Perception Of Students Towards Virtual Learning – An Emerging Pedagogy

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Abstract: The unexpected pandemic of Corona Virus has brought the world to its knees.From streets buzzing with life and activity,we witnessed dead silence. Even the education field is not an exception to this. Schools and colleges continue to remain closed indefinitely. Although, students were happy that they need not go to college initially, it is now a question of their degree/career. Amongst the many challenges faced, the education system wasa major one among them. The overall process of education has faced a drastic change across the world. We cannot follow the traditional method of teaching and learning methods anymore. We are forced to follow the new digital technology - that is nothing but Online Learning System through virtual platform, this is nothing but learning through the internet. This new pedagogy is computer-basedteaching, learning and assessment. With the second wave arriving in different states and country, it is essential to work around the new circumstances and challenges that daunt us.Students are forced to adapt themselves to this emerging technology such as E- learning and Google Class Room to experience the learning potentials through online platform. But as usual students are facing certain difficulties while exploring the online platform. This paper addresses the pros and cons of online learning and the suggestions to overcome and improve quality of learning better for the future generation as well.

Key Words: Virtual Learning System, E-learning, Digital Technology, Google Class Room.

1. INTRODUCTION

Virtual Education which once seemed to be a far dream is now part and parcel of everyday life. Yes, the recent pandemic has set education through virtual medium obligatory at both school and college level. Though there are pros and cons in this modality, yet, there is no

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superior alternative when it is to safeguard oneself from Covid '19. Students and teachers are isolatedequally by time and space, whereas teaching and learning continues. A great multitude of teaching and learning personnel are handling apps like Google Classroom, Zoom, Cisco WebEx, G-suite, etc. with ease. The analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the learning process in the digital world would offer guideline to integrate technological resources in the virtual learning system.
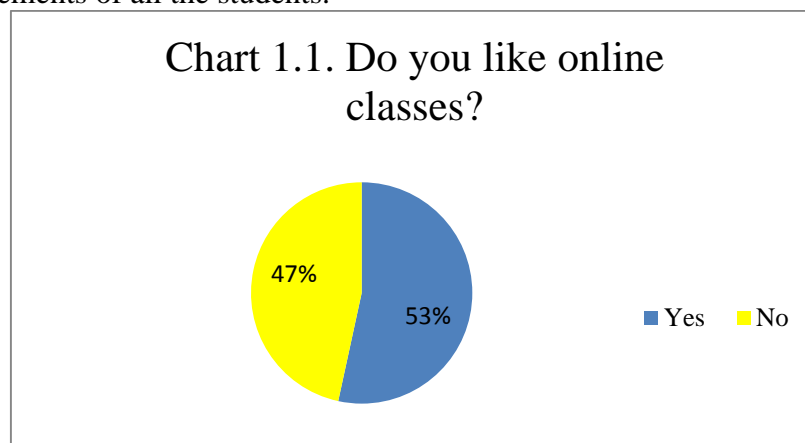
2. OBJECTIVES:

- To discover the benefits of learning through the virtual platform
- To analyze the problems faced by the online learners
- To find the ways to overcome the difficulties faced by the learners in virtual platform
- To give suggestions to improve the virtual learning system.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to explore the perception of the students about the virtual learning system. This study was conducted on 409 students of the tertiary level using the virtual platform. They were from UG degree courses comprising both male and female. The students' perceptive on the benefits derived and the problems faced in relation to using online learning platforms were analyzedto improve their academic achievements and satisfaction. The feedback of the students could help decision makers in universities and higher education and colleges to plan, evaluate, and implement online learning platforms accordingly in their institutions.
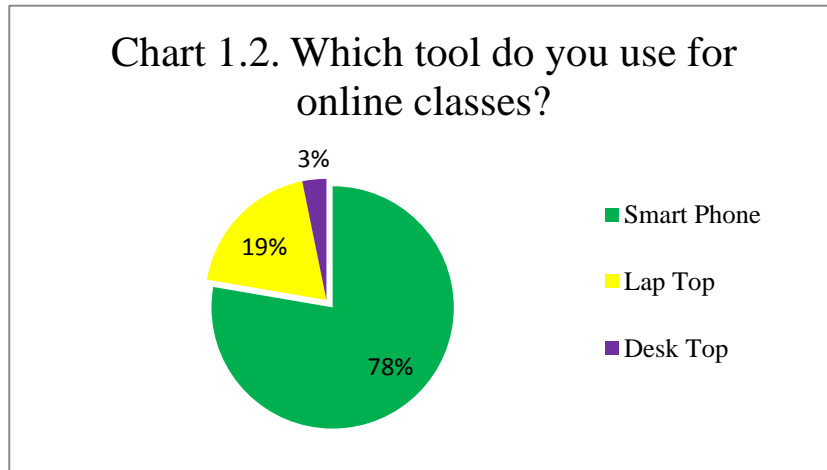
Adaptability to Virtual Education

At the wake 2020 the education system in India had a great struggle due to the unpredicted outbreak of the Corona virus. To continue school and collegiate education the government has adopted the virtual platform. The distribution of laptops and 2GB data card to the students were a great stride for persuading the students into virtual education. The teachers and students took a rollercoaster turn at the initial stages and now it is almost set at order. The students and teachers have started liking the online classes. In his survey results in 2020, Rishabh Gupta[1]has stated that about 50 percent of the students like the online classes. This view is substantiated through the Chart 1.1given below with about 53 percent of students accepting this view. The students' feedback on the virtual classes is worth pondering as they are the future asset of the country. Countries like India with its diversity in economical, geographical and family's educational background need to cater to the educational requirements of all the students.

Chart 1.1. Do you like online classes?
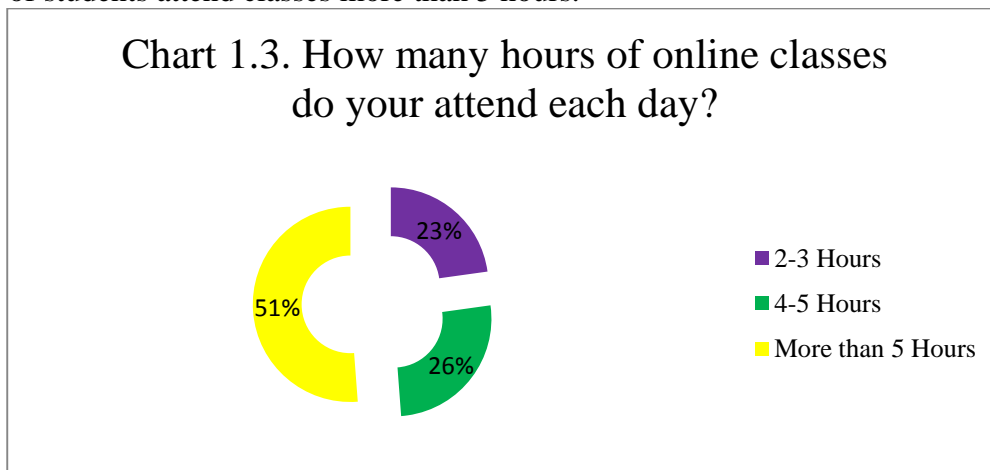47% No
53% Yes

The basic requirement such as Smart Phone, Laptop or Desk top is not affordable by many families. Accessibility and user interface of online learning apps are more convenient to use through laptop or desktop when compared to smart phone. L. Bringman-Rodenbarger [2] and M. Hortsch in their research have also proved that the usage of laptop and desktop convenient
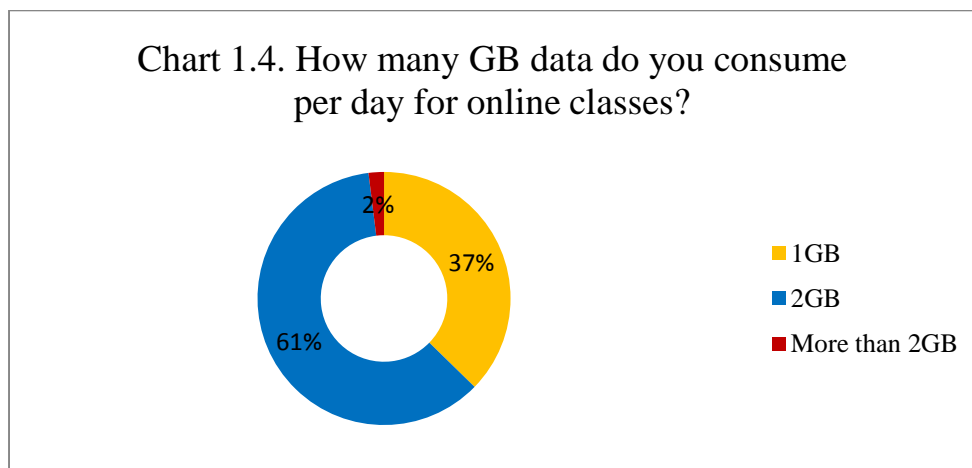
with larger screen and easy to use.It is obvious in the below Chart 1.2 that most of the students (about 77.7 percent) are using smart phones only.

Chart 1.2. Which tool do you use for online classes?

Chart 1.3. How many hours of online classes do your attend each day?

After meeting the requirement of gadgets, there is another necessity that arises, that is the date usage due to long hours of classes. The Chart 1.3 shows it clearly that about 51 percent of students attend classes more than 5 hours.

The Chart 1.4 shows that 98.9 percent students state that the data they consume for the online classes per day is 2GB or more than 2GB. Deepika Nambiar[3] in her study on students' perspective has also corroborated that the students have felt the burden of frequently recharging the data due to increased mobile usage.
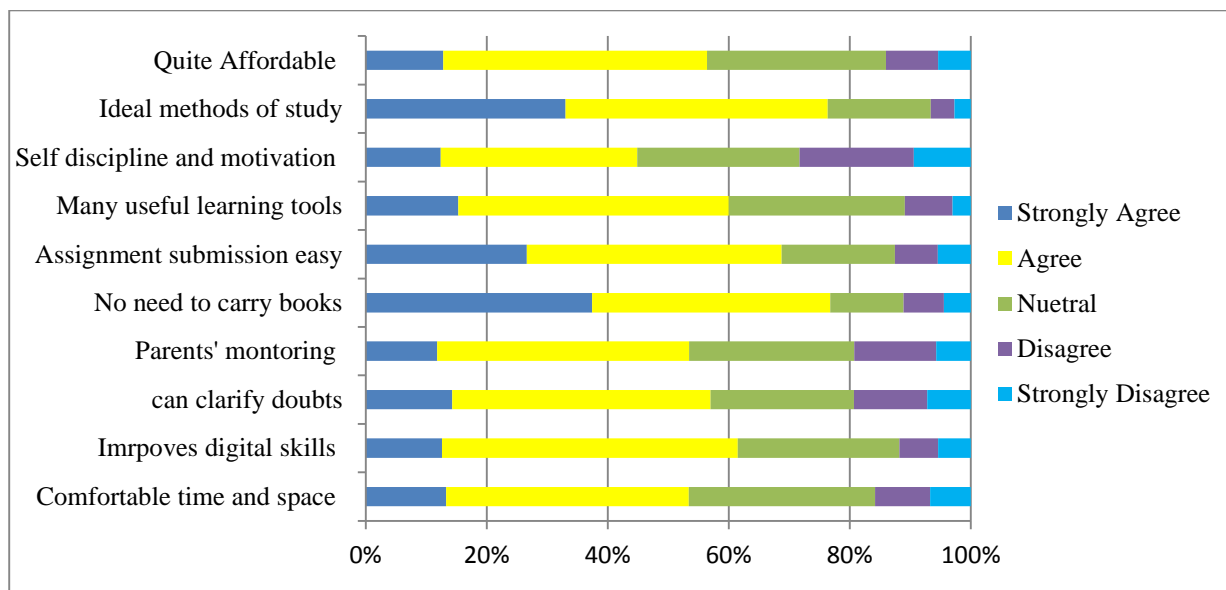
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Chart 1.4. How many GB data do you consume per day for online classes?

Benefits of Virtual Learning System

E-learning tools have created a rapid revolution in the recent educational scenario. The researches carried out on the usage of tools suggest that there are other various advanced levels of functions yet to be tracked by the learners. Increasing the usability and accessibility of the tools can generate improvisedlearning atmosphere. Specialist like Hubackova[4] believes that the proper use of technologies or e-learning resources enhance the learning environment. Therefore it is mandatory to create an appropriate e-learning environment for the learners.

The teachers can deliver their lessons efficiently by using video, podcasts PPT, PDF etc. Moreover, the individual learning strategies and learning styles of the students find a more appropriate direction in their learning journey. The multiple intelligence ofstudentsfindsnew phase of development in the virtual learning system. Online learning platform fosters autonomous learning. The teachers and students can choose flexible time and space for their learning as the classes can be taken from any location it can be their home or workplace, giving scope for a right balance of work and study. The students thus become time conscious and responsible learners. In addition, they can schedule their classes as per their learning pace.

Since virtual classes need no text books, notebooks or papers, the money spent on these materials is saved. On the other hand, there is need to spend on necessary gadgets and good internet connection. As online classes can be attended from the convenience of one's home, students need not spend money even for transportation, thereby reducing the expenditure. Assignment and class work can all be done and submitted easily through the online platform. Students become self-disciplined and self-motivated to continue their studies.

Chart: 2. 1. Benefits of Virtual Learning System

The chart 2.1 clearly shows the opinion of the students about the benefits of the Virtual classes. About 60 percent of the students have agreed or strongly agreed that this learning is beneficial to the student communities in all the above mentioned ten fields. Though about 15 to 20 percent have mentioned neutral, we do find that only about 10 to 15 percent of the students have disagreed or strongly disagreed to these views.

Challenges faced through Virtual Learning System

Virtual technology is existent in many countries but suitable learning environment has to be adopted for the well-being of the learners. Since it is diverse in nature, learners tend to end up on certain unwanted sites and harm their psyche. Not only that but virtual learning challenges physical, mental and emotional health which is an important concern in light of holistic development.

Technological disparity is found in developing countries like India. Shortage of gadgets in economically deprived families can exasperate the eager learners, pushing them to take extreme actions. The learners notwithstanding this problem succumb to undue stress. Lack of right study desk[5] for their virtual classes can lead to improper posture for the virtual classes, thus causing physical health issues. The demand for video in the learning apps, can also force students to reveal the environment at home, which could lead to unnecessary discrimination among students. The virtual classes are mostly digitally focused and not relationship focused. Ryan Pinto[6] has also expressed his opinion that there are these kinds of challenges faced by the users in virtual classes.

Adaptation of virtual education in all the states of India due to the pandemic has generated a great surge in the requirement of electronic tools. Virtual learning has infiltrated quickly into all the nook and corners of the nation. The students from rural areas and remote villages could not access the technology due to lack signal, tower etc. Without quality education for all the citizens of India the future of one sect of students is at stake.

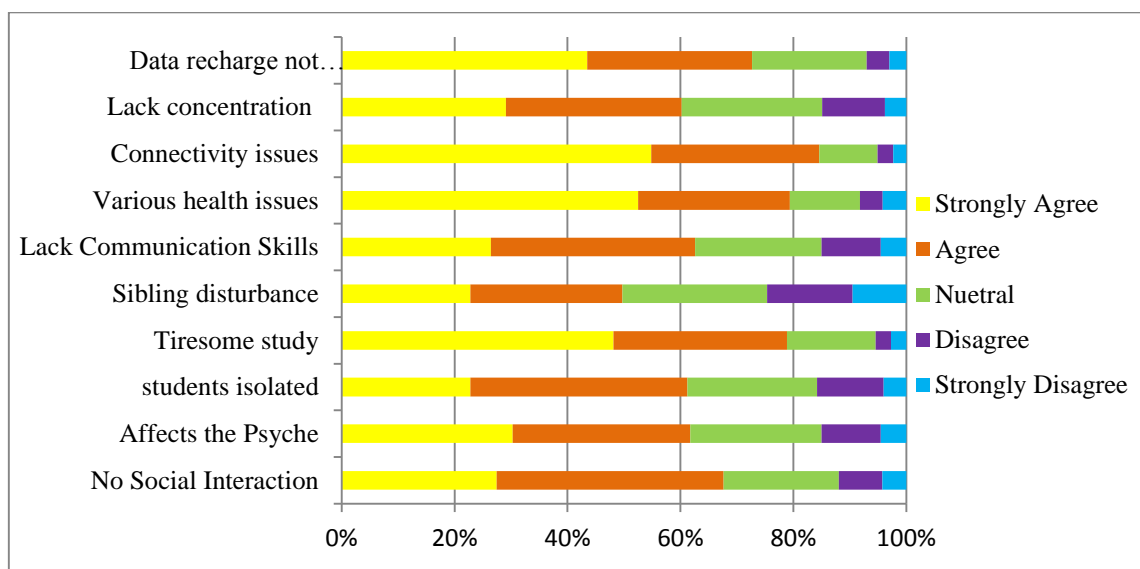*Chart: 3.1. Problems faced in the Virtual Learning System*

Chart 3.1 suggests that there are various problems faced by the students in Virtual classes. About 60 percent of the students have agreed or strongly agreed that they face problems in the online learning platform. About 10 to 15 percent students have marked disagree or strongly disagree to these problems. Highest percent of the students have faced the connectivity problems, health issues and have felt the online study tiresome.

Ways to overcome the difficulties faced by the students

During pandemic situation some students are staying at their home town which might be a remote area. Those students who stayed in the hostel are forced to go back to their native places to continue their studies. So the government, stake holders and decision makers should investigate the infrastructure problems such as internet access and quality and cater to the learning needs of these students.

The teachers can make their classes and short and content oriented with lots of activities. If learning is fun filled students can evade boredom and eagerly attend the classes. If the classes are interactive their communication skills will also develop and there is a certain level social relationship.

Public libraries can accommodate the students to offer comfortable seats and quiet environment to attend the online classes for the students who lack such facilities. Malls and parks can be Wifi enabled for educational purposes.

Futuristic Approach in Higher Education

Virtual learning platform has its own drawbacks such as delayed response from the teachers and learners, too much of informational clash, mere content share, under-utilization of the resources. According to Piscitelli[7] these problems in the virtual learning platform is not 'technological but epistemological, discursive and ideological'. So, to create tomorrow's universities, the students' perception need to be considered. In this regard monitoring, feedback and evaluation should receive the pivotal role. The university online course designers must make the content authentic, systematic and embedded with activities, discussion and suggestions.

Training the teachers and students in digital competence is crucial for the development in the learning process especially through the various digital platforms.

4. CONCLUSION

It is apparent from the present study that the online learning is the best platform provided certain problems are addressed by the government and the stake holders. Based on the study it is clear that students prefer virtual education and are learning certain technical skills. Moreover, the frequent and proper use of this platform can rightly channelize the students into a vast educational field to conquer. Self-discipline and self-motivation can surely cultivate their learning strategies. Nuances of each field of study can be pondered and the students who are focused on their field of interest would surely excel in this platform.

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