commute, the early morning schedule of sessions and the ease of access to a learning session within the sheltering space. As one respondent articulated

"Online sessions feel more like an individual experience, while offline classes feel like collective experiences".

As the course instructor for this batch of online students, my analysis of the feedback revealed significant transformations in the learning environment and its impact on students' ability to view teaching and learning spaces. The asymmetries of digital access were brought into sharp relief as students struggled to join in the scheduled sessions. The fear of missing out was indeed a tangible barrier in discussion with the ever-present threat of being 'logged out'. The information overload with a surfeit of digitized resource material provided very little processing time for students. This became a challenge for the Literature course as rigid breakout room scheduling left little room for a slower and more reflexive contemplation of texts. With an increase in screen time, there was a gradual transition of students into passive listeners, particularly in the absence of non-verbal cues from their peers within the session. Writing skills which conventionally develop incrementally through classroom and tutorial sessions were also impacted. The scaffolding strategies that would normally support and motivate entry-level undergraduate students into advanced reading skills and writing effectively could not be duplicated effectively in the remote learning sessions. The presence of a large number of unfamiliar peers in a video-disabled environment also proved to be a barrier to contributing to discussions. I have found value in introducing fish bowl conversations in remote learning sessions. These have tried to create solidarity and peer support within certain sessions but their efficacy is also dependent on a smaller class strength.

By 2022 work and learning environments limp back to what they were before March 2020. However, futurists predict that zoonotic diseases and problems caused by climate change are here to stay. Hybrid and remote work platforms despite their inherent drawbacks will continue and evolve in a parallel operational mode to ensure flexible communication and training operations. It, therefore, becomes imperative to stay resilient for future disruptions as well as ensure that dialogic deficit does not plague our pedagogical goals. This study of a sample group of graduating students has revealed some immediate areas where these loopholes need a course correction. Digital competencies will be a must and these entry-level requirements need to be combined in a learner-supportive infrastructural enhancement. Longer screen time does not necessarily add to a coherent meaningful understanding of the world. Historians like Yuval Noah Harari reiterate the advice of pedagogical experts to switch to the teaching of the four Cs- critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity and the ability to deal with change (Harari, 2018). Much of these dovetails with the core values of a dialogical Literature class. The learning outcomes still evolve and should not be forgotten as we resume classroom interactions and restore the dialogic nature of our courses. The only way to address the dialogic gap is as Marilyn Cooper (1994) suggests that in order to commit to a dialogic theory of learning we have to go beyond understanding of knowledge as a product of disciplinary inquiry and as a monolithic system of ideas. The scope to draw on different perspectives and a more responsive and open relationship between a discourse and its user is vital (Cooper, 1994). The complexities of our lives will continue to leave us with more questions than answers. However, taking a cue from E.M. Forster, the way forward for humanity is "Only Connect".

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A Study of Selected Poems written in Times of Uncertainty; Resilience of Human Spirit

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Abstract:

Wars, Plagues, Emergencies and Disasters have existed throughout the history of humanity, with each event revealing the indomitable spirit of human nature. Times of crises are reflected and exemplified in the literature written during that period of time. The present day is no different, as Covid-19 roots its branches into our world, we pen down how it feels to be under its shadow. In the face of life-changing events, people find different ways of coping. Poetry has always remained an important form of catharsis and in this paper, the researchers have explored selected pieces of poetry written in response to catastrophic events. Whether it's the uncertainty of a nation finding actual independence after years of partition or the uncertainty of finding a plausible future in a worldwide pandemic, the researchers have studied these pieces as well as the secondary literature associated with it. Through this paper, the effort has been to show that uncertainties continue to exist in history while humans, in their attempts to cope with the uncertainty, strive to find meaning, even in the darkest and bleakest of times by creating pieces of abiding Art.

Keywords: uncertainty, resilience, catastrophe, art, meaning

Introduction:

Humanity has periodically been linked with phases of uncertainty. History has always been beset with life-changing events, some of which have been catastrophic. The evolution of human civilizations, the pathways tread upon and the pathways eschewed, have directly and indirectly resulted from these catastrophes. It has also shaped one's ability to adapt and cope with these surroundings and changes. Major events such as wars, pandemics, national emergencies, widespread riots may be borne by forces outside us but they create conflict and chaos within. The war outside creates a war within. These uncertainties make us anxious and apprehensive for the future and what it holds.

It is in such scenarios that literature rises to the occasion. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Times of uncertainty witness an overflow of creativity and expression in the form of Art and Literature. Feelings of despair, courage, hope, resilience are all expressed in these writings, serving as a piece of history to go back to during testing times, making such literature timeless.

Giovanni Bocaccio's "The Decameron" was written in the year 1348, as a reaction to the aggressive epidemic spread of the Yersina Pestis bacteria and completed by 1353. The devastation and catastrophe caused by the First World War resulted in the outpouring of a number of poems, prose pieces and plays. T.S Eliot's "The Wasteland", published in the year

1922, accurately represents the post-war condition and the plight of humanity after facing the devastation of wars. The trauma of the partition of India was recreated in various literary works by great writers such as Amrita Pritam, Bhishma Sahni, Saadat Hassan Manto and others. Albert Camus' novel, 'The Plague', published in the year 1947, is an accurate representation of the times we currently live in, wherein a deadly virus that spreads from animals to humans creates havoc in the lives of the people of a modern town. Camus's novel did not predict any calamity but simply reflected his feelings of uncertainty and apprehensiveness towards the future.

Humans are constantly in a cycle of flux and change. It is the perusal of such relevant literary works that provide a perspective, a distraction from the present and a prediction of the future. Poetry has often been an expression of the vastness of the human condition. It has been used as a means for coping with loss. Poetry is a definite 'certain' outcome of uncertainty.

Changing times and shifting realities result in poet's trying to find answers in poetry. John Keats has hence spoken of Negative Capability or "to accept uncertainty, mystery, doubt, without any irritable reaching after of fact and reason"[1]According to Keats, a Creative Genius requires people to experience the world as an uncertain place that naturally gives rise to a wide array of perspectives.

This paper attempts to looks at poetry written in periods of uncertainties, drawing upon three perspectives. All three have been chosen on the basis of timeline and on the impact each produces in different time-spans of history- from a world perspective based on war, an Indian post-independence aspect and then to the one we are currently living through - the pandemic perspective of Covid-19.

Global Perspective:

'Tears' by Edward Thomas was written in January 1915, a depiction of the horrors of war-time. War not only causes death and destruction but also drains the survivors of their humanity and causes immense suffering directly and indirectly to all. Wars are mostly based on greed, hunger for power, and political supremacy. In this poem, Thomas is seriously considering whether he should enlist himself for the war. There is uncertainty over making a decision, in a setting of a war where nothing remains certain.

In 'Tears', Thomas shares his love for nature as do other war poets like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Thomas contrasts natural beauty with the haunting horrors of warfare in 'Tears'. The notion of a simpler, gentler life before the war is reflected in words like 'stirring' and 'sweet'. The poet's work is often known for elaborating upon times of uncertainty. The 'tears' lead us to believe that the poet was melancholic about war and in grief. Regret is one of the major themes of this poetic piece as throughout the poem, Thomas appears regretful, ashamed at the loss of humanity in the light of human beings' capabilities to cause destruction and devastation.

Thomas's work shows a continuation of his feelings before the war to the World War 1. His sorrow about speeding industrialization, destruction of the countryside and loss of human values is described. The poet describes the scenes of war; especially evocative is the new recruitment of young men who go marching past in white tunic uniforms, who are naive, unaware of their destiny of dying unknown in war. The dilemma in the poet's mind is delineated as he waits to be enlisted

[1](Richard Gunderman Richard Gunderman is a Friend of The Conversation. Chancellor's Professor of Medicine, 2021)

since he is patriotic but also recognizes the futility of war and does not want to make war into a glorious feat.

Sadly, in the end, he is forced to accept that he might just lose himself, his individuality, and his life and will end up as a dead body on the battlefield. Thomas in 'Tears' was prescient as he died when in France, still a new recruit. The entire poem carries the shadow of death. While there are glimpses of natural beauty in the 'blooming meadows' yet the world appears to be 'shadowed' with the aura of death, when the poet predicts that many on both sides will die.
Wars continue to rage even today. Humanity never learns from history and poems such as 'Tears' symbolize the cruelty, horrors, and destruction of wars. This poem is memorable since it points to the so many little and big wars that continue raging even today. Whether it's the Naxalites in the Dantewada forests or insurgents in the Northeast and Kashmir, or the Russian aggression in Ukraine or fundamentalists in Afghanistan – wars continue to rage and humanity loses out to death and devastation.

In '**What Kind of Times are These',** written in the year 1991, **Adrienne Rich** shows the brokenness of the government and how in such times it's a poet's job to find the cracks through which the light may shine. Rich was once questioned if poetry could play an important role in social change? She had replied,

"Yes, poetry is a liberating language, connecting the fragments within us, connecting us to others like and unlike ourselves, replenishing our desire. In poetry, words can say more than they mean and mean more than they say. In a time of frontal assaults both on language and on human solidarity, poetry can remind us of all we are in danger of losing—disturb us, embolden us out of resignation."[2]

Some poets leave an impact even after leaving this world and Adrienne Rich will always be one such poet. She wrote about stark truths and this takes ample courage.

In the year 1939, German poet **Bertolt Brecht** first wrote the poem "**To those who follow in our wake**",

"What times are these, in which
A conversation about trees is almost a crime
For in doing so we maintain our silence about
so much wrongdoing!"

At the time Brecht wrote his poem, it was assumed that he referred to poets who chose to write about nature, with readers overlooking all the atrocities that occurred even before the Second World War. A century later feminist poet & activist Adrienne Rich reframed Brecht's poem, such that it hauntingly describes our current political environment where real issues are air-brushed or pushed under the carpet. Rich was an activist who wrote quite a lot about nature, and here she cleverly juggles the focus between hidden political conversation and nature, using trees as an excuse.

Rich's poetry is known to showcase a sense of collective consciousness & change. Rich being a very influential & widely read writer in the 20th century uses literary devices cleverly to highlight issues that people are stopped from mentioning. The 'abandoned house' in the first stanza symbolizes a place where change-makers and thinkers used to meet to discuss revolutionary ideas, but now the house stays empty as its people have gone missing due to a dictatorial government. The poet makes the poem more conversational, which also makes it more impactful. Rich talks about the horrors inflicted by politicians when she mentions 'talking about trees'. She uses an ironic tone and

[2]Rankine, C., Pollitt, K., Priluck, J., & Wenger, D. (2016, May 12). *Adrienne Rich's poetic transformations*.The New Yorker.

states how pseudo-environmentalists are on the rise & the only way people will listen is when you talk about trees. Rich talks about the uncertain state of society and democracy marred with corruption and bigotry. She suggests that the only way out of this is to clear the trees of prejudice, only then will there be a vast land of equality, justice & inclusion. Rich cleverly refers to the human predicament under the apparent trope of Trees. She depicts a time period of political and social uncertainty and also provides a way out.

Indian Perspective

When we turn the gaze towards a developing nation like ours, we can see that in all these years, we have gained some and lost quite a lot. With every new decade, new problems await our country. Post-Independence, India has always remained in a state of uncertainty, whether it's war, national emergencies, corruption, or riots. These uncertainties shake our beliefs, our dreams of a free society. It makes us wonder at our destiny, making us apprehensive and unsure. So be it Adrienne Rich or Jayanta Mahapatra, their poetry has been a response to oppression, which shows how humanity has failed to achieve freedom in all its glory.

B.K Das says, "Post-Independence Indian English Poetry is genuine because it is deeply felt and addressed to the whole community; Indian situations form a vital part of it."[3] Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the few poets to have unabashedly portrayed the plight of our nation with all its smudges and spots. According to A.N Dwivedi, a poet is supposed to air out the pains and sufferings of the people as best as he can and help ameliorate their conditions since the political system has not been able to deliver the goods to the deprived and the destitute.[4]

In '*Dawn at Puri*' and '*Main Temple Street*', Mahapatra paints a picture of poverty-stricken Orissa. He exposes the reader to the hard realities and problems of the state and in turn, makes them sympathize with the entire country. **'***Freedom'* by Jayanta Mahapatra' is a similar exploration into "freedom" as a concept in the personal and political sense. Written post-independence, the poet contemplates the existence of freedom in its truest sense. Throughout the poem, a visible unease can be sensed within the poet, a conflicting state of mind regarding the state of affairs in the country. The poet contemplates whether independent India has really received its true freedom from poverty, illiteracy, hunger or is it just the freedom of ignorance and excuses that we enjoy.

Jayanta Mahapatra in his essay "Poetry as Freedom" states,

"I can write a poem through my anguish and the awareness of my presence and in the process reveal myself—perhaps going out of myself, leaping into blindness or light. Call it freedom. For what we dream can well enter the realm of un-dream, causing something to come out of it, something like a quiet self-discovery or even prayer that brings a joy in the recognition of ourselves against the fear of time. Call it freedom."[5]

[3]- Singh, S. (2009).Post Independence Indian English Poetry. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in Social Sciences*

[4] -Singh, S. (2009).Post Independence Indian English Poetry. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in Social Sciences*, *1*.

[5]Mahapatra, J. (1992). Poetry as Freedom : The Door. *Sahitya Akademi*, *35*, 39–44.

The self-exploratory element in Mahapatra's writing is evident. He compares the country to a dead body floating down the river while he, the narrator, is a 'half-disembodied' bamboo with its lower part sunk. Both are non-living things, being subjected to external forces, failing to exercise their own will. Trapped within himself, he ruminates over this uncertainty; Is he really free? The poet and his country believe in an illusory sense of freedom, but beneath lay an array of contradictions.

The poet is uncertain about what leads to true freedom, living either in an illusion or in the meaningless pursuit of it. In his attempts to understand Freedom, the narrator brings up tragic situations in the country – pictures of sheer poverty, hunger, corruption, and religious bigotry – he talks of the poor and hungry woman and her child in a remote village; the bloodied light symbolizing corruption, that clings to the white, pristine walls of the Parliament and the helpless God in temples, kept imprisoned by the will of the priest. Bleak images of poverty and hunger sensitize the reader to the country's true reality.

While in 'Freedom' Mahapatra focuses on uncertainty from a more personal perspective, **Agha Shahid Ali** in **Postcard from Kashmir** expresses uncertainty for a 'homeland' which has always been in constant strife and conflict. Through the poem, the poet reminisces over what it once was, what it has become and what it shall never be again. It is a deeply personal insight into Kashmir through the lens of an exile. He calls 'Kashmir' home but believes he will fail to recognise it when he returns. The rapidly changing war-torn Kashmir makes the poet nostalgic for his old memories. This 'uncertainty' that surrounds Kashmir is reflected in the poem. The poet keeps contrasting the conditions of the present Kashmir with the memories that he holds of it. He is apprehensive of its future and tries to find comfort in the past.

Although having chosen to live in the US, the poet writes passionately about the place of his birth. He refuses to accept its current reality, preferring the comfort of the past over the drastically changed present. In his mind's eye he holds an image of Kashmir "in a giant negative, black and white", which belongs to the past in its state of eternal glory, untouched by the brutal present. He says, "When I return the colours won't be so brilliant, the Jhelum water so clean, so ultramarine." The poet believes the murkiness of Kashmir's war-torn state will always overshadow the clean and clear image of it in his imagination. It is so changed by the ravages of the present that he believes it to be unrecognisable from what it once was.

Bruce King a contemporary poet and critic remarked that Ali's poetry swirls around insecurity and "obsessions [with]…memory, death, history, family ancestors, nostalgia for a past he never knew, dreams, Hindu ceremonies, friendships, and self-consciousness about being a poet." [6]

Kashmir has long been the bone of contention between India and Pakistan, with both controlling some parts of it. Both have established their own supremacy over this land leading it to become a land of strife, bloodshed and violence. It has long remained a disputed territory, leaving its people in a state of despair and uncertainty. The world has moved ahead, however, Kashmir seems to be left far behind, hovering in uncertainty and unrest.

Current Covid 19 Crisis

The present times are anxious ones with the Corona Virus pandemic being an endless period, filled with fear and uncertainties. The

[6]Bansode, V. (2021, September 7). *"Postcard from Kashmir" by Agha Shahid Ali*. Vijaypriya.

pandemic resulted in prolific poetry being written on themes experienced by all. The world was in shackles, submerged in grief, isolation, loneliness, and loss. In such a suffocating environment of monotony and drudgery, poetry acts as a much-needed form of catharsis to rid ourselves of all that's buried deep underneath.

Pandemic
Sheltered and safe
when others are not,
fed and nourished
when others are not.
How to live
in such a world
alone and connected
at the same time?
Facing forward
stepping back,
do we turn away
or look beyond ourselves
as we choreograph this dance
of fear and love?
- **Joseph Goldstein**

Covid 19 has popularized the term, 'Quarantine" and it has given rise to a bag of mixed emotions that is almost too heavy to carry. These are strange times to live in. A time when hugs and handshakes, always considered to be that warm human touch, have suddenly turned into weapons. Not visiting your loved ones and maintaining distance now becomes an act of love. The Corona Virus has been residing rent-free globally. The cruelty of Covid 19, quarantine and lockdown is appropriately described in **"Pandemic" by Joseph Goldstein**. This poem shows how all of us, collectively, are together in these times, even though, individually our circumstances remain different. Suddenly beauty, money, power are all worthless and can't get you the oxygen you are fighting for and humanity is faced with the harsh unfairness of life.

" Sheltered and safe
when others are not,
fed and nourished
when others are not."

These lines portray how the rich and the poor, all are equally anxious. Some are, however, fortunate enough to have the luxury of a home to sit & worry in. These tough times have shown us despair but have also taught us to find a silver lining in our miseries, to grab tightly onto things and people who give us hope. Our world is a globe of contradictions now. While our situations and privileges might make us different, what brings us together is our grief in the present and anxiety for the future, of losing our loved ones, and the collective pain that brings us together while we are so alone in our own homes. The poet has intentionally used contrary words like 'alone & connected', 'fear' & 'love', to effectively showcase the contrary emotions that quarantine has evoked in all of us. By keeping contrasting words together, the poet portrays the uncertain future haunting us, how time goes by and the future arrives before we know it. Things have changed so drastically due to the current situation that humanity has taken a step back while time marches ahead.

"do we turn away
Or look beyond ourselves
as we choreograph this dance
of fear and love?"

Goldstein addresses the feelings of love & fear. The Corona Virus has led to the realization that merely being alive, cherishing our family and friends, living simply and helping others is what human beings need to practice.

Manohar Shetty's 'Quarantine Blues' is another reflection on the current uncertain state of our reality, of the pandemic in an Indian context. The poet expresses the bleak and ironic nature of the times we live in, making us rethink our reality. While talking about the lockdown imposed by the government to curb the virus, he talks of its after-effects on the rich and the poor. He unravels it and strips it down to its actuality.

The Pandemic was sudden and unexpected, the way all catastrophic events usually are. However, society reacts differently to the situation, the rich tolerate it, the only difficulty for them being how to kill time and monotony, whereas for the poor it's an uphill and endless path of hardships. The class divide was never more pronounced than in a pandemic. The poet touches upon the migrants issue and attempts to expose meaningless political agendas driven in the name of the pandemic.

He writes "To clang your pans at 5 pm, For five minutes and light nine candles to last nine minutes at 9 pm To dispel the darkness." showing the futile attempts of those in power to boost morale. His disdain and contempt towards the rich is evident.

"Now you can time the growth
Rate of your toe nails or stare
Into the jetless, noiseless blue
Of the sky or play a timeless
Game of chess with yourself"

There is repeated emphasis on 'time' and all of us being caught up in it. Words like sublimation, slow motion, indecisions, visions and revisions all symbolize the endlessness of it.

Shetty provides a social commentary of the times we live in – hard uncertain times scored by class schisms.

Conclusion

Poems written in turbulent times are like landmarks, little pieces of history, where each time we revisit them we are reminded of the resilience of the human spirit in the face of difficulties.

Whether it is a state of national emergency, war or a worldwide pandemic, life itself is mired in uncertainty. All the poets in this paper express their feelings, their state of mind over the situations they are faced with. Rich decides to talk about trees, Mahapatra decides to escape into solitude, Ali laments the present reality while Shetty mocks those in power blatantly.

Each have their own ways of coping, making sense of the times. Yet for each poet the turbulent event has its own significance, to be described, analysed, remembered and eventually, forgotten.

It is poems such as these that testify to how in every age and era, humanity has been challenged by all kinds of calamity, leading human beings to believe that the end of the world is in sight. However, the resilience of the human spirit, the fortitude of ordinary mortals and an undying hope in a guiding, protective universal force has led people to find their ways out of such times of crisis. Literature, especially poems, have encapsulated these ages, described them and helped the reader keep things in perspective. Poems, written in times of uncertainty, help us to look beyond ourselves and appreciate the world around us. These poems show the vulnerabilities of human beings, connecting us all to one another, teaching us sensitivity, compassion and courage. Such poems create a sense of empathy and give us the resilience to overcome these challenging times.

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The Gender Studies Classroom in Pandemic Times

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Abstract:

This paper is a self-reflexive account of being the Faculty Administrator of a Gender Studies course that we offer in the department in collaboration with Gender Issues Cell of the college. In 2020, following the pandemic and the consequent lockdown, when UGC norms stipulated that all classes and lectures move into the digital space, this course too moved online. This transition from in-person classes to the digital space initially seemed difficult for a course that had a different kind of imagination and was designed to provide an immersive, face to face dialogue with a small number of participants to enable shifts in perspectives. However, I soon realized that the online class with all its limitations and constraints could also be a site of immense possibilities and provide an emancipatory space to our students.

As pedagogues, 'classrooms' are where we belong. These are spaces where we nurture our students enabling a process of reflexivity, creativity and criticality. The onset of the pandemic in 2020 disrupted the very idea of the classroom. Teaching moved online and we were grappling with understanding the intricacies of virtual classrooms. Access to smartphones and the internet was still very limited. Every discipline faced distinct challenges when it came to online learning. Courses which have always had a laboratory component needed a redesign. Compared to urban students, rural students and the marginalized from urban ghettos faced more challenges when the traditional methods of learning gave way to new pedagogic techniques. As a feminist pedagogue, I was anxious about how to create safe and nurturing classrooms in the digital space. This seemed especially daunting and challenging for a 'Certificate Course in Gender Studies' that we at the department along with the Gender Issue Cell of the college have been running for nine years.

Unlike 'mainstream' certificate courses that focus on dissemination of information and knowledge, this course aims at enabling a shift and building conversations around gender and sexuality through an intersectional lens. Built on feminist pedagogical practices that necessitate an intensive, face to face dialogue, it draws heavily from lived experiences that provide an immersive experience for students. I wondered whether we could provide this experience in the digital space. The apprehensions were real since this was not just an academic exercise but also involved a lot of unlearning and relearning from feminist perspectives. How does one foster solidarity and connectedness in the digital space is a question that I asked myself time and again.

The course was not just about a particular topic (studying gender) or method (qualitative research) but rather an epistemological stance (Crawley et al. 2008). This is a vision of the classroom as a liberatory environment in which we, teacher-student and student- teacher, act as subjects, not objects. Feminist pedagogy is

engaged teaching/learning - engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism, classism and homophobia, engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change (Shrewsbury 1987). Teaching is also an embodied process.

Pedagogic challenges

I was apprehensive about whether we could create such emancipatory spaces online. Our classrooms are not homogenous spaces. Students come from diverse social locations and they do become unequal spaces. As Raman writes (2020), Indian Public University classroom is a particularly fraught space, comprised as it is of students with a diverse range of experience, socio-economic backgrounds, and varying degrees of privilege. This course attempts to create a feminist classroom, a collaborative and egalitarian space by disrupting the hierarchy between teacher and students with an emphasis on participatory approaches and experiential learning which help in knowledge production within the classroom. After all, teaching is not simply about disseminating the received wisdom but also constructing a non–normative discourse that not only sensitizes students to multiple axes of marginalization and discrimination but also encourages them to raise questions, however disturbing or uncomfortable that might be. As Freire (1970) asks, is teaching simply about knowledge dissemination or is it about creating the possibilities of production or construction of knowledge? The classroom and campuses must be enabling and empowering spaces that propel students to re-think and re-imagine the 'standard, the norm and the given' and construct a transformative vision of the world. (Freire 1970; hooks 1994)

I often wondered whether we could create this in the online space given the real issues of network disruptions, unequal access to digital technology, spatial constraints and lack of a personal space within the home, invasive presence of family members and the burden of housework for some of our students. Given the extraordinary times that we lived in during the pandemic, conducting a course which had a different kind of imagination presented unique opportunities as well as immense pedagogic challenges. While we could access remote resource persons and thus have a greater depth and breadth of views, the virtual space does have its limitations, in the sense that it precludes a face to face interaction, and dialogue gets really difficult. Nonetheless, I chose to focus on the opportunities rather than the challenges and forged ahead in the hope of being able to transcend some of these challenges and gaining a different and rich worldview.

Around 70 students both from within and outside Mumbai enrolled for the course. For the faculty and student administrators of the course, the online platform gave a lot of flexibility. We could invite resource persons from across the country and participants from outside Mumbai could register for the course. We had an engaged audience and several enthusiastic participants who were proactive in the deliberations on the online platform. For our resource persons, we had the option of breakout rooms that helped immensely in designing group based activities during the sessions. However, not many students would turn on their videos during the sessions and at times it felt like we were talking to those ‘black boxes’ on screen. We totally understood their reasons for not doing so and we respected their privacy but sometimes it felt like the ‘connect’ was missing.

Reflections

At the end of the course, we have a session titled ‘Reflections’ where we ask students, in small batches of 5 to 6 students each, to reflect on the sessions and whether the course enabled a re-think of the received wisdom. I ask them to list down ways in which the process of ‘unlearning and relearning’ has happened and their significant takeaways from the sessions. This is

a very important component of the course since it focusses on transformations beyond the classroom and within families, communities and neighborhoods. These conversations were a revelation. They pointed towards how a virtual gender studies classroom became a safe space for many of our students who were grappling with a range of lockdown related issues. Following the lockdown there was an exponential increase in unpaid care work within families with schools and universities being shut, workplaces closed and families stuck at home. A disproportionate burden of this increase fell on women in the household be they married women or young girls. For those whose conditions were already precarious, either due to a preexisting mental condition resulting from trauma of abuse within the family or violence the situation exacerbated during the pandemic and they were 'just holding on'. That's what a survivor of abuse said when I enquired about how she was doing.

For many of our students with non-normative gender identities, the 'home' became a difficult place during the pandemic and they found the course therapeutic. They preferred to remain anonymous in the digital space, while getting an opportunity to learn more about trans identities without necessarily having to identify themselves. I have listed below some of the responses from our participants. Names have been changed to protect their identities. Rahil, a second year student from the media course said

Being a transperson, for me the online mode definitely was a bonus considering it lets you be anonymous while at the same time having a lot of clarity on trans-identity that made me anxious all the time

Or as Dhrishti said

As someone who is an introvert, I was more comfortable with it being online since I could gather information and learn from home and I could type questions directly in the chatbox. In physical classrooms asking questions is a daunting affair for me. The course wasn't any different from an offline session as the sessions were as interactive as they would be offline so there wasn't any difference as such.

Afreen from the science stream echoes this further when she says:

The gender studies course was so much more than just a few sessions courses. Whenever I woke up on weekends it was like YAY today we have our gender course session. The pandemic had hit us hard. These sessions became my safe and therapeutic space where I was able to learn and unlearn.

Ruhita, a first year student of the Arts stream says

Transitioning into online lectures due to COVID certainly spiked my anxiety levels but the CCGS sessions were different. They gave me a space to have safe conversations without being judged

Some mentioned how the online administration of the course enabled conversations within the family around gender and patriarchy as sometimes family members joined them during the session.

Raksha a first year science student says,

I come from a conservative family. The sessions, if overheard by my family members, would tend to make them really uncomfortable which I feel is a good thing as you can't get out of your comfort zone unless you are uncomfortable.

Some thought online sessions were as impactful as in-person sessions.

I would say the course being online didn't really change the impact it would have. Being online made me save time which would have been lost in travelling every single day. As someone who is an introvert, I was more comfortable with it being online since I could gather info and learn from home.

Conclusion

After three years of the course being administered online, I have realized, contrary to

my initial apprehensions and doubts, that the virtual classroom can indeed be a site of immense possibilities. Despite the challenges and constraints, if we want to construct a classroom environment as a democratic space that legitimizes students' voices, provokes students to think critically about themselves and the world around them and has an emancipatory potential, then we need to do a lot of creative, critical and challenging work to ensure that these goals are achieved in the online space.

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