Preparedness of MBA students for On-Line Learning: An empirical study during Covid-19

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Abstract: **The nationwide COVID-19 lockdown has forced schools, colleges and universities to halt their academic progression and send their students home which, in turn, has impacted student population across the globe. The closure has placed unprecedented challenges on governments, institutions, teachers, parents and care givers around the world.**

Many countries are continuing to handle this disruption by deploying different modes of learning through a mix of technologies. In almost all countries, teachers have started delivering virtual live lessons and online classes seems to be gaining popularity. Keeping the above intent in the background the researhers are making an attempt Preparedness of MBA students for On-Line Learning to combat the challenges of lockdown, as well as survival strategies post lockdown.

Keywords: **Online Learning, Online Teaching, Students' Preparedness, New Technology, Teaching Aid.**

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Stephen P. Robbins, learning is " any relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience". It is a continuous process, happens every time, everywhere and for everyone. But the degree, intensity and pace vary from person to person. Observable change in the response is the measurement of learning effectiveness. So, learning is "acquiring knowledge and skills and having them readily available from memory so you can make sense of future problems and opportunities."[Brown et al, 2014] The learner acquires knowledge from many sources and learning from teachers is one among them. The teacher's role is to impart knowledge to the learner and help him or her to understand it. This process of knowledge transfer and establishing learner conviction use many modes, media, and methods. Learners increasingly demand educational services that suit their needs and lifestyles: anywhere, anytime, any language, and modular, flexible, allowing accumulation of credit over time and relevant. In many cases education and knowledge delivery have become the commodity where the customer-learner becomes the king. Private and public education and training providers recognise the commercial opportunities and create many creative approaches for satisfying learners as customers.

According to Eamonn McQuade (2017), People learn for various reasons such as for acquiring knowledge and understanding – scholarly learning, Learning for application, retention and recall, experience and implementation. Besides this, there is also a need to integrate learning approach and learningstyle most preferred by the learner or a set of learners.

As all learners grasping capacity is not same, they need differences in delivery. According to Lohri-Posey (2003), "Learning styles indicate an individual's preferential focus on different types of information, the different ways of perceiving information, and the rate of understanding information" (p. 54). Understanding the learning style preferences of students can provide effective learning strategies for teachers to use (Lohri-Posey, 2003). Students who share a learning style that is attuned with the teacher, remember information longer and are more optimistic about learning (Lohri-Posey, 2003). Along with approach and style, the mode of learning is also equally important. While the traditional "Chalk & Talk" method in the physical class rooms is the most preferred mode of learning by the students, blended learning ie a combination of physical classroom plus online mode and majorly online mode or E- Learning is really catching up with the students. Particularly it has gone up during this pandemic time where "Social Distancing "is the

major formula now. With passing of days and increasing uncertainties learners could not wait for a long period of time to get out of it. Rather they have accepted the new normal situation and molded themselves to the available technological support to have uninterrupted learning. Educational institutions also became partner with learner's expectation and moved hand in hand to enrich and value add to the current knowledge of students as learners. Nevertheless, requirements of the educational institutes to consider the Blended and E-learning modes of delivering knowledge to survive and grow in adverse situation like COVID 19, which has brought the world to a standstill due to total lockdown have opened their eyes. Post lockdown also the academic institutions may have to continue a lot of activities through online to ensure social distancing and give psychological and physical wellbeing solace to student population and their parents.

Hence, E-learning can be the best solution here for providing answers to various unforeseen and uncertain situations. It can best be defined as an art and science of learning without using paper and printed instructional materials. E-learning is the use of telecommunication technology to deliver information for education and training. With the progress of information and communication technology, E-learning is emerging as the paradigm of modern education. The advantages of E-learning include liberating interactions between learners and instructors, from limitations of time and space through the asynchronous and synchronous learning network model (Pei-Chen Sun et al., 2008). E- learning is commonly referred to the intentional use of networked information and communications technology in teaching and learning. A number of other terms are also used to describe this mode of teaching and learning. They include online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, network and web-based learning. The term E-learning comprises a lot more than online learning, as the letter "e" in E-learning stands for the word "electronic", E-learning would incorporate all educational activities that are carried out by individuals or groups working online or offline (Som Naidu, 2006).

Goyal, Sumit. (2012) suggested that E-learning is one of the most used technologies in this modern time. E-learning is basically a learning platform that applies the utilization of electronic media and information and communication technologies (ICT). E-learning can be implied with alternative terms such as online education, computer-based training, technology-enhanced learning, and others. The implementation of e-learning has been carried out in multiple education departments and learning institutions. The usage has also been extended to some corporate and professional companies, in informing their staff and customers on any related development that occurs within their business world. With this background, the researchers have got the interest to understand the preparedness of students now in the present new normal situation when everything has come to a stop and there is no other alternative but to accept e-learning. And the importance of e-learning has led to the need in assessing the mental and physical preparedness of the users before using the e-learning environment. Hence, interest of the researchers here is not only to find out a solution of the present situation but also to understand the readiness of the students to the available solution.

Therefore, e-learning readiness is defined as making sure that the users are capable of using the e-learning environment technology in the best way possible. Technically speaking, e-learning readiness is the capability of prospect e-learning users in using a new learning environment as well as the usage of alternative technology. With this, acceptance of their parents or guardians, physical set up and accessories related to it also cannot be ignored.

The results attained from this particular assessment can be used as some sort of guidelines for further development of e-learning environment or platform towards any enhancement those are essential and required.

The study conducted here is focused on MBA students' readiness for e-learning and their attitude towards it. Readiness for E-learning is studied in terms of Infrastructure required, IT skills, collaborative learning, independent learning and reflection on learning, support rendered by family/ guardians and their attitude towards online learning or E-Learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

E-learning comprises all forms of electronically supported learning and teaching. The information and communication systems, whether networked or not, serve as specific media to implement the learning process (Tavangarian D., Leypold M., Nölting K., Röser M.,2004). The term will still be utilized as reference in both out-of-classroom and in-classroom educational experiences for students through advanced technology, modern devices and changed curriculum. E-learning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. The applications and processes of E-learning include Web based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classroom opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CDROM. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio. Abbreviations like CBT (Computer-Based Training), IBT (Internet-Based Training) or WBT (Web-Based Training) have been used as

synonyms to e-learning. The Internet has facilitated the establishment of electronic learning (e-learning) education systems. The arising popularity of e-learning is attributed to its ability to enable students to study without the constraints of time and space and to reduce internal training costs for some organizations. Rosenberg (2000) states that, e-learning refers to the use of internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance. It is networked, delivered to end user through standard Internet technology, and focuses on the broadest view of learning. Vicky O'Leary (2005) study, highlighted that e-learning could help the company or organization as medium to allow the learner to access material such as, document database and assignment that is required by them. Hence, the usability does not limit to any place ,time and situation. As rightly pointed out by Aliza (2012) an e-learning system will become meaningful when it is being applied in order to make them easier to access, well-designed, learner cantered, affordable, efficient, flexible and has a facilitated learning environment. With this backdrop, the researchers have endeavoured to study the physiblity and acceptability of this system during this pandemic time.

As covid-19 has created a lock-down situation everywhere all over the world , teaching in classroom has taken a pause, hence this attempt is towards e-learning. Off-line to on-line is a transition. This brings a lot of anxiety and excitement for the learners. Students and parents have million-dollar questions about their readiness in terms of ability to handle the unfamiliar learning environment. To ease this transition, online learning orientations are intended to defuse students' feelings of anxiety by clarifying course expectations and requirements while boosting their self-confidence and preparedness. It is also imperative to understand how various factors associated with the online learning experience, like students' demographics, prior online learning experience, satisfaction, and sense of preparedness for the course after completing an online learning orientation – influence online students' feelings of anxiety. The deeper insights on the above said elements is essential in order to boost their confidence, motivation, and preparedness to succeed in online courses.

Becoming an online learner places different demands on students. This necessitates a more proactive, self-directed approach on the part of students (Brown, 1997; Tsay et al., 2000; Khiat, 2015; Kırmızı, 2015). Self-regulated learning, where students use meta-cognitive skills to plan, implement, and reflect on their learning, have been increasingly associated with better academic achievements (Johnson, 2015; Khiat, 2015). Active engagement in academic materials, and with instructors and peers, has been emphasized as a core component of successful learning for students (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Further, lack of social interaction was found to be the major barrier to student success in online (Muilenburg and Berge, 2005)

There an array of factors that students experience while trying to acquire knowledge through online platform. First, students may find themselves poorly prepared in balancing work, social, family and study lives in an e-learning environment. There could also be hassles associated with time management. Vergidis and Panagiotakopoulos (2002) pointed that students are generally considered to have high levels of preparedness for competencies associated with the use of technology and the Internet – for example, using search engines or uploading and downloading resources. The notable exception is the competency associated with the knowledge and use of Learning Management Systems. This suggests that there is the need for the provision of suitable orientation programs for students beyond the development of mere computing skills, as previously identified by Cheurprakobkit, Hale, & Olson (2002). The researchers also suggested that working with others in virtual environment and interactions with content of the course being delivered in the classroom is a foremost obstacle student face while studying through online.

However, not all of the responsibility for effective engagement in online courses lies with the student. There is an institutional and faculty responsibility to create an inclusive, supportive structure where students can engage in social interactions and a sense of (online) community can be fostered, as has been apparent in research findings from Garrison and colleagues in applying and extending the Community of Inquiry model (e.g., Garrison et al., 2000; Aragon, 2003; Garrison and Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Garrison and Arbaugh, 2007)

Effective online instructors have a direct and important role in influencing the student experience, since instructors are often the "face" of an online course. The instructor's presence is the most critical factor related to students' success in online (Easton, 2003; Menchaca and Bekele, 2008; Kennette and Redd, 2015; Kim and Thayne, 2015). In the absence of the richness of interactions available to on-campus students, instructors become an even more important "ingredient" in helping to engage, retain, and graduate online students. Instructors also play a key role in motivating students throughout their online study (Bolliger and Martindale, 2004). Since instructors are the only personalized point of contact provided to students at any one time, their responsiveness and availability has been highlighted as a key predictor of online student

satisfaction. Lack of timely feedback or slow communication timeframes from instructors detract students and reduces satisfaction in online learning.(Bolliger and Martindale, 2004). It is apparent that development of instructor training is a critical component of effective institutional preparation for online courses, so that teachers can develop the range of skills required to teach through online successfully.

According to Chantal Roddy et al(2017) instructors need to work to establish and maintain student engagement. Pedagogical approaches need to account for learner competencies, characteristics, and preferred learning approaches. This is especially important given the emerging demographic differences between online and on-campus cohorts. Intensive online learning environments should take account of potential barriers that can lead to increased attrition, such as perceived isolation, competing work/family commitments, poor motivation, lack of engagement with content, and technical challenges.

Nevertheless, there is a need for regular monitoring of student progress that can help to quickly identify and address potential concerns. Providing comprehensive orientation is key to ensure students are adequately informed and linked to ongoing support services. Communication plays a pivotal role in enhancing the online learning experience through peer-to-peer and student-to-instructor dialog. Ongoing flexible technical support is also vital to manage any technical issues that arise. On a more general note, a flexible and responsive approach to all activities is critical in intensive online environments.
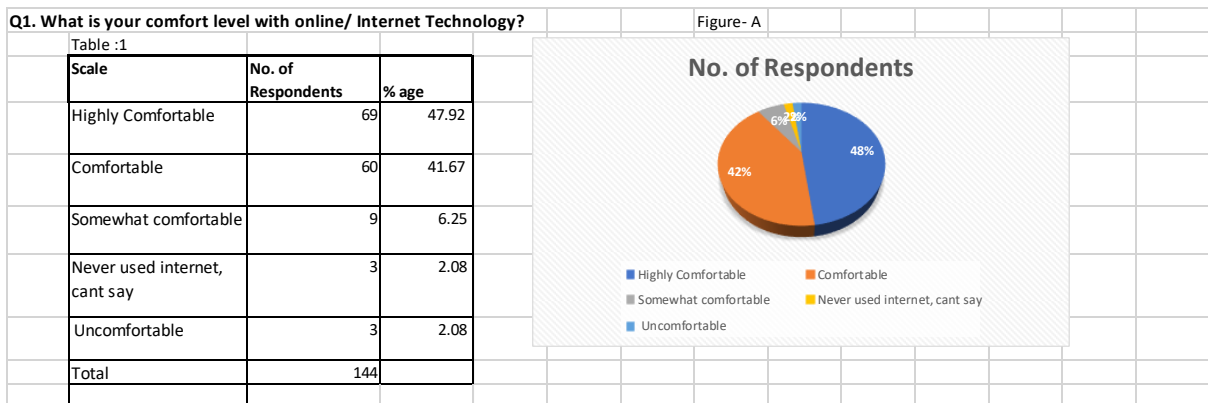
Objective:

- To understand students' preparedness for online mode of learning amid global COVID 19 pandemic situation.

- To assess the attitude of students towards learning in new/ different environment
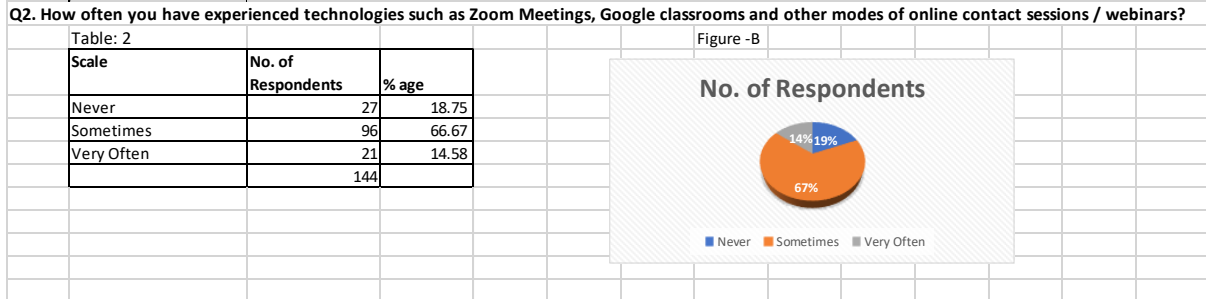
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive study wherein the researchers are trying to describe & analyse the gathered data and to reach to a rational conclusion with respect to preparedness and attitude of students towards online learning. The statistical population for the study includes students pursuing MBA from various institutes across Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. The study covered 200 respondents but after screening properly filled up questionnaire,144 were selected for final analysis. Convenience sampling technique has been used for collecting the data for the purpose of this research. A questionnaire containing of 12 questions was designed by exploring books periodicals, journals. The respondents were also interacted with some free flow discussions. The data collected both through interaction and questionnaire was analysed using statistical tools to reach to a logical conclusion.

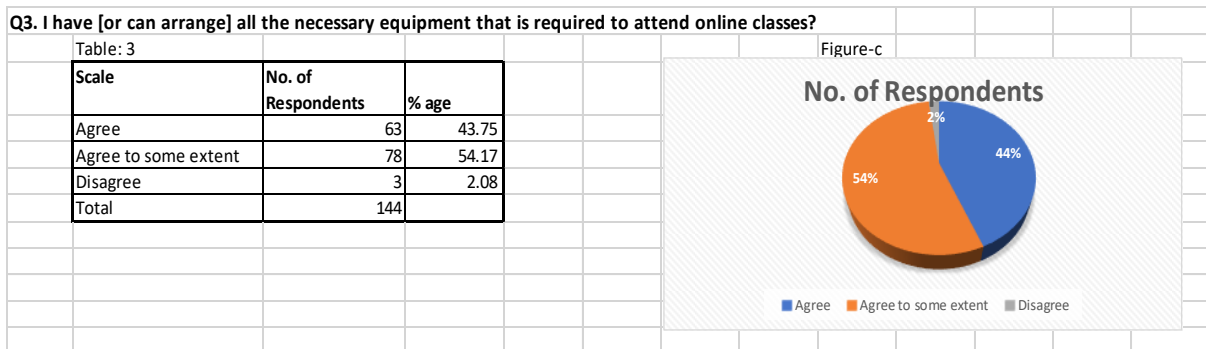## 4. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

The above deliberation suggest that student engagement, work-life balance, environment and family support, adaptive approach to teaching & learning, enabling peer interactions and technological support for both students and instructors should be taken in to account while foraying into online education world. It is imperative to continue to monitor and meet student needs that are particular to the online environment, so that online courses can adapt to changing future needs. It is essential to understand and seek solutions to the above said aspects of online learning to gauge and enhance students' preparedness and active adaption for effective teaching learning environment.

Q1. What is your comfort level with online/ Internet Technology?   Figure- A

Table :1

Scale	No. of Respondents	% age
Highly Comfortable	69	47.92
Comfortable	60	41.67
Somewhat comfortable	9	6.25
Never used internet, cant say	3	2.08
Uncomfortable	3	2.08
Total	144	

No. of Respondents

48% — Highly Comfortable
42% — Comfortable
6% — Somewhat comfortable
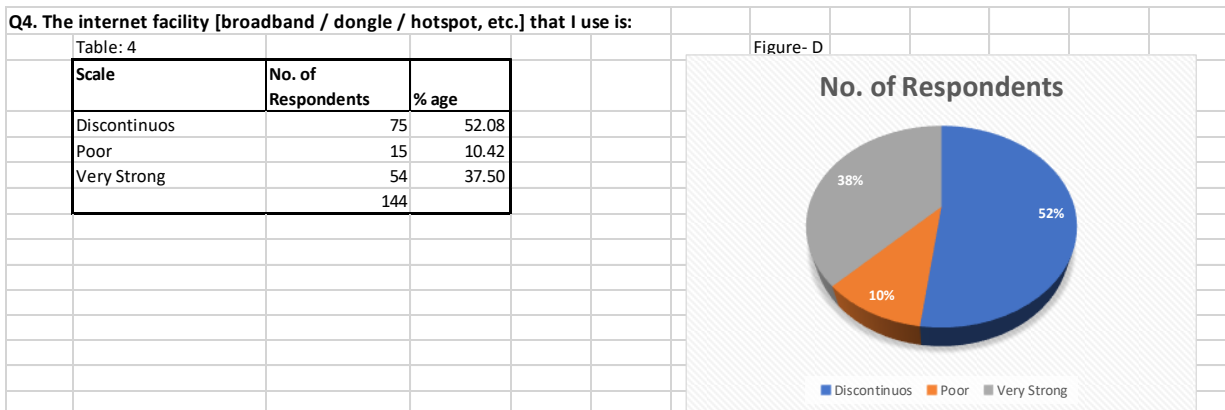2% — Never used internet, cant say
2% — Uncomfortable

As given in Table 1, 90% students are comfortable using online/ internet technology. The population surveyed for the purpose of this research are the students pursuing their MBA program. These students are in the age group of 20 to 25. The young generation considered here is tech savvy and avid internet users. They spend a lot of time online. It will not be an exaggeration to say that they live in a virtual world, thus most of them have indicated their comfort on interaction and use of internet/ online technology.

Q2. How often you have experienced technologies such as Zoom Meetings, Google classrooms and other modes of online contact sessions / webinars?

Table: 2

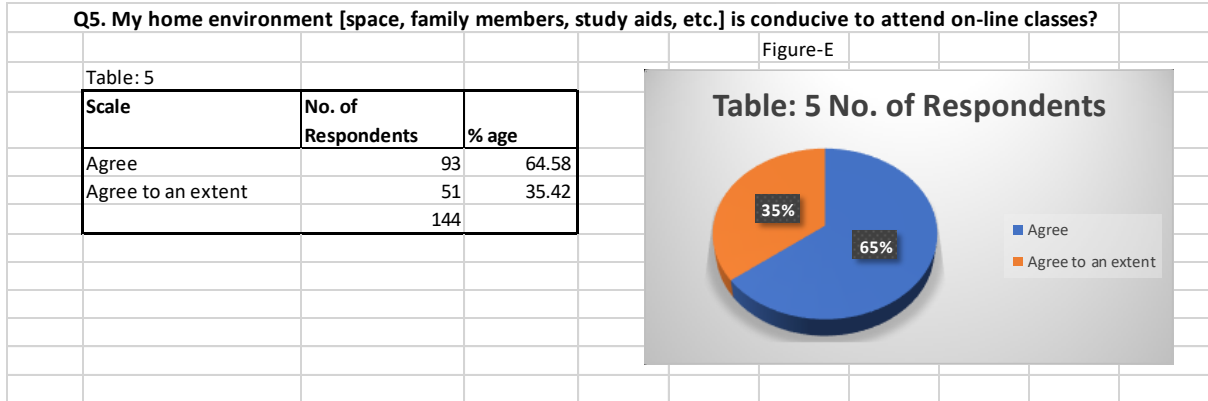| Scale	No. of Respondents	% age
Never	27	18.75
Sometimes	96	66.67
Very Often	21	14.58
	144	

Figure -B

When the students surveyed were asked that whether they have experienced technologies such as Zoom Meetings, Google classrooms and other modes of online contact sessions / webinars, only 15% responded as very often. This category comprises of very aware, self-driven and keen learners who reach out to every possible platform to acquire knowledge. Whereas 67% responded that they have encountered the above sometimes are those, who attend the program only very relevant , essential, or mandatory for them in this lockdown period when the physical classroom sessions are not feasible. The remaining 15% replied as never to the above question, this is indicated as those students who are either very disinterested/ reluctant or have fear of unknown/ belong to rural areas where the above said facilities are sparingly available.

Q3. I have [or can arrange] all the necessary equipment that is required to attend online classes?

Table: 3

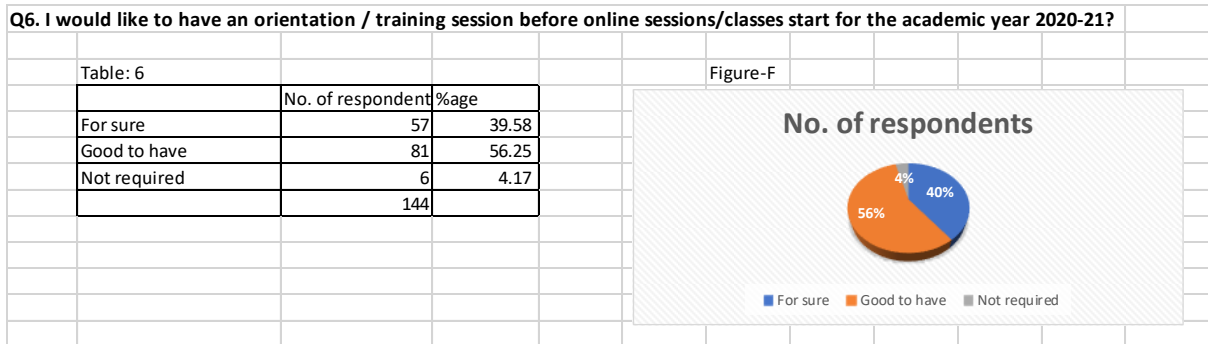| Scale	No. of Respondents	% age
Agree	63	43.75
Agree to some extent	78	54.17
Disagree	3	2.08
Total	144	

Figure-c

Out of total surveyed students, 44% indicated that they have [or can arrange] all the necessary equipment that is required to attend online classes, a majority 55% have responded as "Agree to some extent" as given in Table:3. Due to COVID 19 Lockdown most of the students were forced to move to their hometown , where facilities required for online classes are not up to the mark. out of all only 01 student opted for "Disagree" option. Only 2% have responded as disagree this shows that internet has reached even the smaller cities of India and most of the students are in a position to attend online classes from the safety and comfort of their homes.

Q4. The internet facility [broadband / dongle / hotspot, etc.] that I use is:

Table: 4

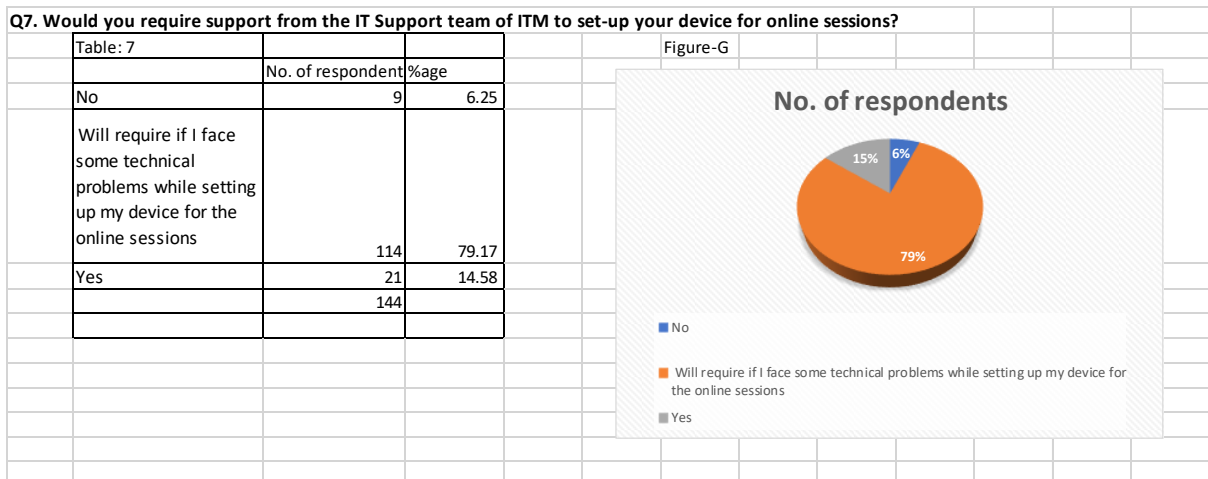| Scale	No. of Respondents	% age
Discontinuos	75	52.08
Poor	15	10.42
Very Strong	54	37.50
	144	

Figure- D

As given in Table: 4, when the students who responded to this survey were asked about internet facility [broadband / dongle / hotspot, etc.] that they use, 38% said that their internet facility is strong enough to support them through their online activities. This generally may comprise of those belonging to urban cities, where online connectivity has become a basic necessity. 52% replied to the above as discontinuous owing to availability, network congestion and allied issues associated with internet facility around them. The remaining small10% cited their connectivity as poor.

Q5. My home environment [space, family members, study aids, etc.] is conducive to attend on-line classes?

Figure-E

Table: 5

Scale	No. of Respondents	% age
Agree	93	64.58
Agree to an extent	51	35.42
	144	

Table: 5 No. of Respondents

The majority 65% of the students agreed that their home environment [space, family members, study aids, etc.] is conducive to attend on-line classes as depicted in Table:5. The next 35% reported some discomfort here owing to responsibilities around family responsibilities, number of family members, size of the house and sometimes even understanding level towards education/online education.

Q6. I would like to have an orientation / training session before online sessions/classes start for the academic year 2020-21?

Table: 6

Figure-F

	No. of respondent	%age
For sure	57	39.58
Good to have	81	56.25
Not required	6	4.17
	144	

No. of respondents

As given in Table: 6, 40% of the students who responded to this survey, seek would like to have an orientation / training session before online sessions/classes start for the academic year 2020-21. Whereas 56% replied as "Good to have "and only 4 % said that do not require any training for the above. It is evident here that most of the students require some training/ orientation before they begin with online classes and the institutes need to schedule the same for effectiveness of Online Classes in the time to come**.**

Q7. Would you require support from the IT Support team of ITM to set-up your device for online sessions?

Table: 7

Figure-G

|	No. of respondent	%age
No	9	6.25
Will require if I face some technical problems while setting up my device for the online sessions	114	79.17
Yes	21	14.58
	144	

No. of respondents

As given in Table: 7, 79% of the students surveyed for the purpose of this research said that they will require support from the IT Support team of the institute to set-up their device for online sessions if they face any technical issue. Whereas 6 % said that they will not require any help and the remaining 16% reported that they will need help for sure. This depicts that majority of the new generation student respondents have a good hold on computer, internet and peripheral gears to be effective online.

Q8. Have you ever attended online classes?

Table-8

Scale	No. of respondent	%age
Yes	87	60.42
No	57	39.58
	144	

Figure-H
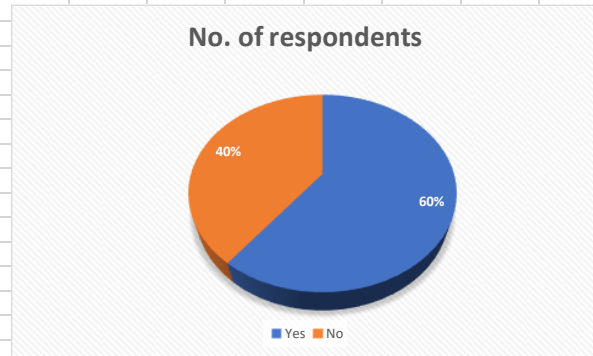
As given in Table: 8, when the respondents were asked if they ever attended online classes a majority 60% said yes whereas remaining 40% replied as No. This depicted that students from MBA course are the millennials. The millennials have been exploring a lot of websites for vocational, additional or informal learning. During informal interaction they confirmed the same, but for formal education they prefer traditional physical classroom arrangements.

Q9. Have you ever experienced any online courses [e.g. Coursera; edX, Udemy, Future Learn, Alison, etc.]? If yes, then mention the details below?

Table:9

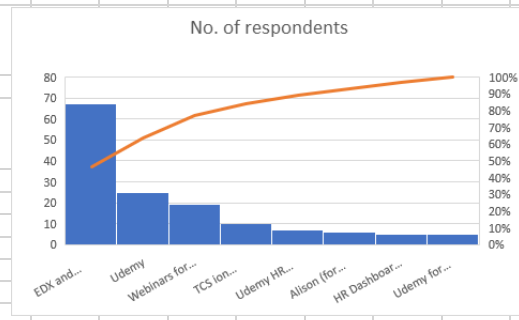|	No. of respondents	%age
Alison (for online certification course)	6	4.17
EDX and Udemy	67	46.53
HR Dashboard & analytics using Ms-excel (Udemy)	5	3.47
TCS ion Udemy	10	6.94
Udemy for my online course	5	3.47
Udemy HR Analytics	7	4.86
Udemy	25	17.36
Webinars for CAT	19	13.19
	144	

Figure-H

Table 9, suggests that a Majority 665% have cited EDX & Udemy as their most preferred site for doing online courses followed by other online course providers as given above.
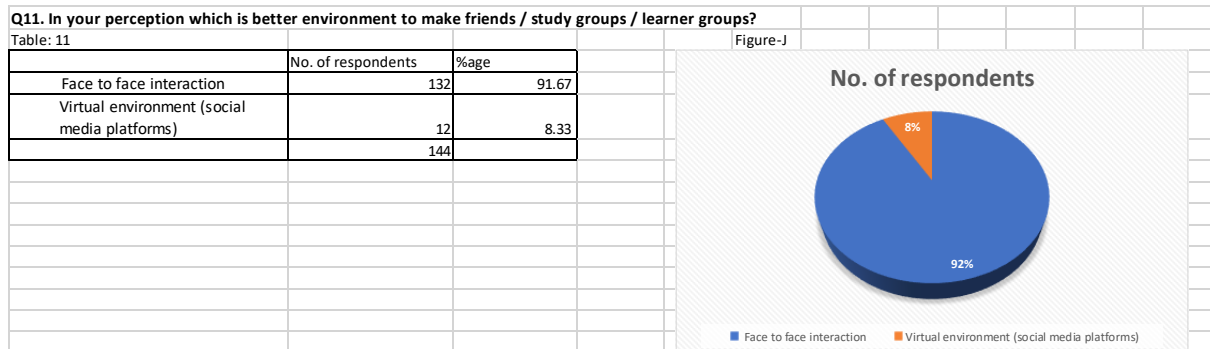
Q10. Given a choice what would be your preferred method of learning?

Table: 10

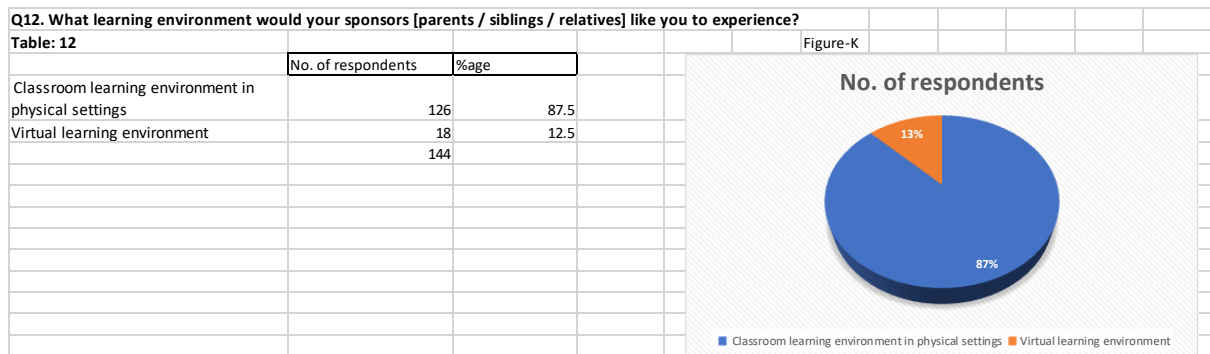|	No. of respondents	%age
Classroom learning in physical s	120	83.33
Virtual learning	24	16.67
	144	

Figure-I
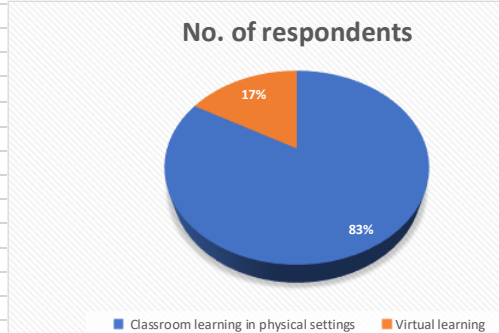
As given Table: 10, a majority 83% student have responded as Yes and remaining 17% replied as No when asked if they would prefer to learn in online or offline mode. It was noteworthy to mention that still majority of the students prefer to attend classes in physical class rooms. It could be attributed to influence of instructor or interaction with fellow class mates that can be experienced only in online mode of learning.

Q11. In your perception which is better environment to make friends / study groups / learner groups?				Figure-J
Table: 11				
	No. of respondents	%age		
Face to face interaction	132	91.67		
Virtual environment (social media platforms)	12	8.33		
	144			

No. of respondents

■ Face to face interaction ■ Virtual environment (social media platforms)

The Table: 11, indicates that 92% of the respondents perceive that 92% provides **better environment to make friends / study groups / learner groups as compared to virtual environment.**

Q12. What learning environment would your sponsors [parents / siblings / relatives] like you to experience?				Figure-K
Table: 12				
	No. of respondents	%age		
Classroom learning environment in physical settings	126	87.5		
Virtual learning environment	18	12.5		
	144			

No. of respondents

■ Classroom learning environment in physical settings ■ Virtual learning environment

As given in Table: 12, 87% of respondents have said that their sponsors [parents / siblings / relatives] like them to experience Classroom learning environment in physical settings over virtual learning.

5. CONCLUSION

E-learning can best be defined as the science of learning without using paper printed instructional material. E-learning is the use of telecommunication technology to deliver information for education and training. With the progress of information and communication technology development, E-learning is emerging as the paradigm of modern education. The great advantages of E-learning include liberating interactions between learners and instructors, from limitations of time and space through the asynchronous and synchronous learning network model (Pei-Chen Sun et al., 2008)

The population surveyed for the purpose of this research are the students pursuing their MBA program. They belong to Gen Z who are born with technology. The basic characteristic of the generation is "all about technology". They need instant gratification for which they are very much dependent on information. This generation is considered as tech savvy and avid internet users. They spend a lot of time online. It will not be an exaggeration to say that they live in a virtual world, thus most of them have indicated their comfort on interaction and use of internet/ online technology.

Through telephonic discussion with respondents also it was found out that almost 82% of students are very much comfortable to be at home and study through online as covid-19 has created the fear and social distancing is the only solution to it. 85% of students have mentioned that they are not that comfortable with technical aspect of information technology but are very much aligned with its basic uses. Basic uses of computer and internet have reached even the smaller cities of India and most of the students are in a position to attend online classes from their homes. Internet facility [broadband / dongle / hotspot, etc.] is the lifeline of online classes and students belonging to urban cities, where online connectivity has become a basic necessity have absolute comfort there. Whereas those belonging to semi urban or rural places have shown concerns on discontinuous service owing to availability, network congestion and allied issues associated with internet facility around them. Particularly, during this time when the whole world is depending upon

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technology starting from telecommuting, online coaching, counselling, training, pursuing hobbies and also online webinars, seminars and conferences people are very much dependent on internet which is creating bandwidth problem. Also, in some cases the environment, infrastructure and space create major problem to be with online learning approach, which is luckily not a constraint with the sample, but this cannot be generalized as this is not rational sample size. But still as the students will be in the safe, secured, and cared environment they will enjoy being at home learning through online.

Most of the students pointed out that they require some training/ orientation before they begin with online classes and the institutes need to schedule the same for effectiveness of Online Classes in the time to come. They will also require support from the IT Support team of the institute to set-up their device for online sessions and also if they face any technical issue The majority agreed that their home environment [space, family members, study aids, etc.] is conducive to attend on-line classes.

The students have been exploring a lot of websites for vocational, additional, or informal learning and have done some to many courses online to enhance their skills and competencies. It was interesting to note that still majority of the students prefer to attend classes in physical classrooms, but no one could deny the effectiveness of face-to face interactions in offline classes. It could be attributed to influence of instructor or interaction with fellow classmates that can be experienced only in offline mode of learning. Most of the students believe that offline/ traditional classes provide better environment to make friends / study groups / learner groups as compared to virtual environment. Even their sponsors [parents / siblings / relatives] like them to experience Classroom learning environment in physical settings over virtual learning.

When Students envision going to colleges/ institutions, they picture the traditional classroom environment—complete with a whiteboard, desks, pencils and notebooks. That's how a classroom has looked for decades, and it's hard to really picture education in any other way. The global pandemic and allied threats have forced majority of the education providers to go online to ensure the continuity of students learning. The online class can be very different than a traditional setting. Often online classes are more interactive, yet more challenging and require different skills than what many students expect. An orientation and understanding how online learning is different from a face-to-face classroom will help students to be more at ease as well as successful. It is imperative to understand that online learning demands as much time as a face-to-face course. while specific expectations will vary by course and instructor. A well-designed coursework – reading, preparing assignments, and communicating with fellow classmates and instructor can be the key to effectiveness in online classes. A thorough training on learning tools used for the online courses, such as discussion boards, instant messaging, online chat, video conferencing, document sharing and a variety of others, may allow students to work with their classmates and instructors. In fact, they may find that online learning provides more opportunities for interaction than the face-to-face environment.

If institutes and students take care of the above said points, online classes/ E- learning could turnout to be a boon amid this COVID 19 pandemic.

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