

## ONLINE TEACHING-LEARNING DURING COVID-19: EXPERIENCE OF NURSING PROGRAMMES OF IGNOU

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### ABSTRACT

Commonwealth of Learning, on 13 March 2020, stated that countries in world are closing down institutions of learning due to COVID-19 pandemic and it is important to ensure that learners' time is not lost and they continue to learn from a location of their choice. In India, Ministry of Human Resource Development and University Grant Commission have recommended that the students get academic support on-line and have shared several ICT initiatives in the form of digital platforms for teaching-learning. Indira Gandhi National Open University also decided to use such I.T. platforms. This study explores a. use of online learning platforms/tools for students enrolled in nursing programmes in the ODL programmes of Indira Gandhi National Open University; b. platforms/tools preferred and used by the students; c. Students' responses and lessons learned by the teacher. In this study, exploratory study approach is used. The study highlighted that during lockdown period and while working from homes, the teacher learned and used the new technology to reach out to students all over India. One of the key challenge was to enrol students and to involve them in the online teaching-learning. Innovative ways to motivate the students to participate in learning were found; mentoring of students became a 24x7 activity as many of these nursing students were working with COVID 19 patient in hospitals as frontline workers. Students preferred to use facebook and WhatsApp platforms for sessions and were willing to participate in Google-Meet sessions as well but internet connectivity issues were the constraint and many students preferred facebook sessions. Reactions of students were positive after completing online theory sessions and participation in online practical sessions was also very good. During this initiative the teacher too learnt several lessons. In future, online teaching-learning offers huge potential for use in various health sciences programmes with some modification especially for practical activities and using a blended approach.

**Keywords:** Online Platforms, Online Tools, Open University, Teaching-Learning, Pandemic

### INTRODUCTION

The 'Commonwealth of Learning', on 13 March 2020, stated that most of the nations are closing down institutions of learning due to COVID-19 Pandemic and that learners' time should not be lost. If the students continue to learn at the convenience of their homes, around 363 million learners worldwide could benefit. Support is being offered to the learners through online platforms. Commonwealth of Learning emphasized that open, distance and online learning, if carried out rigorously and ensuring quality, can improve the outcomes despite lack of face to face contact between the teacher and the learners. Many universities are utilizing their full potential through available online approaches to reach out to the learners but there are many that are still not able to reach out the learners (COL, 2020). Colleges and universities can use available open educational resources and explore innovative ways to reach out and interact with the learners using various online platforms and using online tools. Even in India, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and University Grant Commission (UGC) ensured that students got academic support through online learning and shared several ICT initiatives of various organizations in the

form of digital platforms for teaching-learning during this pandemic period (UGC Order dated 25-03-2020). ITU News highlighted that education sector is also impacted during COVID-19 pandemic and many teaching institutions are closed. But easy to use digital tools are available to reach out to the learners. Even UNESCO listed down distance learning solutions including education applications, platforms, and resources to facilitate learning. All countries are introducing or scaling up distance education modalities based on different information communication technologies and few countries are sharing their digital education tools with others (ITU website, accessed on 18-04-2020).

Study by Sahu P, 2020, highlighted that as large number of institutions are closed due to COVID-19 pandemic, most of the universities in the world opted to cancel on the campus classes, examinations, and other activities and they moved on to online delivery mode. Based on MHRD/UGC order, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) also decided to use various platforms and ICT initiatives to reach out to the learners all over the country and internationally in partner institutions. School of Health Sciences, IGNOU, is offering programmes for doctors, nurses, and other health professionals who are in-service health professionals working in the hospitals and health institutions. As per guidelines, they have to attend compulsory theory and practical sessions for specified period in all the programmes. Diploma in Nursing Administration (DNA) and other programmes for in-service nurses also have specified hours of contact sessions. During this time, it was a challenge to reach out to the learners so that their time is not lost and they complete their programme. And motivating these learners who were working for nearly 12 hours in hospital under stress looking after COVID-19 patients was a second challenge. This study explores online platforms and tools to motivate learners enrolled in nursing programmes for online learning so that they complete their programme successfully.

Study by Krishna Ayu, 2020, highlighted that there are challenges in studying management online, difficulty to concentrate during pandemic and many tasks given by teacher to students are challenging; method of learning is dull and payment for internet is a burden on students. Another study by Agarwal and Kaushik (2020), stated that sessions were relevant as per need and tailored as per level of the students on online medium; they also perceived that sessions were interesting and material was easy to access and enjoyable; online sessions had broken monotony and the COVID pandemic made them realize importance of online learning.

## NEED IDENTIFIED

It was a challenge for the researcher to reach out to the enrolled learners under two courses of Diploma in Nursing Administration (DNA) all over India and conduct academic counselling as Course Coordinator. Besides this, academic counselling for two other courses under Post-basic B.Sc. Nursing Programme was to be done at a Delhi Study-centre while working from home during the lockdown due to COVID-19 pandemic as per guidelines of the Government and University. It took some time for the researcher to acquaint with the online tools and platforms to take on the challenge to provide online teaching-learning experiences to learners.

**Description of the research** The purpose of this research was to reach and teach the learners from nursing discipline pursuing DNA in IGNOU ; conduct academic counselling for them and to Post Basic B.Sc. Nursing students in Delhi; provide requisite material and other resources for learning using online platforms and tools. As a teacher, the first issue for the researcher was to explore and select suitable online platform from amongst the several available free tools/platforms; to learn to use these platforms/tools so that learners can easily access and use them. Additionally, it was observed that several amongst these learners were working as frontline workers in Covid areas in hospitals under stressful conditions for 14 days at a stretch and it was a challenge to help them participate in

teaching-learning activities at their convenience. In this connection, the following main research questions are addressed:

1. Which platforms are preferred by the learners?
2. What is the reaction of students regarding online learning?
3. What will be the long term advantages to the university?
4. What lessons are learned by the teacher?

## METHODOLOGY

Exploratory study approach was used to obtain insight into an issue. 30 Post Basic Nursing and 120 DNA students participated in the study. Willingness of learners was taken into consideration. Few learners opted out but later were added in the group on their request. Permission from Programme In-Charge of Study Centre in Delhi for Post Basic B.Sc. Nursing was taken to conduct online sessions.

Two courses of DNA programme were also selected for which researcher was course coordinator. Regional Centres were informed through Facebook and e mail and included them in the dedicated Facebook page.

I. Searched various online platforms and tools which were freely available: Researcher explored the internet, various university websites, and discussed with colleagues who were well versed with online platforms and tools. Read the reviews in detail and reviewed experiences of others. Then shortlisted WhatsApp, audio books, Facebook, Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, Google Drive, YouTube, OER links, Kahoot, Hot Potato, GoSoapBox, PDF and PPTs. These were selected as few were used by the researcher in previous years for student support like WhatsApp, audio books, OER links, and others were selected as they were free, could be used for 100 plus learners, easy to use, feasible for the learner to access and use, and easy to learn in limited time period.

II. Learn the use of platforms/tools in short time: Used videos, attended webinars, and studied user guides to learn various platforms/tools. Participated in WhatsApp group with fellowship group on Medical Education and Research for learning use of advance features of various platforms. Started activities with WhatsApp group, audio books, OER links, PDF and PPTs which were used by the researcher since last 4 years. By the end of one month, could use Facebook, Google Classroom, Google Drive, Zoom, Webex, GoSoapBox and YouTube to facilitate learners.

III. Reach out to learners and motivate them for learning using online platforms and tools: Collected 132 DNA student data from Student Registration Division and 30 PB BSc. N from PIC; created two WhatsApp groups and invited the learners. Brief introduction about learners was taken, introduction of self, university, and programmes was given, and strategy to be used for teaching-learning activities was shared. Some active learners helped the peer group to understand the implementation and syllabi of the DNA programme. Advance information was given to the learners regarding Facebook sessions and they were requested to read the units and give questions in advance. Google Classroom was created and folders in Google Drive created to be shared with the group, and YouTube channel was created to upload the sessions. Mentoring by the teacher was done continuously, sending messages, answering to the questions and taking help of group leaders to motivate peer groups was very helpful to motivate students to learn.

**Tools:** Records of students were obtained from university records, Google form was designed for the feedback of the students, for preference of platform, reactions of students and online poll was also used for the preference of platform. Google form consisted of 12 questions and 1 open ended question for comments. Students were free to fill up the form

which was shared with them through link in WhatsApp group and Google classroom. Reactions of students were also obtained after each session on WhatsApp groups and facebook page using questionnaire.. Ethical issues related to informed consent, privacy of data and students were taken into consideration. Received 100 responses and nearly 110 students had given feedback on Facebook and WhatsApp group after the sessions. Benefits and lessons learned on online teaching-learning are personal views of the researcher based on the study experience. Analysis and interpretation was done.



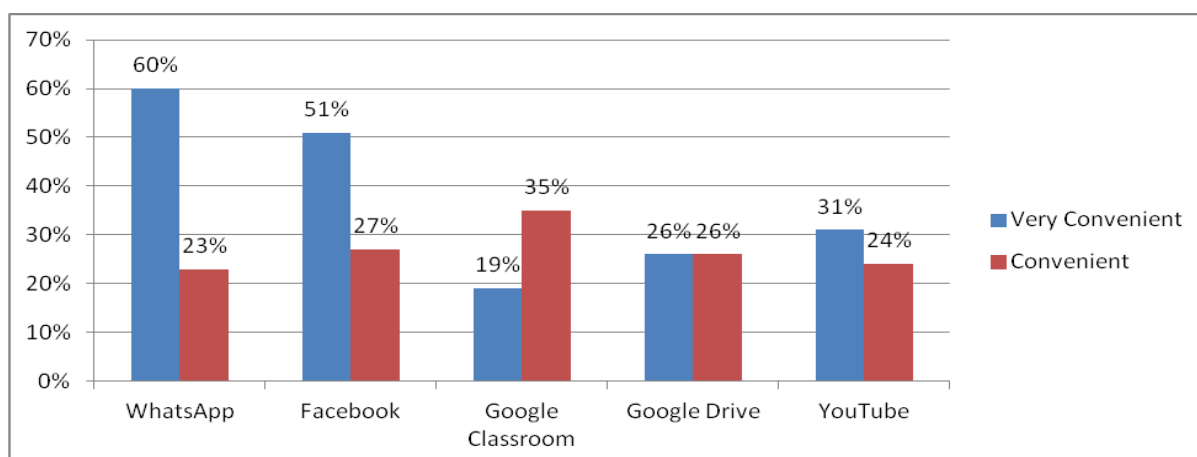
**Figure 1:**  
Showing types of platforms used for learner

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Preferences and reactions of students were obtained in-between sessions through questionnaire and at the end of all the sessions through Google Form.

### 1. Platforms preferred by the students

WhatsApp and Facebook were the two most convenient platforms used by students for online teaching-learning activities. Google Classroom, Google Drive and YouTube were also preferred by the students. Facebook sessions were preferred by students as they could attend live and go through the sessions later also. They also expressed that these sessions can be reviewed before examination.

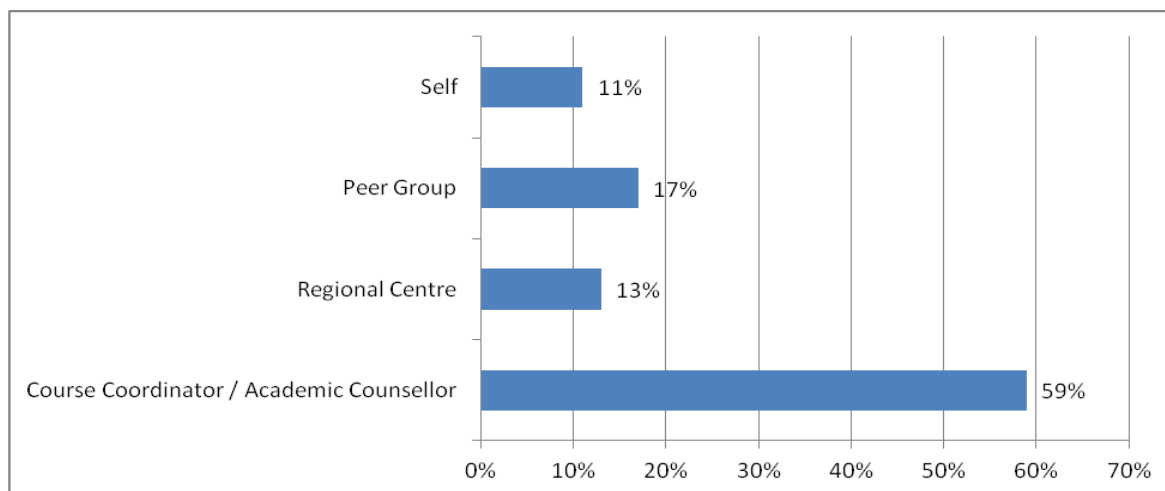


**Figure 2:**  
Platforms used by number of students as per convenience

## 2. Reaction of students regarding online learning

Reactions and experiences of students who participated in online learning of DNA and Post Basic B. Sc. N programmes are analysed below.

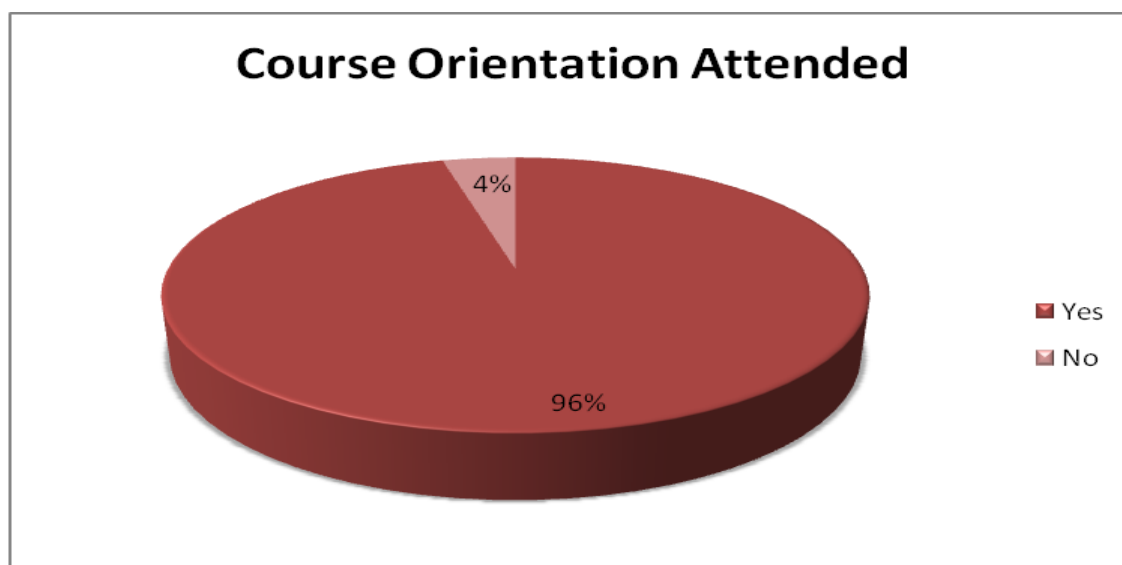
### A. Who contacted you about the online teaching sessions/support?



**Figure 3:**  
Percentage of students contacted by academic counsellor and others for online support

59 percent students were contacted by course coordinator and 28 percent students were contacted through their peer or self for online support. It was difficult to contact PBBSCN students for online academic support. Academic counsellor approached the previous year students as no phone numbers were available; Programme in-charge informed that all the records are in her office. Academic counsellor was able to get mobile number through students who passed in 2019 as many students were working in same hospital and were known to each other. For DNA courses, course coordinator contacted the Student Registration Division of IGNOU to get the names and mobile number of students enrolled in 2020 session.

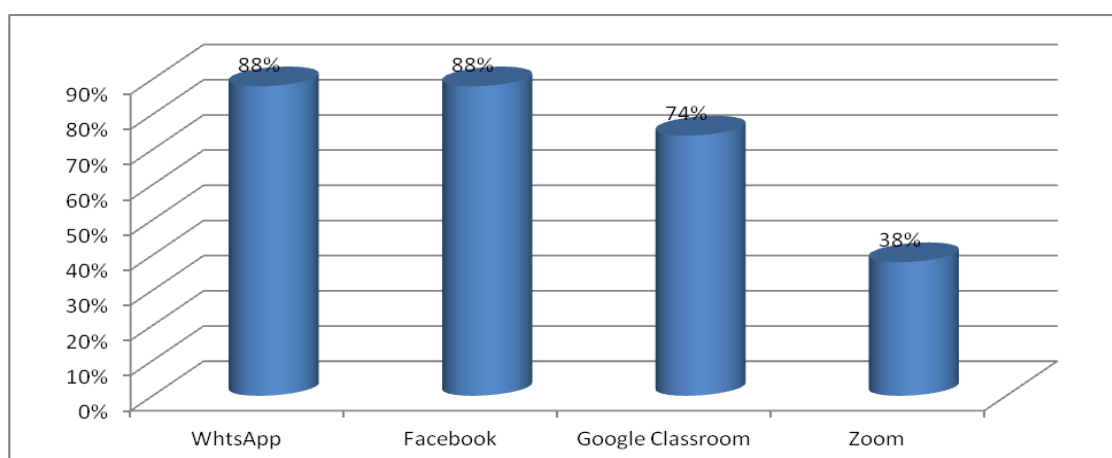
## B. Was course orientation provided by course coordinator?



**Figure 4:**  
Percentage of students who attended orientation training

Orientation/Induction sessions are conducted by Regional Centre in collaboration with the study centres on first day of contact session. But during lockdown period it was not possible to conduct induction/orientation session for the DNA students; therefore, Course Coordinator planned online session by recording an audio book regarding DNA programme and sharing it on WhatsApp group; PowerPoint presentation and programme guide was also shared with the students in the WhatsApp group. Students were requested to go through all the material and ask questions. Peer group was helping each other in WhatsApp group to understand few aspects. On first day of online sessions, orientation was also organised through live Facebook session which was recorded and was available on Facebook for future reference too and for students who could not attend.

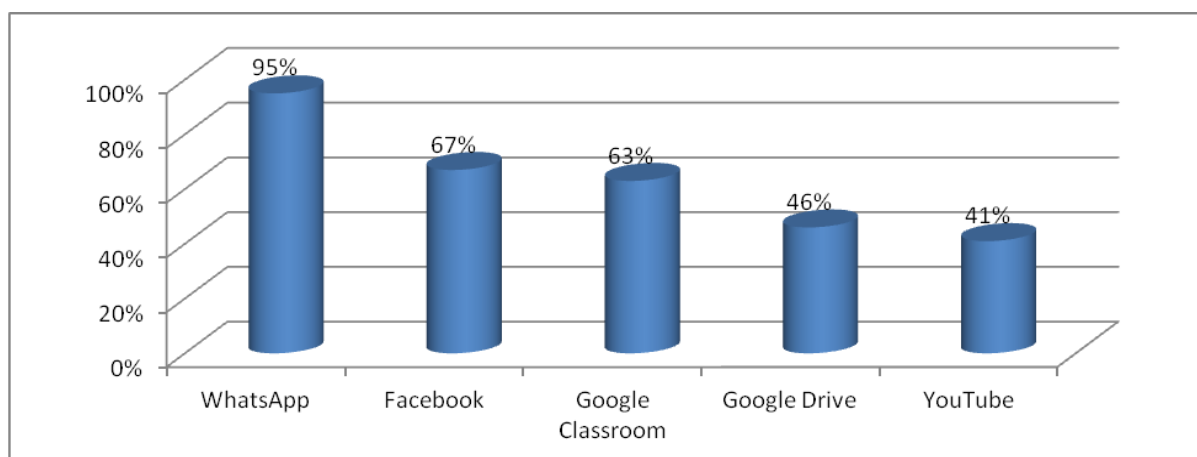
## C. Which online platform was used by the teacher to conduct sessions?



**Figure 5:**  
Platforms used for conducting sessions

Various platforms were used to reach out to the students for online sessions. Initiated the activities with WhatsApp group; then searched the feasibility of Facebook and Google Classroom. Zoom was tried but there were technical issues during the session. Therefore, it was not used for future sessions. Material was shared on three platforms i.e. WhatsApp group, Google Classroom and Google Drive, and sessions were organised through Facebook and Google Meet and recorded and shared, so that all the students could go through the sessions using some platform because many students had connectivity issues or were on COVID duty in hospital and had accessibility issue.

**D. Which online platform was used by the teacher to share material and provide academic support?**

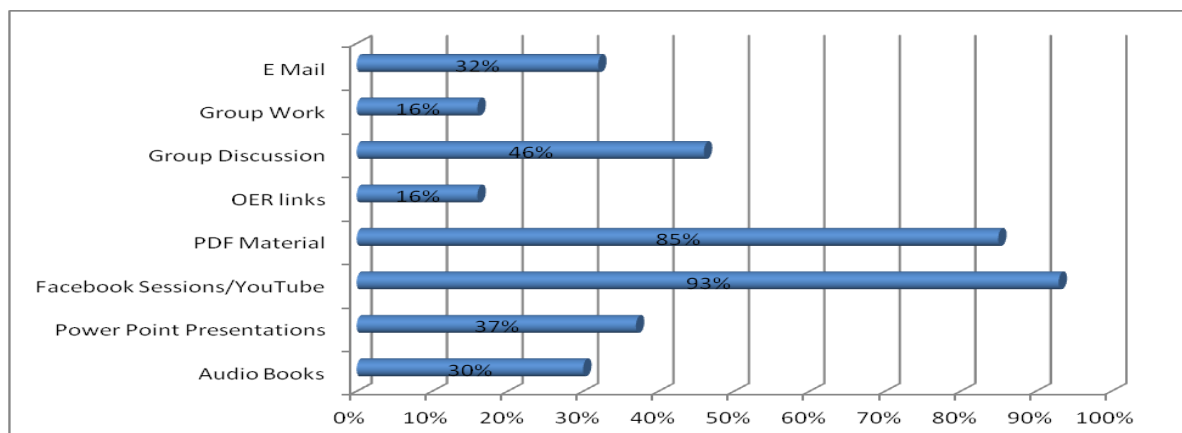


**Figure 6:**  
**Platforms used for sharing material and providing academic support**

Course coordinator downloaded all the units of material from website of university and shared soft copy on WhatsApp and uploaded on Google Drive. Facebook sessions were available at FB page. YouTube channel was created and sessions were uploaded on YouTube too. All the material from IGNOU and other material provided by the course coordinator was uploaded on Google Drive, and links of YouTube and Google Drive were shared in Google Classroom and WhatsApp group. It was important to share material at various platforms because all students were not able to access any one or two specific platforms. As per their feasibility and connectivity, they could use any of these platforms. Facebook and WhatsApp group were also very useful to provide student support and to get feedback. Google Classroom was used for uploading assignment, its evaluation-feedback and grade-recording. Study by Sultana Anisa (2020) highlighted that 37 percent student had internet issues to get connected and access the classes and 97 percent students agreed that face to face teaching cannot be replaced by online teaching. But in present study, students agreed that there was no difference between face to face and online learning and attending sessions on Facebook.



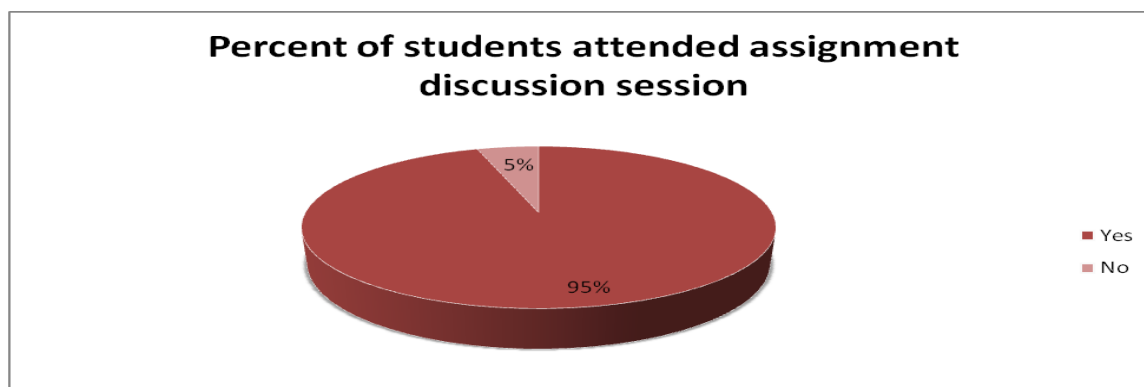
### E. Which methods/media were used by teacher for online teaching-learning?



**Figure 7:**  
**Methods/media used for online teaching-learning**

Various methods and media as shown in figure 7 were used to reach out to students so that they could participate in learning, group activities, and discussions, and for formative assessment. Students were divided into groups for discussions using WhatsApp, and GoSoapBox was used as a tool for conducting a pilot discussion. Notes shared by students during group discussion were shared in WhatsApp group and uploaded on Google Drive for future reference. Study by Krishna Ayu (2020) recommended that variety of methods of learning can be given like video, live stream, discussion, and using various apps and platforms.

### F. Did you attend the assignment discussion session conducted by the teacher?

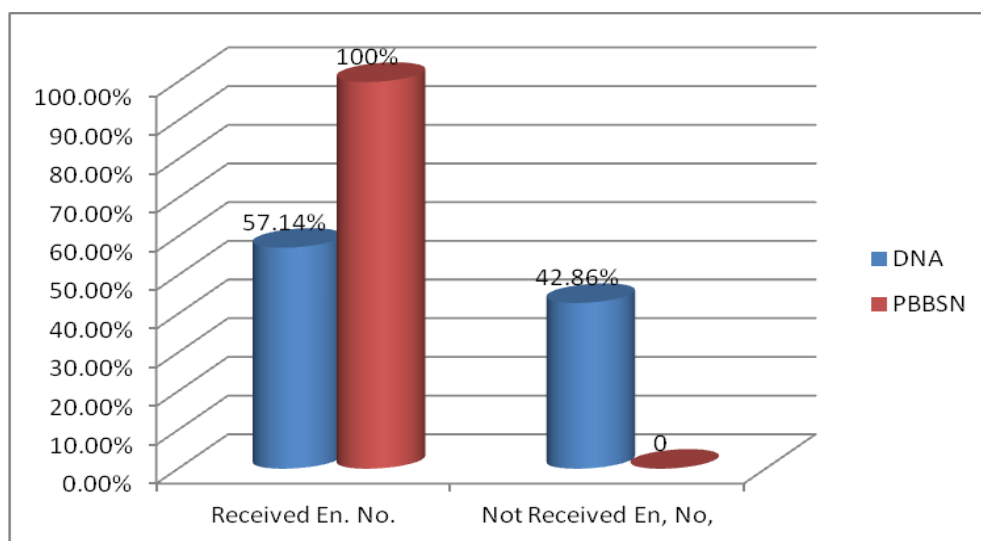


**Figure 8:**  
**Percent of students attended assignment discussion session**

Assignment guidelines and all assignments were discussed with the students during live Facebook session and audio book was also shared.



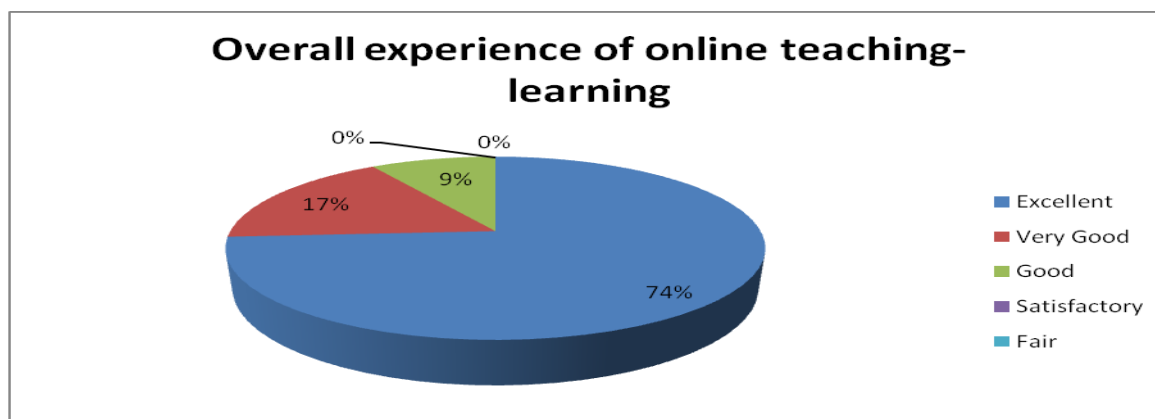
### G. Did you receive your enrolment number?



**Figure 9:**  
Percentage of students received enrollment number during 2020

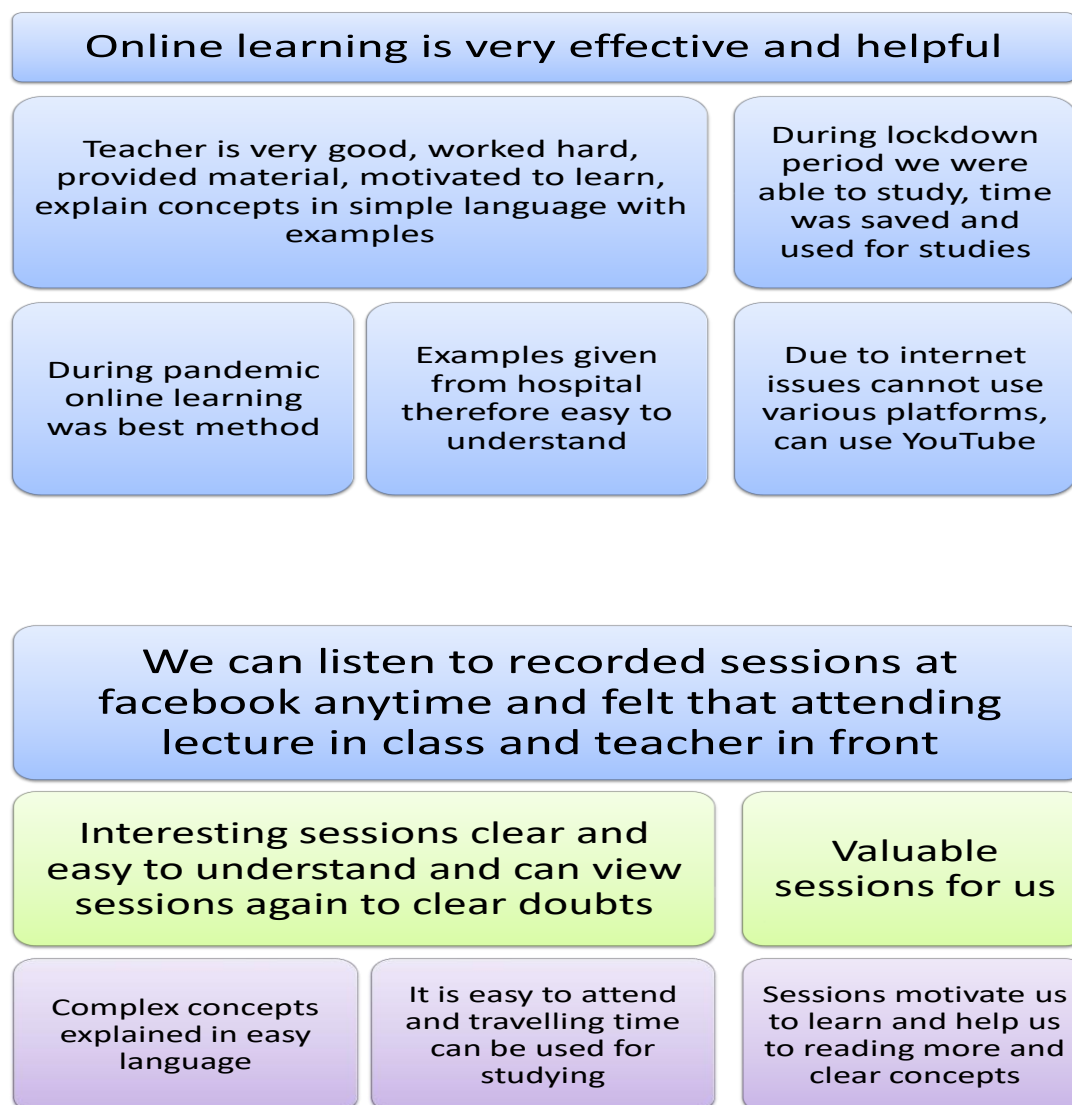
Post Basic. B.Sc. Nursing (PBBSCN) students received the enrollment number because they were enrolled in 2018 for 3 years programme and at present they were enrolled in third year after re-registration. Only 57 percent Diploma in Nursing Administration (DNA) programme students received enrollment number as they were enrolled fresh during 2020; due to lock down period all the Regional Centres and HQ of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) were not functional from campuses. Therefore, few students could not get their enrollment number but course coordinator provided them enrollment number after the feedback from the list provided by the Student Registration Division, IGNOUH. How was your overall experience of online learning?

Majority of students had excellent and very good experience of online teaching-learning. They actively participated in live sessions, and in case they missed any session due to duty, they watched the recorded videos and gave feedback on the same day; participated in group discussions, and formative assessment questions were submitted on time. Study by Agarwal S (2020) also supports that online learning is feasible and student satisfaction is high.



**Figure 10:**  
Percent of students showing overall experience

Summary of students' reactions and feedback given after sessions in Google Form, WhatsApp groups and Facebook was also compiled.



**Figure 11:**  
**Sample of students' reactions and comments**

It was encouraging for the teacher to observe that students were interested to attend online sessions and give immediate feedback, ask questions, read the units in advance and send questions. Students were motivated to learn as sessions were taken in easy language and supported with examples from the hospital.

**Benefits observed and lessons learned by the researcher based on study experience**

Analysing reactions of students and drawing upon experience of the researcher in conducting online teaching learning, following benefits were observed for university and lessons for adopting online learning for other programmes in future are highlighted.

### 3. Long-term benefits to the University

In ODL University, study centres are established in traditional colleges and their faculty is appointed as academic counsellors for conducting contact sessions, and they are paid honorarium as per the university norms. In-house faculty is designing, developing, monitoring, and coordinating the program.

- This experience has shown that potential of in-house faculty can be utilised for conducting sessions for the students and providing academic support. This will help teachers to monitor the progress and take direct student feedback to effectively evaluate the programme.
- This is also a cost-effective model for the university, as it saves on the honorarium, payment to the study centres, and other expenses, which can be invested for the development of online infrastructure.

### 4. Lessons learned by the researcher and replication of the model

- Pre-planning regarding searching platforms and tools is very important.
- Background of students i.e., experience in using technology, internet availability need to be considered.
- Teacher's own capabilities to use online tools and platforms need to be accessed, and if required, training should be planned.
- Plan the sessions meticulously and make lesson plan with methods and media to be used for online teaching-learning.
- Collaborate with the students so that they also participate in planning activities as per their feasibility to use various tools and platforms for online learning.
- Use various platforms and tools so that all the students can access the material and participate.
- Motivate the students to participate and attend sessions and take immediate feedback.
- Be innovative and creative during sessions so that students attend live sessions or view recorded sessions.
- Give examples from related field so that students can relate to their experience and relate theory with practical.
- Group work can increase peer group learning and team building.
- Attendance can be increased as compared to face to face contact sessions by offering greater convenience to students as it saves their commute and does not necessitates leave from job.
- Assignment for formative assessment needs to be interesting and assessment gives motivation to students.
- Theory and practical sessions need to be modified.
- Teacher required to invest time and energy, and be creative and innovative in online teaching, mentoring and guiding.
- Model can be replicated by other teachers and for other courses too.

### CONCLUSION

Online teaching-learning can be organised for School of Health Sciences programmes; theory sessions can be organised using various platforms and using variety of methods and media. It is important to be creative and innovative and encourage students to participate in sessions and group activities. Mentoring, guiding and follow up with students is very crucial. More time is required for planning, implementing and monitoring the activities. Faculty development programs can be undertaken to make the teachers well-versed in the use of various online platforms and tools. Workload studies can be conducted for online

teaching-learning, and related policies can be modified accordingly for quality assurance in online teaching-learning.

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