

# BLENDED LEARNING DURING PANDEMIC (COVID 19): STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses about students' motivation towards blended learning method in application in the pandemic situation of COVID 19 through a small survey conducted upon Under Graduate students of West Bengal. A questionnaire was developed using online platform (jotforms) and circulated among students through social contacts. UG students belonging to age group of 18-21 were targeted in the study. 75 responses were received on line as recorded. Students are seen to be keen to attend online classes but in conjunction with on-site classes in the pandemic situation. They appreciate the importance of online classes. However, in so far as testing or evaluation is concerned a majority of them do not favour online mode currently.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the year 2020, when the entire world is fighting together against COVID 19, like several other facilities, education system in our country is going through a major transformation. All the stakeholders of education are trying to cope up with this newly developed situation and in this process, social experimentation has become obligatory to find out necessary solutions. In this current situation, where it is difficult to predict the upcoming scenario, experimentation with online teaching and learning is on demand. Current worldwide trend is to expose the learners to technology based virtual means of learning. Blended learning method might be considered as a solution in the post pandemic situation. This paper discusses the scope of blended learning method in application in the pandemic situation of COVID 19 through a small survey conducted on UG students of West Bengal.

Blended learning is a composite method where teaching and learning takes place both online and on site, i.e. at the institution. According to Garrison & Kanuka (2004), the current trend that is complementing face to face classes with internet-based materials is known as "blended learning". Although this is much popular in several countries, in India, general education system depends on regular mode of communication inside the institution, sometimes supported by online mode of information sharing. Sharpe & Benfield (2005) found little researches in the field of blended learning at undergraduate level, and most researches have focused on the different methods of teaching and on the innovations introduced; however, no research was found on the students' experiences. Lopez-Perez et. al. (2011) found that the use of blended learning reduced dropout rates and also helped in improving score in examinations. Moreover, the students' concepts of blended learning were found to be interrelated, with their final marks depending on the blended learning activities, and on their age, background and class attendance rate. In a large urban university, Owston, York and Murtha (2013) examined the relationship between student perceptions in blended learning courses and their achievement. A remarkably strong relationship was found between perceptions and grades. Moreover, blended learning was found to be more effective and interesting to high achievers. Stockwell et al. (2015) conducted a randomized controlled trial of blended learning and found that problem solving inside the class boosted performance in examination, and attendance and satisfaction increased when video assignments were given. Due to student protests that interrupted normal classes at many South African universities during 2016, teaching and learning had to be shifted to complete the academic year successfully. Louw and Thukane (2016) tried to understand how the use of technology influenced teachin- learning during lecture disruptions. It was also observed how blended learning can be used in best possible way in teaching science. In India, Kharb and Samanta (2016) found that blended learning increased the interest of majority of the anatomy students in the subject. It also motivated them to develop independent learning skills. Teachers agreed that blended learning encouraged students to do self-study and increased learning. Dziuban et al. (2018) argued that Blended Learning merge around access, success, and students' concept of the learning environments. They also reported that blending at times increases access for most students and produces improved success rates. Westerlaken et. al (2019) suggested that blended learning enhances effective learning for postgraduate health care professionals. It added social value through collaboration and interaction among the professionals during online preparation. Ivanova and Vishnekov (2020) found learning outcome to be improved in a blended learning course at university level in an experimental study. Giovannella (2020) conducted a study in Italy at graduation level to find the effects on learners by the sudden shift of the teaching-learning processes from physical to completely online due to Coronavirus epidemic. It was found that although the learners miss classroom settings and face-to-face activities, this sudden switch has been positively accepted by them. Adnan and Anwar (2020) surveyed undergraduate and postgraduate students to find their outlook about online education in Pakistan. They found that online learning



cannot produce desired results in countries like Pakistan, where majority of students do not have access to the internet. Khan et. al. (2020) found that the students of Indian college have positive perception towards online learning and have accepted this new learning system during COVID pandemic. Radha et al. (2020) conducted a study to find out view of Indian and International students towards e-learning. The findings showed the impact of online learning, students' interest in using online learning resources, and their performance. Kundu et. al. (2020) found that blended learning ambience increases students' classroom engagement in an elementary classroom in India when teachers were supported with necessary proficiencies. Muthuprasad et. al. (2020) focused to understand perception and preference of Agricultural Student of India towards the online learning during pandemic and found most of the students preferred online classes because of its' flexibility and convenience. However, internet connectivity problems are found to be a major issue in rural areas. Ba, czek et. al. (2021) also studied the advantages and disadvantages of online learning among medical students during COVID-19 pandemic and found the advantages to be the ability to stay at home, continuous access to online materials, learning at one's own pace, and comfortable surroundings. Technical problems of equipment were found to be one of the disadvantages. However, online learning was considered less effective than face-to-face learning in terms of increasing skills and social competences. Gjestvang et. al. (2021) found blended learning programme to be a solution for adult learners who live in villages and working as well as have responsibilities for children and family. Thabet, Hill and Gaad (2021) showed that the university academic staffs in a university of UAE understand the importance of incorporating blended learning and they are willing to administer any innovation that would help students if professional training is provided. In a qualitative study, Bruggeman (2021) investigated for teacher attributes required to implement blended learning. Adaptive attributes such as understanding the need for change in pedagogy, creatively connecting technologies with learning etc. were found to be important. In this sudden developed pandemic situation, where the Indian Government is bound to shut down educational institutions, online mode of education has taken front seat in India also. However, at the same time, it is important to take an account of the socio-economic backgrounds of our students as well as technological drawbacks which might cause hindrance in online mode of education.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

The research aims

- To find out UG students' motivation towards blended mode in West Bengal;
- To study the preferred mode of teaching-learning and evaluation of UG students in West Bengal.

### METHODOLOGY

This study reveals the perspective of undergraduate students of West Bengal towards online as well as on-site mode of teaching- learning. A questionnaire comprising of 22 close- ended questions was developed on online platform (jotforms) and circulated among students through social media in June, 2020. UG students belonging to age group of 18-21 were included in the study. Purposive sampling technique was followed. 75 responses were recorded from undergraduate students.

#### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The survey shows interesting results. From the data received through the online survey of 75 UG students, total 4 students are studying commerce, 11 studying humanities and 60 students are from science background. Table 1 shows the distribution of students according to their gender and discipline.

	Residence				
		Rural	Semi urban	Urban	
Gender	Metro city	Area	Area	Area	<b>Grand Total</b>
Female	14	8	9	26	57
Male	3	5	3	7	18
<b>Grand Total</b>	17	13	12	33	75

Table 1: Distribution of 75 UG students

	Discipline			
Gender	Commerce	Humanities	Science	<b>Grand Total</b>
Female	1	8	48	57
Male	3	3	12	18
Grand Total	4	11	60	75

Table 2: Distribution of students according to their gender and residence



Table 2 shows the distribution of students according to their gender and area where they live. It is found that 98.67% students have at least one gadget to access internet. Although only 12% students have Home WiFi, rest 88% students use mobile data pack (Table -3) for which they spend Rs. 100 and above (Rs. 100 – Rs. 300 & above) monthly. Interestingly, only 8% students spend less than an hour on social media daily, 34.67% students spend 1-2hours daily, 28% students spend 2-3 hrs daily and 29.33% students spend more than 3 hours daily on social media platform. However, 94.67% students use internet for the purposes other than social media also.

Device	Home WiFi	Mobile datapack	Grand Total
Android touch-screen phone	1	39	40
Android touch-screen phone; Desktop	4	6	10
Android touch-screen phone; Keypad phone	-	5	5
Android touch-screen phone; Laptop	4	7	11
Android touch-screen phone; Laptop; Desktop	-	1	1
Android touch-screen phone; Laptop; Desktop; Keypad phone	-	1	1
Android touch-screen phone; Laptop; Desktop; Tablet; Keypad phone	-	1	1
Android touch-screen phone; Laptop; Keypad phone	-	4	4
Keypad phone	-	1	1
Laptop	-	1	1
Grand Total	9	66	75

Table 3: Distribution of students acc. to devices available Vs Access to Internet

Another interesting fact is that, in this pandemic situation, 84% students have attended online classes (Table 4) irrespective of their location of residence. 85.33% students stated that online classes are necessary in this situation.

Attended Online Class			
Residence	NO	YES	Grand Total
Metro city	2	15	17
Rural Area	1	12	13
Semi urban Area	4	8	12
Urban Area	5	28	33
Grand Total	12	63	75

Table 4: Distribution of students attended online class and their residence

When they were asked about their preferred mode of class, 45.33% students opted for on-site class inside the institution and another 45.33% students were found to be comfortable with both the modes (Chart 1).



Chart 1: Distribution of students according to their preferred mode of class vs. attended online class

However, when they were asked about effectiveness, total 57.33% students stated that on-site classes are more effective, and 21.33% students stated that both the modes are equally effective though 20% students stated that these two modes were not comparable (Table 5).



	Attended online class		
Effectiveness	NO	YES	Grand Total
'Actual' class is more effective	9	34	43
Both equally effective	-	16	16
Not comparable	3	12	15
'Virtual' class is more effective	-	1	1
Grand Total	12	63	75

Table 5: Distribution of students according to their experience of online class vs. effectiveness of the modes

In the question of preferred mode of evaluation, 57.33% students opted for pen- paper mode, and 29.33% students were found to be comfortable with both the modes. Only 13.33 % students preferred absolute online mode of evaluation.



Chart 2: Distribution of students acc. to their preferred mods of class and evaluation

## CONCLUSION

From this study we come to know that students are very much motivated in attending online classes in the pandemic situation. They are aware of the situation where they agree to the fact that online classes are necessary. College teachers are also trying hard to meet the need of the hour. However, a large number of students still believe that actual classes are more effective. A major change in attitude of students was found in case of preferred mode of evaluation. They still prefer to give examination on paper. That might be due to examination fear or lack of knowledge about online mode of education. Further study is required to reveal the associated factors. Although this study does not focus on socio-economic status of the students directly, it is a very important factor of consideration for the policy makers in a developing country like India. Without massive state support online mode of education is not going to make any headway in the realm of quality learning.

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