

# Report on Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Mental Health of Students



Prepared by  
**Research Division,**  
**Project Saathi**



## **Project Saathi**

**Report on Impact of COVID-19 on  
Education and Mental Health of  
Students**

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Lastly, I thank the dedicated team of researchers who helped me materialise this report.

**Debargha Roy,**  
**Director,**  
**Research and Extension,**  
**Project Saathi.**

# Note from Editors

It gives me immense pleasure to produce this consolidated report that raises the collective voice of students regarding the problems and prospects of new forms of teaching and learning during the ongoing Pandemic outbreak. As students are made to sit back at home, the schools have attempted to take the classrooms online which marks a significant turning point of how education is imparted. Our attempt has been to study the common concerns of students under the new system and draw out recommendations that the institutions can adopt to increase the efficiency and effectiveness. This shall serve as a benchmark for schools that are still finding the right way to undertake a transition from the conventional mode of teaching and learning to the online counterpart. I sincerely hope that our empirical study helps schools cope up to the expectations of its students during this phase of transition.

**Debargha Roy, Editor**

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the team that has worked immensely hard to produce this valuable report on the “Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Mental Health of Students”. The issues highlighted in this report revolve around the online methods of teaching and learning that have been adopted by various schools after the break of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interaction and analysis of the data collected pointed towards the lacunas hindering the education of the students simultaneously affecting their mental and physical health. Amidst this global emergency, the education sector is suffering because the next generation of children in every field is being held back due to loss of the vitally engaging classroom learning experience. The consolidated report of the survey produced facts and we are really happy to publish them so that it reaches the masses and the intended institutions and steps are taken to enhance the learning experience of children.

**Radhika Boruah, Co-Editor**

# Contents

Introduction	1
Research Methodology	3
Key Findings	4
Infographics	12
Recommendations	14
Conclusion	16

# Introduction

With the exponential rise in the number of COVID-19 cases reported in India, significant measures have been taken by the Government that have made an impact on every sector of the country, including education. Closure of schools and colleges has led to a strong setback towards education. The current set of challenges, however, has paved the way for the growth of online education. Globally, online education has met with some success. In the case of India, we still have a long way to go before digital learning is seen as mainstream education, because while students living in urban areas have the facilities to opt for digital education, students from semi-urban and rural areas do not have the required infrastructure nor are they financially strong to avail the resources required for digital education. While the private schools were fast at shifting to the online mode of teaching and learning, their Government counterparts still struggle due to the wider socio-economic background of students that it caters to.

The sudden shift to online learning in India has created the added risk of making the students passive learners, making them lose interest in their curriculum.<sup>1</sup> E-learning is likely to witness a high dropout rate due to the lack of atmosphere for studying. Students might tend to get distracted by gaming consoles, social media at home and might not feel a sense of community while taking online classes. Children with special education needs, such as those with an autism spectrum disorder, are also at risk. They can become frustrated and short-tempered when their daily routines are disrupted. Successful delivery of education is also in question because learning at the level of higher education and learning at the kindergarten/school level can be different for every student. Digital education cannot be applied the same at every level of education, especially today when we are talking about inclusive education.

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Kamlesh Mishra, "COVID 19: 4 Negative Impacts and 4 Opportunities created for education", *India Today*, May 12, 2020.

These nationwide closures are impacting over 70% of the world’s student population.<sup>2</sup> Several other countries have implemented localized closures impacting millions of additional learners. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“UNESCO”) is supporting countries in their efforts to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, particularly for more vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and to facilitate the continuity of education for all through remote learning. The UNESCO report<sup>3</sup> estimates that the coronavirus pandemic will adversely impact over 290 million students across 22 countries. UNESCO estimates that about 32 crores students are affected in India, including those in schools and colleges<sup>4</sup>

According to the key indicators of Household Social Consumption on Education in India report<sup>5</sup>, based on the 2017-18 National Sample Survey,<sup>6</sup> less than 15% of rural Indian households have internet (as opposed to 42% urban Indian households). A mere 13% of people surveyed (aged above five) in rural areas — just 8.5% of females — could use the internet. The poorest households cannot afford a smartphone or a computer. The building of the digital education infrastructure by the Government of India presently appears to be difficult due to a lack of budget. Further, even if the digital infrastructure is built, training has to be given to the teachers to use the digital system to provide authentic and proper, uninterrupted, and seamless education to the students. Remote learning increasingly relies on the reliable power supply and ubiquitous Internet connectivity which might be a far-fetched thing for Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India.

While the Research and Extension Division of Project Saathi has endeavoured to continue its research on the impact of COVID-19 on different stakeholders of the education sectors, this report shall exclusively discuss the impact of COVID-19 on Education and Mental Health of Students from the perspective of Urban Private schools in Guwahati, Assam. Students from over fifteen schools across the city have participated in our data collection. While significant research is being conducted on government schools and how they can shift to the newer model of education by various organisations, there is a lack of research in terms of the efficacy of the online mode of education which is used by private schools. The problems faced by the students having online classes can help us find a sustainable solution to the concurrent problems that arise due to online education. This report not only serves as a guide for private schools in improving their quality of imparting online education but also serves as a benchmark for schools that are yet to move to online classes. The recommendations of the report shall be fruitful to all schools as the best alternative to physical classroom education is moving to online education which, we believe, shall be the new normal.

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *COVID 19 Educational Disruption and Response*, May 31, 2020, available at <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse> .

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Government of India, “Key Indicators of Household Social Consumption of Education in India” (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Government of India, “Annual Report 2017-18” (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, 2018).

# Research Methodology

As the study focuses on the implementation of online education by schools and its effects from the point of learning and mental well being of students, a sample size of over 100 students from classes 6-12 studying in schools across Guwahati, Assam was used in the research. The data was collected through the means of a focus group interaction and a questionnaire respectively. The focus group interaction, referred to as Student Discussion Forum, was conducted by Project Saathi on 14th May 2020 over Zoom Meetings Interface from 7 pm to 9 pm, which saw the participation of 35 students from across schools in Guwahati. Following the Student Discussion Forum, the questionnaire was circulated by the organisation with the same research questions from 14th May 2020 to 24th May 2020 on the social media accounts of the organisation for the targeted audience to fill up the same.

While the Student Discussion Forum has allowed students to voice out their problems and recommendations on the research agenda in the form of a moderated discourse, questionnaires have allowed more students, who could not participate in the focus group interaction or who prefer to state their responses in the written form, to participate in the research. This approach towards data collection has allowed us to gather maximum samples within the set time duration.

# Key Findings

The opinions of the students regarding the sudden shift to the online mode of teaching and learning, which has emerged due to the pandemic, falls into a broad spectrum. We have consolidated the points that are highly fundamental to know the status of online education.

## 1. Internet connectivity and affordability of gadgets:

The basic prerequisites for online learning are smartphones, laptops, tablets, and a good internet connection. Students in our study have highlighted that the connectivity issue is the major drawback to this type of teaching for students as well as teachers. Studies have shown that the Indian internet infrastructure is not ready for the paradigm shift to online learning mandated by the situation prevailing due to COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> All of these students are having online classes on different apps, namely- Zoom, Google Hangouts Meet, CampusCare, WhatsApp, Google Classroom, etc. Around 55% of the students used the 'Zoom' app for their online classes and they claim that about one-fourth of their class is wasted on attendance and connectivity problems; the lack of a good internet connection leads to anxiety in some students as they feel that they will not be able to cope with the syllabus due to constant buffering and network problems. The point was raised on the existing digital divide in our country that is leaving behind a large proportion especially in certain areas with little or no internet connectivity. Some students have expressed their concern for the less underprivileged children who cannot even afford the necessary gadgets to continue their academic curriculum. If necessary steps are not taken then the existing socio-economic gap will keep widening with digital illiteracy.<sup>8</sup> In the countries most affected by COVID-19, regulations are being adjusted to boost internet capacities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>QS I Gauge, "COVID-19: A wake up call for telecom service providers" (QS I Gauge, 2020).

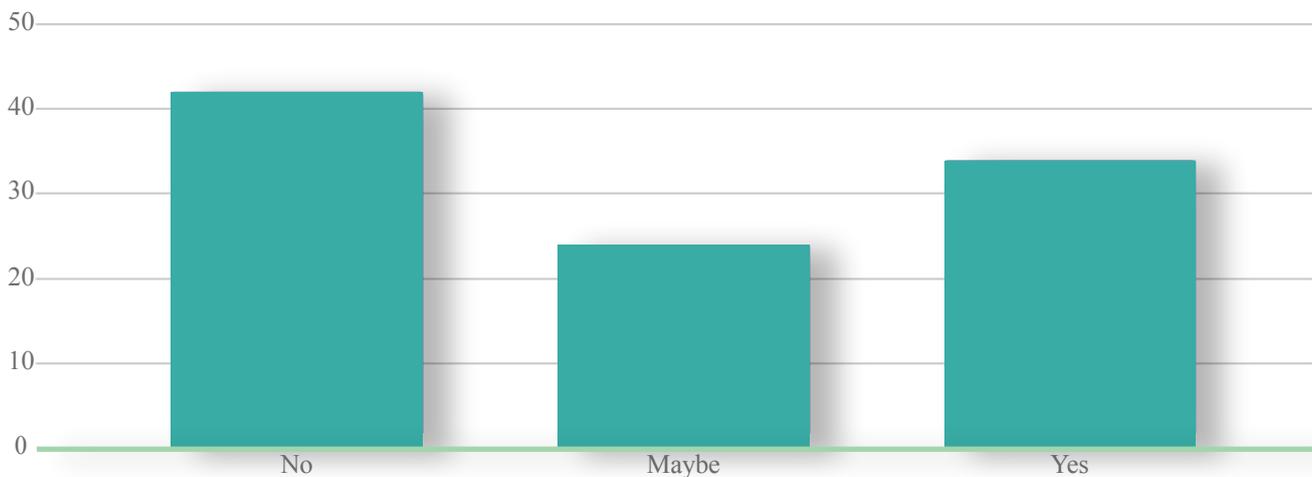
<sup>8</sup>Abhiroop Mukhopadhyay, "Covid-19: Online classes and the digital divide", IDEAS for India, available at: <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/poverty-inequality/covid-19-online-classes-and-the-digital-divide-during-the-times-of-corona-1.html> (last visited June 3, 2020).

<sup>9</sup>Makhtar Diop, "COVID-19 reinforces the need for connectivity", World Bank, available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/covid-19-reinforces-need-connectivity> (last visited June 4, 2020).

## 2. The efficiency of the educators:

According to our survey, around 35% of the students consider it a boon to continue with this mode of learning in the short run but the larger group is of the opinion that the teachers are not equipped to teach via online platforms in the long run. There is an acute dearth of clear communication between the teachers and students in video classes. A section of students also face difficulty in understanding the concepts and consider e-learning a formality to attend classes for exams and attendance, rather than a source of learning. About 33% students conveyed that they are not benefitting from the mode of teaching adopted by their teachers and institutions. There was a lack of free-flowing discussions and much individual attention wasn't paid on the students, which is an integral part of learning. Teachers were focussing on the completion of syllabus instead of making sure that students were learning. Many felt that instead, self directed learning should be encouraged and then later teachers could hold doubt clearing sessions for the portion covered by the students and could then extend necessary help.

*Is the pace and mode of teaching adopted in the online class allowing you to effectively learn the lessons in a similar manner as before ?*



## 3. Toggling between apps:

Apps like Zoom for classes and WhatsApp to share notes are used by the institutions to provide the course material to the students. For certain institutions Zoom video classes aren't conducted, instead, an app called 'CampusCare' has been used where all the students are required to login in the morning at a specific time and for 3 to 4 subjects, written explanations were provided each day. It was observed that at times only the written explanation wasn't sufficient in these cases and they weren't receiving in-depth education. These students prefer video calls, which would help them in understanding the material in a better manner. For a handful, classes were conducted through 'WhatsApp' where explanations were not provided.

#### 4. Rising indolence:

The long duration of video classes leads to eye strain and sometimes even mental harassment. The schools where a written explanation is used over video classes face the insincerity of students arising from their lack of motivation. The students expressed that they felt that copying notes was just a waste of time. One of the students even mentioned that the online mode of teaching can make the students lethargic because they do not feel the pressure of deadlines.

#### 5. Overburdening assignments:

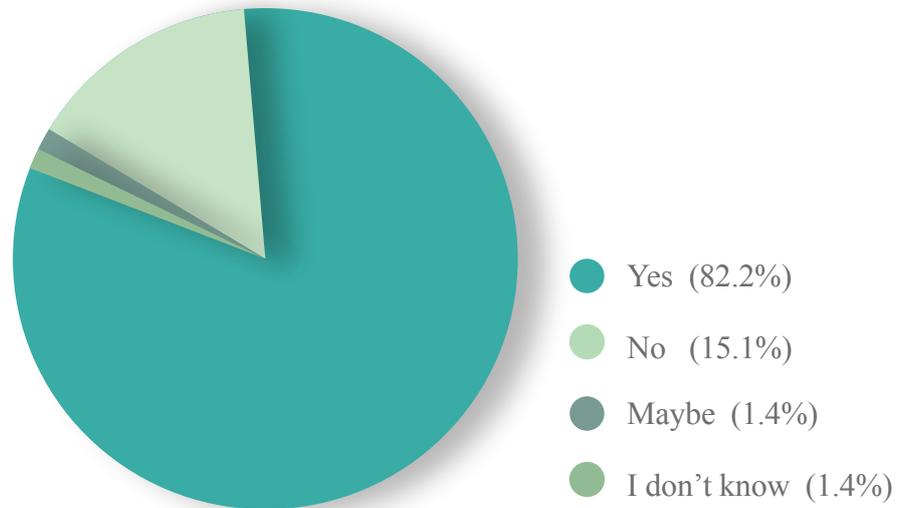
We received a vast array of responses when we asked the students if their teachers were assuming that they had plenty of free time since they were all at home. The pressure of attendance has also affected them as the classes generally start at eight in the morning and go on until one or two in the afternoon with very short breaks between classes. About 63% students claimed that their teachers were overburdening them with assignments because the teachers presume that they have plenty of free time. They argued that the burden was leading to a lot of stress and anxiety, and leading to mental health issues, which again became the ground for their demotivation. Some students say that they do not even have the time to sleep properly or engage themselves in other work. For every miniscule topic they have been bombarded with an over piling set of assignments with fixed deadlines which at times coincide with other subjects' assignments as well. It has been difficult for many to grasp new topics every single day and move to a new topic the following day. Flexible learning hasn't been prioritized at all, keeping in mind the needs of all students. They voiced their frustration over their workload stating that at times there is a lack of balance in their lives. They feel like there is a constant need to choose completing their assignments over engaging in social, physical, and restorative activities that could support their well being.

Many acclaimed that online weekly tests are also happening along with their classes and assignments, making it difficult for them to cope and engage in other self reflecting and recreational activities. Few raised the point that someone's family or relatives might be suffering from COVID-19 or health distress related to it, so it becomes more difficult when overburdened with the assignments for them in greater intensity.

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<sup>10</sup>R. H. Huang, D. J. Liu, et al., *Handbook on Facilitating Flexible Learning During Educational Disruption: The Chinese Experience in Maintaining Undisrupted Learning in COVID-19 Outbreak* (Smart Learning Institute of Beijing Normal University, 2020).

*Are you relatively more burdened during lockdown than otherwise?*



## 6. Increased use of gadgets:

As per the findings, many students gave tidings that with increased screen time usage, it has led to disturbance in sleep cycle, more distractibility, irritability of eyes, headaches, and sheer mental and physical exhaustion. Few gave an insight that these haven't been much of a problem and they are adapting well and for quite a time prior to these situations they have been increasingly using these gadgets for other activities.

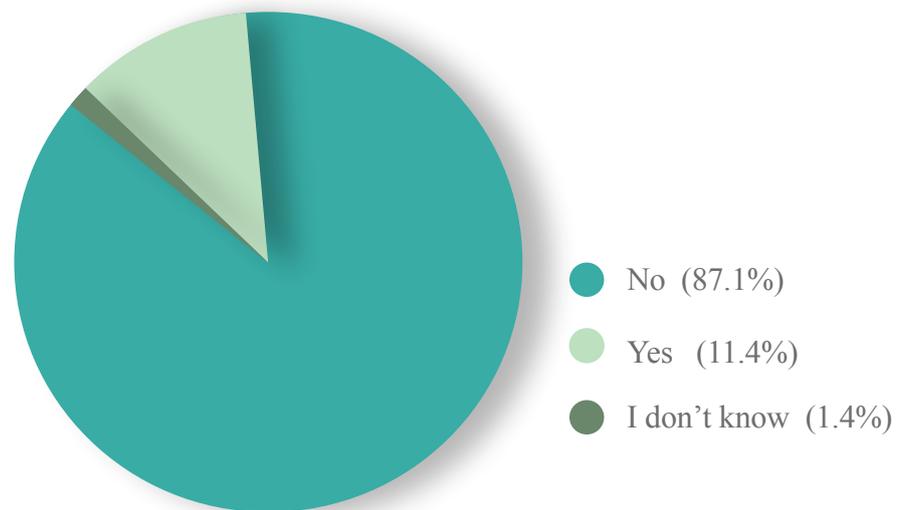
Some are avoiding unnecessary usage of gadgets and are emphasising more on usage of gadgets for only academic purpose. They have also been using apps from Google to track their screen time and also have been engaging in self-control as much as possible to avoid unnecessary use of gadgets. Few acclaim that there is an increase in usage of gadgets apart for academic purposes as they are also using the gadgets to fill up the gap that is left from the lack of social interaction with their near and dear ones to fill the void. The pandemic has left most people feeling anxious and looking for support amid the ongoing uncertainty and as such people need to feel connected more than ever before.

## 7. Minimal Emphasis on Mental Health:

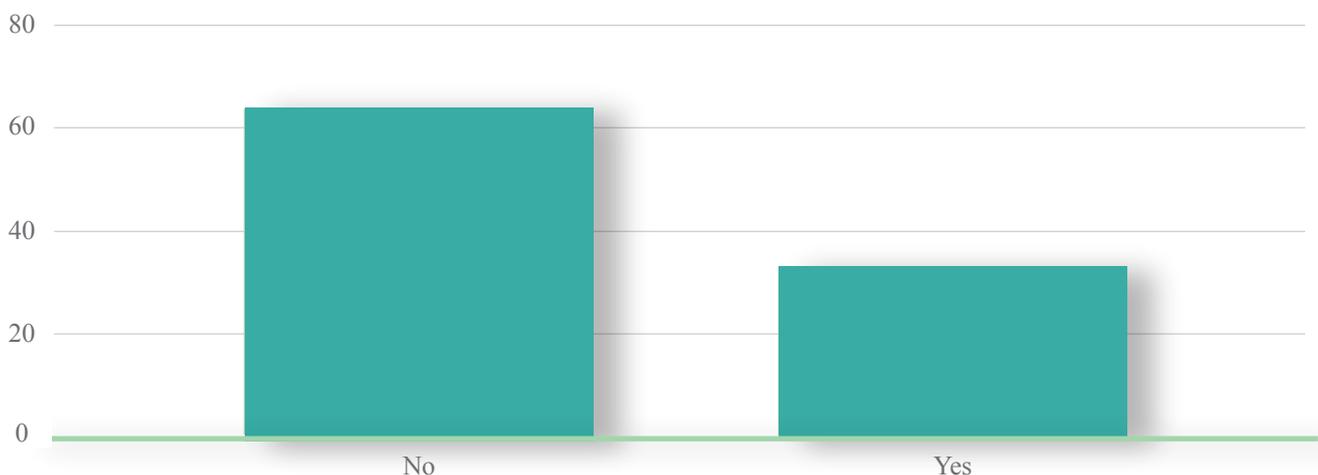
Of all the students, over 60% of them stated that no efforts were made by the school authorities to look after their mental health. Against that, one of the students mentioned that they were provided with the school counsellor's number, while another said that some teachers were checking upon them regularly for feedback. They also said that the school was organising webinars to discuss the current situation and how to better it. But those were only about 7% of all the students that concluded that their schools were concerned about their mental health.

Other circumstances like the institutions not paying heed at all to the mental health of the students and just emphasising on completion of academic curriculum were also revealed by a handful of students where even the teachers ceased to acknowledge their mental health. Another riveting point was brought forward by an attendee where they felt that there wasn't much need for addressing the mental health nor was it addressed as students are hardly taking much interest in the online education as it wasn't being much effective, per se the execution of the online classes wasn't upto the expectation which has led to large proportion of the schoolmates becoming passive learners and not taking it seriously. We can interpret from these points raised that motivation should be inculcated among the students and addressing mental health in contrast to what was stated by this student should be done.

*Has there been any effort taken to look after the mental health of students by your school authorities ?*



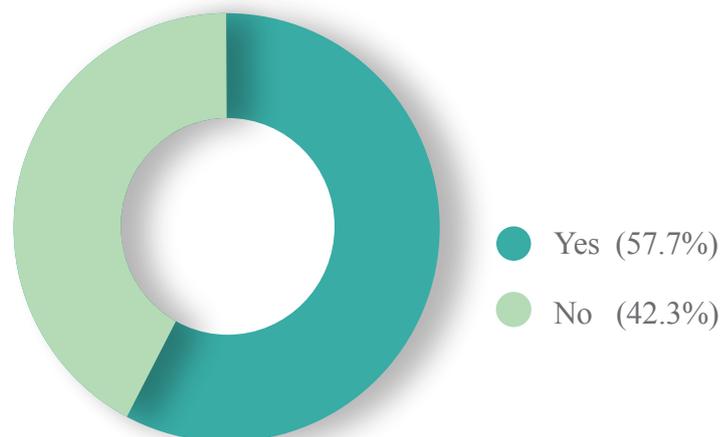
*Have you been given any counselling sessions by your school counsellor during this period ?*



## 8. Deteriorating Physical Health:

Some students assert that they face difficulties in coping with the excessive use of technology. Around 22% of the students face no such problems having adapted themselves to high usage of mobile phones and other gadgets. On the other hand, more than 50% of them faced difficulties like eye strain<sup>1</sup>, migraines, improper brain functioning, deterioration of body posture, and other health issues. Computer Vision Syndrome is something that happens when somebody focuses their eyes on a computer or other display device for long uninterrupted periods of time. The eye's muscles are then unable to recover from the constant tension required to maintain focus on a close object. Proper rest to the eyes and its muscles is recommended to relieve the associated eye strain, Kohler said.<sup>2</sup> He recommends getting an adequate night's sleep, and when a student is on a display device, take breaks and look at distant objects.

*Do you face problems like headache, the strain of the eyes, etc. after attending classes all day-long ?*



## 9. The silver lining:

A few of them viewed this time to be utilised for exploring hidden talents and for self-grooming. One of the students also mentioned that household chores should also be thought about as the helpers are not allowed to come. On the contrary, around 16% of the students stated that they faced no stress and were able to manage their work well.

Approximately 10% of students accepted that their coping mechanism includes dividing their time among studies, extra-curricular, and on their phones in order to avoid addressing their health problems. One of the students also mentioned that reading books helped him tackle this problem.

<sup>11</sup> Shu-Fang Shih and Olivia Kileen, "Increasing screen time during the coronavirus pandemic could be harmful to kids' eyesight" *The Conversation*, May 21, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Brittni Johnson, "Eye doctors explain how students can minimize eye related problems from online learning" *EastIdahoNews*, Apr 20, 2020.

Despite all the arguments against video classes, 16.66% of the students consider this as an advantage over physical classes for the sole reason that it helps them balance well between their studies and extra activities, considering that they can manage time well now with more interaction with family members. They also seem to be fascinated by this new perception of learning.

The students have been taking measures for fostering positive mental health and psychological resilience. Many are engaging in yoga, workouts or any such activities that promote serenity amidst this uncertainty. A particular student mentioned engaging in a programme called '*Baatein Ankaheesi*' which also helped to navigate through this period.

## 10. Proposals from the Students:

The surveyed students came up with interesting solutions to the problems they have been facing:

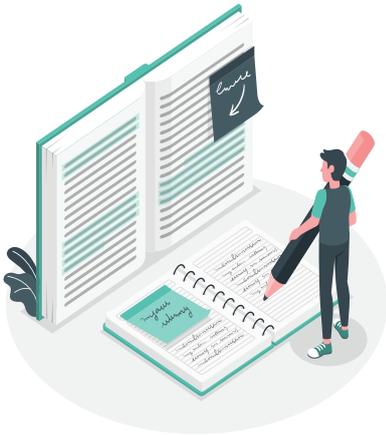
- Schools could conduct classes on alternate days to give the students enough time to grasp the concepts taught in the classes. More than 10% students suggested that video classes should be conducted thrice a week and assignments should be given twice a week so that students are not overburdened.
- Teachers could recommend a list of documentaries and videos to the students which would make learning easier for them. Recorded video lectures could also be shared via WhatsApp or any other platform so that students facing connectivity issues could refer to them. Open pedagogy can be practiced, which is a set of teaching and learning practices that is only possible in the context of the free access and 5R (reuse, redistribute, revise, remix and retain) permissions characteristic of open educational resources<sup>13</sup>
- As visual aids help to communicate ideas better, graphic learning could be encouraged and implemented as it attracts attention and spur up the students to learn more.
- Taking note with the extended lockdown, it was recommended that the syllabus of the academic curriculum be revised and reduced for the middle school section.

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<sup>13</sup> *Supra* note 10.

- Considering that learning can go beyond core educational topics, life skill classes or any such sessions with an aim to motivate students and encourage them to participate in other pursuits of their interest should be conducted. About one-sixth of all students suggested that live interactive sessions could be conducted by schools where one can come up with one's views on general issues. Few students suggested that counselling sessions, doubt clearing sessions and sessions other than curriculum-based should be conducted.
- Online classes can be overwhelming, at times the Zoom video portrayal could be used for conducting other activities by institutions like debating, jamming sessions, communicating and exchanging insight on how they are coping with the present scenario, a platform for them to have other interactive sessions as such.
- Noting with deep concern that many students are struggling psychologically, so in order to help the students navigate response to the present scenario of uncertainty, the school counsellor and educators should check in with the students and prioritize their mental health and wellbeing.
- Further recommends that educational institutes should take steps to obtain feedback on ways in which online classes are being conducted from students to address the gaps and their problems. Added to these, the student should be allowed to remain anonymous.
- Schools could consider recording the classes and sharing the same with the students for them to access the content for revision or follow the same in an event of poor internet connectivity during the lecture hours.

# INFOGRAPHICS



Indian education system is the most diverse and largest in the world with more than **15 lakh schools and 50,000 higher education institutions**.<sup>14</sup>

These nationwide closures are impacting over **91% of the world's student population**.<sup>15</sup>



As of April 8, 2020, schools have been **suspended nationwide in 188 countries**, according to UNESCO. Over **90% of enrolled learners (1.5 billion young people) worldwide are now out of education**.<sup>16</sup>

Some research shows that on average, **students retain 25-60% more material** when learning online compared to **only 8-10% in a classroom**.<sup>17</sup>



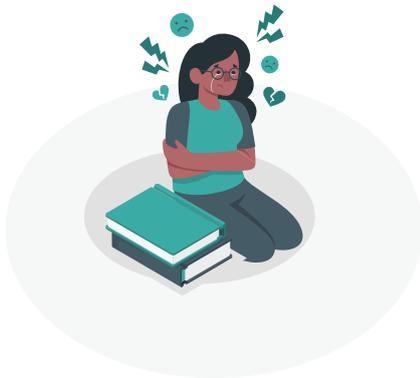
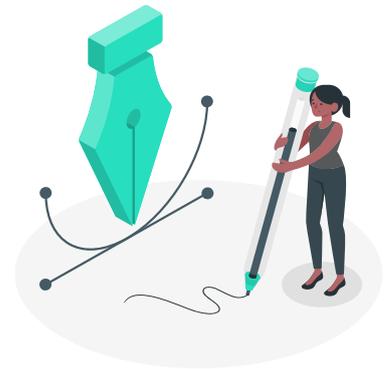
<sup>14</sup>Richa Choudhary, "COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact and Strategies for education sector in India", *The Economic Times*, Apr 16, 2020.

<sup>15</sup>Deepali Kasrekar and Gayatri Wadhavane-Tapaswi, "Impact of COVID-19 on Education System in India", *LatestLaws.com*, May 16, 2020.

<sup>16</sup>Joyce Lee, "Mental Health Effects of school closures during COVID-19", *THE LANCET Child & Adolescent Health*, Apr 14, 2020.

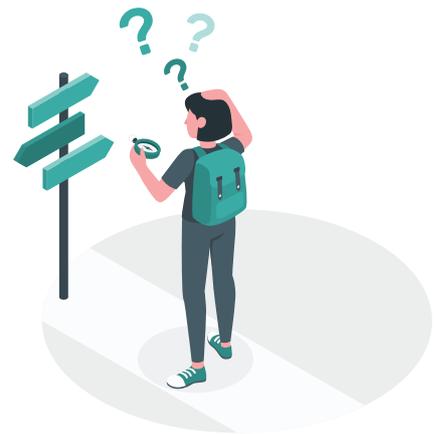
<sup>17</sup>Cathy Li and Farah Lalani, "Students retain more in online classrooms, shows data", *World Economics Forum*, Apr 29, 2020.

**E-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting because students can learn lessons at their own pace.**<sup>18</sup>

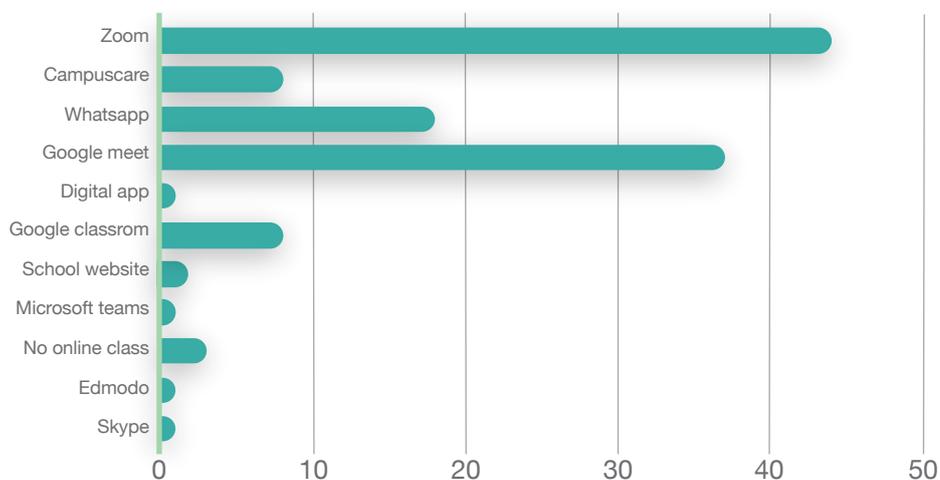


**78% of households with high school or college students report educational disruptions from COVID-19. Over 8 in 10 students experiencing these disruptions report increased stress.**<sup>19</sup>

**Almost 44% of students worry about their ability to enroll or stay enrolled in college.**<sup>20</sup>



**What online platform is your school using to provide online classes ?**



<sup>18</sup>*Id.*

<sup>19</sup>Reece Johnson, “Students Stressed Out Due to Coronavirus, New Survey Finds”, *Best Colleges*, Apr 20, 2020.

<sup>20</sup>*Id.*

# Recommendations

## ISSUES

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Students feel overburdened with assignments and deadlines

- The schools shall consider extended deadlines and less homework as a student is found to be engaged in different household chores and cannot be expected to be in the same state of mind as before.
- The school shall promote better coordination among subject educators so that a student is not overburdened with too many assignments at a point of time.

Questionable emphasis on the mental health of the students

- Schools shall share contact details of psychologists/counsellors who can help the students manage stress and other problems.
- The School Counsellors shall engage with students by conducting weekly sessions where they could understand the issues and concerns of students in the form of life skill classes.
- The School Counsellor shall update students on best practices, activities and other information that can help them deal with the stress.
- The Counsellors shall share regular updates with Parents and Subject Educators on the concerns of the students.

## ISSUES

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Toll on physical health of the students

- There shall be a provision for students to join the online classes through audio without using the video camera when more than 2 classes are scheduled in a day to reduce the screen time, allowing lesser strain in the eyes.
- Students must be encouraged to practice yoga and physical fitness exercises; schools shall invite physical fitness coaches to conduct small sessions in order to motivate students.
- Students shall be encouraged to take breaks from using electronic devices for a certain period of time every day.

Feasibility and accessibility to smartphones, laptops, tablets, and internet connection

- The lectures shall be recorded for students to access later when they have proper internet connection.
- Summary of the lecture (in the form of key points) can be asked by an Educator to be prepared by a student for every class.
- The schools shall encourage audio recordings of the lectures of theoretical subjects so that the overall screen time can be reduced for a student.

## ISSUES

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Need for change in teaching pedagogy for online education

- An Educator could use video clips, cartoons, small documentaries to complement their lecture.
- There can be a provision for Junior Teaching Assistance where a senior class student could help the Educator in the usage of all the online resources; he or she may also be allowed to conduct remedial classes for students requiring additional help.
- The schools shall conduct refresher courses on the access and usage of online resources for the Educators.
- Assignments/homework can be graded instead of conducting weekly tests for all subjects that has been a common concern for many students.

Less interaction of students with non-virtual world

- The school shall encourage students to express their emotions in the form of writing (journalling), music, art, dance etc.
- The School Librarian shall issue a Book Reading List weekly for students to consider reading.
- Competitions like Book Reading Challenge, Poster Making Challenge or Bake a Cake Challenges shall be organised for students where they could voluntarily participate.

# Conclusion

Schools can make the lives of students easier and motivate them to continue with the process of learning through proper management and smooth administration. One of the students even went on to suggest that periodic tests, strict schedule, delivery of books at home should be the primary motive of school authorities in the present times. The students seem to suggest prioritizing systematic learning, more interesting ways of explanations, encouraging students' mental and physical development. The schools that follow other methods than video classes for teaching should resort to teaching through online classes only as this is the most effective mode of remote teaching or learning.

One of the students was of the opinion that teachers could give on the spot assignments and study material which were easier to understand and interpret. All in all, it was concluded that the entire set up of conducting online video classes needed more time and familiarity, both on the teachers' and the students' part.

Parents/Guardians can guide their wards at home by reading out books to them, discussing various topics from time to time, that are relevant for their learning. Collective work of the institutions, teachers, and parents can help students cope up with the “new normal” amid this pandemic.

Peer-to-peer assistance can help cope up with studies. Along with that creative discussions, debates, pop quizzes online may contribute towards building a healthy learning environment.

Thus, the pandemic situation has paved the way for the shift to the newer ways of teaching and learning. It is commendable on part of the schools to have been able to reach where they are today, but just like any new invention requires successive rounds of testing and user feedback mechanisms, the system of online classes requires the inputs of its beneficiaries (i.e. the students) to make it successful.

