



## The Impact of Digital Divide in Rural and Semi-Urban Schools in U.P.

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to explore the impact of the digital divide on learners in schools located in rural and semi urban areas. Glaring inequalities were seen to exist among learners as the schools tried to cope with these disparities leading to digital inequities in society. The objective of the research questions is to look into the digital competencies of the learner which extend the notion of Dell Hymes' communicative competence. The study was undertaken in seventeen districts of Uttar Pradesh and the data was collected through digital questionnaires and telephonic interviews. It looked into the digital divide in schools and the private spheres. The impact was studied both in terms of quantitative and qualitative questionnaires.

**Keywords:** digital divide, inequalities, multilingualism, digital literacy, diversity

### 1. Introduction: *Digital Divide and Digital Competence*

As the world grappled with Covid-19 onslaught, countries moved towards digitalisation. India had set a target of reaching a trillion digital economy by 2025. However, a significant disparity among states remained in their inability to access the internet. This led to a digital divide, i.e. the gap between those who have and do not have access to computers and the internet. However, a closer look at the simple definition of the digital divide forces us to go beyond the binary of 'have' and 'have not'. The digital divide shows an uneven distribution in the access and use of information and communication technologies. This is visible among the distinct groups that can be demarcated based on social, geographical or geopolitical criteria<sup>1</sup>. The effective use of new technologies brings in the disturbing question of access to New age technology. It reaffirms the belief that the digital divide is not a binary; instead, it is multifaceted and includes many factors such as affordability, accessibility, etc.

### 2. Literature Review

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<sup>1</sup> The members of this distinctive group are "the children and youth from marginalised populations, those who have historically faced 'opportunity gaps'. (Great Schools Partnership, 2014, cited in Charles 2022, p. 9)

## **2.1 Impact of Digital Divide**

The digital divide has had a tremendous impact on several social spheres. It has led to a significant number of people being left behind. One of the most significant impacts has been on education. The tremendous impact of the technological revolution on language and education can be seen at the different levels of learning. Online classes are a challenge for both the learner and teacher in the ability to operate internet-enabled devices. According to the 75th Round of the National Sample Survey conducted between July 2017 and June 2018, only 04.40% of rural households had access to computers, as compared to 23.40% in urban households and 14.90% of rural households had access to internet facilities, as compared to 42% in an urban household (Digital Divide in India, July 31, 2020).

## **2.2. Consequences of the Digital Divide**

This can be seen concerning digital competence. This concept describes “technology-related skills such as ICT skills, technology skills, information technology skills, 21st century skills, information literacy, digital literacy, and digital skills”. (Ilomäki et al., 2011, p.1) Traditionally *competence* was seen more in terms of *skills*. However, recent publications have brought a change in perspective, which allowed/allows the term *competence* to acquire wider currency than *skills*. It considered competency as being “more than just knowledge and skills... involv[ing] the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context.” (OECD 2005, cited in Ilomäki et al., 2011, p. 2). The ambit of the scope of digital competency was further expanded to include not only the digital skills but also “social and emotional aspects for using and understanding digital device [that] is grounded on basic skills in ICT, i.e. the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet”. (Ilomäki et al., 2011, p. 2)

## **2.3. Digital Competence and Learning**

Digital competence extends the notion of Dell Hymes’ communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Digital competence depends on a few learning factors, including knowledge of the linguistic resources for effective communication and the need for virtual learning. (Simpson & Walker, 2014, p. 482). Digital competence depends on a few learning factors, including knowledge of the linguistic resources for effective communication and the need for virtual learning. The need to communicate seeks to re-examine the psychological and sociocultural perspectives of the L2 learner. The psychological perspective views the importance of internalisation, storage and retrieval of language for greater learner autonomy and sets “a specific plan, action behaviour, step, or technique that individual learners use, with some degree of consciousness, to improve their progress in developing skills in [a second language].” (Oxford 1999, cited in Cohen & MacCaro 2010, pp. 47–48) The socio-cultural perspective is “a learner’s socially mediated plan of action

to meet a goal, which is related directly or indirectly to L2 learning” (Oxford 1999, cited in Cohen & MacCaro 2010, p. 48).

#### **2.4. Assessment and Digital Divide**

Online interaction has led to an assessment of place and space in order to understand the functioning of digital learning. Digital competence seeks to look at how internalisation takes place and the retrieval of newly acquired knowledge sources. The other factor is the ability to understand the socio-cultural aspects of one’s community and the target language. The underlying process is the mediation of the individual with societal expectations and learning goals. The norms of the interaction of the users will depend on the community context and the governing conventions. It has been referred to as ‘situated cognition in communities of practice’ (Brown, Collins, Duguid 1989, cited in Cohen & MacCaro 2010, p. 54). An online ‘community of practice’ will involve learners engaged in a common pursuit. The virtual environment and its effective functioning have rules governing online interaction. Digital competence, further, means developing the language resources required for interaction with virtual speakers and for developing the competence to function expectedly. The understanding of both the domains of shared language and target language leads to the understanding and fulfillment of the required expectations. Digital competence further leads to the required skills of messaging, joining a meeting, listening to classroom lectures, sending tasks online and being assessed online. It also requires an understanding of the procedural knowledge regarding the technical knowledge of digital devices. Besides the competencies spelt out by Canale and Swain (1980), digital competency requires strategic competence which means having the necessary strategies for manoeuvring and overcoming problems for effective functioning.

#### **2.5. Digital Divide and Digital Literacy**

The digital divide is a way of viewing the disparity between access to resources in today’s communicative world. Digital literacy turns the focus away from only digital access to the acquisition and development of critical skills that will allow individuals to use the internet in a meaningful and beneficial way. In this entire process, it was literacy and schooling that were under tremendous pressure. In most cases, the out-of-school practices where no formal digital learning had taken place contrasted with the in-the-classroom practices that had prevailed earlier. Online learning resources attempted to extend learning to new hybrid learning. The gap between people living in an area with an internet connection and learners unfamiliar with it is evident. People with low-income groups, low formal education, lack of digital understanding and children out of school find it difficult to access this worldwide connecting resource. The unequal participation due to several such issues has led to digital inequities in society. Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that ‘the right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application is up for debate’. (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Articles 1 and 12) The Report of the General Secretary to the Commission for Social Development in February 2021 stated the following:

'Member states should close the digital divide and promote digital inclusion by taking into account the national and regional contexts and by addressing the challenges associated with access (poor infrastructure roll-out), affordability (cost of connection and computers and similar devices), skills (digital literacy) and awareness, and relevance (limited awareness of the benefits and absence of relevant content in local languages).' Report of the Secretary General, 8-17 February 2021)

The digital literacy divide was visible in semi urban and rural areas. It affected learners in different ways. Many learners were unable to use this because of their unfamiliarity with technology. Smartphones were out of reach, and many shared mobile use in a family. Others shared the learning space in the home environment. The lack of accessibility to technology, social and economic disparities and the inability to keep pace with online learning led to a negative washback among learners. Literacy practices saw an enormous imbalance resulting from this divide. This was a new challenge for education. The Digital Empowerment Foundation (2018) report stated that ninety per cent of India's population was digitally illiterate.

## **2.6. Diversity and Power Differentials in a Language Classroom**

India is a multilingual country with Hindi, English and twenty-two regional languages as its official languages. The languages used in the schools differ with English and Hindi being taught in most cases. If a regional language is used, it may not necessarily be the mother tongue as it differs among the speakers in a classroom. The language policy and practice in education find it increasingly challenging to cope with the diversity in a language classroom, which is a microcosm of the existing situation in India. Learners need to develop high levels of literacy and communication skills, along with digital skills, to cope with the present situation. 'School educational practices in India involve multiple languages but can be characterised only as nominal forms of multilingual education' (Mohanty, 2008, p. 17). Multilingualism, on one level, seeks to develop Basic Interpersonal Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academy Language Proficiency (CALPS) for competence in the home language. On the other hand, it seeks to address diverse social practices. Studies have shown that it takes more than five years for linguistic minority learners to reach the level of native learners. (Cummins 2009, p. 25)

Multilingual societies often exhibit differential power relationships among the various languages. The centre-periphery distribution of languages manifests itself in the privileges accrued to a particular language. This is closely tied to the notion of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) where 'capital acts as a social relation within a system of exchange and the term is extended to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation.' (Harker et al. 1990, cited in Webb 2002, p. 22). Bourdieu views educational practices as being governed by the values which are part of the social space. He views education as one of the most significant aspects of bringing change and this assumes importance for researchers to understand the inequities in society. He regards the social set-up as being intrinsic to educational practices. Education confers cultural and economic capital to those who pursue it. Cultural capital plays a significant role in maintaining the

dominant social practices, primarily through formal learning. 'Because the cultural capital is inequitably distributed tending to favour those who occupy positions and dispositions that provide access to these socially legitimated and valued ways of knowing, knowledge becomes a marker of distinction and social privilege.' (Webb 2002, p.110) The structures and practices accruing from them are complex. Pierre Bourdieu (2014, p. 44) views the importance of the habitus which is the child's disposition and the 'school habitus' (Webb, 2002, p.116) and how they interact towards building a child's repertoire which includes the cognitive and affective factors. This unequal access to internet learning has been explored in this study. This divide was reflected in the lack of facilities at home and school, along with economic disparities in the inability to use technology for learning in and outside the classroom.

### **2.7. National Education Policy 2020 and Digital Learning**

India's National Education Policy, 2020, states that schools must foster educational platforms innovatively by exploiting New age technology. The schools should build an atmosphere to incorporate new developments and e-resources to encourage hybrid learning and assessment. With the help of the state government, the institutions could get the benefits of the National Institute of Open Schooling which will help them to meet the demands relating to students' requirements and teachers' expectations.

### **3. Research Gap**

Changing technology could put anyone in the trap of the Digital Divide (Dasgupta, 2018). The Digital Divide is apparent at the individual and community level (Sadiku et al., 2016). India needs to address it in energy, IT, teledensity and online business (Nayak et al., 2022, pp. 57-75). India, which is struggling with a 77.70% literacy rate (NSO 2022) and seems to have a much higher rate of technological discrepancy (Tripathy & Raha, 2019), dreams of a digital society. However, Digital Divide between rural and semi urban schools in Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), where the average rural literacy rate is 65.46%, is not researched much. Can the schools, teachers and students in such areas welcome hybrid learning with New age technology to contribute to a dream 'Digital India'?

### **4. Statement of Problem**

The study aims to look at the digital divide in urban and semi urban areas in 17 districts of Uttar Pradesh. This was the survey carried out at the school level through a questionnaire.

### **5. Research Questions:**

- i. How has online learning affected the rural – semi urban divide?
- ii. What are the problems faced by the learners?
- iii. What are the strategic competencies which the learner has used?
- iv. What are the digital competencies which the learner has used?

## 6. Methodology

### 6.1 Subject

Taking data from Uttar Pradesh, a state in Northern India, this paper intends to understand students' technical skills, physical access to technical gadgets and their exposure to educational technology during Covid-19. At the same time, the study is also interested to know students' preferences between online and offline teaching, their experiences and the benefits of online teaching which has been currently in practice.

Focusing on the students of class VIII, IX, X, XI and XII, a study has been done on both genders in all medium schools in both the government and private schools in rural and semi urban areas. The data has been collected from Hindi, English and mixed languages (Hindi and English) medium schools of CBSE, ICSE and U.P. boards.

Only 17 districts of Uttar Pradesh were selected to cover different districts, namely Shamli, Rampur, Amroha and Moradabad districts from Northern U.P., and Basti, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur and Ambedkar Nagar from Eastern U.P. From Western U.P. Aligarh and Firozabad were surveyed. The districts included in Central U.P. were Sambhal, Badaun, Bareilly and Farrukhabad. Besides this, a few U.P. districts, namely Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr and Gautam Buddha Nagar, which lie in the National Capital Region of Uttar Pradesh (popularly known as U.P. NCR), were also considered for the survey. A digital questionnaire was sent to 200 students but only 65 students from 36 schools responded. The following Table 01

**Table-01: U.P. Districts (Responses in percentage)**

State Covered	Zones	Districts	Students
Uttar Pradesh	Northern U.P.	Shamli	1.50%
		Rampur	3.10%
		Amroha	1.50%
		Moradabad	1.50%
	Eastern U.P.	Basti	1.50%
		Azamgarh	3.10%
		Gorakhpur	1.50%
		Ambedkar Nagar	1.50%
	Western U.P.	Aligarh	3.80%
		Firozabad	1.50%
	Central U.P.	Sambhal	3.10%
		Badaun	0.80%
		Bareilly	9.20%
		Farrukhabad	1.50%
	U.P. NCR Districts	Ghaziabad	1.50%
		Bulandshahr	6.20%
		Gautam Buddha Nagar	6.90%

provides information regarding the district-wise responses of students from the five zones of Uttar Pradesh. It is evident from Table 01 that the maximum data came from Sambhal (23.10%), Gautam Buddha Nagar (16.90%), Aligarh (13.80%), Badaun (10.80%), Bareilly (09.20%), and Bulandshahr districts (06.20%).

## **6.2. Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was divided into three major parts: the fundamental information part, the quantitative part consisting of 50 questions and the qualitative part consisting of 04 questions. The first two parts of the questionnaire were based on MCQs and the Likert scale with examples, while the third one was descriptive.

The first part is about the student and school's basic information. The first half was to know the name, class and gender of students, while the second half was to know the name, board, medium, area, location and type (government or private) of the school surveyed.

The second part was quantitative. It deals with students' exposure to educational technology during Covid-19. It is also about the online class commencement and their experiences of the classes during the pandemic lockdown. Besides, the awareness and liking of certain apps like WhatsApp, Zoom Cloud Meetings, Google Meet etc., among students and the application of such apps by schools during the pandemic are also checked. Moreover, challenges in online classes, preference between online and offline classes and displacement of school information pre- and post-lockdown are discussed. Additionally, it deals with physical access to technology and the availability of technical gadgets (either at home or school) like 2G and 4G mobile, desktop, laptop and internet facilities. Not only this but the last section of the quantitative part, which is based on the Likert scale, deals with the existing home atmosphere for online learning and students' technical skills, such as accessing online teaching and other sites quickly and downloading and sharing things online.

The last part of the questionnaire, which was qualitative, was concerned with the motivation of the learners. This part carries five questions, each supposed to be answered in fifty words only. The best part is that students are allowed to write their responses in the language of their choice. This section focuses on students' preference between online and offline classes in the post-Covid-19 era and whether online teaching is beneficial to students or not. It also asks whether online learning makes them feel at ease with other learners and how confident they are using the internet. To know the future of online teaching it wants to know how well online learning can help them.

## **6.3. Data Collection**

Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic the data collection process and techniques involved have never been traditional. A bilingual (Hindi and English) digital questionnaire was created on Google Forms and a link was generated. The questionnaire was evaluated by experts of designing and experts of statistical analysis before its final distribution. Digital questionnaires, schedules and telephonic interviews were aptly exploited for collecting data. Firstly, the schools were contacted. Google Form (digital questionnaire) and a helpline number were shared on the WhatsApp groups of schools. Besides, several students were contacted directly through friends and relatives across the state. Secondly, the respondents who submitted the form with a blank qualitative part were contacted. Telephonic interviews with such respondents were scheduled after lunch, dinner, and even on Sundays when they had time to

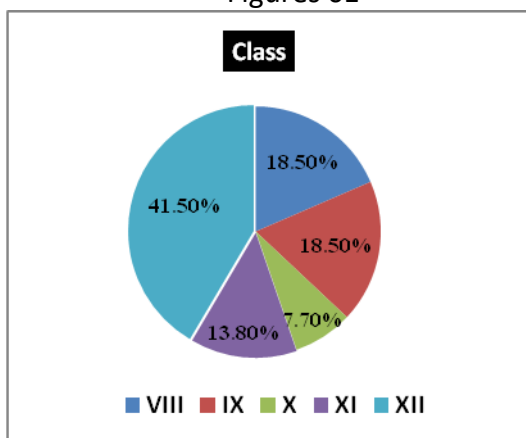
talk. The recordings of all the interviews are saved. The qualitative questions were explained appropriately to the students in simple English, Hindi or even in their home language by giving a few examples when the researcher was good at the dialect or language of the students. In doing this, the researcher surprisingly got much better answers. Thirdly, many students did not have time to complete the questionnaire in just one go. The researcher suggested to the respondents to fill it up in three or four sittings as it demanded almost an hour to discuss it and fill in responses on a telephonic call. Fourthly, female students were not readily available on the telephone. Here, the researcher sought parents' permission first to get the female participants on a telephone interview and then got the questionnaire filled up. The responses received in languages other than English have been translated into English by the researchers. Fifthly, the researcher interviewed a few students in his neighbourhood during evening walks and he kept on filling up their responses. Finally, the Google Form itself produced the results of the 65 filled questionnaires. Still the autogenerated results of Google Forms were carefully and deeply discussed eight times with a Statistics scholar on Zoom Cloud Meetings. Not only this but the table, figures and bars in the paper were created on Microsoft Office Excel with the statistician's help. Moreover, the researchers extensively discussed and analysed the qualitative responses.

## 7. Results and Analysis

### 7.1. Quantitative Analysis

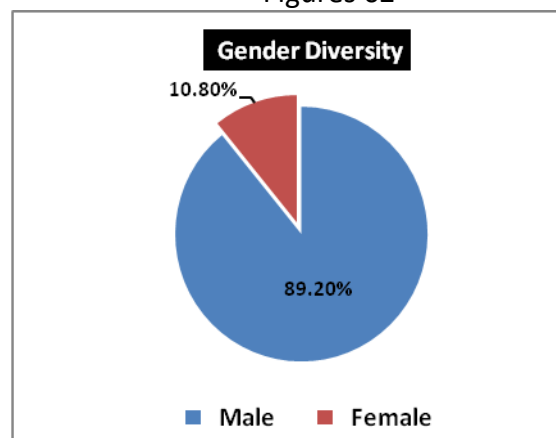
The analyses arising out of the quantitative data are shown in Figures 01 - 06. They provide basic information about students and their responses in percentage in terms of class, gender, area and types of schools, medium of instruction and the school boards.

Figures 01



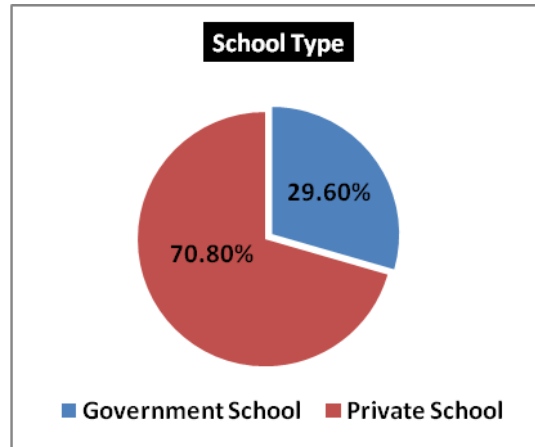
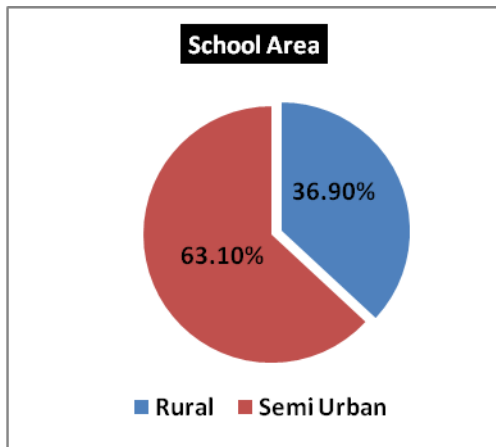
Figures 03

Figures 02

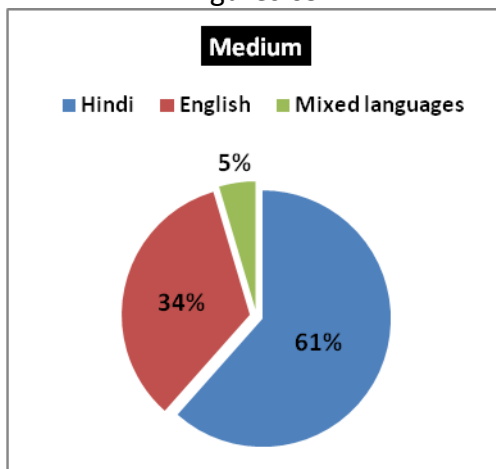


Figures 04

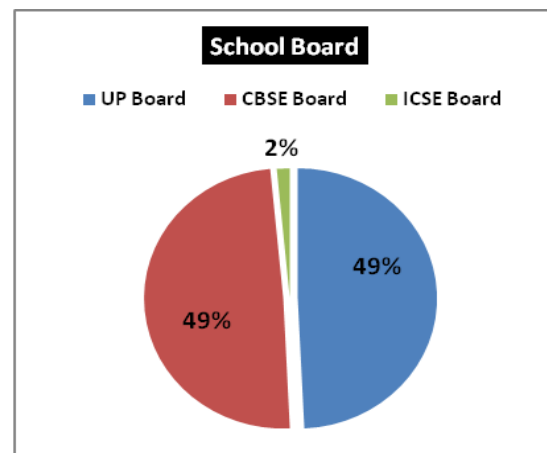




Figures 05



Figures 06

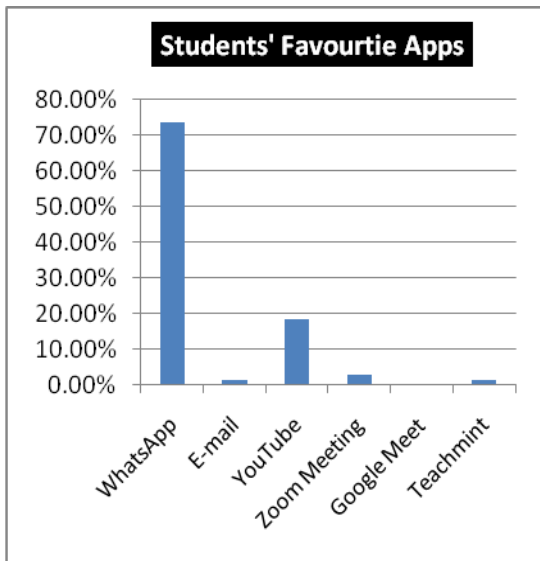


**Figures 01- 06: Basic Information of Students and Schools**

Figures 01-06 provide basic information about the surveyed students and their schools. A total of 65 students took part in the study. Figure 01 shows; they were from class VIII, IX, X, XI and XII. Minimum (07.70%) and maximum (41.50%) numbers of students were from class X and XII, respectively; this can be seen in the Figure. Figure 02 indicates genders where 89.20% were male while 10.80% female respondents, correspondingly. Figure 03 says; that 36.90% of students were from rural and 63.10% semi urban schools in that order. Figure 04 indicates that 70.80% of participants were private and the rest, 29.60%, were from government schools. The break up in figure 05 further tells us that 61.50% of students were from Hindi medium, 33.80% from English medium and 04.60% from such schools where the medium of instruction was mixed languages (Hindi and English). In addition, figure 06 informs us of the surveyed schools' boards. It says that 49.20% of students were from CBSE, 01.50% from ICSE and 49.20% from the U.P. board.

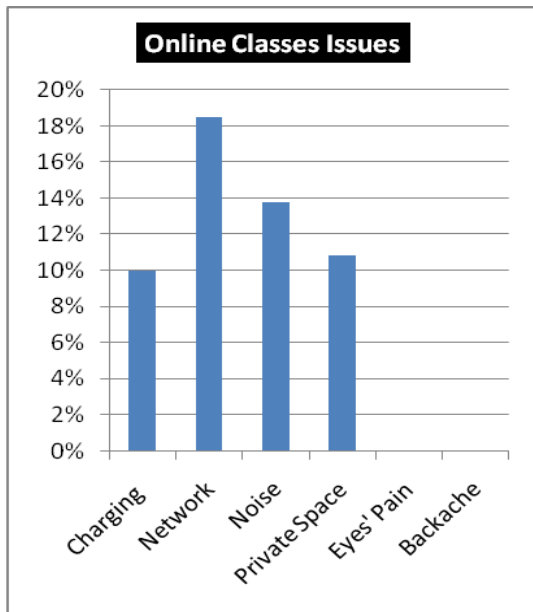
Analyses regarding students' favourite app/s and issues in online classes are represented by Figure 07 and Figure 08, respectively.

Figures 07 (Responses in percentage)



Covid-19 pandemic has led to a number of innovative practices in teaching and learning. Students tend to incline towards online mode and certain apps like WhatsApp, E-mail, YouTube, Zoom Cloud Meetings, Google Meet, Teachmint and Face book have become quite popular among them. In figure 07 the statistics reveals that 73.80% students find WhatsApp, 18.50% YouTube, 03.10% Zoom Cloud Meetings, 01.50% E-mail and 01.50% find the other apps helpful and useful when one talks of study.

Figures 08 (Responses in percentage)



The tallest bar represents WhatsApp and the second tallest bar is for YouTube in the Figure. Google Meet and Facebook are lower on the scale. It is not surprising that majority of students have started preferring soft copy of study material to hard copy. Contrarily, many complain of challenges in online classes. Figure 08 reveals that 18.50% students face network issue, 13.80% are disturbed by noisy environment, and 10.80% have no personal space for online study, whereas, 10% have charging issue. Above all, 26.20% students face all the discussed problems.

Analyses regarding online teaching, gadgets' unavailability, internet facility and gadgets' sharing are shown in Figures 09, 10, 11 and 12, respectively.

Figure- 09 (Responses in percentage)

Figure-10 (Responses in percentage)

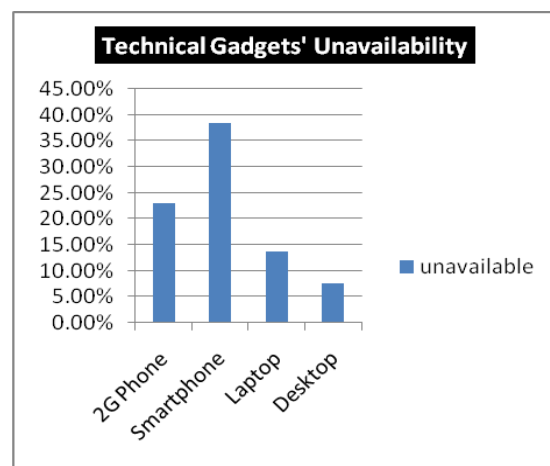
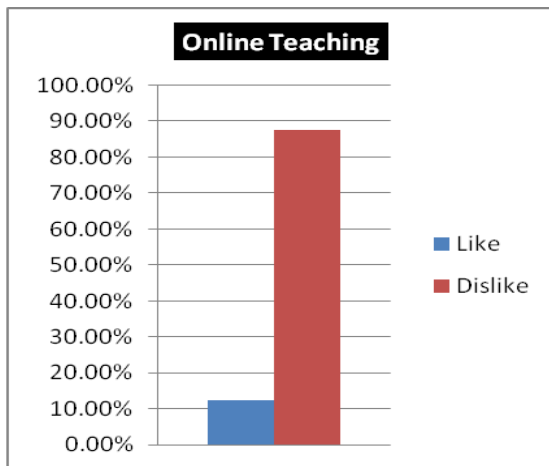


Figure 09 looks into the reactions of students to online learning. The study shows that 12.30% respondents choose virtual classes over on-site ones. 87.70% students show little interest in online teaching for they dislike this mode. As for technical gadgets, figure 10 throws light on unavailability of gadgets to students. The figure shows that 23.10% students do not have 2G mobile phones, 38.50% have no Smartphones which is the entry device needed for online learning, 13.80% do not have laptops while 07.70% have no access to desktop either at home or school.

Figure- 11 (Responses in percentage)

Figure-12 (Responses in percentage)

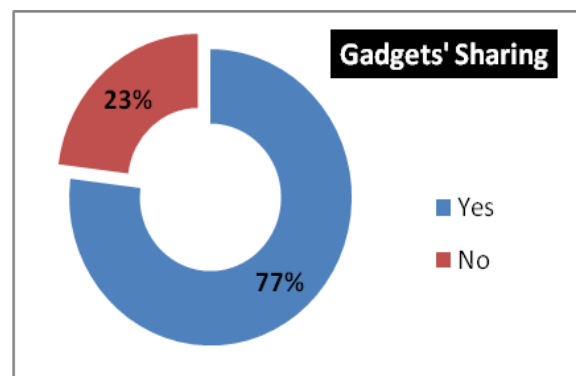
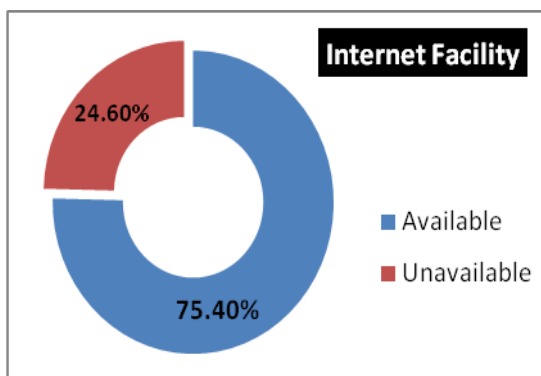


Figure 11 discusses the availability of internet facility for the students. The blue part reveals that internet is available to 75.40% students only whereas 24.60% do not have internet. Gadget (mobile, laptops etc.) and device sharing with others is discussed in figure 12. According to the data, 77% students share mobile and other devices with others as they do not have their personal phone and devices for study. Only 23% students have such technical devices and they are not dependent on others for sharing.

Responses in percentage concerning online lecture, academic interruption, private space for online study at home, accessibility to online teaching, downloading skill and sharing skill are represented through Figures 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18, respectively.

Figure- 13 (Responses in percentage)

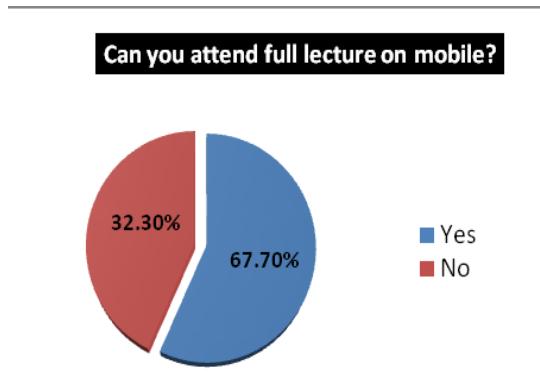
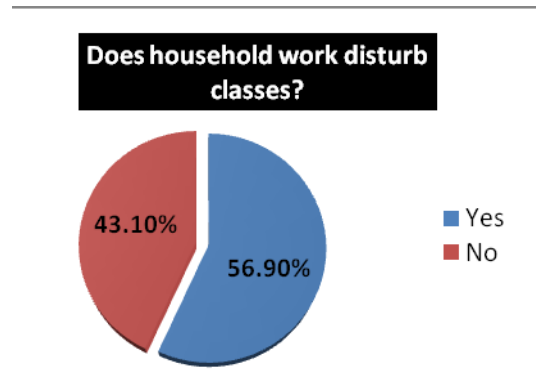


Figure-14 (Responses in percentage)



Partly because of no mobile and partly because of mobile sharing with others, plenty of students were unable to complete online lectures. Figure 13 shows that during Covid-19 lockdown merely 67.70% students could listen to the full lecture on mobile while 32.30% were unable to listen to the entire lecture. Not only this but household works also interrupted online study. Figure 14 makes us intelligent by saying that online classes of 56.90% participants were got disturbed owing to household works whereas, 43.10% students did not have such type of disturbance.

Figure-15 (Responses in percentage)

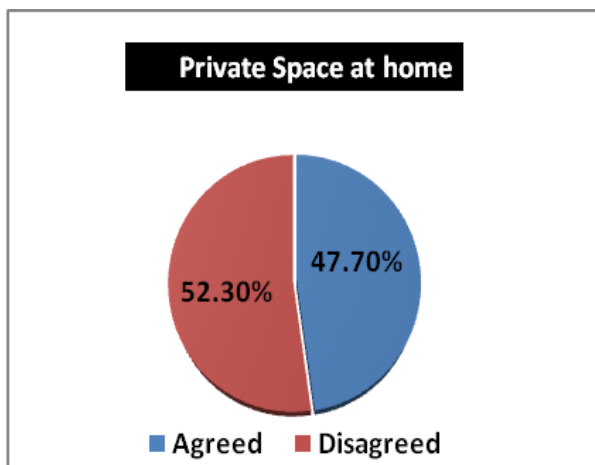


Figure-16 (Responses in percentage)

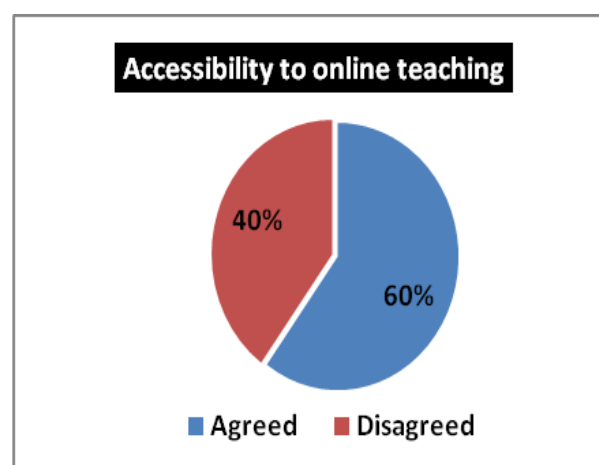
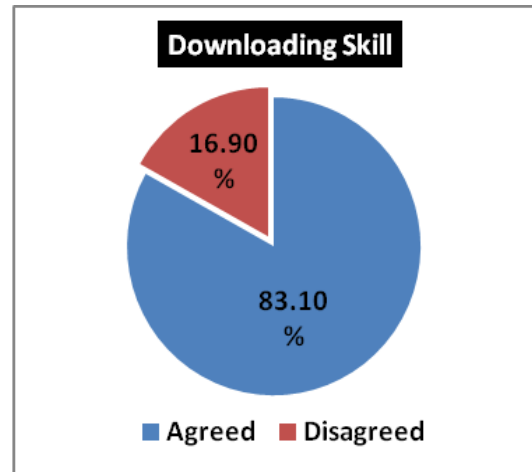
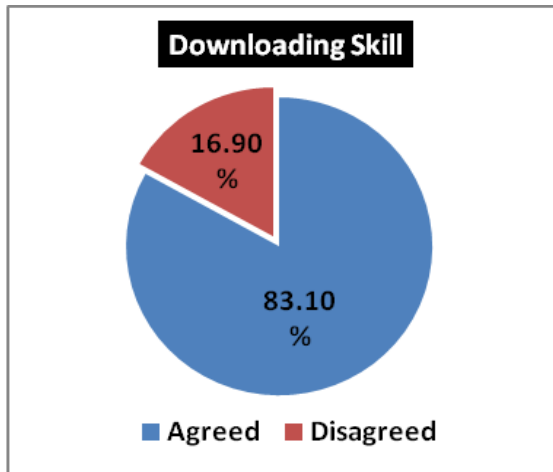


Figure 15 shows; 52.30% students did not have any private space for online study at home and this number is more than half of the total participants. Just 47.70% students enjoyed the availability of personal rooms. Figure 16 speaks of the accessibility to online teaching. It informs us that only 60% students had access to online teaching while 40% had no access. This is represented in blue and red, correspondingly.

Figure-17 (Responses in percentage)

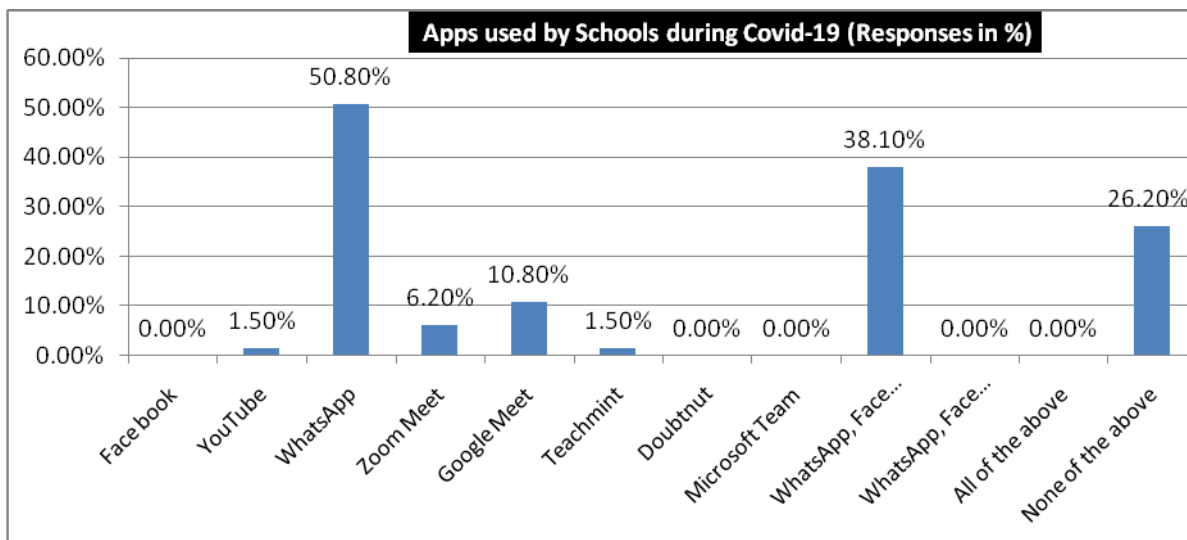
Figure-18 (Responses in percentage)



Surprisingly, many students do not know how to download and share the study materials. Figure 17 says; only 83.10% of students could easily download the materials from the internet while 16.90% could not do it. Regarding sharing material either with peers or with teachers, only 76.90% of students could share it while 23.10% did not have the sharing skill; this is shown in blue and red in figure 18.

Quantitative analysis of the data to show the use of apps during pre- and post- Covid-19 and pre- and post- lockdown can be seen in the Bar Charts 01 - 04.

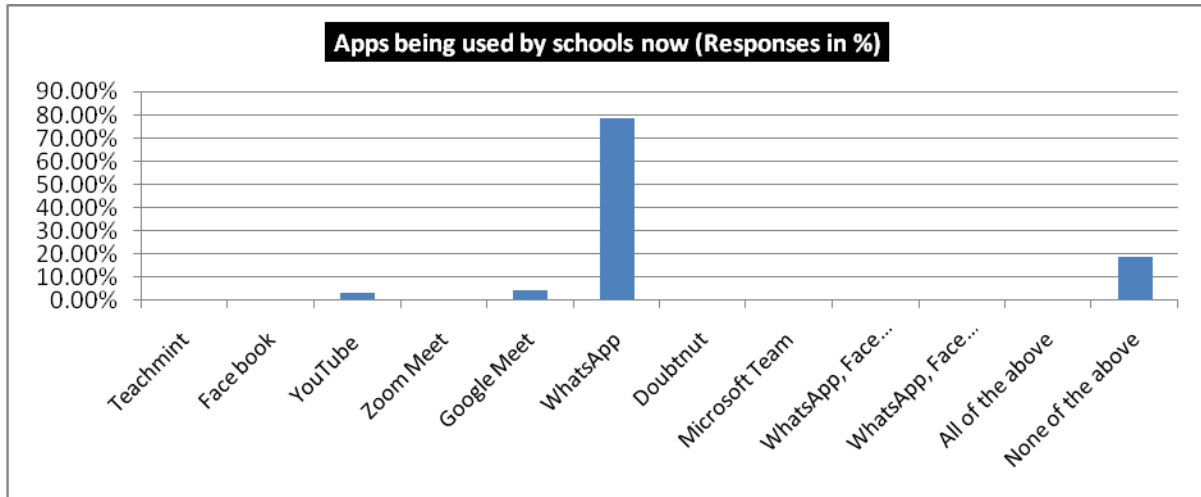
Bar Chart 01: Apps used by schools during Covid-19



Bar chart 01 shows schools' various apps (Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Zoom Cloud Meetings, Google Meet, Teachmint, Doubtnut and Microsoft Team) during the pandemic. It says that 50.80% of schools used WhatsApp, 10.80% used Google Meet, 06.20% used Zoom Cloud Meetings, 01.50% used YouTube, and 01.50% of schools chose Teachmint for teaching. Besides, 38.10% of schools went for WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube altogether. None of the schools used Doubtnut and Microsoft Team. Facebook, the most popular

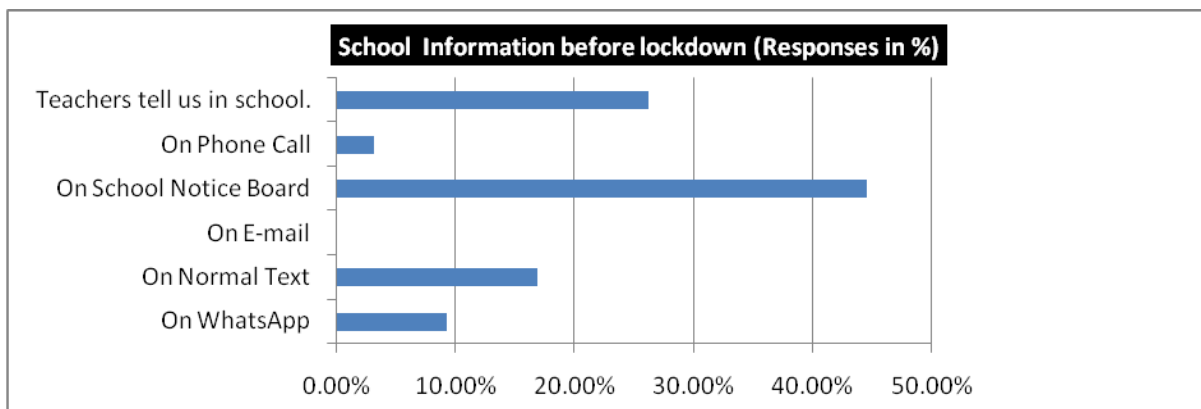
among youngsters, was not used separately for teaching purposes. Astonishingly, 26.20% of schools did not use any of the Apps. No school used all of the mentioned apps.

Bar Chart 02: Apps used by schools post- Covid-19



A good number of schools switched to online teaching during Covid-19 lockdown whilst many schools did not teach at all. Although the lockdown of Covid-19 has been lifted, yet several schools are using the online teaching platforms along with on-site teaching to make learning and teaching better result oriented. Bar chart 02 shows that 78.30% schools are still using WhatsApp, 05% Google Meet and 04% YouTube. Surprisingly, 18.50% schools are not using any of the above said apps. Facebook, Teachmint, Doubtnut, Zoom Cloud Meetings and Microsoft Team are not being used by any school. Besides, none of the schools are using more than one or two apps.

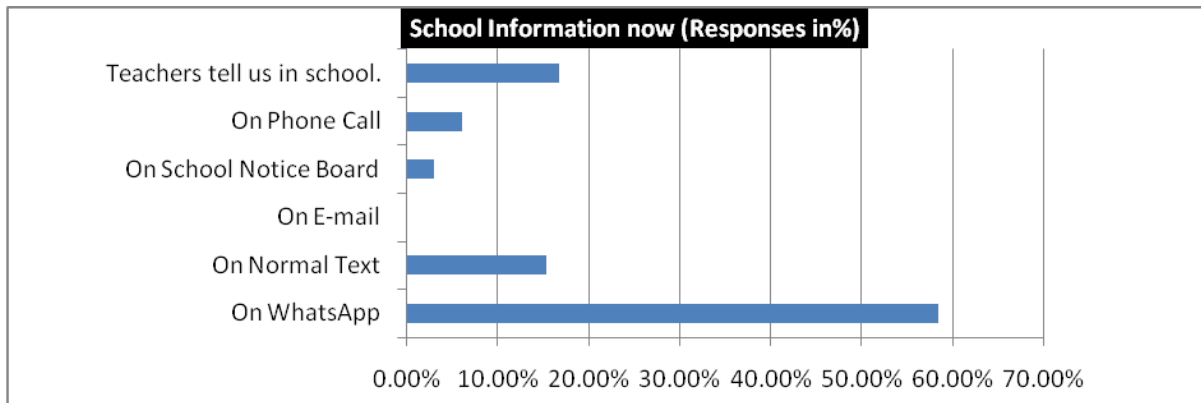
Bar Chart 03: School Information pre- Covid-19 lockdown



Numerous schools started embracing technology long before Covid-19 pandemic outrage and they were on WhatsApp, normal text, E-mail and telephonic call. The bar chart 03 indicates how schools would inform the students before the pandemic. The data states that 44.60% schools used to put the information on notice boards, 26.20% would announce it orally in the

class, 16.90% used normal text, 09.20% did WhatsApp and only 03.10% schools were on telephone calls. None of the schools used E-mail.

Bar Chart 04: School Information post- Covid-19 lockdown



Things changed drastically after Covid-19 pandemic. During the lockdown, schools opted for technology to inform their students. After the lockdown has been lifted, many schools are still using it when classes are held on-site. The bar chart 04 shows that 58.50% schools still use WhatsApp for school information, 16.90% inform students orally, 15.40% give normal texts, 06.20% give phone calls and only 03.10% put school information on notice board. None of the schools is on E-mail.

## 7.2 Qualitative analysis

The qualitative data gives the following results based on analysis of the four questions served to the informants.

*Question- 01: I prefer online teaching to offline teaching.*

*Response:*

The majority of respondents showed dislike for online teaching. One respondent states, "I face networks, technical, and health issues." Startlingly, some student from rural areas stated by saying that, "I hardly have access to mobile and laptop, and device charging is the biggest issue." Only some students prefer online mode. "I need not cycle to reach my school and weather is no barrier for study.", responded a rural female student. Speaking on online teaching benefits, a visually impaired student stated that, "Recorded lectures and playback speed facility help in self study. Above all, costly courses and great teachers across the global become very affordable, easily accessible and very flexible."

*Question- 02: Online learning makes me feel almost at ease with other learners.*

*Response:*

There were contrary reactions to this question. Some responded positively while others highlighted problems in online learning. Responding to the question one respondent stated, "It is almost on- site like situation since one can put his/ her ideas in chat box." Conversely, a student stated the following, "It makes me tired and never gives a feeling of togetherness."

Moreover, I dislike online distractions.”

*Question- 03: I feel a sense of confidence while using the internet.*

*Response:*

Speaking on internet, a respondent says, “I get more examples and explanation to clear doubts, and all this give me confidence.” A student responded by saying that, “I learn particular topic in different sources (video, audio and image etc.). Furthermore, things can be watched and read as many times as want. Besides, I can study a topic ahead the scheduled class and get the teachers better in the class.”

*Question- 04: The use of online teaching will help me in the future.*

*Response:*

The majority of students considered online teaching to be helpful. One respondent said, “I can study and work simultaneously as class timings are optional and flexible.” A student stated, “Now I can afford to learn with costly teacher globally.” Contrarily, some find it less supportive. “I undergo eyes problem and backache. In fact, online learning kills creativity and is disadvantageous for practical subjects for my doubts remain uncleared”, commented a student.

## **8. Conclusion**

The semi urban - rural digital divide has seen some glaring disparities in education. The divide is visible both at the structural and social level. The categories of people affected by this were the low-income groups, learners with low formal education and learners who had no access to schools. Extending the notion of communicative competence, digital competence seeks to broaden the reach of virtual learning in terms of strategic knowledge. Among the seventeen districts of U.P. 23.10% did not have access to 2G mobile phones, 38.5% did not have smartphones, 13.80 % had no laptops. The survey, further, showed that 77% of the learners had to share their mobiles and did not have any personal space for study. The pre Covid data regarding use of technology showed it as 40% which was in the form of using messages on the notice board. The use of Whatsapp was 58.50%. Statistics showed that 18.50 % schools were not using the apps at all and none of the schools was using more than one or two apps. The respondents had a mixed response towards online learning. The main problems were the lack of accessibility to internet facilities and the inability to cope with the challenges of technology. There were some significant remarks made by learners despite the challenges faced by them. One respondent stated that the use of technology provided an added advantage, by exposing the learner to multiple sources while working on the same topic. Further, there was the advantage of recorded lectures which could be heard many times. Another advantage was that online learning created a possibility and flexibility in undertaking two tasks simultaneously. The affordability of courses was also seen as an advantage for the learner. A visually impaired student stated that, ‘Recorded lectures and playback speed facility helps me in self-study.’ Despite the attempts by the learners to meet the challenges, there seems to be certain significant gains in online learning. The



biggest advantage is the access to knowledge sources which had not been possible otherwise. It has reached out to a marginalised section of society who can access this in various ways.

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