

Students' Attitude and Well-being and Repercussions on Academics after COVID-19

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Abstract—The cumulative impact of COVID 19 has been immense on all the sectors globally. One of the worst hit sectors was the education sector. Educational institutions were shut and students from disadvantaged backgrounds were the most vulnerable, as schools and higher education institutions replaced face-to-face instructions with virtual learning. Students were learning in isolation with little or no social interaction. It was taking its toll on the mental well-being of school children and young adults. This exploratory study aims at exploring the impact of the pandemic on the first year engineering students' attitude towards academics and their overall mental health and well-being. This study is an attempt to understand how the students feel about their social life, their academics and their attitude post pandemic. Research was conducted in a Tier II engineering college in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in eliciting and analyzing the data. Questionnaires on the impact of the pandemic on their academics, and the impact on their behaviour, attitude, social skills and their learning processes were administered. Informal interactions and discussions strengthened the understanding of the problems faced by the students. The highlight of this study is, contrary to popular belief, the pandemic doesn't appear to have affected the social skills of the young adults and has not affected the well-being of the students.

Keywords—Academics; attitude; education; mental health; pandemic; remote learning; well-being.

JEET Category—Research

I. INTRODUCTION

THE World Health Organization declared COVID 19 as a global pandemic in March 2020. COVID 19 brought the world literally to a standstill and caused havoc on many sectors, causing irreparable damage economically and psychologically. In India one of the worst hit sectors was education. Lock down was imposed which resulted in the closure of all schools and colleges. The education sector was not prepared for a calamity of such magnitude, a calamity which shifted the entire paradigm of the teaching-learning

process. Education is one of the most important sectors influencing the country's growth and individual's growth as well.

This was a very challenging time for all the stakeholders in the education sector. Teachers and students were suddenly forced to give up the traditional teaching-learning process. During the pandemic most of the educational institutions across the globe switched on to online teaching. Remote teaching and learning became the norm in both schools and colleges and it played a vital role in teaching, learning and assessment. A survey conducted by the OECD and Harvard University in 2020 during the pandemic has found that the learning that has taken place through remote learning was negligible when compared to what students would have learnt in the physical mode in school. (Schleicher & Reimers, 2020) Many educational institutions, including the institution where this study was carried out, recreated a traditional classroom environment using digital technology, using the board, special modules to sustain the attention of the students and setting up a typical virtual classroom. The study conducted by Pinaki Chakraborti et al., (2021) revealed that students learn better in physical classrooms and by attending MOOCs than through online education. On the contrary, a study by Mei Yuan Law, (2021) shows that most of the students have a positive attitude and satisfaction in the online learning delivery. The study goes on to prove that suitable pedagogical approach with appropriate integration of technology can help in effective delivery of learning content in online classes (Mei Yuan Law 2021). Another interesting study talks about the positive outcome of blended learning, where traditional face-to-face learning is combined with e-learning activities (Deepa et al.) A study by Baltà-Salvador et al identified that the impact of "pandemic fatigue" on the students is not very clear at the moment. Their study highlighted the emotional connection between the students and faculty and also among students during the prolonged lockdown (Baltà-Salvador et al., 2021).

Many studies and clinical observations reveal that during lockdown students had undergone stress in their personal relationships, academics, and career related aspects of their lives. The ripple effects may be anxiety about performing well in academics and getting a good job to support their families. The unpredictability and uncertainty caused a lot of emotional stress as students became increasingly anxious about their future. Social isolation led to psychological distress (Qiu et al., 2020) and lack of confidence and self-doubt leading to depression among school and college students. Brooks (Brooks et al., 2020) in his study discusses how the loss of

routine and decrease in social contact resulted in frustration and boredom. While the impact of the pandemic on the academic performance of students right from kindergarten to university students has been huge, the influence of the pandemic on the behaviour of young adults is also considerable. Andreas Schleicher (OECD, 2020) in his survey on the impact of COVID on education documents the efforts taken by the educational sector to maintain continuity in the teaching learning process during the pandemic. While teachers had to adapt to new pedagogical teaching approaches and modes of delivery for which they have not been trained before or used earlier, students had to grapple with their own challenges as well. Students in remote areas found internet accessibility difficult, students from economically poor background could not afford the cost of internet charges and also the devices required for the classes. Children belonging to the marginalized groups may not have access to digital technology and/or may not have the resilience for prolonged virtual learning, and such children will lag behind.

As COVID 19 surged towards the end of 2021 many countries in the world, even advanced nations were faced with situations where teachers and students were struggling with mental health challenges, behavioural issues, and poor academic performance. The academic year 2021-2022 concluded on a positive note, with the availability of vaccines, with more than 90% of the population being vaccinated, graduation ceremonies in physical mode and classes also being held in the physical mode. Yet, the pandemic left behind a lasting impact on the general well-being of students.

II. OBJECTIVES

This exploratory study was undertaken with an intention to explore how the pandemic has influenced the behaviour and study pattern of the students. This study is not about the impact of the pandemic on the academic performance of students, but on the attitude of students toward academics. Performance in examinations was not taken up for study. This study also aims at understanding if and how the pandemic has influenced the behaviour of young adults, their relationship with their peers, faculty and most importantly their attitude towards learning. This study reveals some interesting findings which is in contrast to many studies.

III. METHODOLOGY

Primary research was carried out in a reputed Tier 2 engineering institution in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. For the current study, the researchers have applied a combination of methods that include both quantitative and qualitative analysis by using a multi-method system. Surveys and questionnaires were formal modes of eliciting data, while informal discussions and interactions helped in understanding the actual scenario and problems faced by students. Questionnaires were administered to first year students (2021-2022 academic year) of five branches, Civil Engineering, Computer Science Engineering, Electronics and Communication Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. Two hundred and forty two students responded

to the two questionnaires. One questionnaire had fifteen questions on the impact of the pandemic on their academics, the other questionnaire had 24 questions on the impact of the pandemic on their behaviour, attitude, social skills and their learning processes. The data has been elicited using Likert scale as it is suitable to measure human responses, which are not quantifiable. Likert scale is named after their creator, American social scientist Rensis Likert. Likert scales are quite popular because they are one of the most reliable ways to measure opinions, perceptions, and behaviours. Data was also elicited through observation and informal interactions with the students from both first year (2021 batch) and second year students (2020 batch). Observation is an important tool in exploratory research dealing with social sciences, humanities, while informal interactions are very widely used in social research.

TABLE I
LIKERT SCALE

Category	Score
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neutral	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

IV. OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

The researchers administered questionnaires and interacted with first year students, whereas, for second year students it was formal and informal interactions. In exploratory research, there are no rules per se and informal discussions and telephonic conversations are also considered for analysis. Likert scale helped in revealing degrees of opinion that could make a real difference in understanding the responses. The following is the Likert scale used for the analysis (Table 1):

On the question if online classes affected their communication skills 61% of the students responded that it had no impact, while a similar question on mathematical ability, had 88% of the students responded that online classes had no negative impact on their mathematical ability. Questions on patience to study long hours, write for long hours, answering lengthy questions evoked more or less similar responses. More than 88% of the students agreed that they lack patience for such activities. Surprisingly, when asked if they find it difficult to concentrate in class during lecture hours, 78% of the students' response was neutral.

Since, this study was conducted in a college, students' opinion on how beneficial the online classes held in school were also taken, as that lays the foundation for their learning at college. More than 76% said that they did not gain much knowledge and hence, did not help them in performing better in college (Fig. 1). The psychological impact as a result of the pandemic had adverse effects on the young minds leading to concentration issues. Fig. 2 shows that 29% of the students strongly agreed and 48% of the students agreed that after the pandemic they found it hard to focus on academic activities. This could be directly connected to the next question where

the responses reflect probable reasons why the students find it difficult to focus on academic activities. The responses in Fig. 3 are not entirely surprising but the honesty of the students in their responses, not just for this question but for all questions is highly commendable. 57% of the students strongly agreed and 39% of the students agreed that they are more addicted to mobile phones and social media now than before the pandemic. The remarkable aspect to be noted here is that zero percentage of students disagreed about the usage of mobiles and social media.

The responses in Fig. 4 once again reflect similar findings as in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3. Addiction to mobile phones and social media, results in lack of focus in academic activities, which in turn prevents them from managing their time effectively. This lack of time management affects their day to day academic work. Here too, more than 63% of the students accept that they cannot manage their time effectively, cannot complete the work assigned by their faculty and as a result fail to perform well in their examinations. In Fig. 5, it is obvious that due to their mobile/social media addiction they sleep less and their sleep pattern is erratic. This could lead to mental health issues and affect their overall well-being. 58% of the students strongly agree that they sleep less due to their long hours of online presence and 35% accept the same. This response by 93% of the students suffering from lack of proper sleep is a matter of huge concern and they have to be counseled.

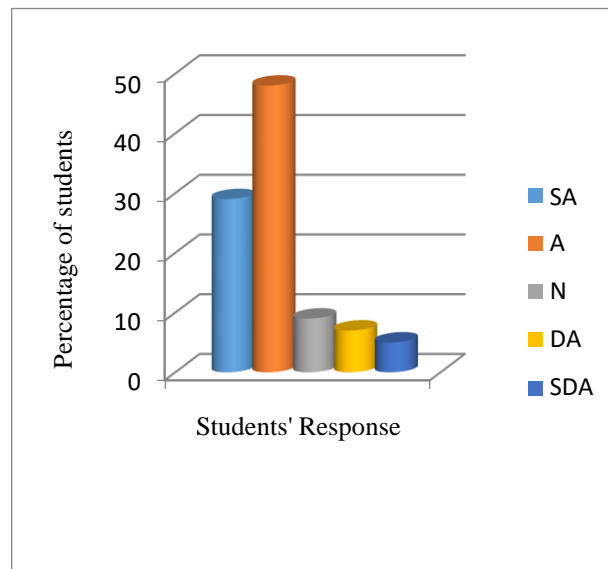


Fig.2. After the pandemic I find it hard to focus on academic activities

The measures taken to counteract the pandemic, like complete lockdown, social distancing, and closures of educational institutions and prevention of all social gatherings led to a feeling of uncertainty, feelings of isolation and loss of self-worth (Williams et al., 2020). The responses as seen in Fig. 6 on how confident are they about their success after the pandemic shows their insecurity, anxiety, and probably low self-esteem. It highlights the fact that students need counseling and intervention to help them get through this crisis.

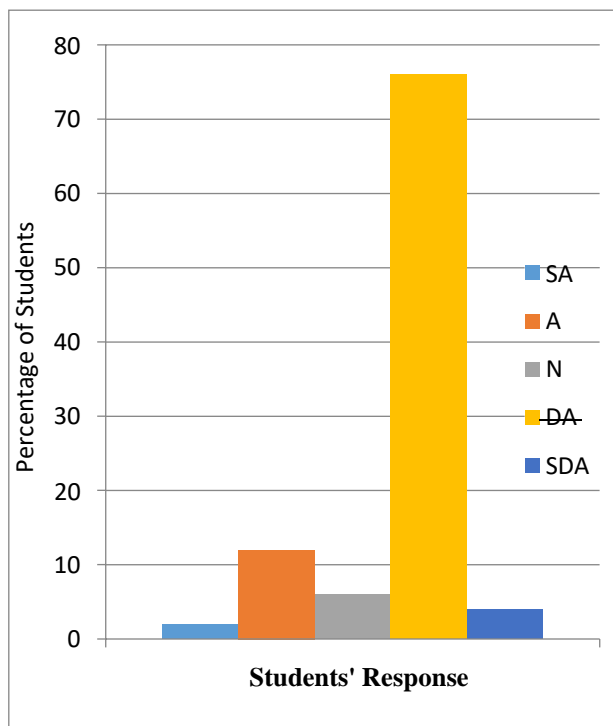


Fig.1. Online classes (school) helped me to gain knowledge to progress in my studies in both school and college

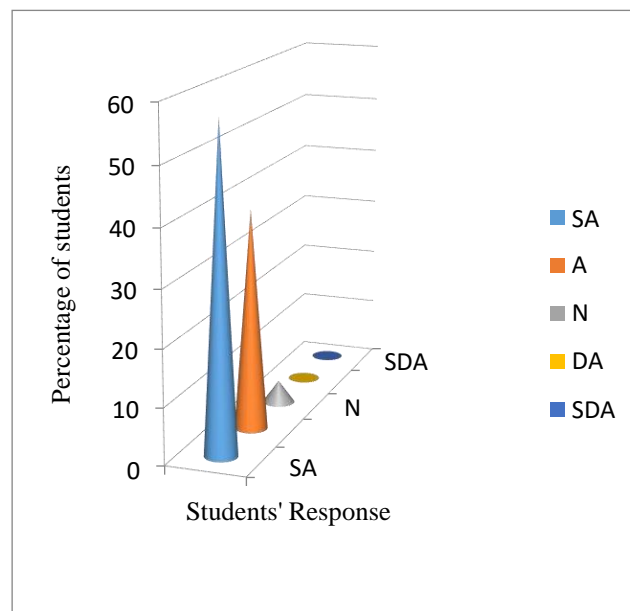


Fig.3. I find myself more addicted to mobiles social media now than before the pandemic

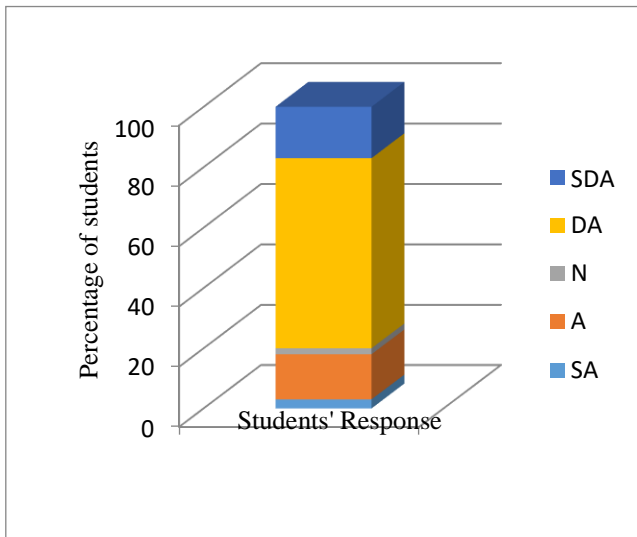


Fig.4. After the pandemic I can manage my time and do all the work assigned by my faculty and perform well in exams

Questionnaire Two consisted of questions pertaining to students' behaviour and attitude towards learning post COVID 19. From the responses it seems evident that the pandemic did not have much impact on their social skills. More than 90% of the students responded that they had no problems in making friends, communicating with their peers and seniors and faculty. To the question if they feel lonely, 95% of the students responded that they do not feel lonely at all.

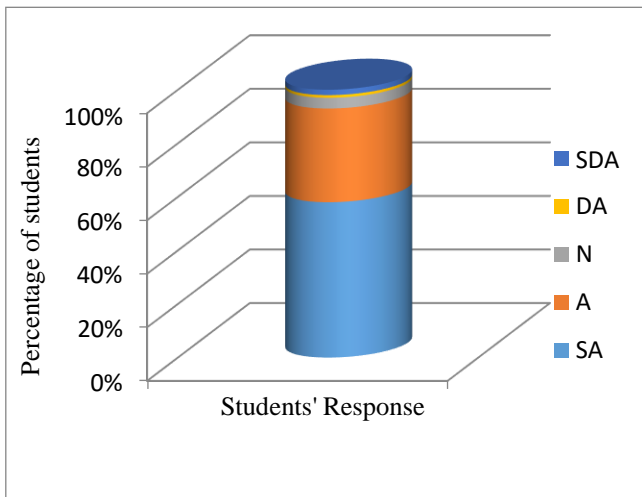


Fig.5. I sleep less/my sleep pattern is erratic because I spend more time on mobile/laptop

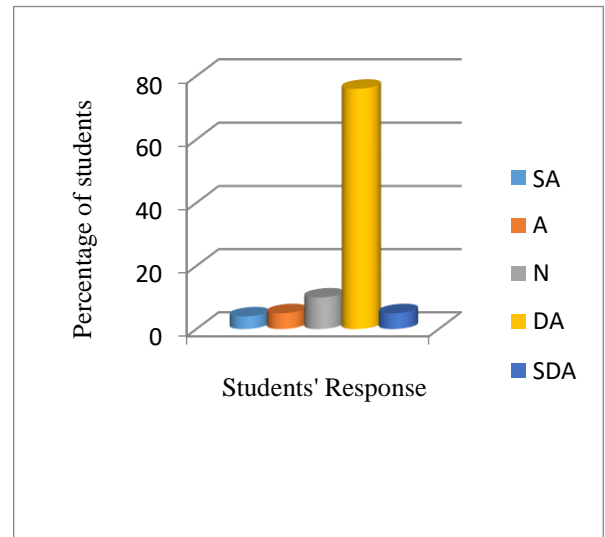


Fig.6. I am confident of my success after the pandemic

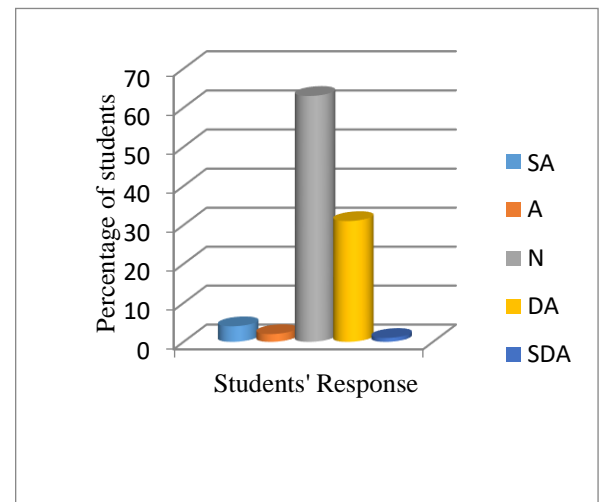


Fig.7. After the pandemic I am anxious about my studies and career

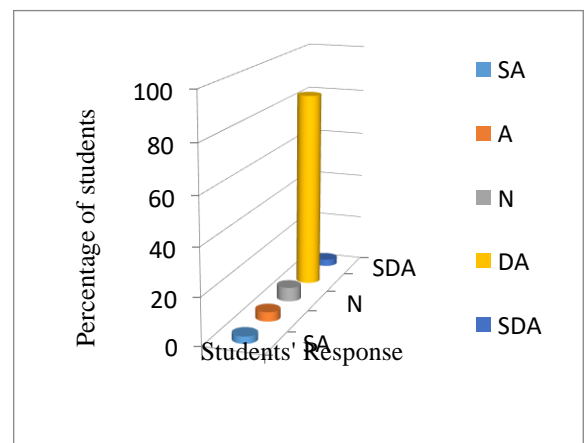


Fig.8. I prefer only online examinations

This is quite heartening and is a sign of good mental health.

When asked about autonomous learning and group study, the responses showed that students were comfortable with independent learning. More than 91% expressed their views that they are confident in learning independently and they do not prefer group study. Regarding online learning, 63% of the students do not prefer online classes, while 37% of the students preferred the convenience of online classes. On the other hand, interestingly to the question if they can prepare for their examinations with the resources available online and with online instructions, an overwhelming 81% agreed that they could do so. A very heartening response is, when more than 90% of the students disagreed that they could prepare well for exams only if important questions were given. A whopping 97% said that they would not panic and feel anxious if important questions were not given. This clearly shows not only their interest in academics but also their emotional maturity and responsibility towards their studies.

Informal interactions with students from second year revealed a slightly different picture. While more than 97% of the students did not prefer online classes, more or less a similar percentage of students preferred online mode of examinations. It must be noted that these students had faced three semesters of online examinations and hence, were comfortable with online mode of examinations. While, most students in the first year were neutral in their responses to the question on anxiety about their career, more than 76% of the students in the second year expressed a little anxiety about their career. It is understandable that 63% were neutral and 32% of first year students were not anxious of their career as they are just out of school and only in the first year of college (Fig.7). When more than 87% of first year students say they do not prefer online examinations, (Fig.8) it speaks volumes of their academic maturity and their industrious nature. It also highlights that they want to work and earn their success which augments well for the country.

V. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study restricts itself to students from first year engineering. Further research could be carried out among senior students as well. This study was not gender wise, it was a wholesome study. There is scope for studies based on gender and analyze the differences on the impact and attitude of male and female participants.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study revealed some interesting findings which are quite different from many previous studies. Contrary to what many studies reveal, the pandemic seems to have not affected the social skills of the young adults as this study proves. Their general well-being has not taken a hit. They are confident about studying independently and online classes had not impacted negatively on their intellectual capabilities. On the other hand, they do agree that they find it hard to focus on academics due to over indulgence in social media, increasing lack of patience to listen to lectures and write for long hours. They also express anxiety about being successful, lack of

proper sleep due to addiction to mobile phones and lack of time management time. Yet, students are willing to work hard and students in the first year, prefer only examinations in the physical mode. On the contrary, students in the second year prefer examinations in the online mode, as they had already experienced the comfort of online examinations. With proper intervention and professional counseling and monitoring students can overcome their mobile addiction, regulate their sleep patterns and lead a healthy life mentally and physically.

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