



Status of Online School Education and School Libraries at Selected Metro Cities in India During Corona Pandemic Lockdown: A Study

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Abstract

The Covid-19 has resulted in closure of schools. The pandemic has transformed the centuries-old, chalk-talk teaching model to one driven by digital technology. This study has been conducted to find the prevalent situation of online/digital mode of education in selected schools of Kolkata and Delhi in India from the perspectives of the students/learners with a focus on different aspects of online/digital learning. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to students of different schools of Kolkata and Delhi, covering 78 different schools. The survey tried to capture students' response on the adoption of immediate measures for ensuring essential continuity of learning for all types of schools. The study clearly indicates that the students are missing their classrooms. They are getting overly stretched and stressed as the school hours are going at times beyond the usual school hours and it is now all study and no play. School libraries need to be digitized and networked also. This will lead to the creation of virtual school libraries through which the students can access to information at any time.

Keywords: Online school education, Digital education, School libraries, Covid 19, Corona pandemic.



1. Introduction

State governments across India, around the second week of March had begun to close down schools, colleges and universities temporarily as a measure to restrain the spread of the Covid-19 virus. By end of March lockdown was declared all over India. That was crucial time for the education sector, major examinations were still on, board examinations, nursery school admissions, entrance tests of various universities and competitive examinations, were all scheduled during this period. As the months passed by with no immediate solution to stop the outbreak of Covid-19, the closures of schools, colleges and universities are no longer a short term solution. It has already impacted over 240 million children (MHRD, 2020) in India who are enrolled in various classes in schools all over the nation.

The Covid-19 has resulted in closure of schools across the world. Globally 1.2 billion children are out of their classrooms now. The established structure for learning and schooling, including prevalent method for teaching and assessment, have already been affected by these closures. School libraries are also pandemic affected mode trying to reorient themselves to provide necessary services.

Libraries play important roles in education. It provides access to education by teaching information skills, it helps to ensure equity in education, it impacts academic achievement for individuals and assisting them in lifelong learning.

Needless to say, the pandemic has transformed the centuries-old, chalk-talk teaching model to one driven by technology. This disruption in the delivery of education is pushing policymakers to figure out how to drive engagement at scale while ensuring inclusive e-learning solutions and tackling the digital divide. A multi-pronged strategy is necessary to manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term (Patnaik (2020)).

The relevance of the present survey based research is to study the initial phase of only a few schools in two big metropolitan cities in India which were affected by the pandemic and were able to adopt available stopgap type online teaching methods. Even these handful schools were not prepared fully to face this disastrous situation. The main purpose of the present research is to study the present online school education system for developing a proper mitigation model to



deal with this situation of pandemic which may call for remodelling the basic prototype of schooling and learning.

2. Research Objective

This study has been conducted to find the prevalent situation of online/digital mode of education in selected schools of Kolkata and Delhi from the perspectives of the students/learners with a focus on different aspects of online/digital learning.

3. Literature Review

On one hand online education seems to be the only solution for the school education under this pandemic situation as reflected in one of the survey, conducted by Local Circles (a polling platform on issues of governance, public and consumer interest) received more than 18,000 responses from across 220 districts in India. According to the survey a majority of Indian parents do not want schools to reopen until there are zero Corona cases for at least 21 days. On the other had as commented by Prof Avijit Pathak mentioned about the present situation in his article ‘Rethinking Education in the Age of the Coronavirus published in The Wire Pathak (2020) “however, what is ironic is that even at this puzzling moment, we fail to see beyond techno-managerial solutions; seldom do we go beyond what is popularly known as ‘online’ learning. Hence, nothing, it is thought, is more important than reading the same texts, completing the same kind of assignments, and listening to the same monologue of the teachers. Thus it definitely raises the questions of effectiveness of the school education including the preparedness of the school libraries to cope up with the present pandemic situation. Before getting into the topic we will try to understand the present pandemic situation with respect to other studies done by different international agencies on both school education and school libraries.

As mentioned in UNESCO website under Covid impact UNESCO Institute for Statistics Data (2020) “Most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. These nationwide closures are impacting over 60% of the world’s student population. Several other countries have implemented localized closures impacting millions of additional learners.”



Fig.1 (Source: Taken from UNESCO webpage which shows the global of school closure caused by Covid-19)

In the IFLA website Covid section International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions(2020) while estimating about the status of closure for different types of libraries around the world, it has been commented for the school libraries that “School libraries in 144 countries have been affected by the closure of all educational institutions”.

A survey (School Covid-19 Response Survey) was conducted by School Library Journal(2020). It queried K-12 librarians from April 2 to April 12 about their experience mainly in USA. The experiences they shared depicted that “63 percent of librarians have provided students/families with technical assistance during the shutdown, 57 percent have provided access to online learning software, and 57 percent have helped prepare teachers in their school for online learning. 42 percent have licensed additional eBooks and other digital tools. The most common library services currently being offered to students at home are readers’ advisory (55 percent), research/project assistance (46 percent), and story time/readaloud (42 percent).Only 14 percent of libraries have offered live virtual classes”.



The figures below are visual representation of the survey as found in School Library Journal website.

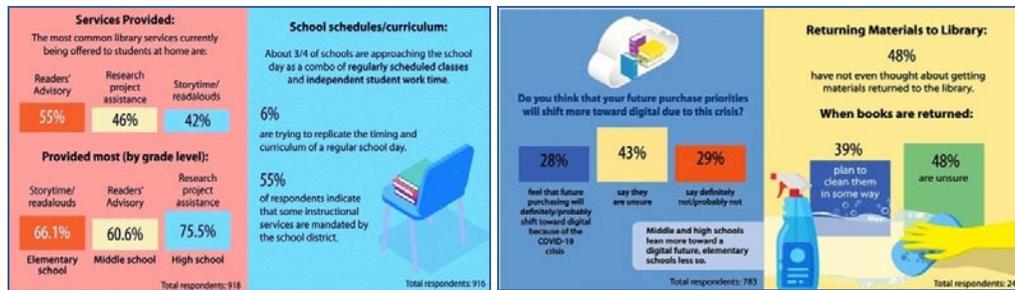


Fig. 2 (Source: Taken from the article ‘What Librarians Are Doing to Support Students and Teachers in the Shutdown | SLJ COVID-19 Survey’ published in SLJ website by SLJ Staff on Apr 23, 2020 and is filed in News & Features.)

4. Methodology

The survey has been carried out through an online questionnaire to collect primary data. It has been designed in Google Forms containing 35 questions, posted on different what's app groups. Questions have been written in easy language that anyone can understand. They are simple and are not very technical or filled with jargons. The questions are with fixed-alternatives tried to exhaust the universe of responses and also tried to be mutually exclusive. An extra category is added to the alternatives, ‘others specify’ to accommodate such answers which the respondent thinks, are not covered by the suggested alternative. The questionnaire is so designed that students differing in classes will also understand the questions and give complete and pertinent answers.

5. Data Analysis & Findings

A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to students of different schools of Kolkata and Delhi, 117 filled-in questionnaires were received back out of which 111 filled in questionnaires could be used as the rest were either duplicate forms or from the same school. The survey covers 78 different schools of Delhi and Kolkata. The survey tried to capture students data from



different schools. And in case of repetition a maximum of two students representing a single school were taken. The survey was conducted during April 2020 to June 2020.

5.1 Students, Class and Schools: Similarities and Dissimilarities

The representation of respondents from Delhi is 62% and that of Kolkata is 38%. The survey has almost equal participation of male and female students with 55 male and 56 female students.

The survey got maximum response from students of class 11, class 10 and class 9. About 24% of the students are from class 11 and 15% are from class 10 and class 9 respectively. Since the survey was not class specified, it has representations across middle, secondary and higher secondary sections. Even there are 5 students who belong to the highest class of the primary section.

For 96 respondent students there have been regular online classes for the rest even if there are online classes but it is still not on regular basis. Out of these 96 students 74% are having their classes since April 2020, 16% from May and 10% are having their class since March 2020.

The maximum respondent of the dataset is from private schools representing 66% although a good number respondents are also from either government aided private schools i.e. 15% or government schools i.e. 10%. Since the survey is focused on Delhi and Kolkata, majority of the representations are students from private schools.

Majority of the students i.e. 59% are having their classes in the morning, followed by students i.e. 20% having classes both in the morning and afternoon. Only 1% of students is having classes in the evening.



5.2 Devices and Connections: Familiarities and Unfamiliarities

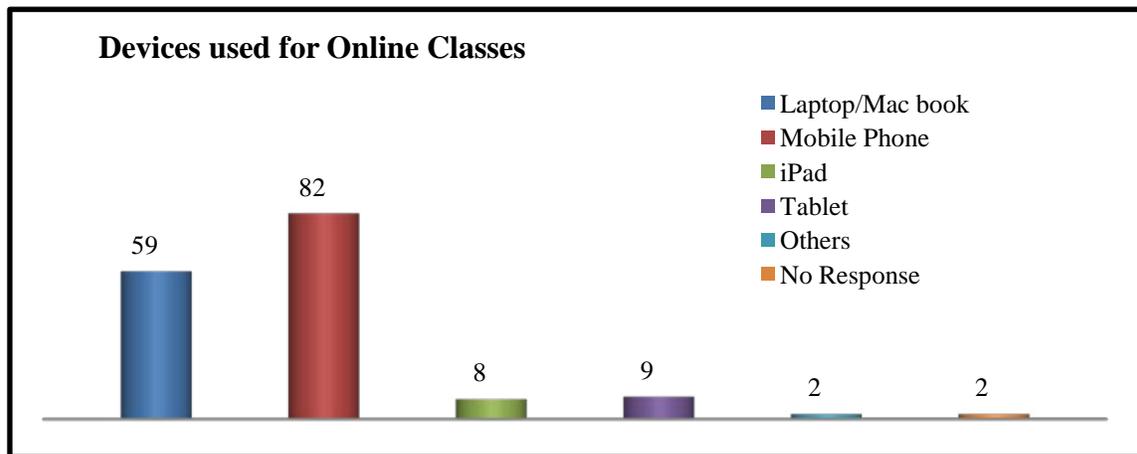


Fig. 3: Devices used for Online Classes

Mobile is the most common device for attending the online classes among the respondents. This figure also indicates that mobile is the most widespread device that is available in almost every household. Since our survey is based on cities so there are many households having laptops as well.

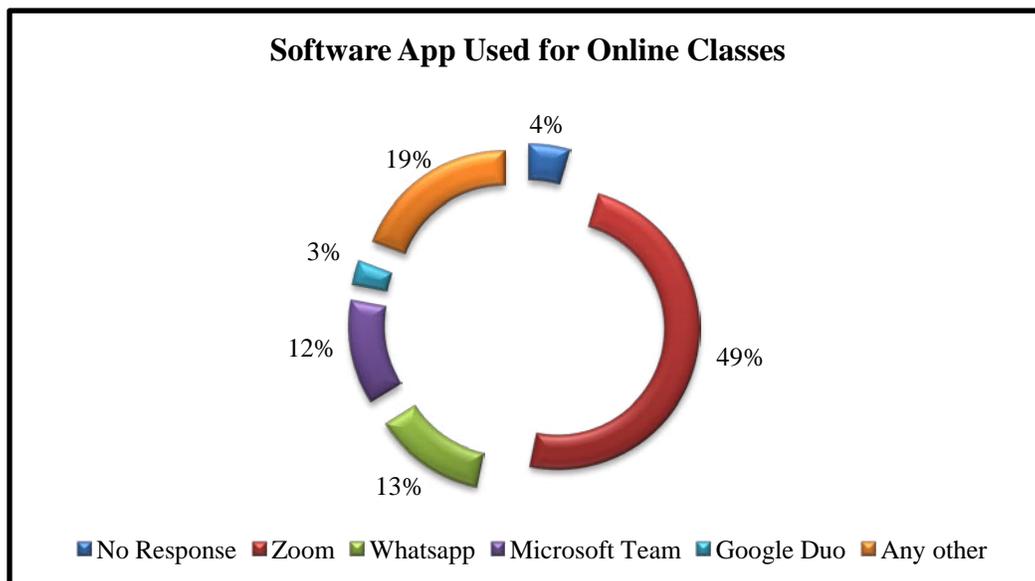


Fig. 4; Software App Used for Online Classes



From the above figure it is observed that zoom app has been the most popular app used for online classes among the respondent's school. Due to the nationwide lockdown to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, the central government has asked all schools to start the academic session 2020-21 online. Initially zoom was quite popular because it offers free, 40-minute conference call classes with up to 100 attendees. It is easy to use for students as it doesn't need a login to access a class and the interface is relatively intuitive. But by mid-April 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued an advisory to all private individuals using the Zoom app for meetings and video calls, alerting that it is unsafe. Since then, a number of private schools that had been using the app for online classes have started exploring alternate ways to teach students. As this survey has been conducted between April to June 2020 so even if initial responses went in favour of zoom but gradually the responses are in favour of other apps as well.

Predicting a change might have happened, a query was put up regarding any change in the apps used and whether it was a different one at the beginning. For 37 respondent students belonging to different schools agreed that there were changes. Out of 20 schools that were earlier using Zoom app, now shifted to Microsoft Team (10 schools), Google Meet (8 schools), Cisco WebEx and Google Duo (one school each).

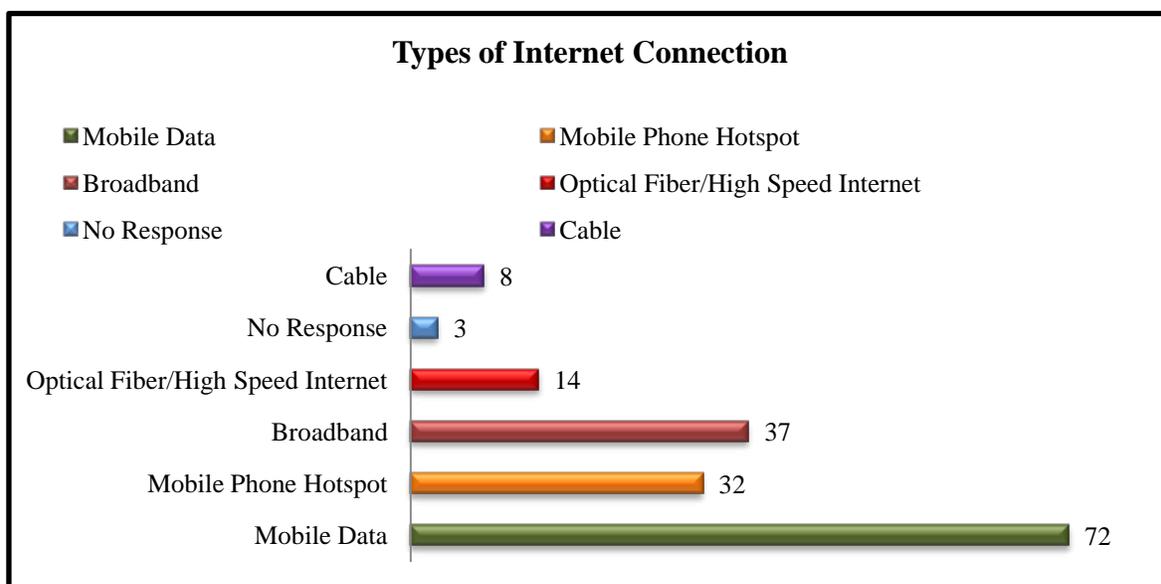


Figure 5: Types of Internet Connection



From the above figure it is quite evident that majority of the respondents have used mobile for their internet connection for joining the online classes. Even students have used Mobile hotspot connection in other devices for attending the online classes. According to report by Medianama.com (2019) that in India there were 1,021.7 billion active connections in March 2019 which implies that Mobile data connection is most common connection among the Indians and so for students as well.

Almost 39% of the respondent students have limited amount of data allowed for their Internet access but majority i.e. 49% of the respondent students do not have any limit for their data access. Rest of the student are not sure about the limit related to data access.

In 74% of the responded students' households, all other adult members are using internet, in 33% of the households some adult members are using. In rest of the households' no one except the student is using the internet.

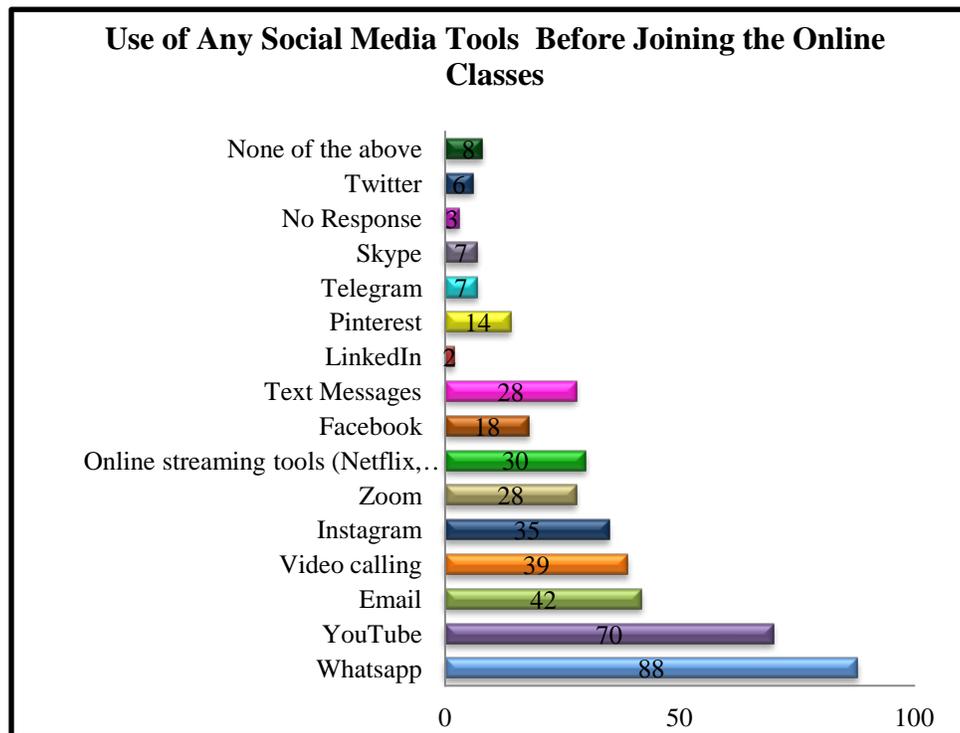


Figure 6: Use of Any Social Media Tools before Joining the Online Classes



The above figure shows that the responded students have experiences with social media before their online classes started. A question has been framed to capture the Social Media tools that they have been using before their online classes commences. That exposure may have helped them to adopt with the technological aspects of their online classes.

5.3 Virtual Classrooms: Comforts and Discomforts

There are some questions in the questionnaire pertaining to the quality of education provided on the virtual platform and to the extent the students are able to understand them. One of the questions is whether the online classes clearly explain what they were expected to learn. In reply to this, 42% students feel that yes they are properly explained through the online classes. But majority i.e. 57% students feel it is getting explained to some extent rest 12% are not getting at all explained through the online mode.

Regarding the query whether their schools are sending study materials, 95 students accepted it and rest denied the same for their respective schools. Out of this, 95 students who are getting materials from their respective school, 65% of the students are having it either before the class or after the class which is being followed by 26% of students having it after the class. This is quite an important aspect because online classes with study materials are definitely going to supplement each other. Without the presence of the study materials it will be difficult for a young learner to follow the online classes. These materials to some extent can complement as the offline classes that they are missing right now.

A more direct question was asked to the students to understand whether teaching through online mode is effective to achieve their learning objectives. The options given were

- (1) Excellent, because I can understand clearly what is being taught.
- (2) Good, I am getting a feel about it but a parallel with text as was earlier works better for me
- (3) Neutral, because I am not sure
- (4) Not Good, because I am unable to follow
- (5) Bad, I am unable to understand anything

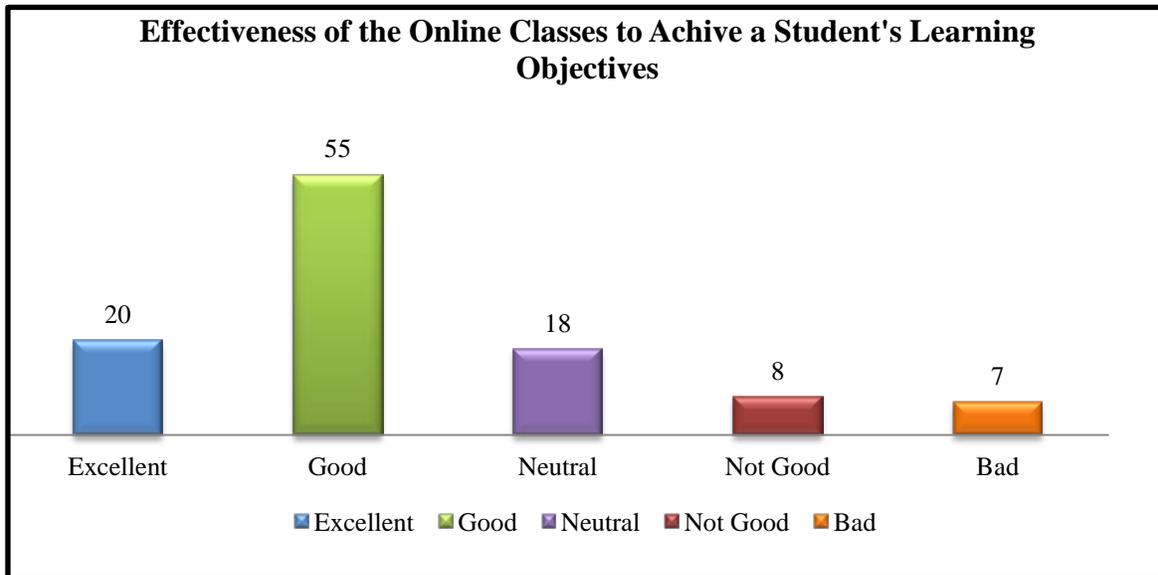


Fig. 7: Effectiveness of the Online Classes to Achieve a Student's Learning Objectives

Out of 108 responses received, almost 76% students opted for either good or excellent. Almost 18% choose to remain neutral. Less than 15% felt that they are not able to follow and understand anything. From this dataset it may be perceived that if effectiveness of the online mode of education be considered on the basis of the parameter of learning objectives of the responded students, then it is in much higher side. But one consideration should be taken into account that these are urban students from two metropolitans. This may vary from school to school. It may not be right to generalize on the basis of these responses.

While comparing the time required to complete their chapters in the online mode with the traditional school class mode by the respondent students, 57% choose usual or normal time, 29% said that it takes more time and according to 14% it takes less time. 4 students abstained from responding this query. Here again majority found that even in the online mode the teaching progress is not getting hampered.

Guidance for the online education is absolutely necessary for the students to understand and use wisely the new mode of education. Opportunities can be provided to the students and as a form of systematic assistance in the new mode whereby students are aided in achieving satisfactory adjustment to the online school classes. To capture this aspect a query has been asked to find out



whether any further guidance is being offered after the class if required. 67% agreed that they have been given assistance, for 28% there was no assistance in this form and 5 % have not respond to the query.

The issues that the students are currently facing while attending online classes are projected in the figure below.

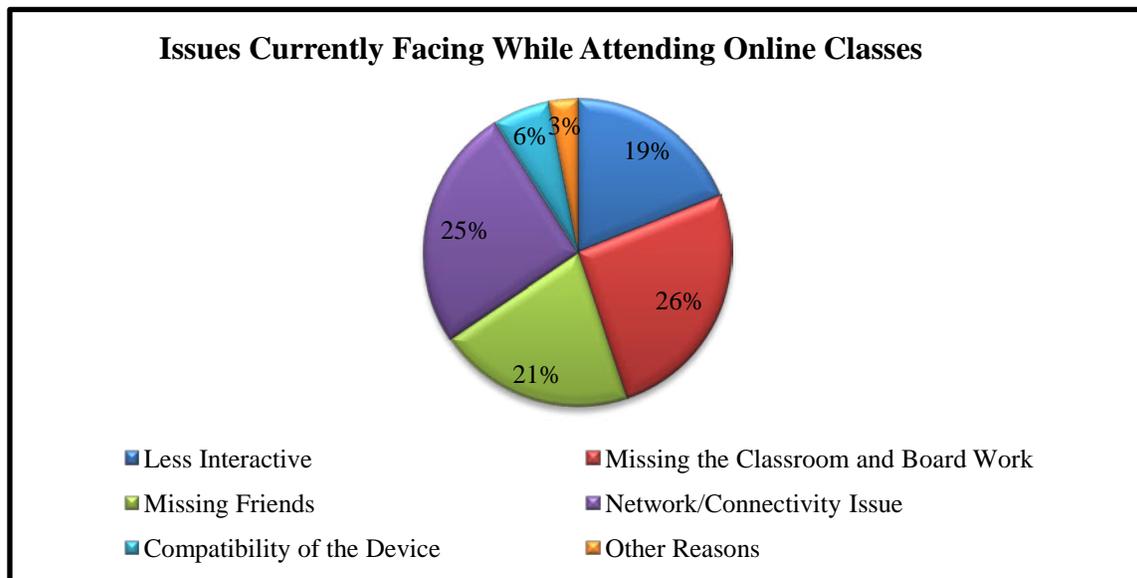


Fig. 8: Issues Currently Facing While Attending Online Classes

For the young minds, missing the classrooms, missing their friends are the major drawbacks in the online classes. No present technology can really change this current virtual class into a real class. Neither the virtual presence of their classmates and friends can be changed into a real one. Other issues listed can be tackled with technology. In the other reasons section, some students have specified their issues.

One respondent mentioned that he and his friend get logged out on their own. Since the classroom restrictions cannot be imposed rigorously, so he is executing his choice although he knows that he should attend the classes. He might have some uneasiness with his actions that is why he mentioned it separately as an issue that he is facing in the online classes. Self-restrictions are not always possible for these young minds. Another student is missing the direct interaction with the teacher. Some students enjoy their rapport with the teacher, they liked to be in close interaction which is not possible in virtual plane. Another respondent is facing problem with her



device. Whichever device she used developed some defects. It may be a coincidence or lack of efficient and sensible usage, but affording modern compatible devices with back up is not at all feasible in majority of the households. Another respondent is missing the fun of talking between the class while teacher is teaching. Two students pointed out that they miss the ambience and environment of the school. Another student said that he gets distracted sometimes and there is no one to scold and bring him back to the study. Another student complained that with limited mobile data access there remains no extra data for him to use for his other internet activities. Senior students are missing that practical classes. Some students were also missing the playing ground of their schools. One student has raised a very matured issue that since it is not possible for all teachers to buy the Zoom 24x7 meeting subscription, the classes often end in the middle of discussion of a topic. Although it is resumed in the following class, yet the flow is disturbed and there is trouble to catch up. Students also complained for difficulty in taking notes. Some students also raised the issue that teachers are unable to adjust and adapt to the medium within allotted class hours.

When asked about their preference for the nature of classes in the future, 47% students have chosen offline classes i.e. they are preferring traditional schooling, 45% students favouring a combination of both offline and online classes, 4 % students opted for online classes only and 4 % of the students haven't chose anything. That reiterate the earlier notion that the students like to be a part of traditional schooling and the online classes can also continue with the traditional schooling.

Some questions are framed to capture the clarity of the pictures and the audibility of sound throughout the online classes. 64% of the respondent students find all the content and images are clearly visible during the class, for 29% the clarity is not being maintained in their school online classes, 7 % did not reply to this question. Regarding the audibility, 69% find the sound quality is perfect during their classes, for 25% the sound quality is not at all good in their classes, 6 % did not reply to this question.

Induction to the online mode of education need orientation specially designed for both students and their parents to provide a student with the information he or she needs to learn comfortably and effectively in the online school. This can be given in the training as well. Question to find whether there had been proper orientation and training given before the commencement of online



classes has been asked in the questionnaire. For 53% students stated that their schools provided them with orientation, for 39% there was no orientation and 8% preferred not to respond. Students from 32 schools had orientation/ training programme, pertaining for both students and parents, 24 schools provided only for students, 3 schools provided only to the parents.

5.4 School Libraries: Preparedness and Unpreparedness

Three sets of roles that libraries play in education are identified. In the first place, libraries provide access to education by teaching information skills, by providing leadership and expertise in the use of information and information technologies, and by participating in networks that enhance access to resources outside the school or community. Secondly, libraries help ensure equity in education by: (1) helping children start school ready to learn; (2) addressing the needs of student most at risk; (3) providing access to information and ideas unimpeded by social, cultural, and economic constraints; (4) ensuring free and equal access to information and ideas without geographic constraints, in an environment conducive to learning. A third role is that of impacting academic achievement for individuals and assisting them in lifelong learning, preparing individuals for productive employment, promoting the enjoyment of reading, preparing individuals for responsible citizenship Boucher and Lance (1992).

A school library is always an important knowledge source for the young minds. It helps in developing the habit of reading other books that are not given in their school syllabus It always help in creating positive academic achievements for the students. A school librarian can guide the students for accessing and using quality information and resources, can help them for enhancing their study and research skills and can explain the usage of latest technologies to enhance their learning. But while moving from the traditional schooling to online schooling the preparedness of the school libraries to cope up with online platform are not up to the mark in general. It has been capture through the response of the students. 86% students replied that they do not have any dedicated library facility and library period in the online mode, for 8% there is some facilities available and 6% did not reply to this query.



In some school in the library period generally there is book discussion, in another school their teacher talks about different books, importance of reading habits etc. Some schools use the library period for story telling classes with presentations. Out of the 78 schools of Delhi and Kolkata studied under this survey only three school libraries were found to be prepared for supporting the online mode of education. Two schools from Delhi and one school from Kolkata are prepared. Coincidentally three of them are Convent girls' schools. One of them mentioned that they have online library, the other one commented that they are provided with online books and the third one said that there is a room in the app called "Library" and students can access the books in the form of pdf. This is an eye-opener for the school libraries The school need to understand that school libraries are integral part of the studies and the role of the school librarian are very important in this aspects. They need to take on the role of resource curator by using different tools and scrutinize the collection of their libraries and organize them by grade/class level, subject areas, and purpose. But this may not be enough to compile a list they need to create short videos, make slides, or host an online session to show teachers how to integrate the school library's collection into their assignment. Many of the school librarians have taken on the role of technology specialists over the years. They definitely can provide others with tips, suggestions, and advice. The school librarians need to be proactive and they need to create a solution and control the situation rather than just responding to it after it has happened.

A question has been further formulated to find whether the school libraries tried to provide some reading materials like online newspapers. Reading newspapers daily will help in widening the scope of the knowledge which is an integral part of education and is definitely very useful especially for student. It can also provide the students with interesting thoughts and ideas.

The school does not provide with any newspaper for 61% of students and 7% of students have not responded to this question. For the rest 32% of the students, the schools provide reading materials and newspapers.

The basic intention is to find out the involvement of the school libraries in this online mode. It is obvious that even the school librarians wish to develop their technological infrastructure to provide services for their students but unless their school authorities support they cannot really



do it. Subscribing and downloading the students' version of the newspapers can be a viable option. A positive environment of learning will definitely be emerged only when all of players will try hard to overcome the current pandemic situation.

6. Conclusion

Sudden outbreak of pandemic implies adoption of immediate measures for ensuring essential continuity of learning for all types of schools. However in long run open-source digital learning solutions and Learning Management Software should be adopted so teachers can conduct teaching online at the earliest. There is a need to develop an appropriate decentralized model considering the prevalent pedagogical methods and integrating classroom learning with e-learning modes for building a unified learning system Patnaik (2020).

The study clearly indicates that the students are missing their classrooms. They are getting overly stretched and stressed as the school hours are going at times beyond the usual school hours and it is now all study and no play.

School libraries need to be digitized and networked also. This will lead to the creation of virtual school libraries through which the students can access to information at any time.

Another important issue to be addressed in the long run would be emerging health problems. Prolonged exposure towards digital devices may lead to postural defects, ophthalmic issues, and other physical problems. Also the students need to be protected from cybercrimes and cyber bullying.

The current initiative of the Government of India includes DIKSHA, SWAYAM Prabha, SWAYAM MOOCS, Radio Vahini, Shiksha Vaani, Special content for children with special needs and ITPAL. By the time we have completed this study we get to know that MHRD has come up on July 14th, 2020 with a guideline for Digital Education. With 28 states and 8 Union territories in the country, characterized by geographical, socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, it is really difficult to have a single type solution for 95 lakh school teachers and 25 crore students India. Ministry of Human Resource Development (2020). Different combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning models will be required. Also the school libraries need to be incorporated in both the form learning models.



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