

ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION – A CASE STUDY**Dr. Marina Pereira**

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Abstract:

Covid-19 pandemic has had widespread impact on the education sector. Online learners have been facing myriad issues since March 2020 when educational institutions were forced to adopt Online Teaching Learning Management Systems due to the lockdown and Covid protocol imposed. This Paper is an attempt to analyse the impact of the pandemic on online learners in higher education.

It is a Case study based on Primary data collected through Google Forms administered through WhatsApp Groups. The Questionnaire aimed at analysing the Academic, health, alienation problems if any faced by learners and studying the effectiveness of Online Learning in Higher education. Telephonic conversations and discussions helped to give a deeper insight into the various issues involved.

The Paper has four Sections. Section 1 is an Introduction and Backdrop. The Objectives of the Study and Research Methodology are included in Section 2. Section 3 is an analysis of the Findings and Discussion. Section 4 summarises the Conclusion.

Key words: *Covid-19, pandemic, online, learners, higher education.*

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1.1 Introduction

Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all sectors of the Indian economy. It has had widespread effects on the education sector. Online learners have been facing myriad issues since March 2020 when educational institutions were forced to adopt Online Teaching Learning Management Systems due to the lockdown and Covid protocol imposed. Learners have discussed in telephonic conversations personal and family problems, feeling of alienation, device problems, internet issues, anxiety about Online Examinations, study material issues and the like. This Paper is an attempt to examine these issues and analyse the impact of the pandemic on online learners in higher education.

1.2 Backdrop

As early as 2013 Nazarlou pointed out the negative impact of online learning. It affects the health of learners and takes them away from reality. The Skymet Weather Team (2021) has highlighted the fact that campus and cafeterias are an important aspect of college education and online learning has caused stress and anxiety. Bird

et al (2022) have also studied the negative impact of the online shift and the role of faculty. In sharp contrast, Prakash (2021) gives the title of Superhero to online education as it helped to maintain the mental wellbeing of students during the Covid-19 induced lockdown. Sharma (2020) has also discussed the pros and cons of Online learning in higher education. This article aims at studying the effectiveness of Online learning in Arts Classes with limited number of mature learners. Hence the Third Year Arts Graduate and Final Year Post Graduate Students were chosen as the Sample.

2.1 Objectives of the Study:

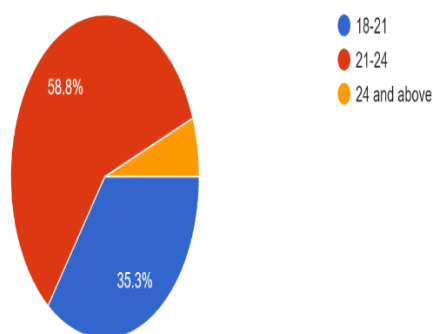
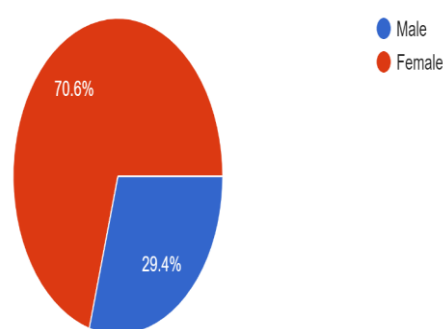
- To study the effectiveness of Online Learning in Higher Education.
- To analyse the Academic problems if any faced by online learners.
- To examine health problems if any faced by learners.
- To identify problems of alienation if any caused by online learning.

2.2 Research Methodology:

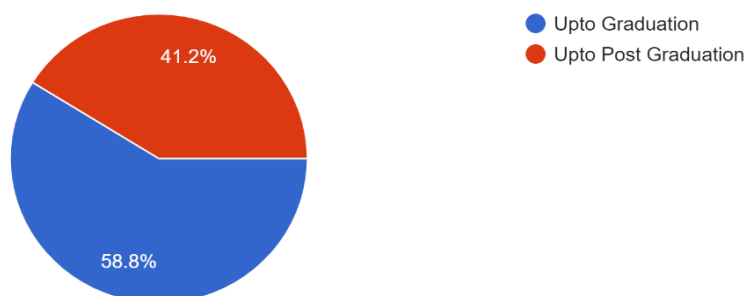
It is a Case study of 34 Research participants from the Arts Stream who had completed Graduation or Post-Graduation in June 2021. The Research is based on Primary data collected through Google Forms administered through WhatsApp Groups. The Online Classes and Presentations were conducted on Google Meet. Tests were conducted through Google Forms. Term End Examinations were conducted on Moodle Platform. Data was collected from Learners who were in their Final Year of Graduation or Post-Graduation in the Academic Year 2020-21. All respondents had completed one year of online learning. The Research Questions aimed at analysing the Academic, health, alienation problems if any faced by learners and studying the effectiveness of Online Learning in Higher education. Telephonic conversations and discussions helped to give a deeper insight into the various issues involved.

3. Analysis of Findings and Discussion

3.1 Sample Profile

 Age
 34 responses

 Gender
 34 responses


You have completed
34 responses

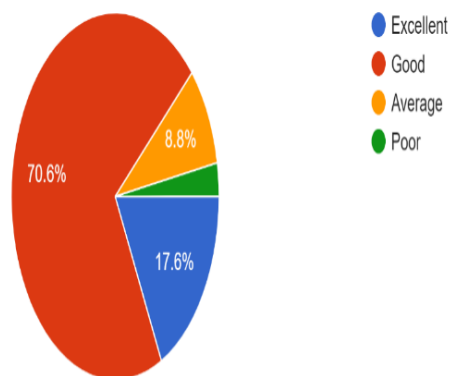


In the Sample 20 respondents (58.8 per cent) were between 21 to 24 years of age; 12 respondents (35.3 per cent) were between 18 to 21 years of age and only 2 respondents (5.9 per cent) were above 24 years. 24 respondents (70.6 per cent) were Female and 10 (29.4 per cent) were Male. 20 Respondents (58.8 per cent) had completed up to Graduation and 14 (41.2 per cent) up to Post-Graduation.

3.2 Online Learning Experience and Network Problems

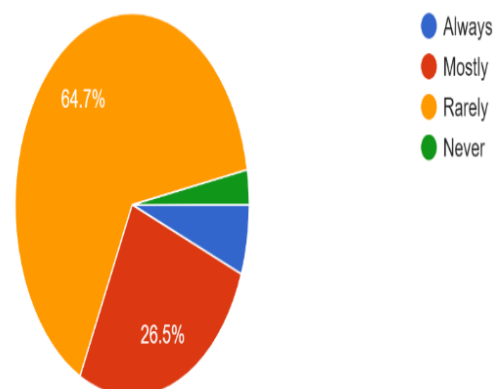
What was your experience of Online Learning?

34 responses



Did you face network problems?

34 responses



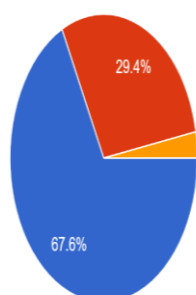
6 learners (17.6 per cent) mentioned that they had an excellent experience with Online Learning; 24 learners (70.6 per cent) had a Good experience; 3 respondents (8.8 per cent) had an Average experience while one respondent (2.9 per cent) had a Poor experience. This Respondent explained that she did not have her own Smartphone for studies. She had many siblings and the family had migrated to their native place as they could not pay the rent of the urban dwelling. In the remote village there were a lot of network issues. She had to go far away from the house to get network coverage. This affected her performance in Tests and Presentations as well as attendance in Online Lectures.

22 learners (64.7 per cent) rarely faced network problems; 9 learners (26.5 per cent) mostly faced network

problems; one respondent (2.9 per cent) never faced while 2 respondents (5.9 per cent) reported that they always faced network problems.

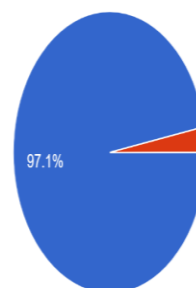
3.3 Learning Devices

You attended lectures mainly through
34 responses



Did you have your own smartphone for learning?
34 responses

Smartphone
Laptop
Desktop



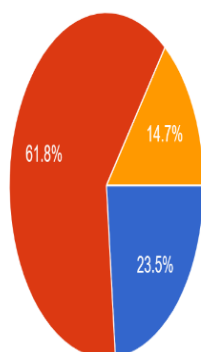
Yes
No

It was very encouraging to find that 10 learners (29.4 per cent) used a Laptop for attending lectures; one learner used a Desktop while 23 learners (67.6 per cent) attended lectures through Smartphones. All except one Learner had their own Smartphone for learning. This Learner explained that she used the family mobile which was shared with siblings for Academics as well as by parents for communication. Many times there were problems of inadequate balance or downloading Learning and Management Systems due to lack of storage as some siblings had other Learning Platforms like Zoom and MS -Teams. Moreover, the device was outdated.

3.4 Academic Problems

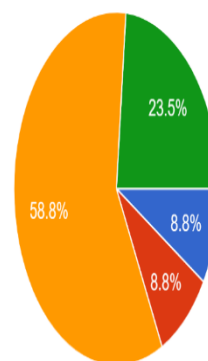
3.4 An Earning while learning and Study Material

Did you have a job while pursuing Online education?
34 responses



Yes
No
For some time

Did you have problems with study material?
34 responses



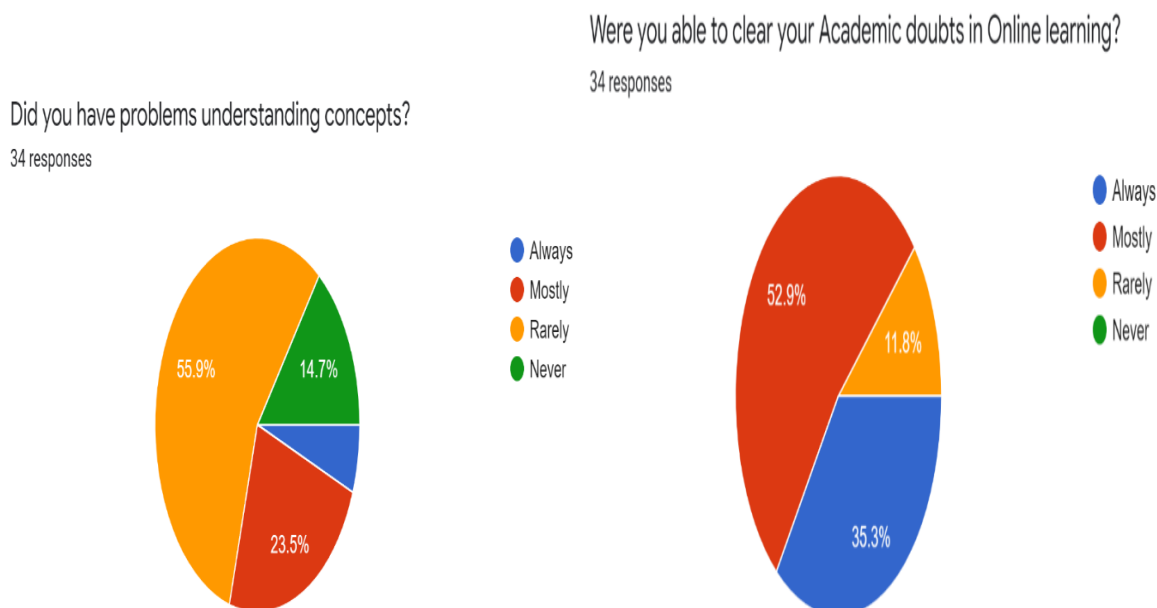
Always
Mostly
Rarely
Never

Due to the pandemic many learners had to take up jobs to supplement the family income or fund their education. 21 learners (61.8 per cent) did not have a job while pursuing Online education; 8 learners (23.5 per cent) had a job while pursuing Online education while 5 learners (14.7 per cent) had a job for some time or

worked part time. Having a job many times shifts priorities from learning to earning with education being accorded secondary importance. Many students who were working skipped online lectures or only virtually attended without actually paying attention. They had difficulties in understanding concepts.

In Online Learning Study material was mailed through Class Representatives or shared through Google Classroom or WhatsApp. 20 learners (58.8 per cent) rarely had problems with Study Material; 8 learners (23.5 per cent) never had problems; while 3 respondents each (8.8 per cent) reported that they Mostly or Always had problems with Study material. These were the Learners who had to attend to ailing family members or relatives or had to bear the burden of household responsibilities with their mothers temporarily migrating to their native places to take care of ailing elders or complete last rites due to the precarious situation. These learners found it very difficult to contact their classmates and keep track of studies. The Faculty and Class Representatives found it impossible to communicate with them as they kept using different Mobile numbers which were not officially recorded on groups.

3.4B Understanding Concepts and Doubt Clearing

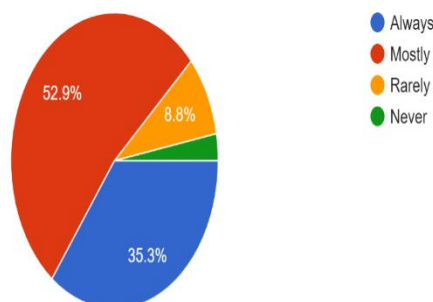


19 learners (55.9 per cent) reported that they rarely had problems understanding concepts; 8 learners (23.5 per cent) reported that they mostly had problems; 5 learners (14.7 per cent) never had problems while 2 respondents (5.9 per cent) reported that they always had problems understanding concepts. These were the 2 learners who faced network problems due to which they had difficulty joining the Meets or there were intermittent disruptions.

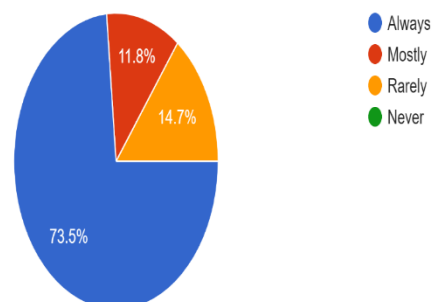
18 learners (52.9 per cent) were mostly able to clear their Academic doubts in Online Learning; 12 learners (35.3 per cent) were always able to clear their academic doubts while 4 learners (11.8 per cent) were rarely able to clear their academic doubts.

3.4C Rapport with Teachers – Virtual vis-à-vis Physical Contact

Did you share a good rapport with your teachers in Online Classes? 34 responses



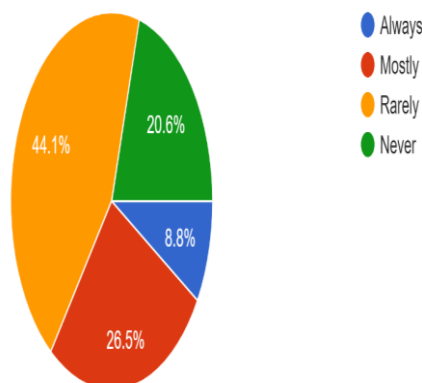
Did you miss the real contact with teachers? 34 responses



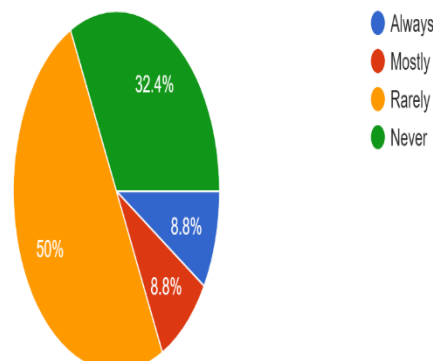
Doubt clearing in most cases was related to the rapport learners enjoyed with their teachers in Online Classes. 18 learners (52.9 per cent) mostly shared a good rapport with teachers in Online Classes; 12 learners (35.3 per cent) always shared a good rapport; 3 learners (8.8 per cent) rarely shared a good rapport while 1 student never had a good rapport. This was the same learner with device and network problems as well as personal problems. Online education has made the learner and many times even faculty also faceless as in case of poor network cameras need to be switched off. Interacting with the screen or through it is not as effective as physical classes. 25 learners (73.5 per cent) mentioned that they missed the Real Contact with Teachers; 4 learners (11.8 per cent) mostly missed the real contact while 14.7 per cent Rarely missed the Real Contact.

3.4 D Online Projects/ Presentations and Examinations

Did you face difficulties in preparing Projects/ Presentations? 34 responses



Did you face difficulties in Online Examinations? 34 responses



3 learners (8.8 per cent) reported that they always faced difficulties; 7 learners (20.6 per cent) mostly faced difficulties; 15 learners (44.1 per cent) rarely faced difficulties while 9 learners (26.5 per cent) never faced difficulties in preparing Projects / Presentations. Many learners reported that they borrowed a Laptop or

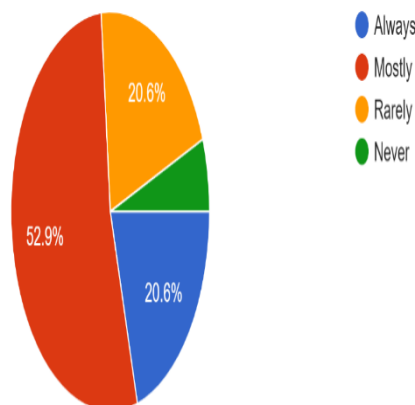
Desktop or asked the student with a Laptop or Desktop to prepare the Presentation in the case of group projects. The Covid -19 pandemic had taught them the benefits of teamwork.

11 learners (32.4 per cent) reported that they never faced difficulties in Online Examinations; 17 learners (50 per cent) reported that they rarely faced difficulties in Online Examinations while 3 learners each (8.8 per cent each) reported that they Mostly or Always faced problems.

3.4E Learning Atmosphere -Classroom, Library, Home and Canteen

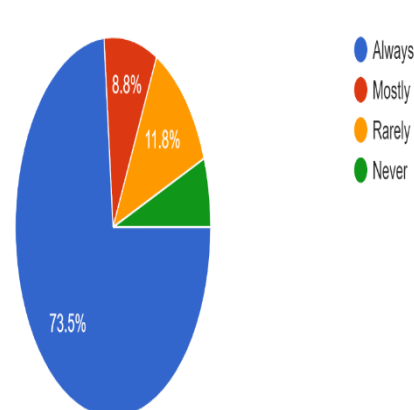
Were you able to concentrate on Online Lectures at home?

34 responses



Did you miss your hangouts with friends in College?

34 responses



Learners bloom in different learning environments – be it classrooms, libraries, their own homes or in College Canteens with group studies and intellectual discussions during hangouts with friends. 7 learners (20.6 per cent) reported that they were always able to concentrate on Online lectures at home; 18 learners (52.9 per cent) reported that they were mostly able to concentrate on Online lectures at home; 7 learners (20.6 per cent) reported that they were rarely able to concentrate while 2 learners (5.9 per cent) reported that they were never able to concentrate on Online lectures at home. Difficulties arose because learners had to share the study room with siblings whose classes went on simultaneously. Or there was background noise of household chores or sound from neighbouring houses in cases of dwelling in chawls.

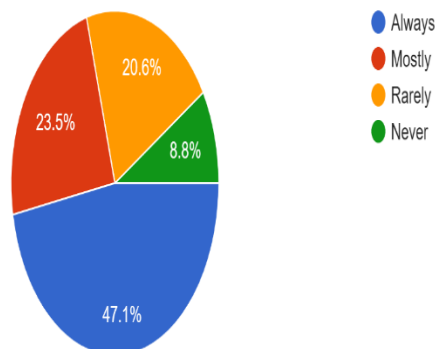
The Covid pandemic deprived learners of Canteen hangouts with friends- the best part of College life. 25 learners (73.5 per cent) reported that they always missed; 4 learners (11.8 per cent) rarely missed it; 3 learners (8.8 per cent) mostly missed it while only 2 learners (5.9 per cent) reported that they never missed the hangouts with friends. They were generally introverts and preferred self-study.

3.5 Health Issues

The main health issue faced by learners was stress due to Connectivity issues that could arise during examinations. 12 learners (35.3 per cent) always faced stress; 9 learners (26.5 per cent) mostly faced stress; 9 learners (32.4 per cent) rarely faced stress while 2 learners (5.9 per cent) never faced stress due to this reason.

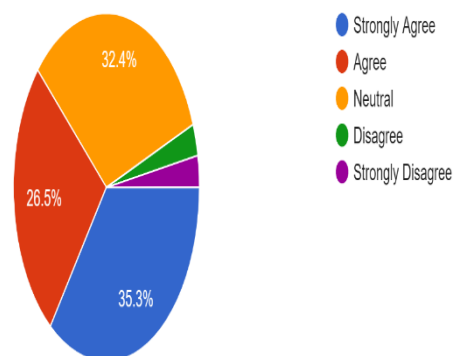
Did you face eye strain due to Online learning?

34 responses



Your fitness levels suffered due to Online Classes

34 responses

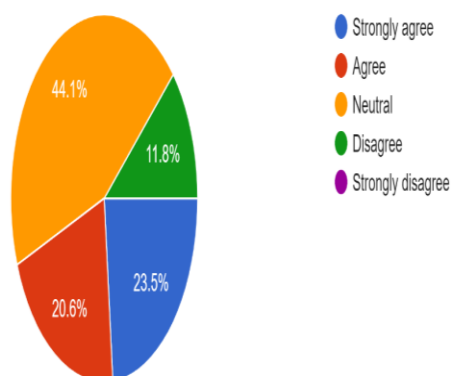


16 learners (47.1 per cent) reported that they always faced eye strain; 8 learners (23.5 per cent) reported that they mostly faced eyestrain; 7 learners (20.6 per cent) reported that they rarely faced eye strain while 3 learners (8.8 per cent) reported that they never faced eye strain. 12 learners (35.3 per cent) Strongly Agreed while 9 learners (26.5 per cent) Agreed that their fitness levels suffered due to Online Learning; 11 learners (32.4 per cent) chose to remain Neutral while one learner each (2.9 per cent) chose to disagree and strongly disagree.

3.6 Holistic Development

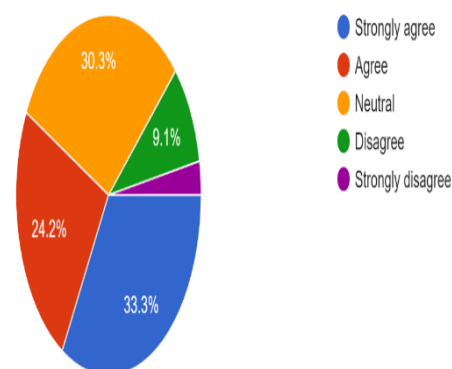
Online learning does not lead to holistic development of learners

34 responses



Online learning is no substitute for Classroom education

33 responses



8 learners (23.5 per cent) Strongly Agreed while 7 learners (20.6 per cent) Agreed; 15 learners (44.1 per cent) chose to remain neutral while 4 learners (11.8 per cent) disagreed that Online learning does not lead to holistic development of learners.

11 learners (33.3 per cent) Strongly Agreed while 8 learners (24.2 per cent) Agreed; 10 learners (30.3 per cent) chose to remain neutral; 3 learners (9.1 per cent) disagreed while one learner strongly disagreed that Online learning is no substitute for Classroom education.

4. Conclusion

In spite of various problems in Online Education pointed out by the study the problems were much less according to learners compared to other Classes. In this study the Class size was around 60 students at Graduation and 25 in Post-Graduation which led to a better faculty-student ratio. In most Undergraduate Classes especially in the Commerce stream the average size of a class is 120 students. The higher Learner-Faculty ratio could magnify problems for online learners in Higher Education. The Research Paper highlighted the fact that issues of Online Learners in Higher Education vary across streams and subjects. Mentor meetings and doubt-solving sessions could go a long way in solving the problems of learners and improve the effectiveness of Online learning in Higher Education.

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