COVID-19: Impact of Remote Learning

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Abstract

The method of remote learning was earlier popularized through distance learning and open universities but even then the examinations and evaluations were conducted in person. The COVID-19 pandemic not only made education remote but also completely digitized. The hurdles and barriers of remote learning are being slowly overcome but no particular strategy seems to be universally applicable. The impact of online learning is seen through the responses made by the students in this study. The process of learning and assessment has become casual and availability of resources at fingertips has weakened the relationship between the teacher and the taught. The uncertainty of today's time has created indecisiveness among students and their parents and they are evident throughout the results of the study as most of the questions have been answered neutrally. Remote and online learning have been the immediate and most appropriate solution even though the system has its own limitations. Numerous ways are being employed to curb the problems brought about by remote learning and the current system can only be treated as a stepping stone to tackle similar challenges in the future.

Keywords: *Online learning, Remote learning, Digital instruction, Reading materials, Online examinations*

Introduction

COVID-19 took the world by storm in 2020 and changed the social structure of the world in the blink of an eye. It was the first time that the advanced and modern human race had no option but to bow down to the forces of nature for the sake of its survival. The abrupt and sudden standstill of human life has taken a toll on the social and economic prospects of individuals. The turmoil was not only felt in the outside world but also close to home. Every individual was equally vulnerable and susceptible to the virus irrespective of their social status, caste, creed, gender. Some age groups and people were more severely affected than the others as their immunity was comparatively compromised. The pandemic opened our eyes to see the shortcomings of our lifestyle which was concentrated around the exploitation of material and natural resources of the Earth. While family members had ample time to mend their relations at home, nature during this pause revived itself and gave way to clearer blue skies, fresh water sources and patches of greenery along the way. It also provided us with an opportunity to relook and reframe our perspectives on life. This major change brought along with it inevitable changes that have been felt in every aspect of our lives.Work culture and employment of human resources have also undergone drastic changes wherein work from home became the new trend. The age-old practice of teaching-learning adapted itself to meet the needs of the hour and became a method of digitized instruction. To cope with these changes, various online methods of teaching-learning gained prominence which may or may not have been completely successful in its endeavors. This paper tries to closely analyze the impact of COVID-19 on the status of teaching-learning being carried out at one of the Undergraduate college in Kolkata.

Objectives

It is needless to say that the pandemic has transformed the centuries old education system of the chalk and talk teaching model to one driven by technology. The educational institutions faced the challenge of maintaining the continuity of learning. The seemingly simple and immediate solution was to continue classes remotely using online resources. The aim of the study was to determine the impact of online education from the perspective

of the students as well as their parents. It also tries to find out if remote classes have had an impact on the physical and psychological wellbeing of our learners.

Methodology

To study the above mentioned objectives, a quantitative method of data analysis was adopted. A survey was conducted where a Google Form was circulated among the students and instructions were elaborately described. Data was collected by recording the responses of undergraduate students (N=111) of different colleges from Kolkata. The Google form was subdivided into five sections so that each section would be covered in its entirety. Section A posed questions to know if the students were attending online classes or did the institution make the provisions for holding online classes, Section B provided us with an insight about the applicability of various e-learning tools and their preferences among students, Section C focused on the physical and psychological health of students, Section D brought forward the concerns and perspectives of the parents of the respective students, and Section E studied if the students were equipped with the basic tools for attending online classes and if they were satisfied with the classes being offered.
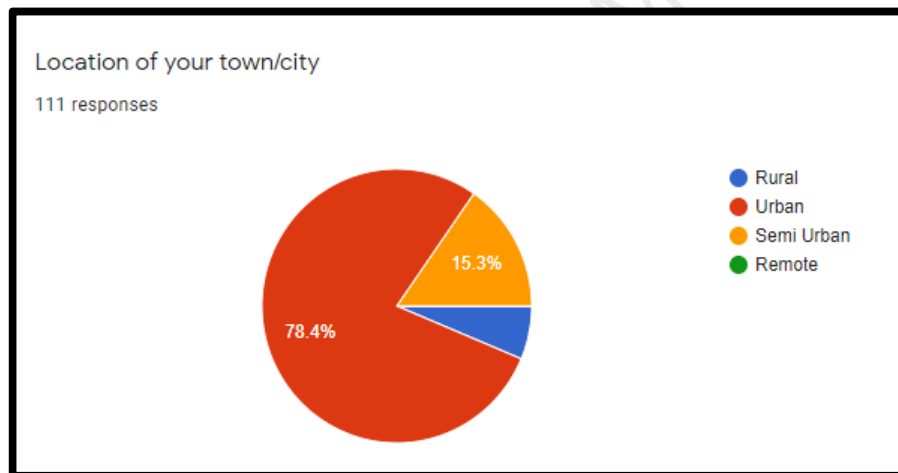
Data Analysis

The data has been collected through the Google form in five sections focusing on different aspects of online learning. The data will also be analyzed considering each section at a time to discuss and elaborately present the findings of the study.

Analysis of Section A
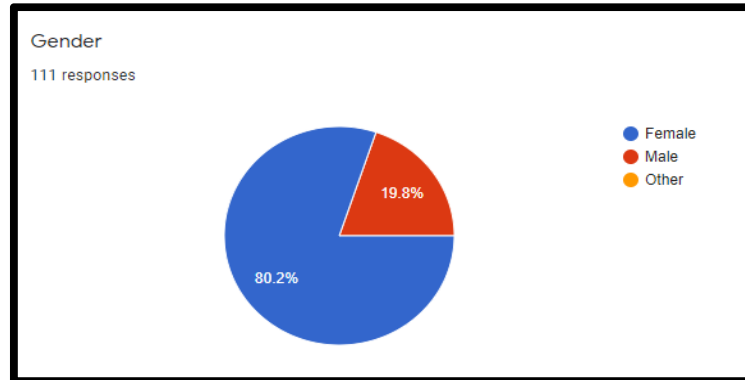
A majority of 80.2% respondents are female while 19.8% respondents are male.

The figures indicate that a majority 78.4% respondents are residents of the Urban area and 15.3% respondents are from the Semi Urban area. A very small percentage of the respondents belong to the Rural area. Also, out of 111 responses, 99.1% respondents are currently pursuing Undergraduate.
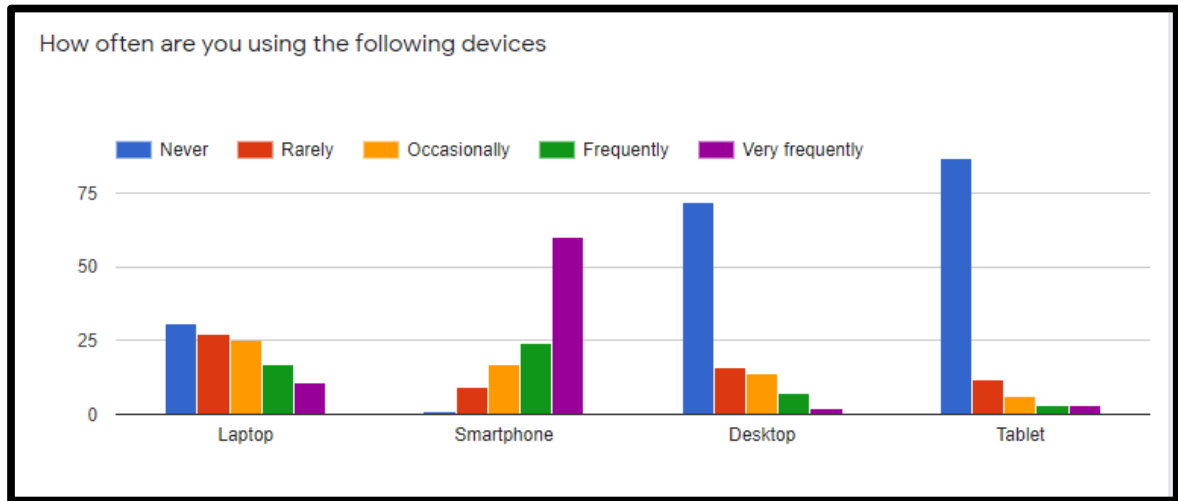
The above chart indicates that Smartphones are the most frequently used devices for attending online classes. Laptops were the second most commonly used device while Desktops and Tablets were being used only by a few. A 100% of our respondents agreed that their institution is organizing online classes for them.
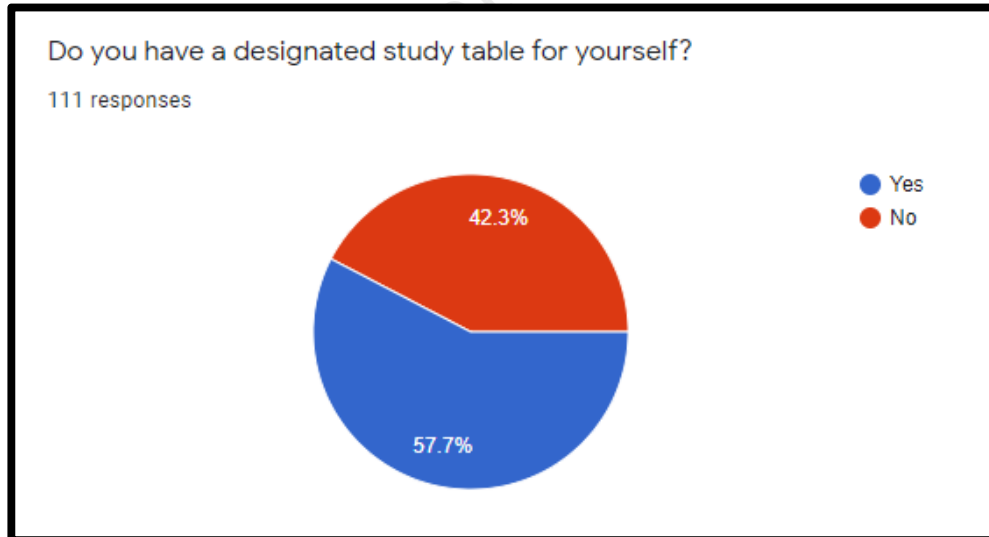

57.7% of the respondents confirmed that they have a designated study table for themselves while 42.3% of the respondents do not have a study table for themselves.
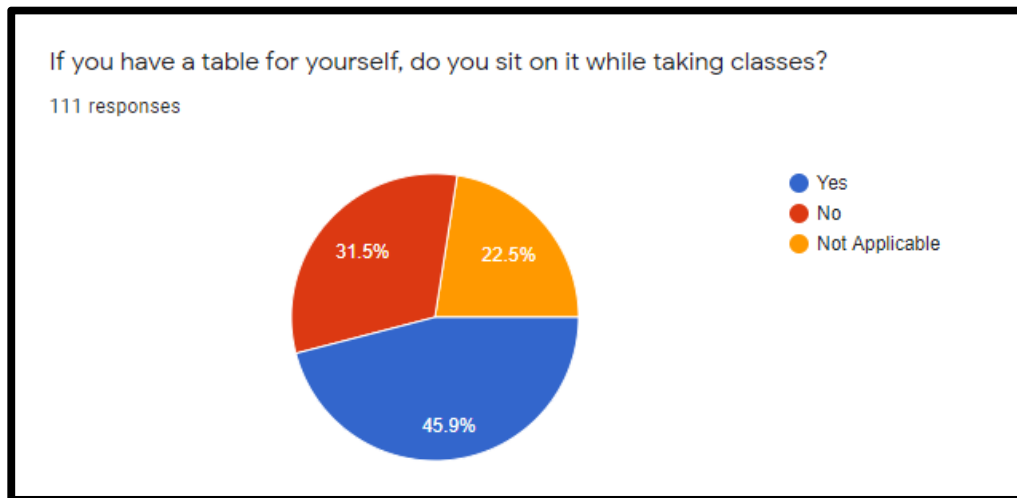
The responses indicate that 45.9% of the respondents sit on their study table while taking classes and 31.5% of the respondents do not sit on their study table while taking classes whereas 22.5% of the respondents are not applicable as they do not have the facility of a study table. This illustrates that even though students had access to a study table for themselves, they preferred sitting on other pieces of furniture like a comfortable bed or a couch to learn in an informal environment.
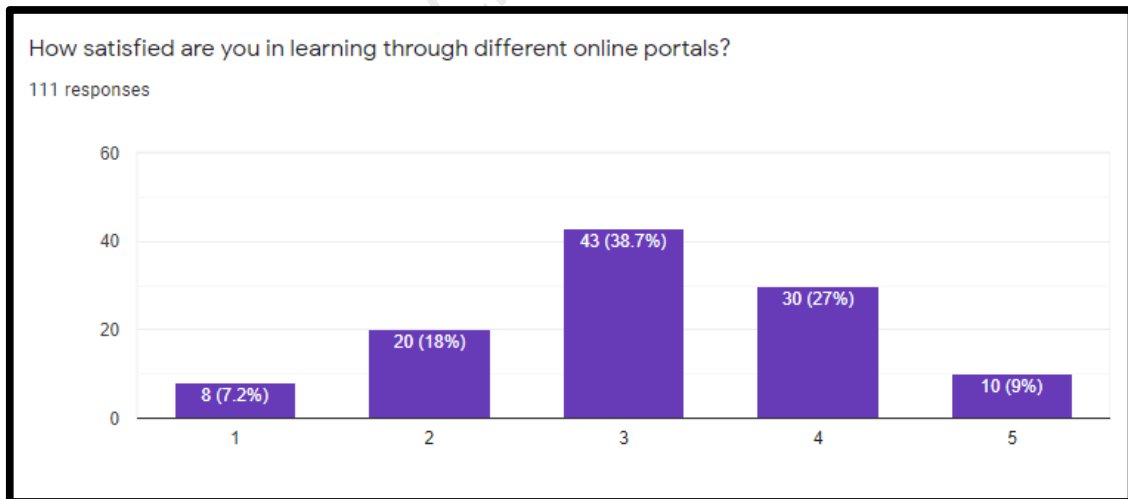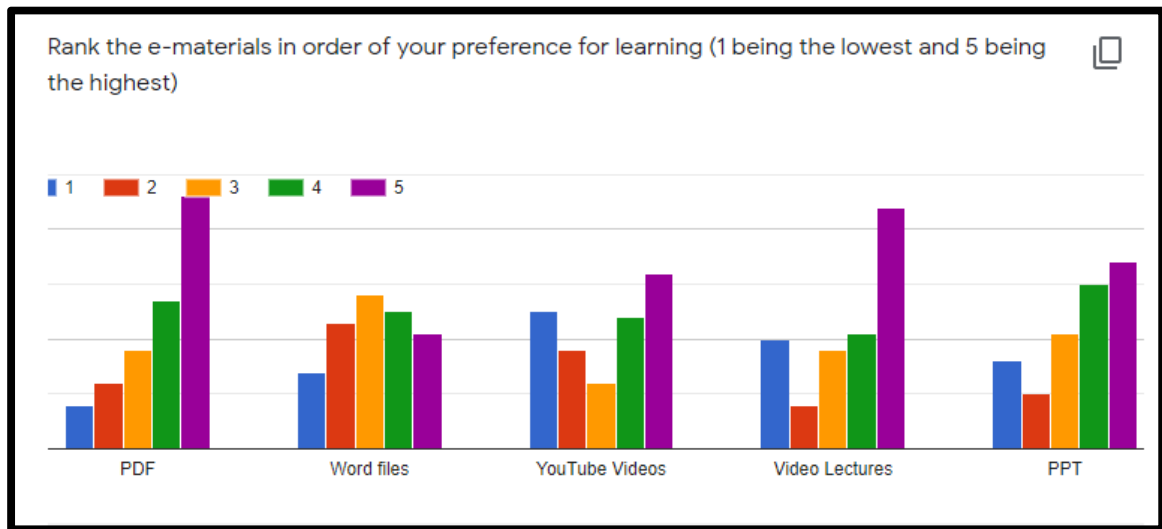
Analysis of Section B
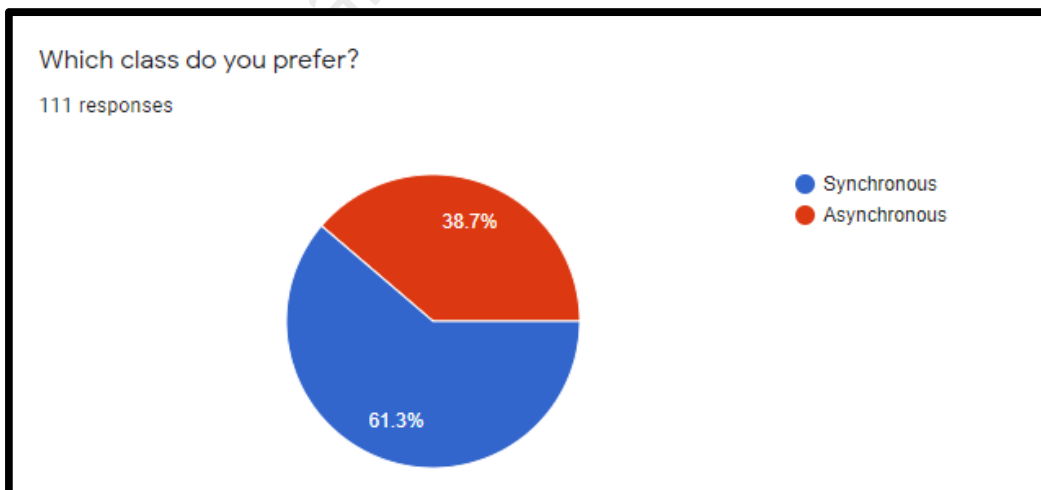
61.3% of the students responded that they prefer a synchronous class while 38.7% of the students responded that they prefer an asynchronous class.
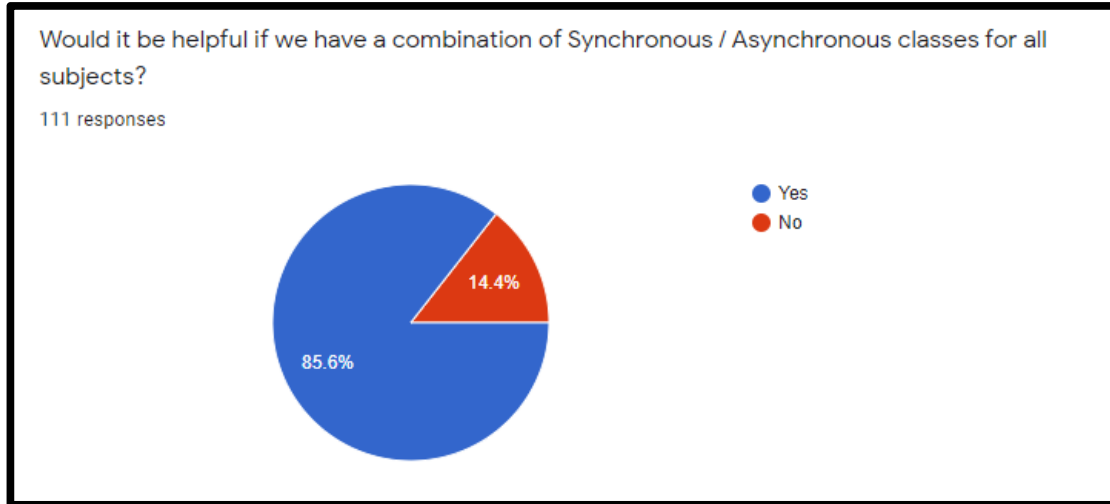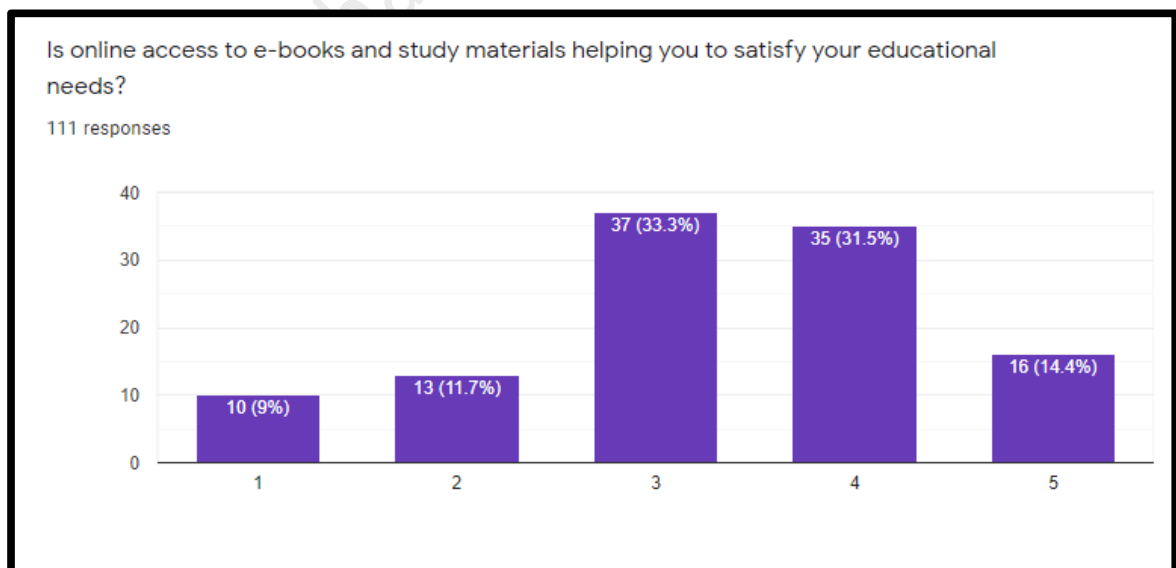

Majority of the students, 85.6%, established that a combination of synchronous and asynchronous classes for all subjects would be helpful, whereas 14.4% did not find it helpful.
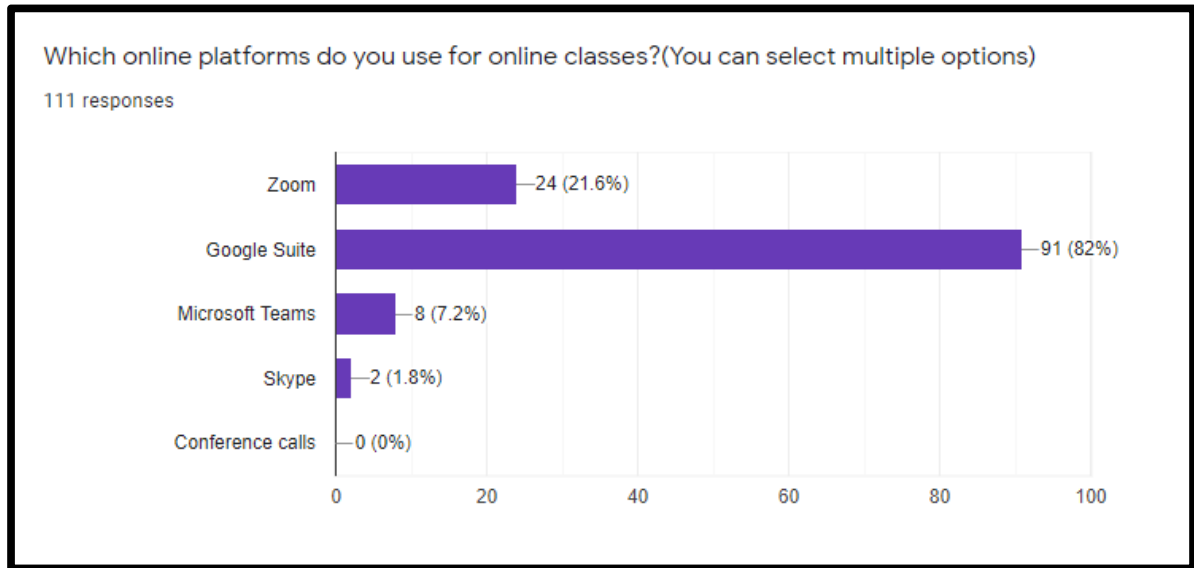

The chart indicates that only 9% were very satisfied with their learning through different online portals and 7.2% were very unsatisfied. The majority, which is, 38.7% were neutral in their responses and did not reflect highly on either side.

Rank the e-materials in order of your preference for learning (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)

The students preferred PDFs among the other e-materials. Video Lectures were the second most preferred e-material of the students. PowerPoint Presentations and YouTube Videos were next while Word Files were least preferred. The PDFs are readily available reading materials on the Internet which require no extra energy or effort on the part of the students, whereas the other materials even after being audio-visual in nature were not highly preferred by the students. This shows that convenience has been a priority over quality.

Is online access to e-books and study materials helping you to satisfy your educational needs?
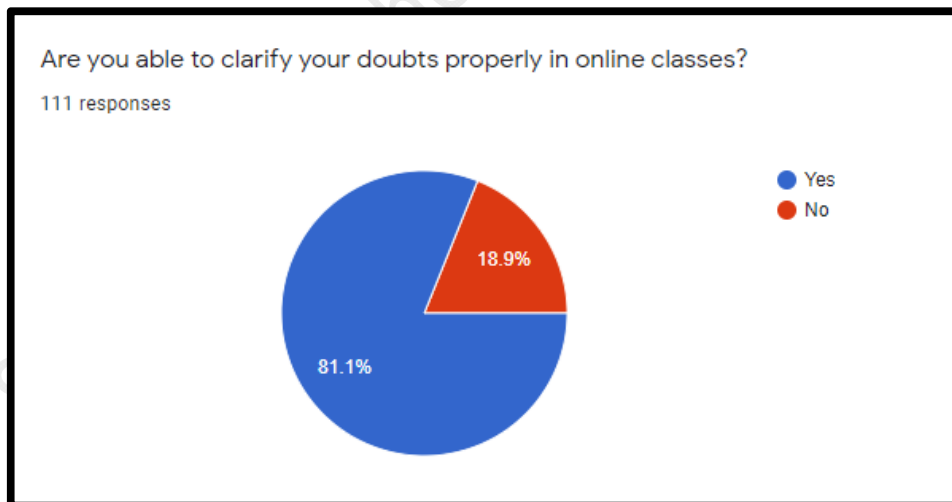
111 responses

Only 14.4% students are very satisfied with the online access to e-books and study materials for their educational needs, 31.5% are satisfied while the majority 33.3% are neutral as to whether online access to e-books and study materials are helping them satisfy their educational needs.

Which online platforms do you use for online classes?(You can select multiple options)
111 responses

The responses indicate that 82% of the students are using Google Suite, 21.6% of the students are using Zoom while only 7.2% of the students are using Microsoft Teams and 1.8% of the students are using Skype as an online platform for their online classes. The Conference Calls are not at all used by students as an online platform for online classes.
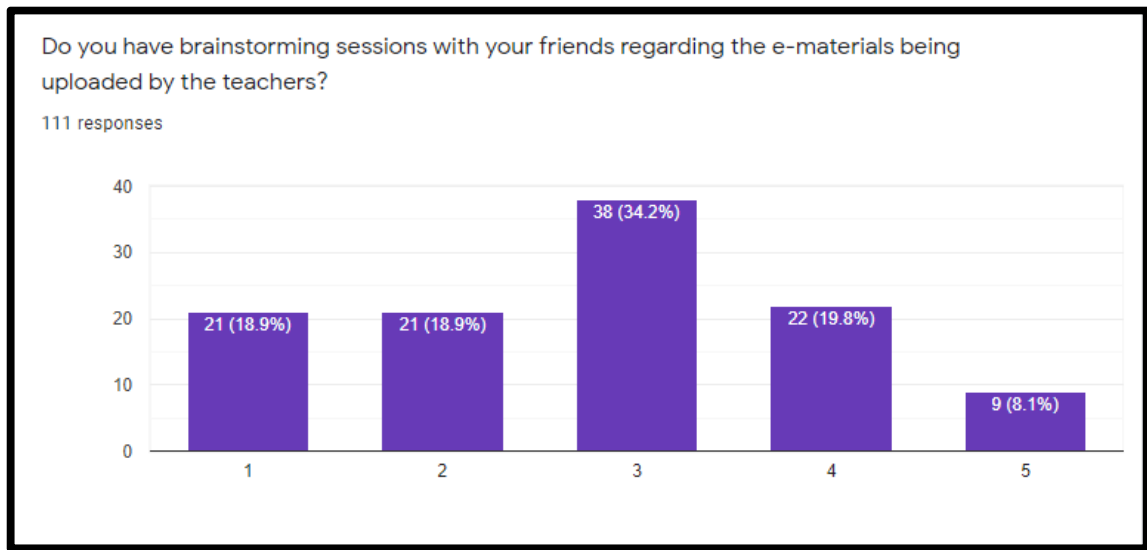
The responses indicate that most of the respondents, 34.2% are sometimes indulging into brainstorming sessions with their friends regarding the e-materials being uploaded by the teachers and 18.9% are never doing so while only 8.1% respondents are actually indulging in doing so.


Out of 111 responses, 81.1% respondents are able to clarify their doubts properly in online classes whereas 18.9% respondents are unable to clarify their doubts properly in online classes. An open-ended question was put forward to identify the reasons for students not being able to clarify their doubts in online classes and out of the 21 responses,

most of the respondents identified network issues and lack of personal and face-to-face interaction with teachers as reasons for non-clearance of doubts.
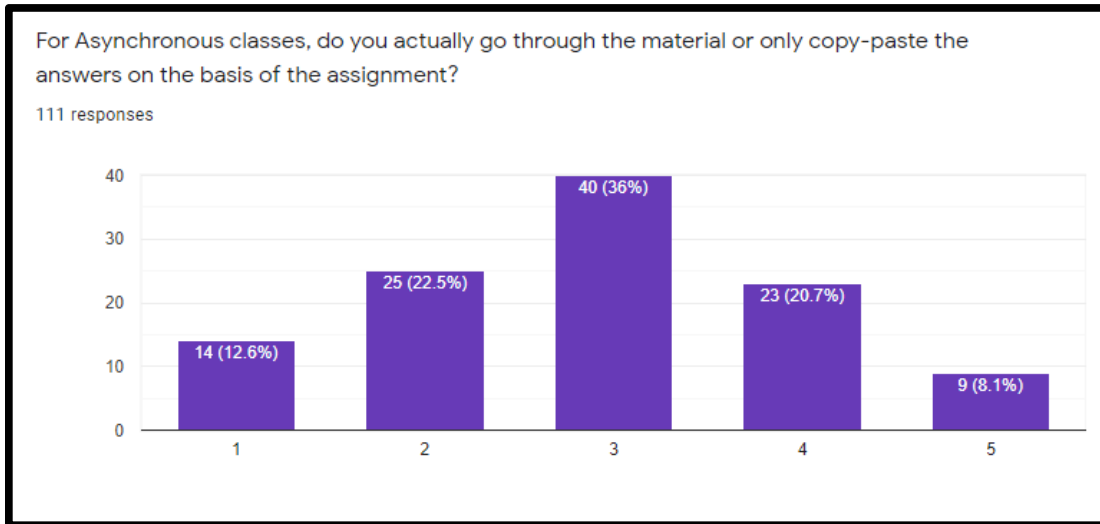

36% of the respondents were neutral in their response, while 22.5% disagreed and 20.7% agreed that they copy-pasted the answers for completing their assignments due for asynchronous classes.
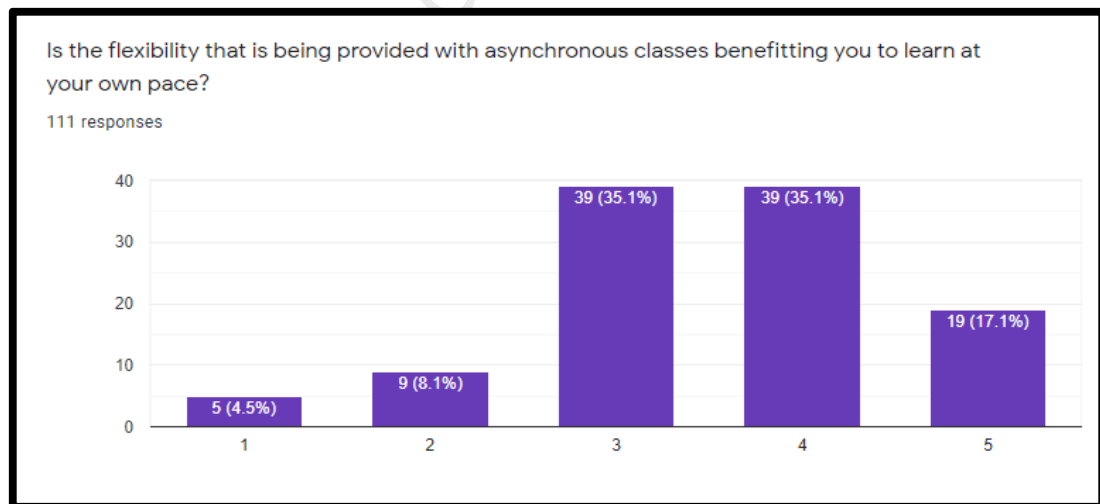

An equal 35.1% of students were neutral and also in agreement that asynchronous classes were helping them to learn at their own pace. Only a small percentage of students

(4.5%) were not in agreement that access to learning materials were absolutely not helping them to learn at their own pace.
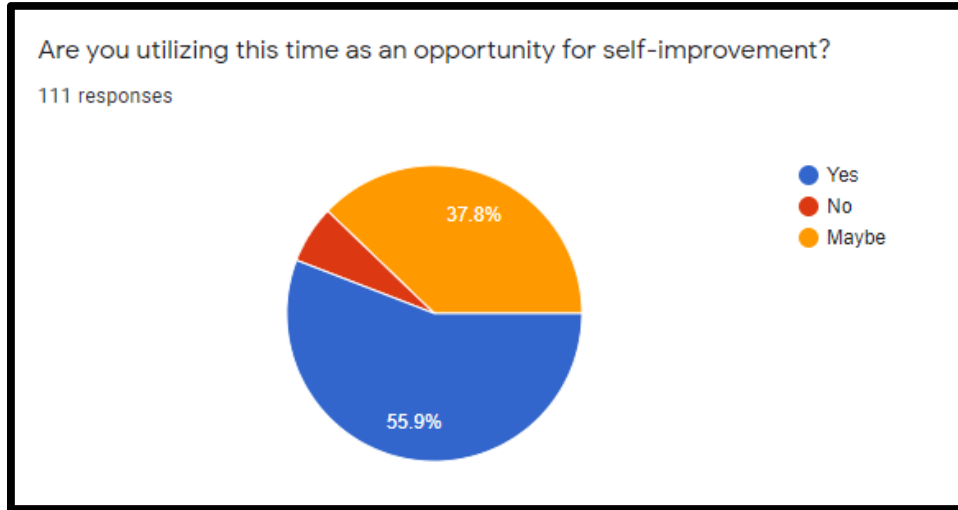

The figures indicate that 55.9% students are utilizing this time as an opportunity for self-improvement and 37.8% students are not utilizing this time as an opportunity for self-improvement whereas 6.3% students are not sure of its impact as it has been a sudden imposition on them.

Analysis of Section C
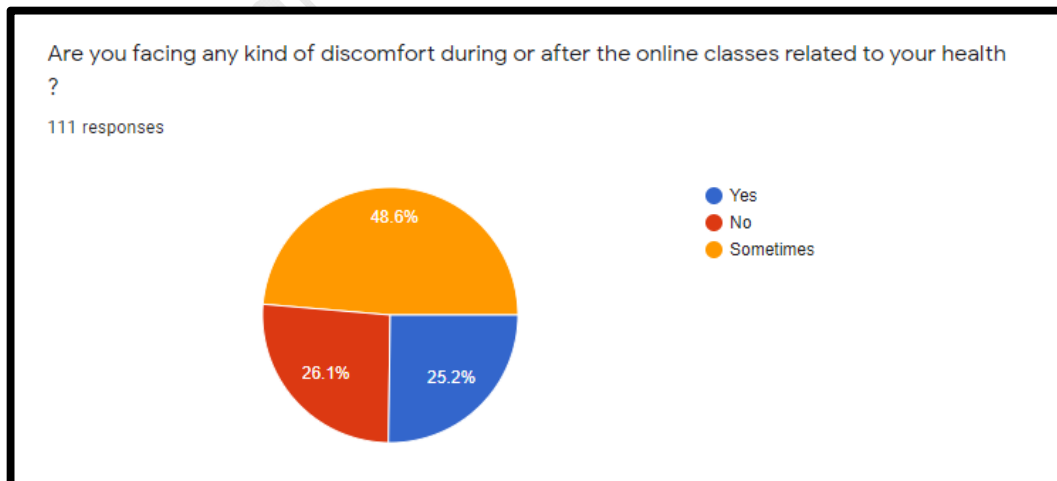
Most of the students,48.6% responded that they are sometimes facing health issues during or after the online classes related to their health. 26.1% responded that they are not facing any kind of discomfort while 25.2% are facing health issues during or after the online classes.
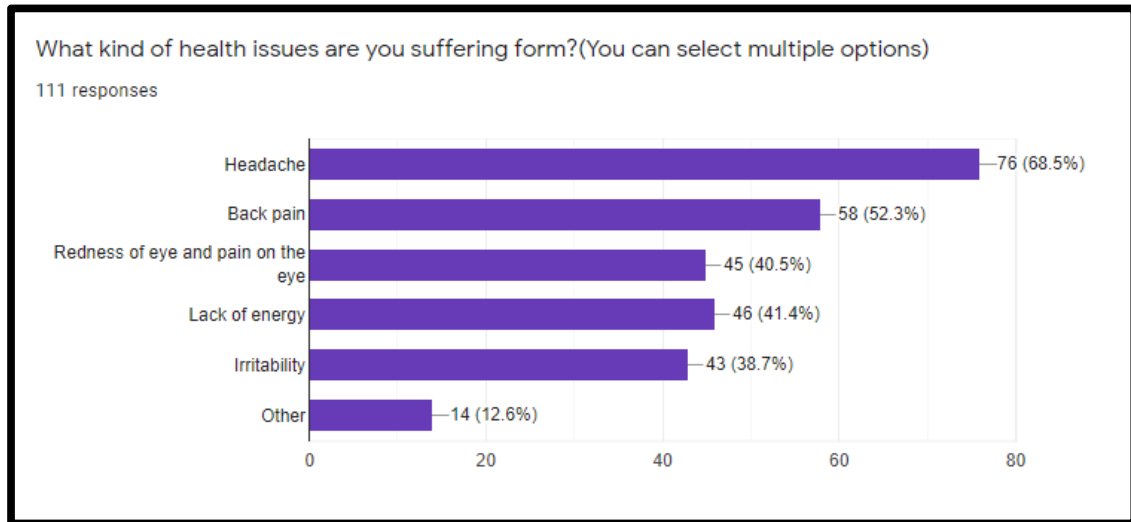

The most commonly faced health issues included headaches, back pain, discomfort in the eye and lack of energy. An open-ended question was also addressed to identify if any other health issues were prevailing and out of the 24 responses, the respondents identified various personal health issues that may or may not be related directly to the online classes.
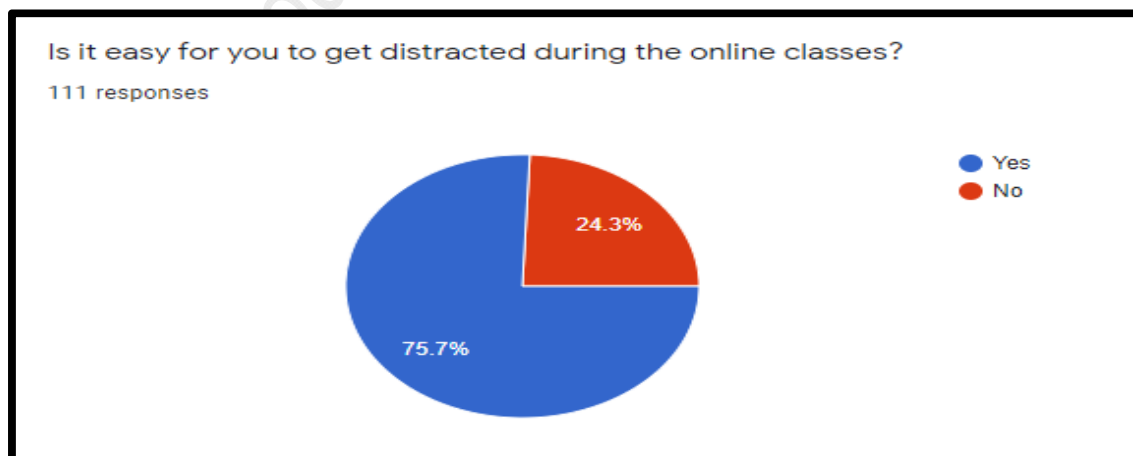
A large number of respondents, 75.7% responded that they are easily getting distracted during the online classes while only 24.3% responded that they are not getting distracted during the online classes.

Is time management becoming an issue when it comes to attending online classes?

111 responses
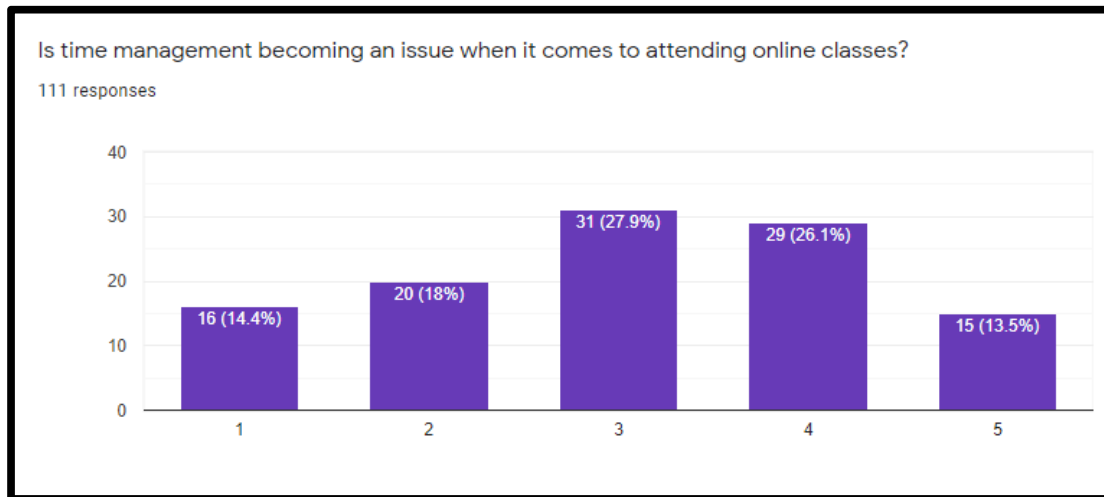
Most of the respondents, 27.9% responded neutrally when asked if time management was becoming an issue when it came to attending online classes. 26.1% agreed that time management is an issue while only 18% did not necessarily feel that time management was a concern for them.

Do you actively engage in helping your parents with household chores?

111 responses
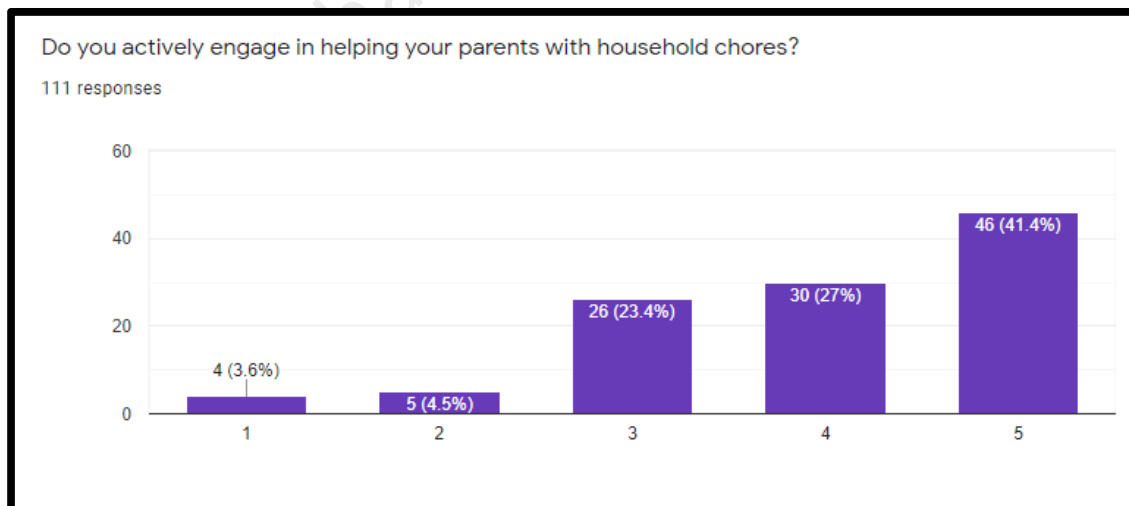
Most of the students, 41.4% responded that they actively engage themselves in helping their parents with household chores, wh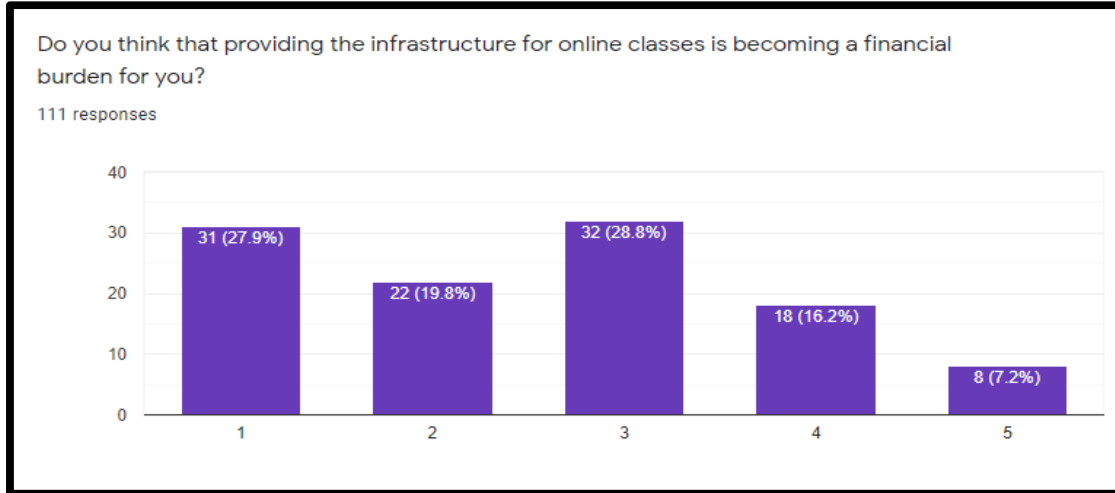ile only 3.6% responded that they are not helping their parents with household chores. Since we have established that 80.2% of the respondents are female then it can be assumed that the large majority of students actively engaged in household chores are also predominantly female.
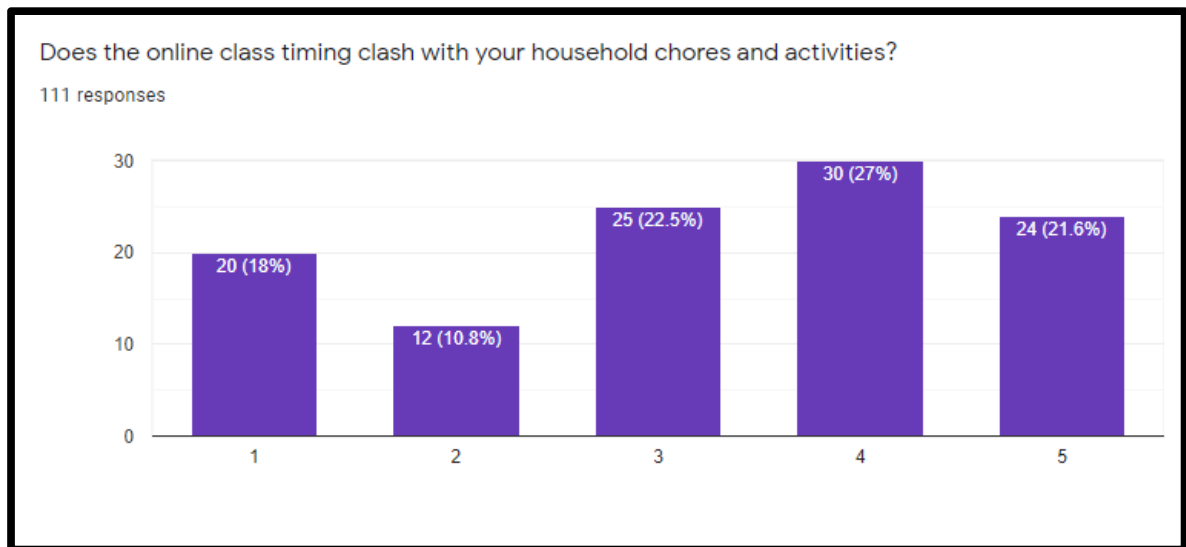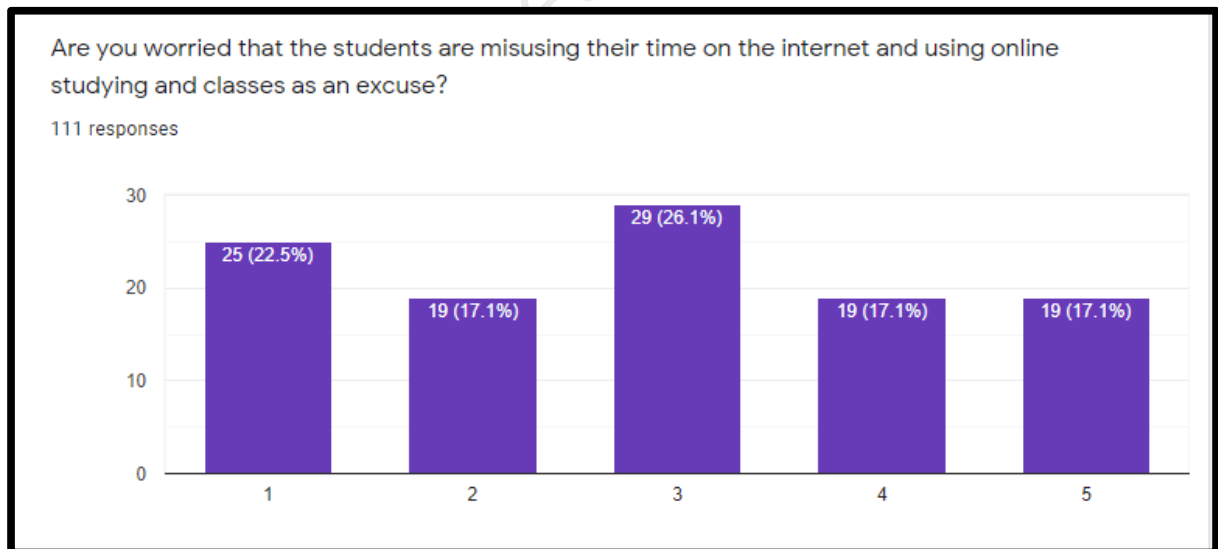

A majority of the respondents, 27% and 21.6% students agreed that that the online class timings clashed with their household chores while only 18% did not feel that online classes clashed with their household chores. The unavailability of domestic help during the lockdown could have contributed to the responses acquired.

Analysis of Section D

Do you think that providing the infrastructure for online classes is becoming a financial burden for you?

111 responses

Most parents, 28.8% have responded neutrally while 27.9% feel that providing the infrastructure for online classes is not a financial burden for them and only a small percentage (7.2%) felt that it was a burden.

Are you worried that the students are misusing their time on the internet and using online studying and classes as an excuse?

111 responses

Most parents, 26.1% have responded neutrally while 22.5% do not feel that students are misusing their time on the internet and using the online classes as an excuse. 17.1% felt that their children were misusing their time on the internet and wasting their time.

How likely are you to send your child to college in the upcoming months?
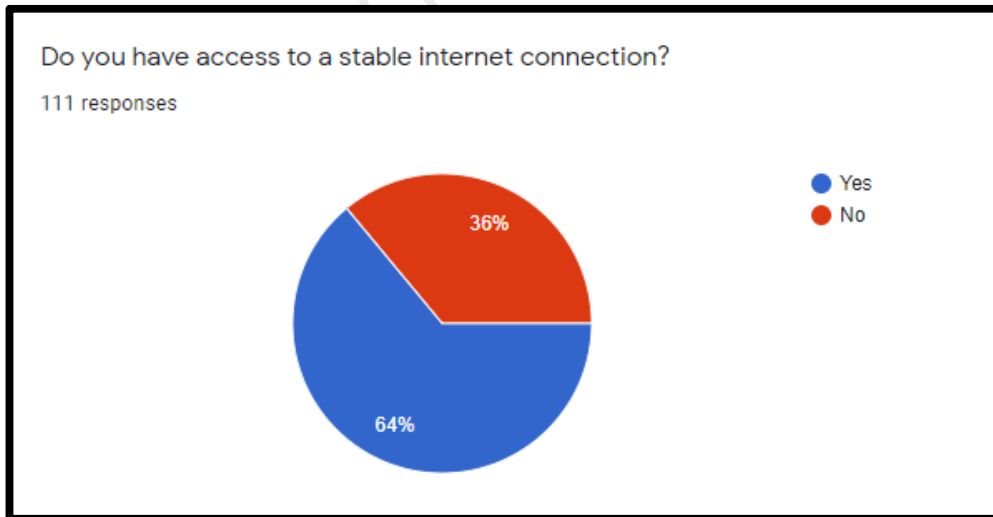
111 responses
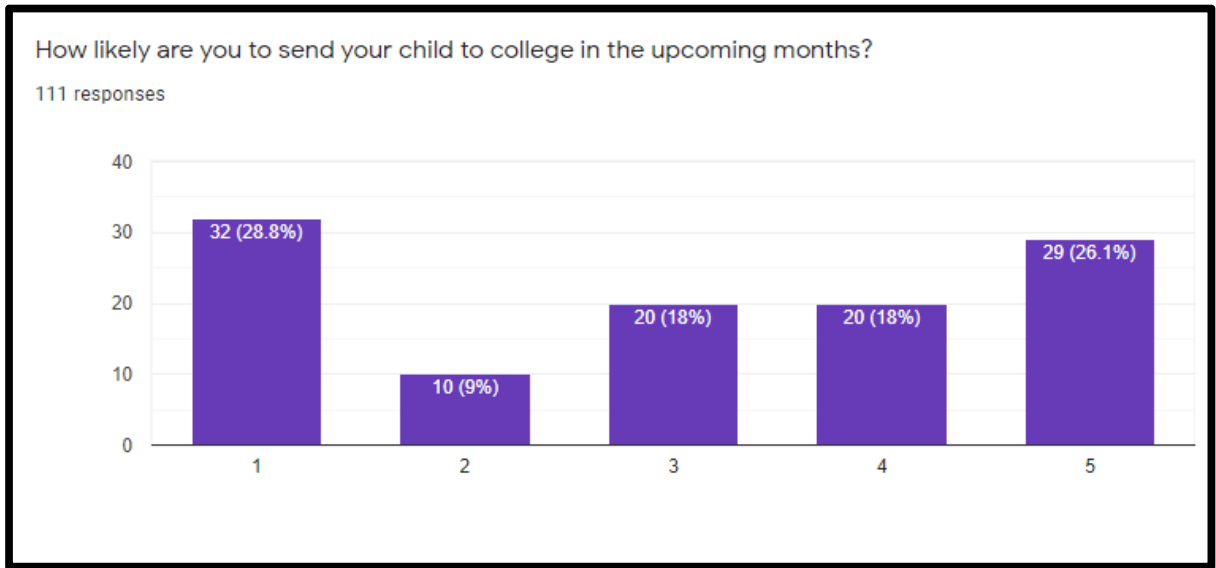
The response from the parents indicate that 28.8% are highly unlikely to send their children to college in the upcoming months while 26.1% are very likely going to send their children to college in the upcoming months.

Analysis of Section E

Do you have access to a stable internet connection?

111 responses

The responses indicate that 64% of the respondents have access to a stable internet connection while 36% do not have access to a stable internet connection.

Do you have access to high-speed internet connectivity?
111 responses
- Yes
- No
58.6%
41.4%
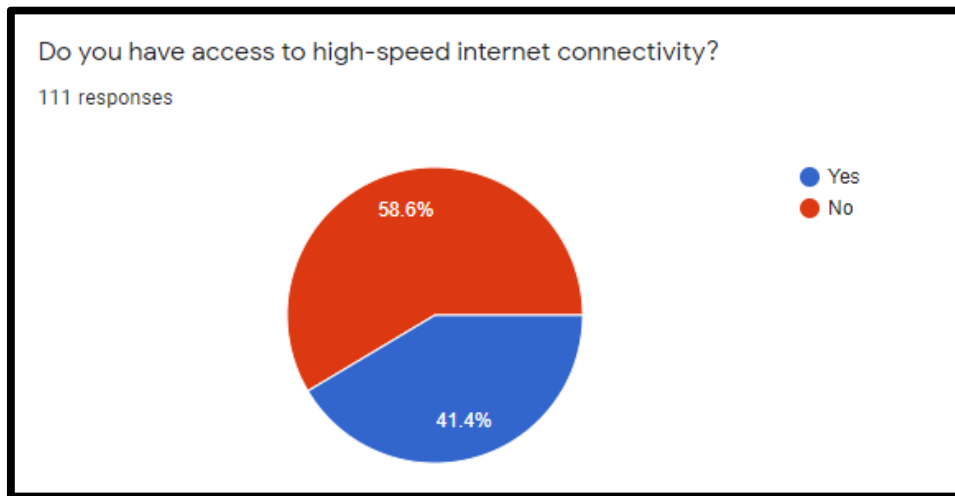
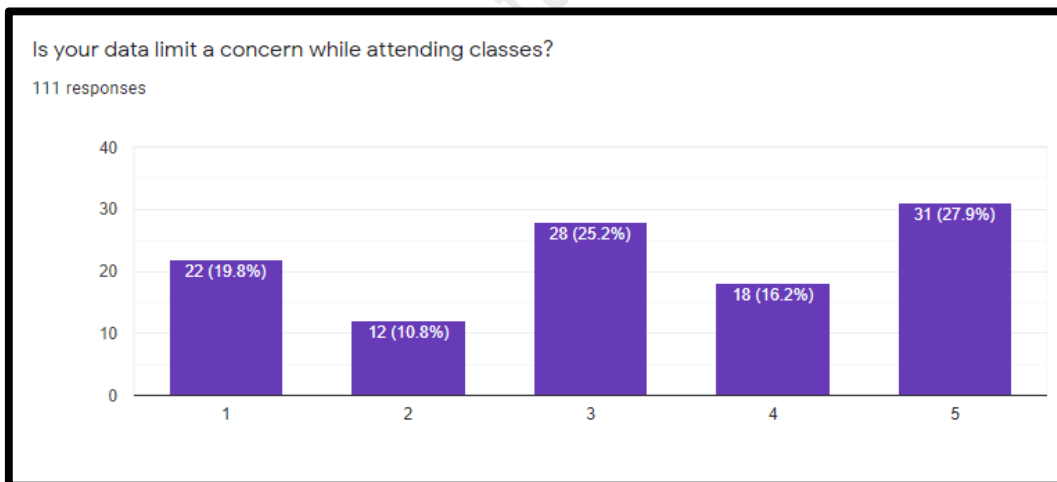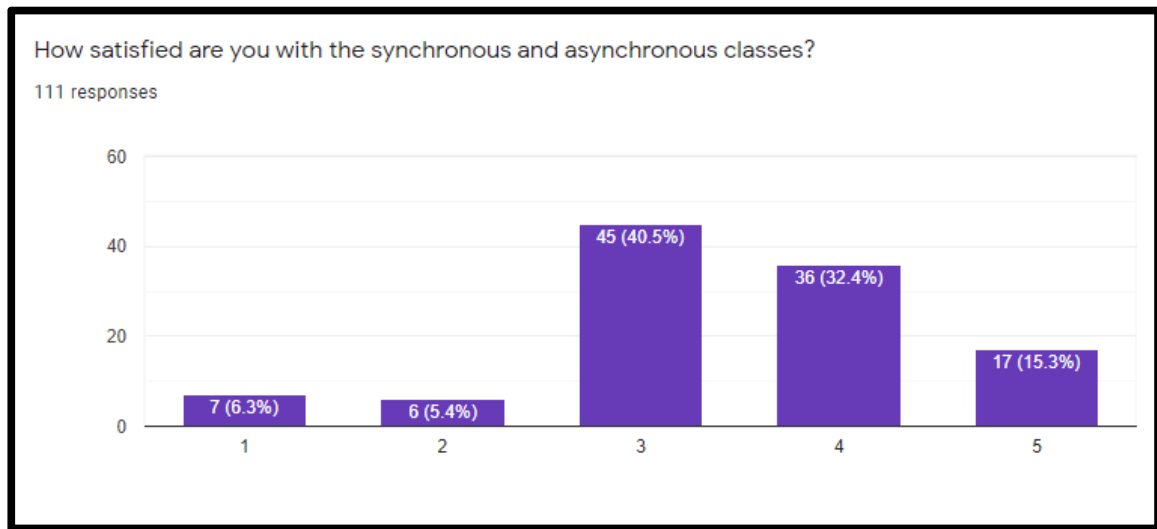A majority of the respondents, 58.6% of the respondents do not have access to high-speed internet connectivity while 41.4% of the respondents have access to high-speed internet connectivity which is necessary when streaming video lectures or attending synchronous classes throughout the day.

Is your data limit a concern while attending classes?
111 responses

22 (19.8%) | 12 (10.8%) | 28 (25.2%) | 18 (16.2%) | 31 (27.9%)

Most of the students, 27.9% responded that their data limit is a concern while attending online classes while 19.8% students did not feel that their data limit was a concern for attending online classes.

Majority of the respondents, 40.5% responded neutrally while 32.5% were satisfied with their synchronous and asynchronous classes. The students were also asked to share the number of classes they had to attend on an everyday basis. Most of the students responded that they had to attend three to four classes every day.

An empirical study carried along similar lines have also proven that students were driven towards the multimedia means of study and the students were content with the online mode of education. Massive Open Online Courses, favorite online learning materials and methods were also significant in framing their attitude towards online learning[2].

Conclusion

The study was conducted when India was under complete lockdown and the teaching-learning system had to undergo a digital transformation overnight. The responses can be viewed in similar light as a feeling of uncertainty was mutual among every citizen. The students have however been optimistic in adapting to the new online mode of education. The online mode of learning has its advantages and disadvantages as the students were not able to clear doubts, access e-materials universally and manage their health and household chores to the optimum level along with their regular classes. Some of them even identified that the process of e-learning has made learning flexible but also invited plagiarism in the

form of copying and pasting of answers and assignments. The current system of teaching and learning is also informal as the formal setup cannot be implemented through the online mode of education. A study conducted in Maharashtra also collected the views of students regarding the teaching-learning process amid the pandemic and concluded that the cost of online education might have also increased to make provisions for the necessary facilities required for an online class[1]. An erosion of duty bound, dignified and ethical communication between the students and teachers have also been seen in the digital mode of education. After conducting examinations for two consecutive semesters, it has been realized that the system of online examination is a farce as no fruitful outcomes are achieved as a result of this process. Thus, the online informal system of education cannot be a substitute to the existing formal system of education. The researchers being active practitioners of the field have also come across various situations where technology has been used as an easy excuse to escape class. The unidirectional approach of remote learning has also contributed to the decreasing motivation among teachers as the students become passive listeners and often show little or no interest in attending and engaging in classroom activities. The respondents of our study were also concentrated in the urban and semi-urban areas and were equipped with the basic tools for attending online classes even though a small percentage have identified problems of not having access to a stable and high-speed internet connection. The parents have also responded positively about the online classes being held keeping in view the global pandemic that surrounds us.

References

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2. Pandey, D., Ogunmola, G. A., Enbeyle, W., Abdullahi, M., Pandey, B. K., & Pramanik, S. (2021). COVID-19: A framework for effective delivering of online classes during lockdown. Human Arenas, 1-15.