Online Survey on the Learner Needs and Experiences in Remote Learning

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Abstract

COVID -19 pandemic plays havoc with the lifestyle of people across the globe, the virtual world has come to the rescue. Amongst many institutions colleges have also shifted their base to virtual platforms to conduct classes online.Government and non-government organisations have been taking efforts to support the system of education to make a smooth transition to the virtual world. This paper aims at understanding the experiences of the learners, the problems faced by them in remote learning and offering best possible recommendations to help the college going population. The study is based on the online survey conducted among the students of Arts and Science, Engineering, MBA and MCA in the select districts of Tamil Nadu.

Key words: Experiences of the learners, remote learning, problems, recommendations

Introduction

This is a time when the world at large is going through a change of course in all walks of life with the onset of this awful Covid-19 pandemic. Change is the basic law of nature. The change affects different individuals in different ways. According to Darwin's Origin of Species,

"It is not the most intellectual of the species that survives;
it is not the strongest that survives; but the species that survives is the one that is able best to adapt and adjust to the changing environment in which it finds itself".
People everywhere are devising new coping strategies to keep afloat. The organizations and the work force across the world have spared no efforts in keeping their work alive by instantly adapting to the changes and challenges that have come along with the unwelcome situation. Thanks to technology that helps us get along!

The pandemic has unsparingly brought a chaotic turmoil in the system of education all over the world on a large scale. There is a dire need of shifting from face to face learning to distance learning. Both the teaching fraternity and student communities are at loss and have finally found the virtual mode of schooling as the best form to transfer knowledge. They are trying to acclimatize themselves with the changed perceptions and roles of the teacher and the learner in remote contexts. Remote schooling has become the main form of teaching mode during this critical crisis, resulting students adapt to new, unfamiliar way of learning devices. Though online teaching and learning is not a downright new process, earlier it was only an option whereas now it has become the only option.

At the bright side of the transformation in teaching-learning system, it has given rise to new learning tools and platforms such as webinars, Zoom, Google classroom etc. It does help in enabling and developing learning autonomy. Incorporating digital teaching tools creates curiosity in learners and makes them take more control over their own learning. Learning happens in a few clicks away.

On the flip side of it, there might arise some affective issues while teaching remotely such as internet constraints, availability of hardware etc, especially with disadvantaged learners.

Aim:

This paper scrutinizes responses of an online survey carried out by a team of teachers into the immediate needs and experiences of students regarding this remote learning.The survey looked at the experiences of students pursuing their higher educationin five districts of Tamilnadu- Dindigul, Madurai, Trichy, Sivagangai and Ramnad.

The main findings are:

- The challenges students face in online classes
- Resources that are expected from teachers
- Transferring knowledge beyond the curriculum.

Summary:

An online survey was developed and distributed among college students to understand the support and resources needed to them. The online survey consisted of 20 questions both open and closed. The survey was publicized among college students and attracted over 674 replies form fivedistricts ofTamilnadu. This report provides results of responses collected from 13

July 2020 to 31 August 2020. The objective of the survey was to ascertain how the learnershave adapted to the virtual learning environment and what tools and platforms they were adopting.The survey was completely anonymous.

The following are the common concerns expressed by students:

- Absence of motivation
- External Distractions at home
- Less utilization of Library Resources
- Poor internet connection
- Absence of peer learning
- Inaccessibility of teachers outside the class hours
- Very limited interactive sessions
- Felt fatigued on continuous listening to lectures
- Physical ailments such as irritation in eyes and ears etc.
- Partial negligence of Activity based learning
- Need of effective testing and Evaluations(assessment methods)

Main Findings:

- Remote learning is new to majority of students who responded to the survey.
- Most of the students are confident in their ability to cope with this remote learning.
- Many students state that they need a moral support to adapt to this virtual teaching mode.
- Students have hand on experience in handling the learning devices than teachers.

The students in the survey perceive online learning to be more tiring and exhausting than face to face interaction. They also feel that this remote learning could increase the gap between teaches and students as well as between students in urban and rural areas. Majority of the students hail from rural region donot own digital devices or smart phones. Hence the amount of time they spent on learning online is limited and very less.

Recommendations to Educational Institutions:

- Teachers should be trained properly to understand the best practices in online teaching.

- Remote teaching techniques, training pedagogy and practices are to be known to teachers.

- Technical support like internet, installation of software and equipment has to be made available to teachers.

Limitations of the Survey:

The following limitations are recognized from the survey:

➢ The survey was not randomized.

➢ The survey was carried out online and so cannot represent the views of those who have no access to internet.

➢ Issues related to logging in and accessing speed may have caused much time and it might have dissuaded some potential participants from the survey.

Respondent Profile:

Table 1: Number of respondents and completionrate (the percentage of respondents who finished ALL the survey questions) for each survey.

Number of Respondents	Completion Rate
674	91%

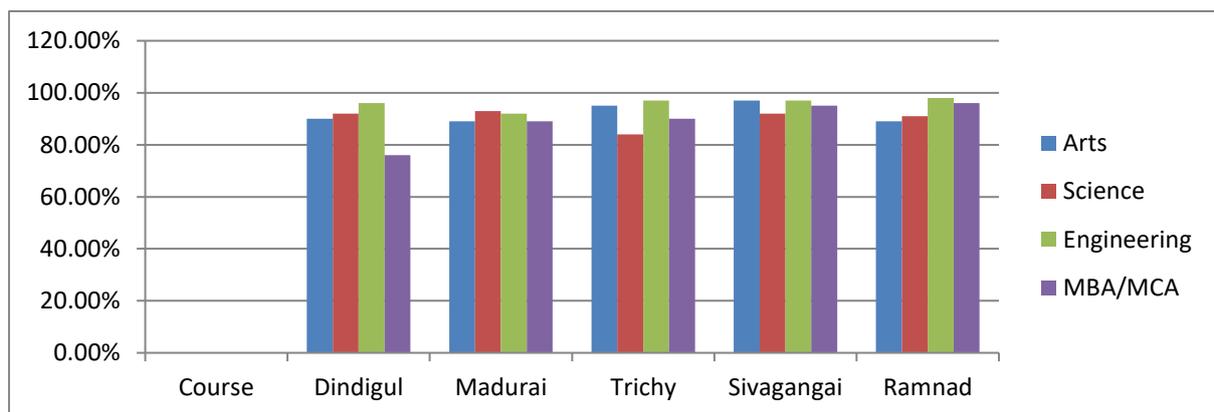Responses by Students of different streams:

Table 2: Respondents identified as their core discipline

It should be noted that respondents were allowed to choose more than one option.

District / Course	Arts	Science	Engineering	MBA/MCA
Dindigul	90%	92%	96%	76%
Madurai	89%	93%	92%	89%
Trichy	95%	84%	97%	90%
Sivagangai	97%	92%	97%	95%
Ramnad	89%	91%	98%	96%

What does remote learning look like for those who answered the survey?

Students are exposed to both synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning involves the learners and teachers being online at the same time, using an online video or audio platform. While in asynchronous learning, students can access the learning resources (recorded video or audio lessons) at their own pace and according to their own schedule.

The majority of students in the survey are receiving their learning resources using a mix of synchronous and asynchronous approaches.
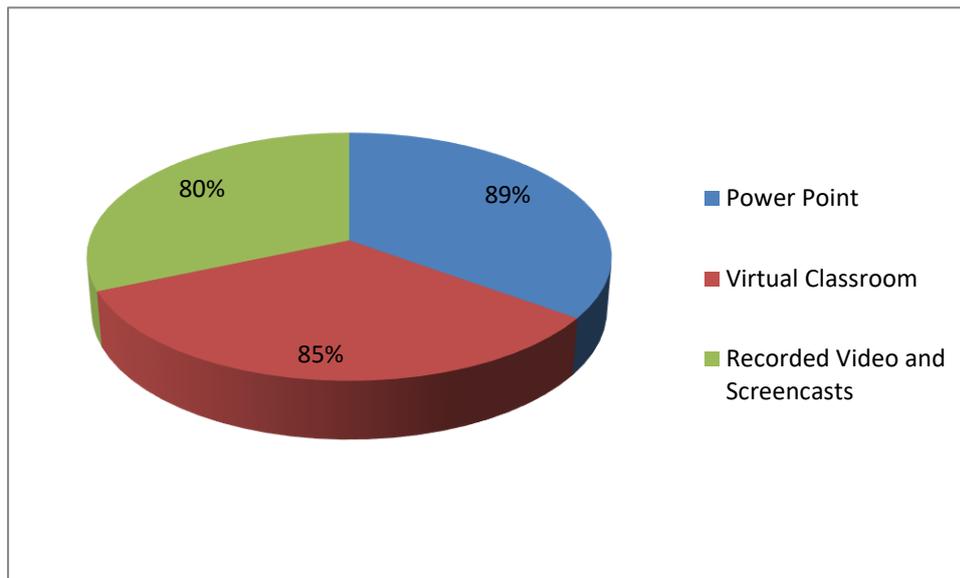
One difference discovered is that students who pursue their degree in private colleges receivesynchronized learning resources and those from government institutions receive asynchronous learning resources. This could be because learners in private institutions may have better access to internet or it could also be because private institutions were expected to replace face to face lessons with online ones for their stakeholders.

The common devices used by teachers are online videos, group calls, virtual classroom in order to teach groups of learners in real time. Mobile messaging and email are also being used. In addition to that, slide presentations, video recordings and screencasts are also being used to supplement lesson.

The survey revealed that the tools used for majority of the classes are

1. PowerPoint-89%
2. Virtual Classrooms- 85%
3. Recorded video and screencasts-80%

Figure 3: Remote teaching tools used

Surprisingly, despite the rapid transition, students are moderately confident with remote learning. This seems slightly at odds with other answers and comments within the survey which suggests respondents also really need help and support with further resources.

What do these students need?

All suggestions regarding the resources are given as options in the questionnaire as either 'helpful' or 'very helpful' by respondents.

For synchronous learning, the first two needs are:

- Suggestions for Online games and short activities.
  This is suggested because learner engagement and motivation are perceived as a problem in online interaction. Hence a repertoire of games and activities might enhance learner engagement.
- Proper training to teachers in online teaching techniques and ideas.
  Teachers are lagging behind in handling the new and unfamiliar methods to delivery and hence they should be given hands on training in adapting and handling them.

For asynchronous learning, the top two needs are

- Finding a platform to improve productive skills (speaking and writing).
  - Students may find it difficult to scaffold these skills effectively without the possibility of face to face explanation.

- A list of resources and priority of students:

Virtual classroom-89%

PowerPoint-87%

Recorded video-80%

Email-73%

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Though remote learning is new to many respondents, their confidence level in their learning ability is moderately high. Some students on the other hand, feel overwhelmed and have been struggling by the sudden switch to remote learning. They would like clear and direct guidance from teachers. Most of the students feel that traininghas to be given to teachers to teach and educate online. Learners feel tired and draining of online learning. In order to make the remote learning interesting, some modern learning games can be used.However, notwithstanding the glitches in the virtual platform, it is high time that the academicians reinvent the wheel and find out ways and means to support sustained learning for learners from all socioeconomic classes.

Appendix:

1.Your name

2.District

3.Name of the institute

4.Discipline:Arts/Science/Engineering/MBA/MCA

5.How confident are you in your ability to learn remotely?(scale 1 to 10)

　　1. Not confident. 10. Very confident

6. Do you get synchronous learning materials? Yes/No

If yes, Do you receive them regularly/occasionally?

7. Do you receive asynchronous learning materials?Yes/No

If yes, Do you receive them regularly/ occasionally?

8. On a scale of 1-6, which tool is very easy for you to listen?

- Virtual classroom
- Recorded video or screen cast
- Group calls
- Email
- Messaging
- Slide presentation
- Social media
- Others (specify)

9. Are your teachers good at handling the digital learning devices? Yes/No

10. Do you think teachers need to improve themselves to the modern methodologies? Yes/No

11. Do you have a peaceful learning environment at home? Yes/No

12. Are you motivated by your teachers? Yes/No

13. Does your institution provide good platform for online learning? Yes/No

If no, what are your suppositions from your institute?

14. Are you able to access library sources online?(Scale 1to5)

15. Will you be able to contact your teachers at the time if need? Yes/No

16. Are the lectures interactive? Yes/No

17. Are you able to focus more than an hour of online learning? Yes/No

18. Do you face any physical ailments during online learning? Yes/No

19. Do you have good internet connection? Yes/No

20. Are you able to discuss lessons with your peers? Yes/No

21. Any other suggestions,…………

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