SIRJODL: Volume 5 Issue 1 & 2 January & July 2023
ISSN 2582-9009

Online Classes: Preferences and Experiences of Distance Learners

Prof. D. Janardhana Reddy
Adjunct Professor of Psychology
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University
Hyderabad, Telangana
INDIA

Prof. Ghanta Chakrapani
Professor of Sociology & Director (Academic)
Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University
Hyderabad, Telangana
INDIA

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic situation has completely disrupted conventional system of instruction across the globe. As a result, online education has emerged as an alternative to traditional system of face-to-face learning. The sudden shift from offline to online mode has posed many challenges to students, teachers and institutions in adapting to new situation as they are totally unprepared for the new system of teaching and learning. In this context, an attempt is made in this study to examine the experiences of distance learners in online learning and to find out their preferences about different aspects of online classes. Data were collected from 216 post-graduate psychology students of Dr. B R Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad by using Google form questionnaire. The study focused on experiences of learners, preferred modes of learning, duration and timing of classes, content delivery, conduciveness of environment, devices used, problems faced etc. The results showed that most of the distance learners are satisfied with online classes. Many students preferred blended mode of learning which is in agreement with the policy of University Grants Commission (UGC). They favored 45-minute duration of classes, a break in between classes, usage of slides, video and audio clippings during online classes, question & answer sessions, discussions, quizzes to enhance teacher-student, student-student and student-content interaction.

KEYWORDS

Learners, Learning, Classes, UGC, Teachers, Online, Psychology, Experiences, University Grants Commission.

Introduction

The recent pandemic situation worldwide forced the Governments to close the schools and colleges for longer periods in order to control the spread of virus disease. The UNESCO (2020) reported that by July 2020 about 111 countries ordered the closure of all schools, affecting over 1.07 billion students which constituted 61% of the global student population. This forced all educational institutions to adapt to online system to provide students with ongoing education and to avoid disruption in teaching learning process. This sudden transition from traditional face-to-face learning to fully remote online learning posed many challenges to students, teachers and institutions as they are not mentally and technologically ready to adapt to new system of online education.

The collaborative activities and discussions that occur in a physical classroom are difficult to replicate in online platform. But it has become a compulsion for educational institutions to accept online system irrespective of their level of preparation for it. Thus, the COVID-19pandemic has become instrumental for the promotion of online learning on a large scale worldwide although there was encouragement for online education since a long time.

Institutional Efforts

Responding to the global trends in online education and pandemic situation, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, Telangana has quickly shifted to the mode of online learning for the benefit learners. As a first step in this direction, the university has purchased 46 Zoom licenses and arranged as many as 10,040 theory and practical classes for PG and UG students of different faculties during the years 2021 and 2022 as detailed below:

P G	No. of Classes	U G	No. of Classes
Theory Classes (All subjects)	4927	Theory Classes (All subjects)	4975
Practical Classes (Psychology only)	57	Practical Classes (Psychology only)	64
Viva-voce (Psychology only)	17	-------	---
Total classes	5001	Total classes	5039
Total Classes - P G & U G - Theory + Practicum + Viva: 5001 + 5039 = 10040			

Source: BRAOU Computer Centre

The Departments of different faculties of the university namely Arts, Commerce, Science and Social Sciences are covered under online education. As shown in the above table, the university has arranged 9902 theory classes of all disciplines and 188 practical classes, including viva-voce sessions. In total, as many as 10,040 online sessions were conducted during the years 2021 and 2022. As a part of university's online program, the Department of Psychology has conducted 171 practical classes for PG & UG students and 17 viva-voce sessions of three hours duration for PG students through online. Further, the university has adopted blended learning approach, as recommended by the University Grants Commission (UGC). Under this approach, 50% of the content is delivered through online and the remaining 50% through physical classes.

Many studies reported that teachers' quality is an important factor of improving performance and satisfaction of online learners (Gopal, 2021). Institutions providing online learning services need to focus on capacity building of online teachers. Recognizing the importance of trained manpower in online education program, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University has designed and arranged various workshops and orientation programs for teachers. They are equipped with technical skills relevant to online teaching and learning. Some of the programs organised in 2021 and 2022 are: orientation program on understanding online education, capacity building program on ICT and blended learning, workshop on online teaching tools and content management, online course development for SWAYAM etc. After this, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad has launched online education program for PG and UG students. PG students had five online sessions

of one and half hour (90 minutes) duration per day and UG students had three sessions of one hour duration. In this background, an attempt is made in this study to find out the preferences and experiences of students about various aspects of online classes.

A Brief Review of Studies

Various studies have been conducted in India and abroad to understand the process of online teaching-learning and to identify the challenges faced by the persons involved in online education. According to the study of Agung et al (2020), over two-thirds of students in rural Indonesia reported the issues of unstable internet, insufficient data and incompatible learning devices. It was found that about 76% of students used incompatible devices for online learning. The study further reported that only 15% of students used laptop and 85% of them used mobile phone. Barbour et al (2018) observed that laptop or desktop is the appropriate device for online teaching and learning. Berge (2005) observed that digital- readiness in countries could influence online experience of students. The term digital-readiness refers to availability and adoption of information technologies and infrastructures in a country. It was observed that students from low digital-readiness countries could experience additional technology-related problems. Barbour & Reeves (2009) stated that students need to have digital literacy skills to find and use relevant information through technological devices.

An important factor in online education is how and what to do to ensure classroom interaction and collaborative activities in online platform. Moore (1989) has suggested three forms of interactions, which include: 1. Student-content interaction, 2. Student-student interaction and 3. Student-teacher interaction. Student-content interaction refers to student engagement with content by way of reading, watching, listening or viewing something presented to them. Some of the examples are: assigned readings (text books, articles), charts, video, audio lectures etc. Similarly, some common student-student interactions are discussions, question and answers between students, listening to peers' ideas etc. The third category teacher-student interactions involve providing feedback on assignments, mentoring individual learners, promoting peer teaching, showing empathy, question & answer sessions, quizzes, video/audio discussion etc. besides formal teaching.

It is observed that online education can lead to a sense of isolation, which can be detrimental to student success (Mclnnerney & Roberts, 2004). Therefore, integration of social interaction into online learning is essential. But many studies reported that online learning delivery during Covid pandemic lacked interactions and collaborative experiences (Baczek et al., 2021; Yates et al., 2020).

Chakravarthy, P et al (2020) conducted a study in Netaji Subhas University of Technology (New Delhi) to find out the opinion of under graduate students on different aspects of online education. The broad areas of the study include content delivery, interaction, assessment, health issues, social issues and general issues. The study reported the ideas and experiences of 358 students. The students had a mixed opinion about online education. A majority of the students (65.9%) felt that learning takes place better in physical classrooms than through online education and about 31.6% opined that online education is better than attending MOOCs. Regarding their views on different aspects of education, about 58.7% and 69.0% of students reported that slideshows and note-taking programs respectively are effective in disseminating information. An important factor of online education is how to make class more interactive. Majority students felt that the use of chat box (76.3%), and digital pen (80.2%) can make the online class interactive. Only a few students (36.0%) reported that showing the faces of teachers and students during lectures can improve interaction. It needs to be examined that why the majority students are not preferring to show their faces during online lectures. Other findings are that three-fourths of students (74.6%) felt that excessive screen time causes stress and half of the students opined that regular assessments improve online education.

Muthuprasad, T et al (2021) made an attempt to find out students' perception and preferences for online education in India during Covid-19 pandemic. The respondents were 307 agricultural graduates of different agricultural universities in India. Of these respondents, more than half of the students (52%) have not attended online classes earlier. The study focused on preferences, perceptions, advantages and constraints of online classes. According to the study, the students preferred: 1. Smart phones for online classes (58%) followed by laptop (36%), 2. Recorded classes uploaded on university website/YouTube (54%) followed by live classes that can be recorded (27%), 3. Video content supplemented with reading material (84%), 4. Teacher teaching with

PowerPoint presentation (53%), 5. Forty five (45) minutes duration of each class (46%), 6. Twice a week classes (58%), 7. Two to four hours a day for online classes (48%), 8. A break of 15 minutes between two classes, 9. Quiz (76%) and assignments (56%) at the end of every class for effective learning, 10. Online examinations (60%), 11. Objective mode of examination instead of descriptive examination (70%). Regarding the benefits and bottlenecks of online learning, the study reported that flexibility and convenience were the major favourable factors and poor connectivity was the major bottleneck. Regarding the factors that could lead to failure of online classes, many respondents reported that technological constraints, students' digital inefficiency, teachers' digital incompetency, lack of access to internet and distractions were major problems in online learning.

A study was conducted on 544 BBA/MBA students in Indian universities to identify the factors that affect students' satisfaction and performance in online learning. The results showed that four factors namely, quality of instructor, course design, prompt feedback and expectation of students have positive impact on students' satisfaction and performance. The findings also indicated that instructors' quality is the most dominant factor that affects students' satisfaction during online classes. The study concluded that institutions need to focus on these four factors to ensure a high-level satisfaction among online learners (Ram Gopal et al, 2021)

The study conducted in China by Yan. L et al (2021) examined school students' experience of online learning during Covid=19 pandemic. The study focused on four broad areas namely demographic, behaviour, experiences and expectations. According to the study, most of the school students (87.39%) used smart phones, followed by computers (25.43%) for online learning. The study also identified benefits and obstacles as perceived by school students. The benefits reported by the students are: more convenient to review course content (75%), 'can learn anytime and anywhere' (54%), helpful to develop self-regulation and autonomy (47%) and about 50% appreciated the access to courses delivered by famous teachers. In contrast, eyestrain due to long staring at screens (73%), poor internet connection (50%), disengagement caused by nearby disturbance (40%), confusion in setting up the platforms (20%) are perceived as obstacles in online learning.

Alamahasees, Z and Amin M O (2021) made an attempt in Jordan to understand perceptions of both students and teachers and to explore the effectiveness, challenges and advantages of online learning. The participants of the study were 280 under graduate and post graduate students and 50 teachers. The respondents indicated that online education problems lie in adapting to online learning, technical and internet issues, data privacy and security. The advantages were mainly self-learning, low costs, convenience and flexibility. The study recommended that blended learning would help in providing a rigorous learning environment.

The case study made in Punjab university, Pakistan by Mahamood, Samreen (2020) analysed the process of implementation of online education programs and identified various instructional strategies for online teaching in higher education. The strategies identified were:

1. **Voice and Pitch Management**: It is necessary for teachers to know the importance of voice modulation and pitch management in online teaching. Bao (2020) suggested that speaking gently/slowly is beneficial for students as it helps students in writing essential lecture points.
2. **Ensuring Higher Interactivity**: Teacher-student interaction needs to be given priority in planning online classes.
3. **Preparation of Smaller Modules**: Teachers need to prepare online class materials of less than 30 minutes to ensure concentration.
4. **Providing Learning Material Prior to Online Class**: Sharing the reading material before the class and asking the students to present a brief explanation of what they have understood improves online class discussion and interaction.
5. **Recording Online Lecture**: Online lectures need to be recorded for sharing them with students. This will be beneficial for students who missed or did not understand any part of the lecture.

Recent studies on online education mostly focused on students as subjects of study to investigate their experiences and feelings about online learning process. Very few studies focused on teachers' experiences and the strategies adopted for online teaching when they shifted to online education during the pandemic. One such study which investigated the teachers' online teaching activities was Taiwan's study by Wu S Y (2021). The study explored online teaching activities adopted by

teachers due to the suspension of classroom teaching during COVID-19 pandemic. The study also explored the similarities and differences among teachers of different levels - colleges, secondary schools and elementary schools - in the design of their online teaching activity processes. A sample of 223 teachers was drawn from schools and colleges through convenient sampling method. Descriptive statistics were used for analysing the data. According to the study, the modes frequently used in online teaching, about 40% of the teachers used synchronous teaching (teachers and students go online at the same time to carry out teaching and learning activities), 29% teachers used asynchronous teaching and 31% teachers used blended teaching. Among the four teaching ategories, the top four activities were 1. Roll call, 2. Lecturing with a presentation screen, 3. In-class task (assignment) allocation and 4. Whole-class synchronous video-/audio-based discussion. Thus, the most common behaviour in each category was teaching behaviour.

According to the study, most of the teachers at all levels frequently lectured with a presentation screen and shared their computer screens in online teaching. With regard to interaction, it was found that the teachers often conducted a whole-class synchronous discussion after teaching and allowed students to become familiar with the teaching content through their own practice. In terms of playing videos, most videos played in colleges were made by teachers, while most videos played in secondary and elementary schools were made by others.

Zoom Fatigue

Zoom fatigue, also called virtual fatigue, refers to the exhaustion one feels after any kind of video call. It is tiredness or stress associated with the overuse of virtual platforms of communication. It stems from how we process information over video. The phenomenon of zoom fatigue has been attributed to an overload of non-verbal cues and communication that does not happen in normal conversations. People have to pay more attention to non-verbal cues like pitch and tone of voice, facial expressions and body language. It requires the brain to work harder than in a face-to-face setting. Slight delay and silence in verbal responses create negative impression of others and generates unpleasant feelings. This may lead to misinterpretation of words. In video calls, minds are together but bodies are not. This cognitive dissonance causes unpleasant feelings which are stressful. Bailenson of Stanford University (2021) identified four causes for zoom fatigue. 1.

Excessive amount of eye contact with listeners generates stressful experiences. In online classes, everyone looks at everyone all the time. Constant staring at each other is uncomfortable. 2. Seeing one's own face on screen for longer hours is stressful. 3. Online class reduces one's mobility as teachers have to sit in the same spot before the camera. 4. Cognitive load is higher in video programs.

The above studies conducted on online education system focused on various aspects of online learning. But there are no much studies on preferences of online learners particularly with regard to duration of each online class, duration of online classes per day, timing of classes, need and extent of break during online classes, presentation techniques, types of classes (online, offline, blended), percentage of each mode and the specific problems the learners faced in attending online classes. Hence, an attempt is made in the present study to identify the preferences and examine the experiences of online students.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the experiences of distance learners who have attended online classes
- To identify the preferences of students about the structure of online classes –content delivery, timing, duration, break, digital devices, learning platforms etc.
- To identify the strategies for effective online teaching and learning

Methodology

The respondents of the study were the post graduate psychology students of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad who have attended online practical classes for six days in two spells of three days each. Google form with 28 items was prepared and administered on250 post graduate students. Of these, 216 students submitted the forms successfully and it served as final sample of the study. The questionnaire consists of multiple-choice questions, open and closed questions. Pre-test was also conducted on 56 students to improve the precision of the Google form questionnaire. Based on this, some of the items of the questionnaire were deleted, added and rephrased. The respondents of the study belonged to different districts of Telangana state, India

Results and Discussion

Demographic Background of Respondents

The personal information of the respondents which include gender, age, education, occupation and region were collected to know their background. The details are presented below.

Table 1: Demographic Background of Respondents

Gender	Age Group (Years)	Education	Occupation	Area
Female 102 (47%)	**20-30** 63 (29%)	**U G** 45 (21%)	**Govt. Sector** 90 (42%)	**Urban** 158 (73%)
Male 114 (53%)	**31 – 40** 75 (35%)	**P G** 153 (71%)	**Private Sector** 81 (37%)	**Rural** 58 (27%)
	41 – 50 64 (30%)	**M. Phil/Ph, D** 18(8%)	**Self-employment** 36 (17%)	
	51 – 60 14 (6%)		**House Wife** 9 (4%)	
N=216	N= 216	N= 216	N= 216	N= 216

The sample size of the study is 216. Of these, men sample (53%) is slightly higher than women (47%). Regarding age group, majority of the respondents are in the age group of 30 -50 years of age (65%), followed by 20-30 of years age (29%). Occupation wise data shows that 79% of the respondents are employed, either in Government sector (42%) or in private sector (37%). While 17% are having self-employment, only 4% are house wives. Educational background information shows that overwhelming majority of the respondents are already holding post-graduate degrees (71%) and 8% are having M. Phi/Ph. D degrees. Over one-fifth (21%) are degree holders. Similarly, most of the respondents are from urban area (73%) and the remaining 27% are from rural area.

Preferred Modes of Learning

The student-respondents were asked to indicate their preferred modes of learning for theory and practical classes.

Table 2: Preferred modes of learning for theory and practicum

MODE OF LEARNING	THEORY CLASSES		PRACTICUM	
	f	%	f	%
Offline	58	27	106	49
Online	48	22	30	14
Blended	110	51	80	37
Total	216	100	216	100

Of the three modes of learning, more than half of the distance learners (51%) preferred hybrid mode for theory classes. In contrast, nearly half of the learners (49%) preferred offline mode for practical classes. However, more than one-fourth (27%) of the students preferred online mode for theory and more than one-third (37%) preferred blended mode for practicum. Students of science subjects including psychology need hands-on experience in conducting experiments. In view of this, most of the students (86%) preferred either offline mode or blended mode for practicum and very few students (14%) supported online mode for practicum.

Blended Learning Model: Preferred percentage of each component

Blended learning involves both face-to-face classroom learning and online technology-based learning. Here, there are two components – offline and online. But the question here is what should be percentage of each component. It is in this direction that the UGC has issued a circular to all higher education institutions in May 2021 suggesting them to cover 60% of syllabus of each course through in-person classes and the remaining 40% of the syllabus through online mode. In this context, the students were asked to indicate ideal percentage of each component for effective learning. Three options were given to respondents in questionnaire to choose one. The options are: 50:50, 60:40 and 40:60. The first one denotes offline and the second one online.

Table 3: Preferred percentage of each component in blended learning

Component	Response Mode	Preferred percentage of each component	
		f	%
Offline (50) – Online (50)	50:50	72	33.3
Offline (60) – Online (40)	60:40	92	42.6
Offline (40) – Online (60)	40:60	52	24.1
Total		216	100

The results show that there is a mixed opinion among students. Of the three modes namely, 1. Offline 50% - Online 50%, 2. Offline 60% - Online 40% and 3. Offline 40% - Online 60%, majority students (75.9%) preferred the modes which have higher (60:40) or equal (50:50) weightage for offline classes. Less than one-fourth of students (24.1%) favoured the mode which has higher weightage for online classes (60:40).

Preferred Duration of Online Classes: Hours per Day and Minutes Per Session

In conventional system and distance learning system, usually the theory classes/personal contact program classes are conducted for five or six hours a day with each session of one hour or one and half hours. This needs to be examined whether the same duration can be followed for online classes also. The students were asked to indicate how many hours of teaching is comfortable per day and also the duration of each session in minutes.

Table 4: Online teaching hours per day and duration of each session in minutes

Number of Hours Per Day	f	%	Number of Minutes Per Session/Class	f	%
2 hours	46	21.3	30 minutes	10	4.8
3 hours	110	50.9	45 minutes	138	63.9
4 hours	46	21.3	60 minutes	60	27.8
5 hours	14	6.5	90	8	3.6
Total	216	100	Total	216	100

Majority of the distance learners (72%) preferred 2-3 hours of online classes per day. Only one-fifth (21%) of the students favoured 4 hours of online teaching per day. Similarly, the study conducted in India reported that half of the students favoured to have 2-to-4-hour online classes per day (Muthuprasad et al. 2021).With regard to duration of each session, majority students (64%) are in favour of 45 minutes duration followed by 60 minutes duration. It is clear that sessions of 90 minutes duration are not comfortable to students.

Need for Break in Online Classes

Continuous learning and long exposure to online teaching without any break is likely to affect the learning performance of students. Hence, the students were asked to state whether they need a break in between classes and if required, what should be the duration of break.

Table 5: Need for Break and Duration of Break

Need for Break	F	%	Duration of Break in Minutes	f	%
Yes	190	88	3-5 minutes	150	69
No	26	12	10-15 minutes	66	31
Total	216	100	Total	216	100

The above data show that most of the respondents (88%) favored a break in between online classes. With regard to the duration of break, nearly 70% of students wanted to have 3-5 minutes break and about 31% of students preferred 10-15 minutes break. Muthuprasad et al (2021) also found that nearly half of the students desired to have a break of 15 minutes in between two classes.

Convenient Timings for Online Classes

Another important factor for organizers of online classes to consider is convenient timings of students. Inconvenient timings would adversely affect the attendance rate of students in classes. Hence, an attempt is made find out convenient timings of students. Timings were set with three hours interval as the respondents have attended 3-hour duration of online classes from 11 am to 2 pm.

Table 6. Timings of convenience for online classes

Convenient Timings	f	%
8 – 11 am	22	10.2
11 – 2 pm	122	56.5
2 – 5 pm	24	11.1
5 – 8 pm	48	22.2
Total	216	100

More than half of the students (56.5%) preferred the timings of 11am to 2 pm. Other slot convenient for students is evening hours of 5 pm to 8 pm. Over one-fifth of students (22.2%) favored evening hours as these timings might be convenient for employees. Very few students, 10 % & 11%, preferred morning time (8-11 am) and afternoon time (2-5 pm) respectively. This suggests that organizers need to avoid morning and after noon time for online classes as they are not convenient for students.

Content Delivery

In a traditional face-to-face classroom setting, teachers usually use lecture method and blackboard for transmission of knowledge. A few developed institutions may have the facility of power point presentation in classrooms. But in online classrooms, there is much scope to use different technical devices for content presentation. This makes online classroom vibrant, interesting and effective. Even in online classes also, many teachers, particularly senior teachers who are not comfortable with online technology, use only lecture method. In this context, the respondents were asked to

indicate the type of materials/devices you expect the online teacher should use in delivering the content, in order to make the class effective and active.

Table 7: Use of audio, visual materials in online classes

Preferred Technical Devices	f	%
Ppt	32	14.8
Video/audio Clippings	10	4.5
Ppt, video, audio clippings	168	77.8
Only Lecture	6	2.9
Total	216	100

Most of the students (78%) opined that teachers should use power point, video and audio clippings while taking online classes, besides oral presentation. These modes of presentation attract the attention of students and make the teaching-learning process effective, active and interesting. The results suggest the use of multi-media approach and discourage lecture method alone in online classes. Muthuprasad et al. (2021) also reported that that more than half of the students (53%) desired teaching supported by PowerPoint presentation.

Experiences of Distance Learners in Online Learning

In the above pages, we have discussed the preferences of distance learners in online classes and how the online classes have to be designed. Now we will discuss the experiences of students in online learning.

Earlier Exposure to Online Classes and Devices used

For many students, the concept of online class may be very new and their online learning exposure may also be less. This concept suddenly emerged on a massive scale due to an outbreak of Covid. An attempt is made to find out whether the students had any exposure to online learning and also the devices they used for online classes.

Table 8. Past experience in online classes and Devices used for online classes

Earlier experience in online classes	f	%	Devices used for online classes	f	%
Yes	185	85.6	Laptop	34	15.7
No	31	14.4	Desktop	10	4.6
			Mobile	161	74.5
			I Pad/tablet	11	5.0

Most of the students (86%) had past experience of attending online classes. Regarding the use of devices, three-fourth of students (74.5%) have used mobiles/smart phones for attending online classes and only one-fifth of students (20.3%) have used laptop or desktop. The study conducted in China has also reported that 87% of students used smart phones for online education (Lixiang Yan, 2021). It is clear that the mobile users are far higher than laptop and desktop users for attending classes. This suggests that in online learning, the content presentation should be compatible with mobile technology. However, Barbour et al (2018) observed that laptop or desktop is the appropriate device for line teaching and learning.

Satisfaction with Online Classes

Though the online learning has certain limitations, yet the distance learners are comfortable with online classes. It may be due to the fact that they can attend classes from anywhere and at any time. It avoids travel and saves time. In this context, the students were asked to say whether the online classes were interesting and satisfactory.

Table 9. Satisfaction with online classes

Satisfaction	f	%
Satisfied	174	80.5
Uncertain	32	14.8
Not satisfied	10	4.6
Total	216	100

Most of the students (80.5%) are satisfied with online classes and found the classes interesting. However, about 5% of students are not satisfied and about15% of students are neutral. It is not clear whether the respondents are happy with online classes because of pandemic situation (Covid). It needs to be ascertained whether they prefer online classes even in normal days.

Need for online technology skills

Multiple studies observed that teachers and students need some technical skills for effective online teaching and learning. Patricia (2020) observed that students with less knowledge in technology are facing problems in attending online classes. Hence, the respondents were asked to say whether they require more technical skills for effective use of online classes.

Table 10: Need for Technical Skills

Need for more technical skills	f	%
Required	118	54.6
Not required	98	45.4
Total	216	100

There is mixed opinion on this item. More than half of the students (55%) opined that they require some more technical l skills for effective online learning. However, considerable number of students (45%) stated that they do not require further skills for online learning.

Conduciveness of Environment and Availability of Space

Usually, students attend online classes from home and the home environment is such that there would be family members and children around them. It is likely that there would be some distractions at home. Patricia (2020) reported that students who live in houses that are not spacious are facing problems in attending online classes. Hence, the students were asked to state whether they had disturbances at home while attending classes and their opinion about the conduciveness of home environment. Privacy is also required for learning and it is possible when there is separate space.

Table 11: Home Environment - Distractions, Conduciveness and Availability of Space at home

Occurrence of Distractions at Home	f	%	Home Environment is Conducive?	f	%	Availability of Separate Space at Home?	f	%
Many times	25	11.5	Yes	158	73.1	Yes	106	49.1
Some times	96	44.4	No	58	26.9	No	110	50.9
Rarely	44	20.3						
Never	51	23.6						
Total	216	100	Total	216	100	Total	2160	100

About one-fourth (24%) of students had no disturbances at home while attending online classes and 11% of students experienced disturbances very often. When the responses 'many times' and 'some times' are combined, about 56% of learners reported disturbances at home. However, majority students (73%) felt that home environment is conducive for online classes. With regard to the availability of separate space/room, the respondents are equally distributed. Half of the respondents have no separate room for online classes.

Internet Issues

Online education requires steady access to digital technology. But students living in rural areas may not have adequate access to online technology. Grishchenko (2020) reported that rural people and economically disadvantaged people have limited access to digital technology. Power supply is another important factor that affects online learning because one-fifth (20.3%) of the students are using computer/laptop for online classes.

Internet problems faced	f	%
Many times	4	1.8
Some times	66	30.6
Rare	52	24.1
Never	94	43.5
Total	216	100

The results show that majority of the students (67%) had not experienced much internet problems while attending online classes. This might be due to the fact that most of the respondents (73%) are from urban area. However, about one-third of the students faced internet problems. Rural sample constitute 27%.

Responses to open ended questions

Besides closed questions, there are some open questions in questionnaire. In the above pages, quantitative data obtained through closed items were analyzed. Now responses to open questions are presented below in the order of priority and high frequencies:

I. If you are teaching through online as a faculty, what would you do for effective teaching?

To deliver the content in an online class effectively and to make the class more interesting and engaging, the students said that they would:

1. Use audio, video clippings and ppt slides along with oral presentation
2. Make the online class more interactive by using chat box, quizzes, questions and answers
3. Use ppt slides
4. Use short experts' audio and video shows of 10-minute duration
5. Explain in Telugu also
6. Explain from basics
7. Would give more live examples, case studies
8. Intersperse lecture with stories
9. Ask students to open their videos
10. Assign some tasks to complete them in class
11. Conduct assessment tests periodically
12. Use white board

II. Problems Faced

About one-fifth of the respondents said that they have not faced any problem in online classes. The problems faced by other students are:

1. Internet issues/low band width
2. Noise problem from students' cross talking when they are in 'unmute' position
3. Less interaction with teachers
4. Lack of voice clarity/voice breaking

5. Disturbance from family members at home
6. Disturbance from colleagues in office
7. Non-availability of devices
8. Conduction of classes during working days
9. Zoom fatigue due to longer duration of classes
10. Mobile charging problem
11. Lack of break in classes
12. Irrelevant questions of students and wastage of time
13. Lack of online technology skills among teachers and students
14. Difficult to grasp in short time

III. Suggestions Offered by the Students

1. Explain by using ppt slides, video, and audio clips
2. Make the online class more interactive
3. Mute all students to avoid disturbance
4. Share ppt slides used in classroom to students
5. Record online classes and share with students
6. Arrange offline classes also
7. Give break between sessions
8. Conduct classes during weekends/holidays
9. Evening hours are convenient
10. Revision on the last day
11. Explain in Telugu also
12. Conduct more webinars to improve knowledge
13. Provide more time for questions
14. Taking screenshots and photos are not comfortable

Conclusion

An attempt was made in this study to find out preferences of students about different aspects of online classes and to examine their experiences in online learning. Data were collected from 216 post-graduate psychology students of Dr. B R Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad by using Google form questionnaire. Simple descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages were used for analyzing the data. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of data obtained. The results of the study would help the policy makers, administrators and teachers in understanding different factors of online education and in designing online program effectively.

- The students who have participated in the study are distance learners. They are mostly post-graduate degree holders besides the one currently pursuing, employed (Government or private), urbanites and are equally distributed gender wise.
- Of the three modes of learning – online, offline and blended – more than half of the students preferred blended learning mode for theory classes and offline mode for practicum.
- Blended learning involves both offline and online mode of teaching and learning. In this context, UGC suggested to offer courses with 60% offline and 40% online mode of teaching. The findings of the study are also in agreement with the UGC policy. Majority students (76%) preferred the modes which have higher (60:40) or equal (50:50) weightage for offline classes.
- Most of the distance learners (72%) preferred 2-3 hours of online classes per day. Similarly, students (64%) prefer 45-minute duration of each session followed by 60-minute duration (28%). It means overwhelming majority of students (92%) do not like class duration of more than 60 minutes.
- Online students (88%) want a break in between two classes and the preferred duration of break is 3-5 minutes (70%).
- Timing of online classes is also is an important factor to ensure higher participation of students. The convenient timings are 11 am to 2 pm (56%) and 5 pm to 8 pm (22%).
- An important factor for online teaching and learning is how to present the content effectively. Students (78%) want the teachers to use PowerPoint, video and audio clippings while taking online classes. In other words, content delivery through lecture method alone is not preferred.
- Many students (75%) are using mobile for attending online classes. Similar trend is found in other states and countries as well. Hence, content delivery needs to be designed in such way that is compatible with mobile technology. Many studies suggested that laptop/desktop is the appropriate device for online learning. Hence, universities may plan to have a tie up with corporate companies to supply laptops/desktops to students at subsidized rates. This would help students to benefit more from online learning
- Many students (55%) desired to have a orientation program on online technology for effective learning.

- In order to ensure effective online classroom interaction and active participation of students in teaching-learning process, the teachers can undertake activities like whole-class video/audio-based discussions, question & answer sessions, quizzes, chat box usage etc.
- Short audios/videos of 10-15 minutes duration may be prepared by the teachers concerned or other experts and they may be played during online class for discussion.
- Online teachers need to focus on voice modulation and pitch management practices.

Pre-class reading material or audio/video may be shared to students and encourage them to read and understand before they come to the online class and facilitate discussion during the class.

References

1. Almahasees Z and Amin M O (2021). Faculty and Students' Perceptions of Online Learning During COVID-19, Frontiers in Education, 12 May 2021
2. Bailenson, J N(2021). Nonverbal Overload: A Theoretical Argument for the Causes of Zoom Fatigue. Technology, Mind and Behaviour
3. Chakravarthy Pinaki et al (2020). Opinion of Students on Online Education during the Covid-19 pandemic, Human Behaviour and Emerging Technologies, Wiley Online Library
4. Muthuprasad, T et al (2021). Students' Perception and Preferences for Online Education in India during COVID-19 Pandemic, Social Sciences & Humanities Open Vol.3, Issue 1, 2021
5. Lixiang Yan et al (2021). Students' Experience of Online Learning During the COVID-19 pandemic: A Province-wide Survey, British Journal of Educational Technology, Vol.52, Issue 5, September 2021
6. Ram Gopal, Varsha Singh and Arun Aggarwal (2021). Impact of Online Classes on the Satisfaction and Performance of Students During the Pandemic Period of COVID-19. Education and Information Technologies, Volume 26, pages 6923-6947
7. Samreen Mohammod (2020). Instructional Strategies for Online Teaching in Covid-19 pandemic, Human Behaviour and Emerging Technologies, Wiley Online Library, 03, September 2020.

8. Wu S Y (2021). How Teachers Conduct Online Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Study Taiwan, Frontiers in Education, 6: 675434