

Will the Role of Infrastructure in Higher Education Become Redundant?-A Critical Study of the Expectation of Students

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Abstract

During the countrywide lockdown due to the pandemic, students attended online classes and it appeared that physical classes may not be necessary or lose their relevance in future as students could easily get access to online learning materials. Students sitting in the comfort of their homes could access the best learning materials available anywhere in the world and excel in their respective fields of study. One of the astounding questions that came for debate those days was whether we need huge college buildings and enormous infrastructure facilities when laptop, a mobile phone or any device serves the purpose. But interestingly, students slowly but steadily showed signs of boredom and ennui with the online classes and were eager to join the physical classes. Many of them went to the extent of demanding physical classes. This phenomenon has led to some of the significant questions that we, as educationists and policy makers need to seriously address with immediate priority. First and foremost, why is that students prefer physical classes in spite of the fact that best of the resource material is available on their finger tips? What are the expectations of students in the changed contemporary scenario? Will the words of Bill Gates on the complete irrelevance of physical campuses, classrooms and physical infrastructure prove to be prophetic? This paper will delve deep into these research questions by conducting a systematic empirical study of the phenomenon. The research partners would be the managers of education, students, staff, parents and other stakeholders. It is envisaged that the outcome of the study will be of immense use in the context of most of the higher education institutions adopting virtual, blended or hybridized pedagogies. They will have tremendous implications to the higher education scenario of the future.

Key words: Pandemic, Physical classes, Virtual classrooms, Blended mode, Higher Education

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1. Introduction

According to All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2019-20, 3.38 crore Students enrolled in programmes at the under-graduate and the post-graduate levels. If we consider all the three years of UG programmes and two years of PG, we can say that around 12 to 13 crore students are presently pursuing higher education, which amounts to 10 % of the Indian population spending long hours in the institutes of Higher Education comprising of 1043 Universities, 42343 Colleges and 11779 Stand Alone Institutions listed on AISHE web portal.(1). The major question to be addressed here is whether the higher education institutions truly understand what students want from them. In order to get an insight into this important issue, a survey was carried out and the data obtained from this survey is presented in this paper. An analysis of this data is likely to give some insight into what exactly students are looking for by attending the classes in a colleges. The findings also give an insight into the need for putting in place systems to map the aspirations, priorities and expectations of entrants into higher education as well as the methodology of incorporating the same into higher education admission process.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by sending a questionnaire to 500 students. The respondents were given the choice to opt or not to opt to respond. Among them 160 students responded and submitted their responses voluntarily. Majority of the participants were from the science background. About 70% of the participants were from UG section, and the rest were from PG sections. The survey focussed on the students of private colleges. The participants were from rural, semi urban and urban areas. The survey was focussed on questions on specific areas such as:

1. The purpose of taking up higher education
2. The necessity/need for physical classes in future
3. The topmost priority of students enrolling for higher education
4. The most liked aspect of education that they enrolled for.

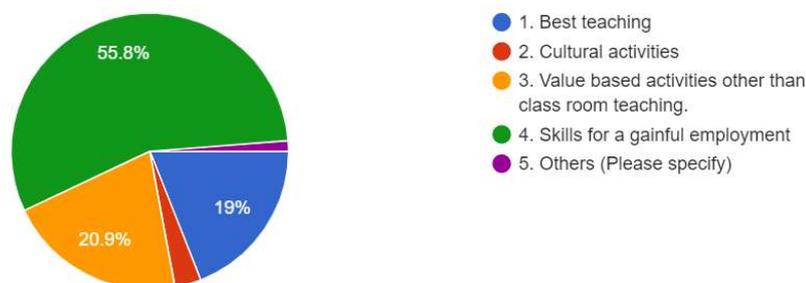
Findings:

Why do students go to the college?

It was found that there were two Mainly there two primarily professed purposes of getting admission into

colleges. There was a camp that said college is about preparing a person for a job– to help them get a good or better job. The other camp said college is generally about preparing a person to achieve success in life - to be an engaged and enlightened citizen capable of thinking critically and communicating clearly, ultimately to be able to thrive in their well-being. (2).

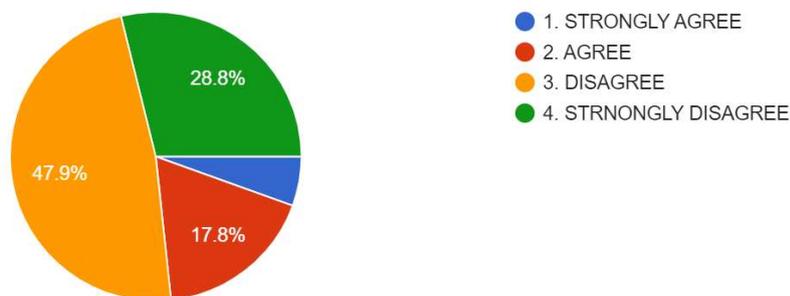
According to the survey that we conducted the top reasons for the decision to go to college are:



- i. To improve one’s employment opportunities-In fact , 60% of the students were looking for skill- based training that will help them to get a gainful employment.
- ii. To participate in value based activities other than class room teaching-20% of the students preferred to have Value based activities other than class room teaching; A marked difference in the percentage can be observed here which implies that majority of the students come to the college to improve their employment prospects.
- iii. 19 % of the students were looking for best teaching in the college which clearly indicated that priority of the students was less on class room teaching. In this regard the findings of our survey are almost similar to the findings of Rachel Fishman (3).

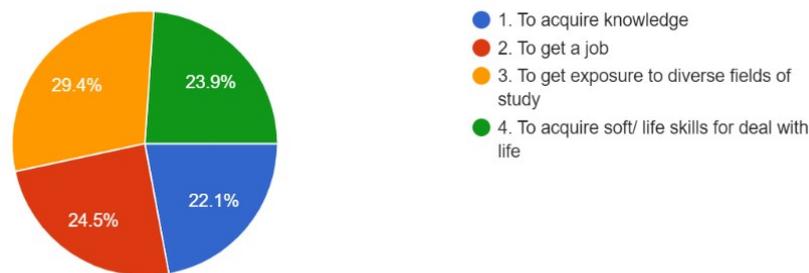
Whether the necessity of Physical classes fall in future?

In 2010, Bill Gates predicted that with the advent of internet and best online materials available to the students, students would prefer to learn online and the demand for physical classes would come down (4). In fact, students were compelled to attend the online classes during the lockdown period and experienced the benefits and problems related to the online classes.



About 60% of the respondents were exposed to the online classes for more than a year and surprisingly only 5% of the students preferred online classes while 62.3% students preferred offline classes. 32.7 % students preferred a blend of the two (online along with off line) clearly indicating what Bill gates predicted would never happen. When we asked whether the respondents agreed with what was envisaged by Bill Gates, 95% of the students disagreed with the statement ‘Colleges may not be necessary in future’.

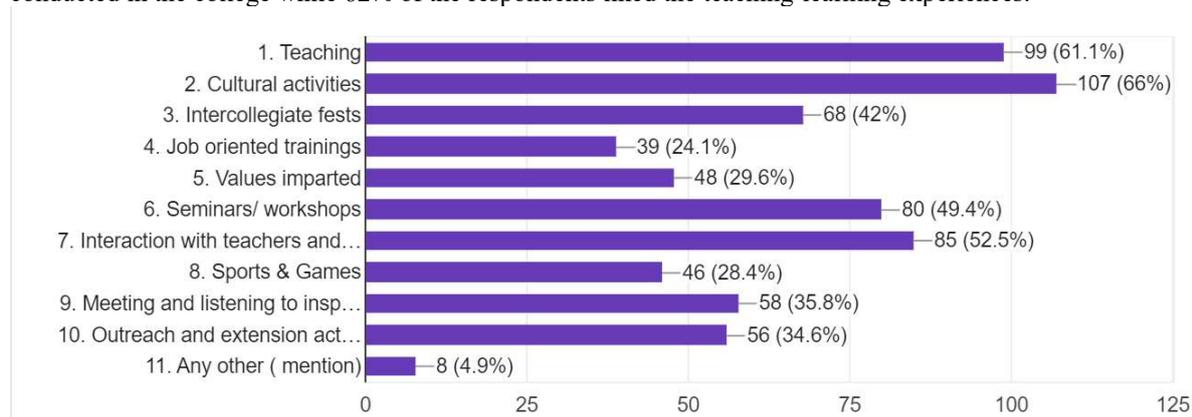
What do you think is the topmost priority for a student in higher education?



In spite of the best materials available on the net why did the students prefer offline classes?- was a question that will come to any educator's mind(5). In order to ascertain this aspect, students were asked why they attend the physical classes in a college. The response was diverse. 29 % of the students were of the view that they wanted to get exposure to diverse fields of study, while 25% of the students had the objective of getting a job. 24% of the students were of the view that they join a college to acquire soft/ life skills, while 22% of the students felt that they join a college to acquire knowledge. The findings are very interesting and need deeper evaluation. Probably this can be taken up as a separate project.

What did you like the most during your studies in the college?

In order to further ascertain the pulse of students they were asked to indicate the aspect they liked the most in a college. A list of 10 items/activities normally offered by colleges was given and they were asked to select the item they liked the most in the college in the scale of their priority. It is obvious that this response may vary from college to college. Nevertheless if this sample is any indication, 66% of the students liked the cultural activity conducted in the college while 62% of the respondents liked the teaching-learning experiences.



Conclusion:

As per the survey conducted on what the students look for from higher education, it is evident, that in spite of the online materials available, students prefer to attend physical classes. However, the objective of the students attending a college is not to listen to regular teaching but to learn some skills which will enhance the prospects of their employment.

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