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E-LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF THE JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN

Caroline Wahlang

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, The English and Foreign Languages (EFL) University, Regional Campus Shillong, Umshing, Mawkynroh, Shillong- 793022, Meghalaya, India
E-mail : **cwahlang@efluniversity.ac.in**

ABSTRACT

Among the many worries, anxieties, and insecurities that the COVID-19 shutdown has produced, the distress it has caused in academia is unprecedented. The push for online learning in India has put teachers, in a bind. The paper aims to find out the experiences and challenges that journalism and mass communication students' face during the pandemic lockdown period. The study finds that students of journalism and mass communication rely primarily on smartphones to access e-learning. It also reveals that e-learning was supported and perpetuated by freely available services such as Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and email. Teachers frequently use Google Meet and Zoom to conduct online classes. Due to the inadequate content and delivery of lectures during the lockdown, students find e-teaching unenthusiastic and unengaging. Further, the choice of educational technologies for e-learning purposes appears to be heavily determined by the tried and tested media technologies to gratify educational needs. (150 words)

Keywords: *Journalism & Mass Communication, COVID pandemic, E-learning, experiences, challenges*

INTRODUCTION

The attempt to integrate modern technology into education started with the 1968 National Policy on Education (NPE), which encouraged the development of a scientific mindset through academic research on the use of technology. Twenty years later, the 1986 National Policy on Education, as amended in 1992, promoted the use of available technology in education by stating, "*Modern educational technology must reach out to the most distant areas and the most deprived sections... Educational technology will be employed in the spread of useful information. Maximum use will be made of the available infrastructure*" (Department of Education 1998). In 2005, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) stressed the need to adapt to the optimum use of new and existing technology that suits the local needs of the learners through hands-on experience. It states: "*ET facilities need to be used at all levels of schools.*" (NCERT 2005)

MODERN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY EXPERIMENTS IN INDIA

Satellite Instructional Television Experiments (SITE)

India's exploration of advanced technology using satellites for education started with the Satellite Instructional Television Experiments (SITE), which took place from January 1, 1975, to January 1, 1976. Direct Reception Systems (DRS) were installed in inaccessible and backward 2,400 villages for community viewing of the TV programmes in six states. Educationally, the objectives of the programme were to make the process of education more interesting, creative, purposeful, and stimulating to improve the quality of education and reduce wastage and stagnation, especially at the pre-primary and primary levels (Chander and Karnik 1976). The experiment was met with a mixed result. On the one hand, technologically, the experiment proved the country's capability to use advanced satellite and space applications; on the other, the linguistic diversity of the target audience, programmes that are irrelevant to local needs, the wrong choice of programme formats, etc. hindered the success of the experiment. Interest in the programmes was dictated by the value of entertaining images and visuals.

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Studies on the use of instructional television experiments found that, irrespective of the heavy expenditure incurred, their success is limited. In the United States, Cohen (1988) notes that television sets languish and waste away inside storage closets, rather than teachers incorporating the medium into their classroom teaching. Similarly, Harwood and Asal (2007), in a study of how students and teachers use technology in the classroom, found watching television to be a passive activity and the number-one form of entertainment among students. Postman (1985) notes that the classroom is not just for education but a space for students' societal interaction. Further, a student may ask questions to a teacher in a classroom but not to a screen (Postman 1985).

Educational Satellite (EDUSAT)

Similar to SITE, EDUSAT, launched in 2004, was to bring about social and educational change by providing quality education to the remote rural regions of India. The 549.09 crore investment was to serve as a technological instrument to bridge the multilingual and multicultural population that is separated by immense geographical distances and, in many instances, inaccessible terrain (Department of Space 2013). EDUSAT was in operation for seven years, from September 2004 to September 2010.

Among the many factors that contributed to the setback in meeting the goal and the objectives are a lack of planning and implementation, connectivity challenges, content development, monitoring, and evaluation. According to the DOS Report, as late as the fifth year of its operation, 57 percent of the satellite capacity remained idle, and by the sixth year of its operation, it had stopped working. "*During the entire life of the satellite, the scarce and valuable satellite capacity could not be put to use for the purpose of reaching quality education to the poor rural masses.*" (Department of Space 2013)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

The New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1991, which promoted liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, resulted in socioeconomic reforms and technological growth. It resulted in the establishment of the Telecom Regularity Authority of India (TRAI) and the Digital Communications Commission to develop telecom policies, as well as the National Internet Exchange to improve internet offerings. As a result, internet usage in India increased significantly, from 0.03% in 1995 to 34.45% in 2018 (ITU 2018). Further, Digital India was initiated to transform India into a digitally empowered knowledge economy. India now has the world's second-most mobile subscriptions. By the early twenty-first century, India had emerged as a science and technology powerhouse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Status of E-Learning before the Pandemic Lockdown

Despite policy efforts and scientific advancement, technology has struggled to make its way into academia. The current educational system mainly relies on conventional teaching techniques, and learning is restricted to the acquisition and retention of knowledge. Cohen (1988) terms the educational system a "*deeply rooted scholastic inheritance*" where "*in this inheritance, teaching is telling, learning is accumulation, and knowledge is facts, strung together by rules of procedure*." Even universities are reluctant to embrace technological progress, favouring conventional teaching techniques (Flavin 2017). Miglani & Burch (2020) found no work that satisfactorily probes how teachers make sense of educational technologies in classroom teaching and learning. In a study (Cuban 1986; 2001; Tapscott 1998; Cohen 1988) it was found that rather than transforming established instructional practices, technology is frequently employed to enhance existing educational practices. Teachers have been shown to primarily use technology for administrative activities such as attendance and grading (Miglani and Burch 2019). The bureaucratic nature of education, as well as teachers' romanticised moral authority, impede

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technology integration. Technology has been applied to assist teachers in performing their non-instructional role as administrators (Harwood and Asal 2007).

Another source of concern in India is a lack of access to media and e-learning tools. Many people, particularly in rural areas, do not have computers or internet access at home. Internet connectivity is primarily limited to cities, resulting in a major digital divide in the country. Despite having the world's second-highest number of mobile subscriptions, India's internet penetration remains below 50%. Furthermore, a large section of the mobile phone population is unfamiliar with the internet and how to use it on their devices (ITU 2018). Warschauer (2003) notes that simply having access to equipment does not ensure efficient technology utilisation. For the successful deployment of technology in education, it is required to identify and utilise physical, digital, human, and social resources. The author further states that "*full access to information and communication technology (ICT) requires more than just the presence of devices and conduits*." (Warschauer 2003)

E-learning during the pandemic lockdown

The COVID-19 lockdown took academia off guard. In India, school closures prompted teachers, regardless of age or technological ability, to manage online technologies in order to maintain teaching-learning continuity. According to a 2020 poll conducted by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, nearly every country in the world has adopted remote learning (UNESCO; UNICEF; World Bank, 2020). Zhejiang University, in China, in two weeks of pandemic closure of educational institutions, managed to get more than 5,000 courses online (World Economic Forum, 2020). Besides digital instructions, many countries have also developed broadcast curricula (UNICEF, 2020). Afghanistan broadcasts national curriculum-related programmes on television and radio. Argentina, Iran, Morocco, and Vietnam have all chosen hybrid models that rely on a combination of online learning for those who have access to the internet and instructional material available via television or radio for those who do not have access to the internet (Hereward, Jenkins, & Idele, 2020). In India, access to learning during the lockdown period was carried out using the online mode, partially online mode, and offline mode (MHRD, GOI, 2020). According to 2022 World Bank research, while remote learning has not been equally beneficial everywhere, hybrid learning is here to stay (World Bank 2022). In India, Wahlang (2021) found that before the lockdown, excepting institutions of national repute and a few others, many teachers and students had never utilised an online learning management system (LMS). They depended on freely available e-learning tools to sustain the teaching-learning process during the pandemic closure of educational institutions (Wahlang, 2021). There has been little research into the success of remote learning uptake during the pandemic's shutdown.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of remote learning for journalism and mass communication students during the COVID pandemic lockdown. The study investigates if the move to remote learning via media technology affects these students differently from students from other fields. Furthermore, the study explores the special difficulties and limitations that journalism and mass communication students encounter in an online learning environment.

Objectives of the study include:

1. To find out the common E-learning tools that teachers employ to engage the students and motivate the learning continuum during the Pandemic lockdown
2. To find out the students' responses, experiences, and challenges to E-learning

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RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Methods of collecting data

Primary and secondary procedures are used to obtain data. Secondary data is gathered from published articles, books, and journals. Primary data collection adopts the survey method using questionnaires. Data was collected at the peak of the pandemic (September–December 2020). A set of 56 questions was randomly sent to 100 students of journalism and mass communication using a Google Form. Over four months, 47 responses were obtained (22 males and 25 females). Table 1 below provides respondents' type of institution (*see Table 1: Respondents' distribution by type of educational institution*).

Table 1: Respondents' Distribution by type of institution

Type of Institution	Percentage (%)
Central University	44.7%
State University	4.3%
Private University	6.4%
Government College	2.1%
Semi-Government college	14.9%
Private College	27.7%

Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis: use of qualitative contextual analysis of published articles, books, and journals on the subject matter.

Primary data analysis: Content analysis is adopted to analyse quantitative data derived from the survey method. Data is tabulated in terms of frequency and percentages using MS Excel and presented through the use of tables and figures.

Limitations of the study

At the peak of the pandemic, the study is limited by a small sample size; the findings of the study cannot be generalised to a larger population.

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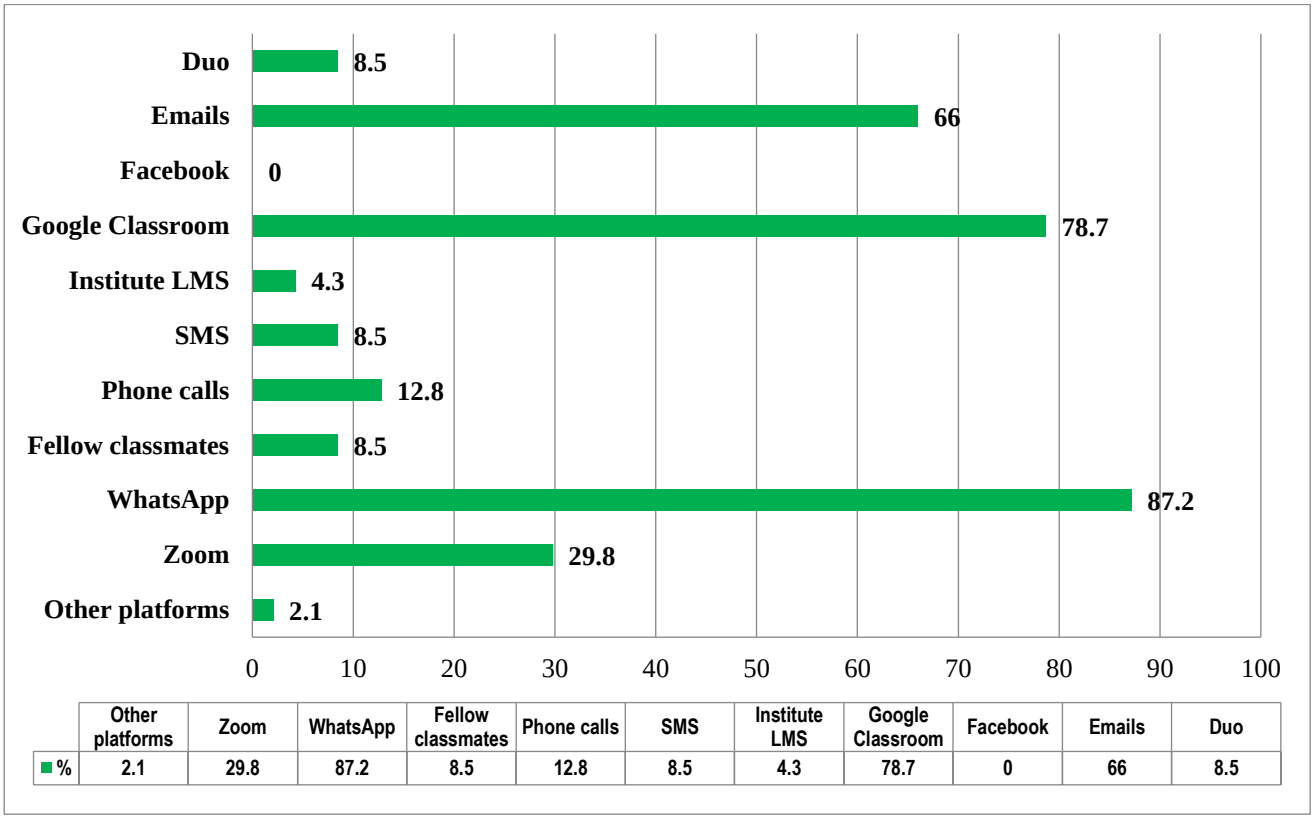
FINDINGS

According to the study, 66% of students had never used an e-learning platform before the pandemic lockdown. Apart from other applications, WhatsApp (87.2%), Google Classroom (78.7%), and email (66%) are the three most common means for teachers to communicate with their students. (*See Figure 1: How do teachers communicate with you during the pandemic lockdown?*)



	Other platforms	Zoom	WhatsApp	Fellow classmates	Phone calls	SMS	Institute LMS	Google Classroom	Facebook	Emails	Duo
%	2.1	29.8	87.2	8.5	12.8	8.5	4.3	78.7	0	66	8.5

Figure 1: Generally, how do teachers keep in touch with you during the pandemic lockdown?

Google Classroom was the most extensively utilised learning management system (72.3%) during the pandemic lockdown. Students of journalism and mass communication also use digital libraries (21.3%), virtual labs (2.1%), and other forms of open access resources (12.8%).

Common E-Learning tools that teachers employ in E-learning during the Pandemic lockdown

The publicly available apps are the three key e-learning technologies that teachers use to sustain the teaching and learning experience during this shutdown. With 78.8%, WhatsApp is at the top of the list. (*See Figure 2: E-learning/study materials are provided through*)

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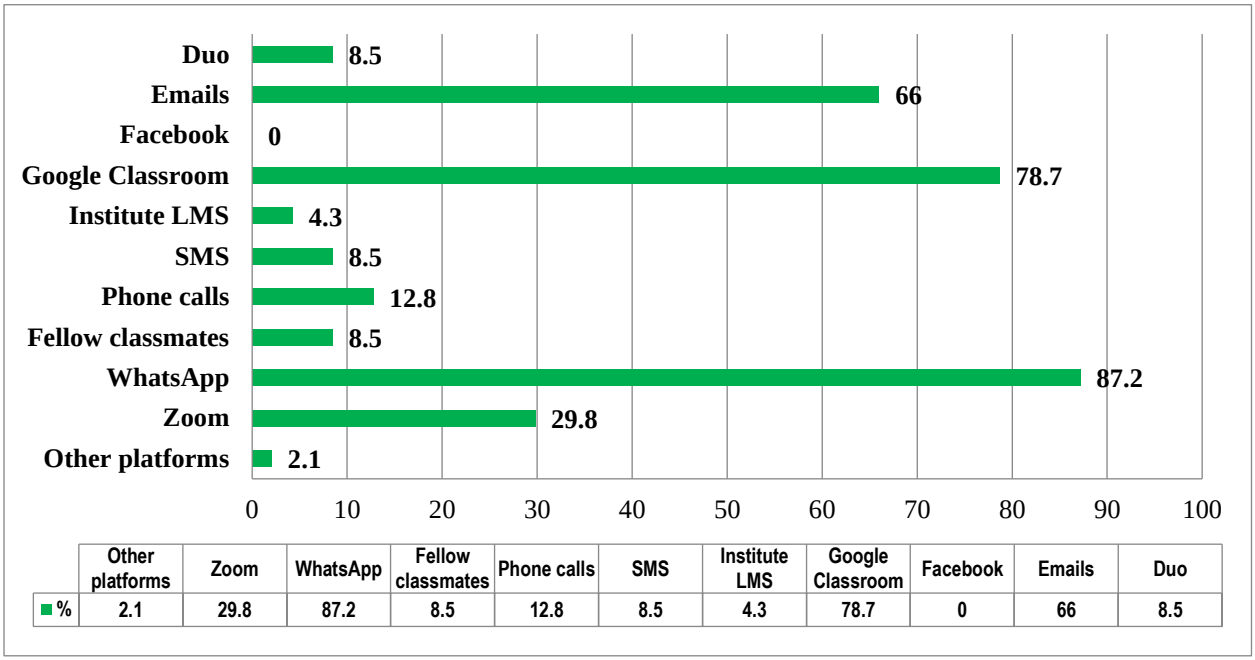
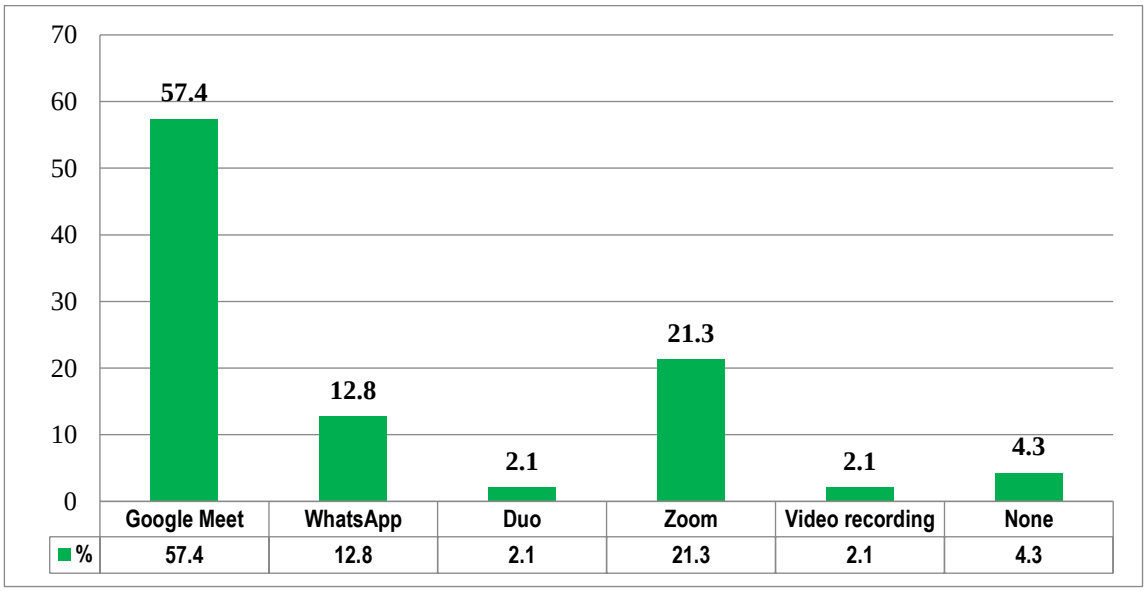


	Other platforms	Zoom	WhatsApp	Fellow classmates	Phone calls	SMS	Institute LMS	Google Classroom	Facebook	Emails	Duo
%	2.1	29.8	87.2	8.5	12.8	8.5	4.3	78.7	0	66	8.5

Figure 2: E-learning/study materials are provided through

In terms of real-time online classes, 48.9% of students stated that they are held sometimes, as and when needed. 34% of students agree that online classes in real time are held every day, while 17% believe that online classes are not held at all. Google Meet and Zoom are the two most popular platforms for holding online classes (*see Figure 3: A real-time online class is typically delivered via)*. Online classes are typically held in half an hour to 45 minutes (40.4%), one hour to one and a half hours (48.9%), or up to two hours (4.3%). Students were assigned theory-based (46.8%) and practice-based (53%) (*see Figure 4: What kind of work is assigned to you?*)



	Google Meet	WhatsApp	Duo	Zoom	Video recording	None
%	57.4	12.8	2.1	21.3	2.1	4.3

Figure 3: A real-time online class is typically delivered via

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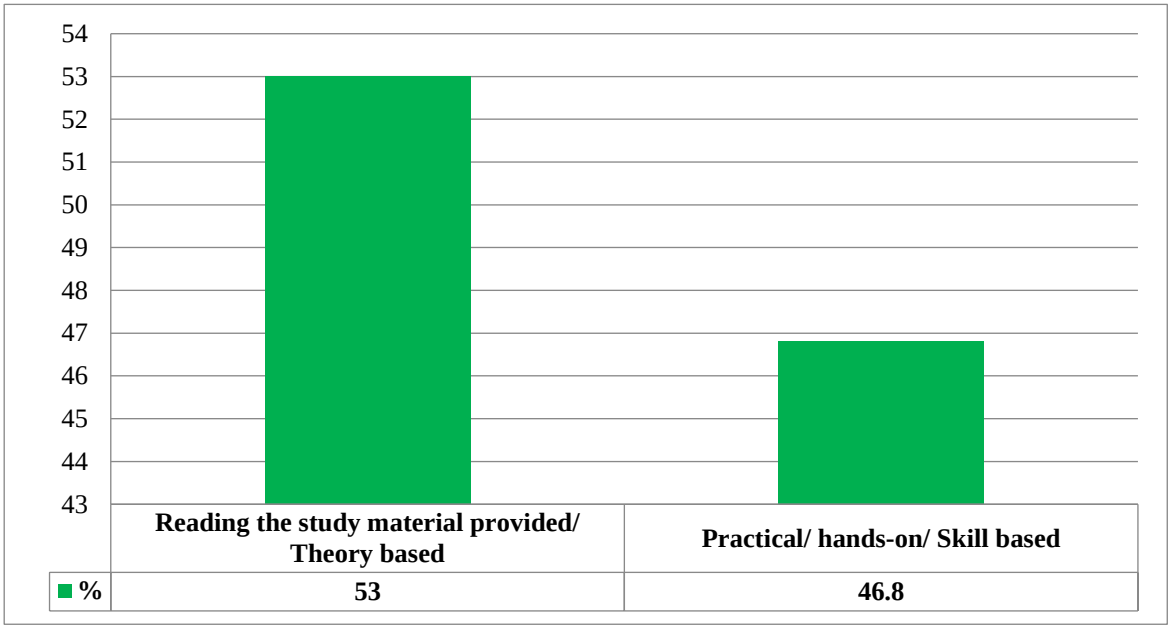

Figure 4: What kind of work is assigned to you?

Students' access, constraints, and experiences with e-learning

During the pandemic lockdown, 78.7% of students rely on mobile data and mobile hotspots to access e-learning resources, while 21.3% have WiFi, broadband, or LAN internet access. Students used their mobile phones to access E-learning in large numbers (*see Figure 5: I gain access to E-learning through*).

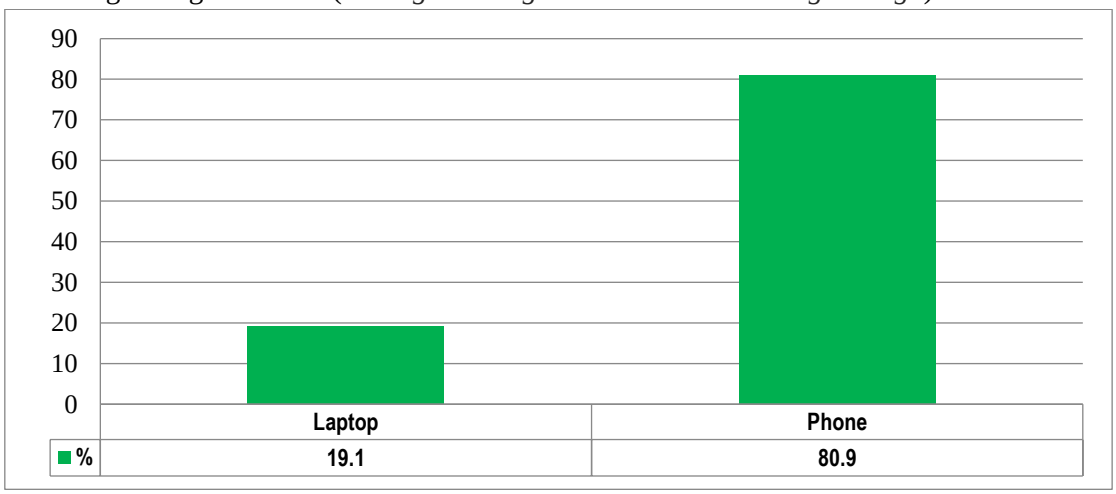

Figure 5: I gain access to E-learning through

Many students struggle to understand the study materials offered to them (*see Figure 6: Do you find the study materials helpful in understanding the subject matter?*). This is mirrored in the fact that 46.8% of students '*Sometimes'* go through the study material provided, 34% '*Most of the time',* and 19.1% '*Always'.*

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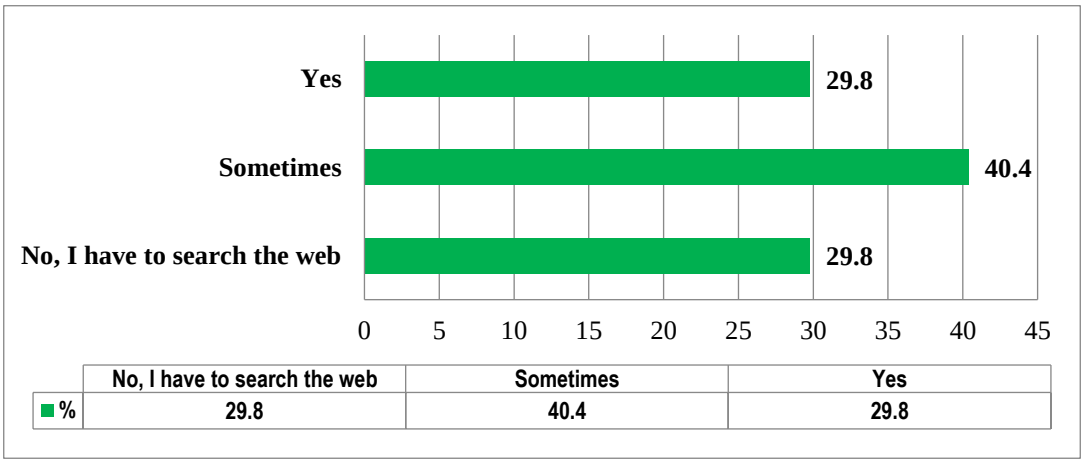

Figure 6: Do you find the study materials helpful in understanding the subject matter?

On average, 76.6% of students reported obtaining 1–5 assignments per week; 14.9% received 6–10 assignments; 6.4% received 10-15 assignments; and 2.1% received more than 15 assignments per week. 74.5% of students complete their assignments on time. The challenges of submitting assigned work on time are represented below (*see Figure 7: What, in general, stops you from completing given work on time?*)

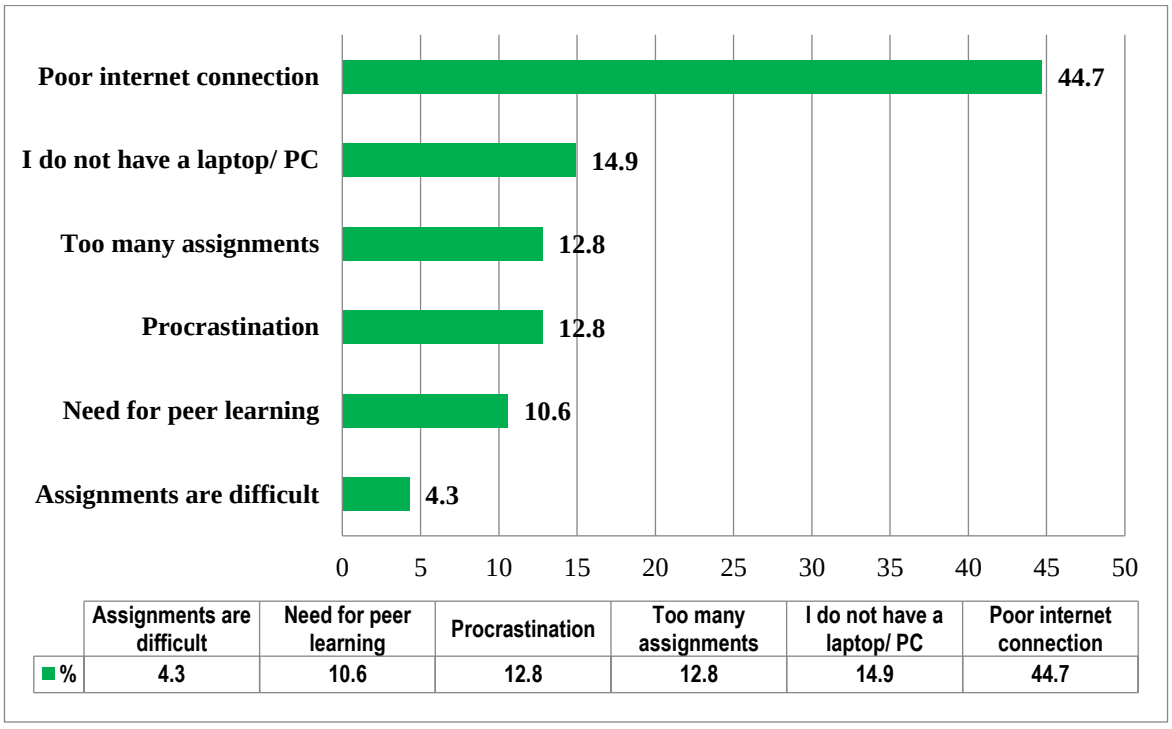

Figure 7: What, in general, stops you from completing given work on time?

Approximately 60% of students are confused about whether they are excited to attend an online class in real time (*see Figure 8: Are you excited to attend an online class?)* Poor network access is one of the many

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obstacles they experience when taking online classes (*see Figure 9: What are the challenges of attending online classes?*)

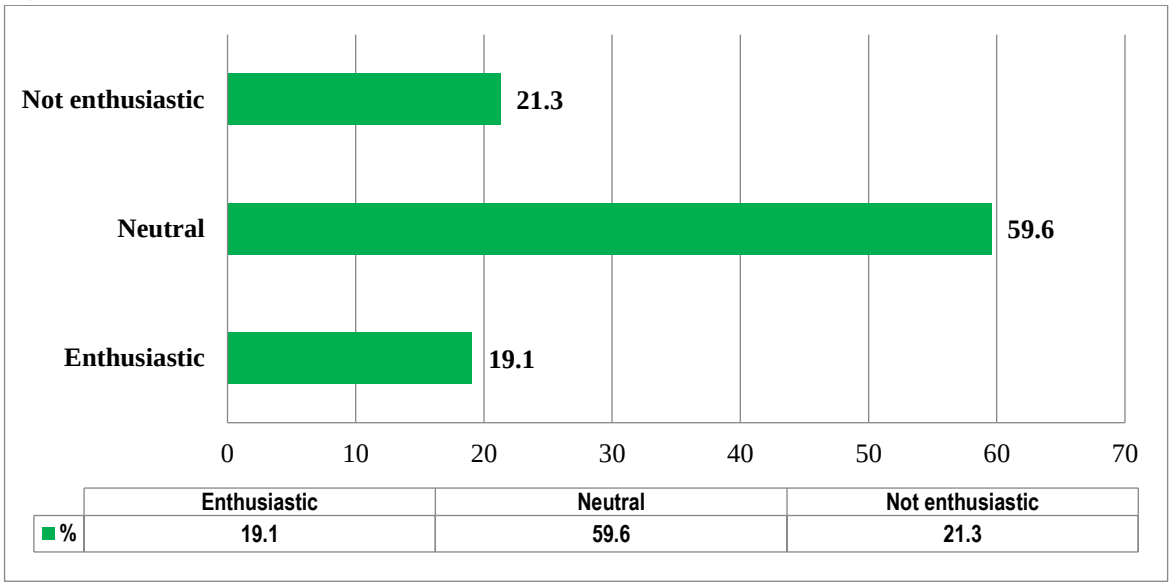

Figure 8: Are you excited to attend an online class?

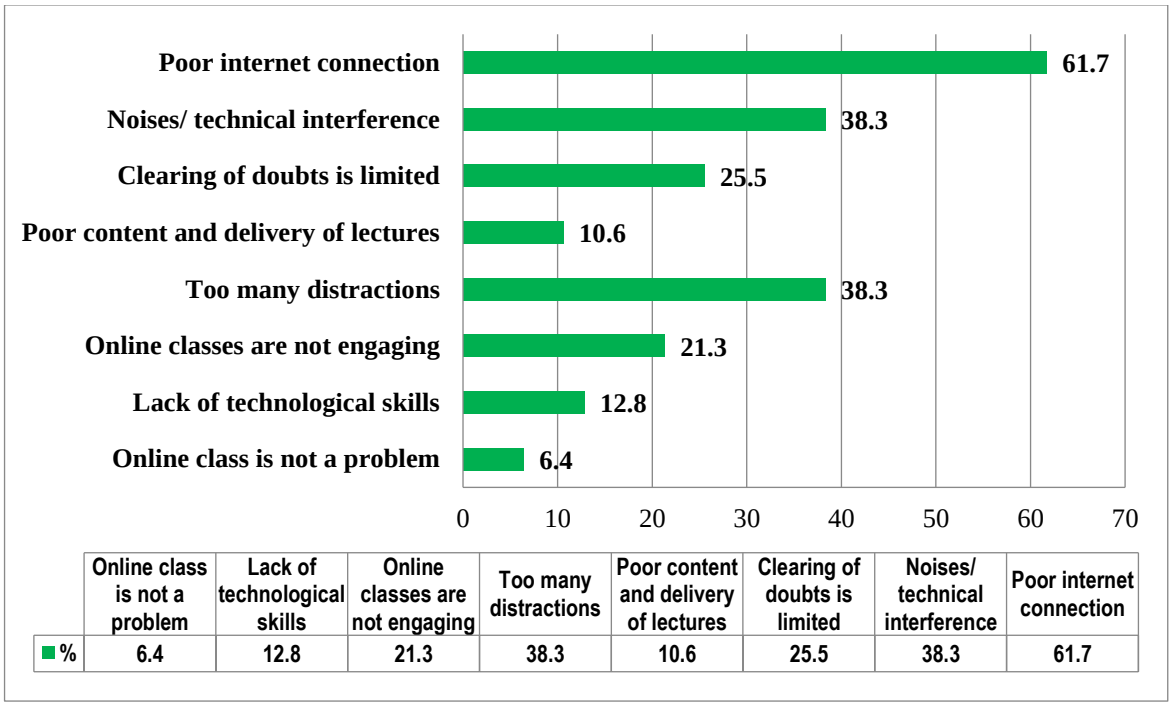

Figure 9: What are the challenges of attending online class?

Of the challenges encountered with the course, 42.6% of all students believe that papers involving field work suffered the most, followed by papers needing collaborative learning (17%) and papers requiring continual teacher assistance and monitoring (14.9%). Theoretical papers, those requiring laboratory experiments (10.6% each), and those in need of library access (4.3%) The majority of students believe that inadequate internet

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connectivity is the most significant impediment to e-learning (*see Figure 10: My experiences with e-learning during the pandemic lockdown*).

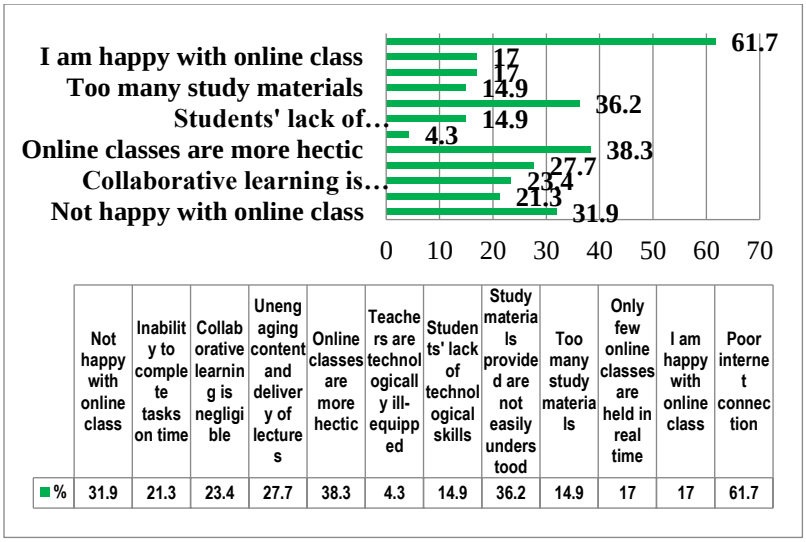

Figure 10: My experience with E-learning during the Pandemic lockdown

Findings revealed that the majority of journalism and mass communication students are not comfortable learning online. (*see Figure 11: On a scale of 1–5 (1–least to 5–most comfortable), how comfortable are you with online learning?*) According to the study, not a single respondent disagrees that e-learning is not problematic. E-learning is a challenge for 70.2% of students, and over 30% are undecided. The related figure (*see Figure 12: The Biggest Challenge to E-learning, according to me*) depicts the e-learning scenario encountered by journalism and mass communication students during the pandemic lockdown.

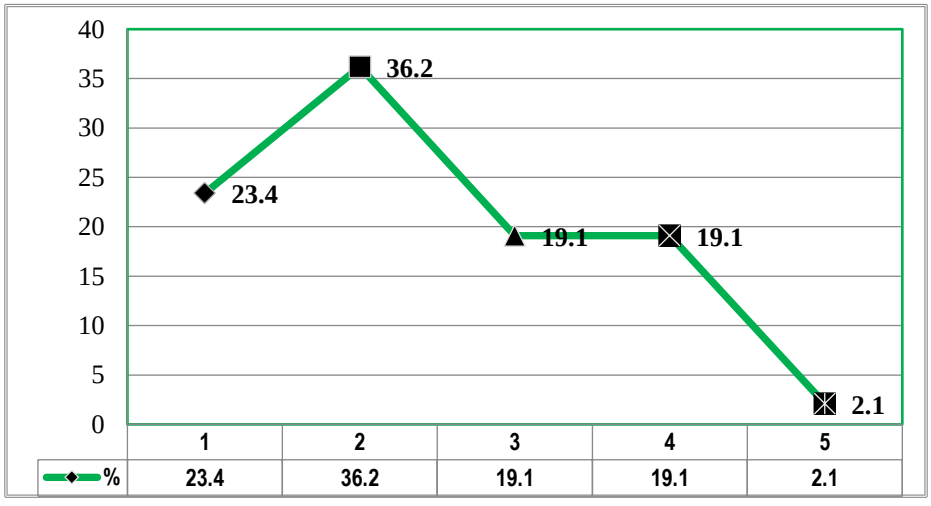

Figure 11: On a scale of 1–5 (1–least to 5– most comfortable), how comfortable are you with online learning?

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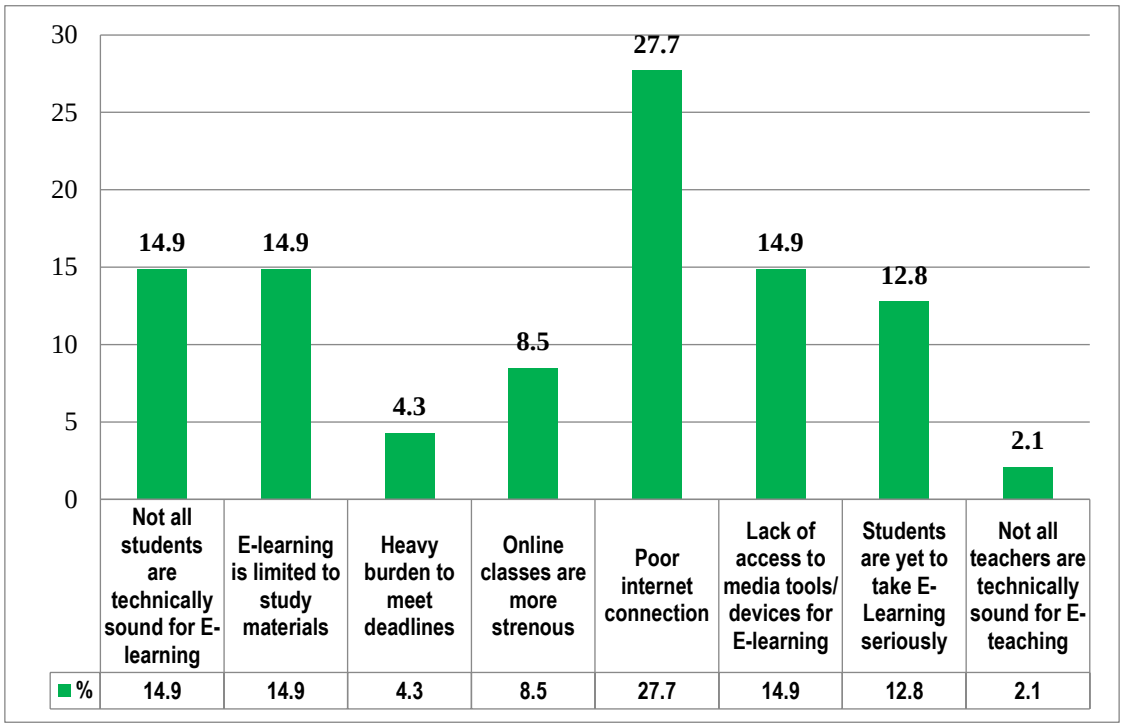

Figure 12: The Biggest Challenge to E-Learning according to me

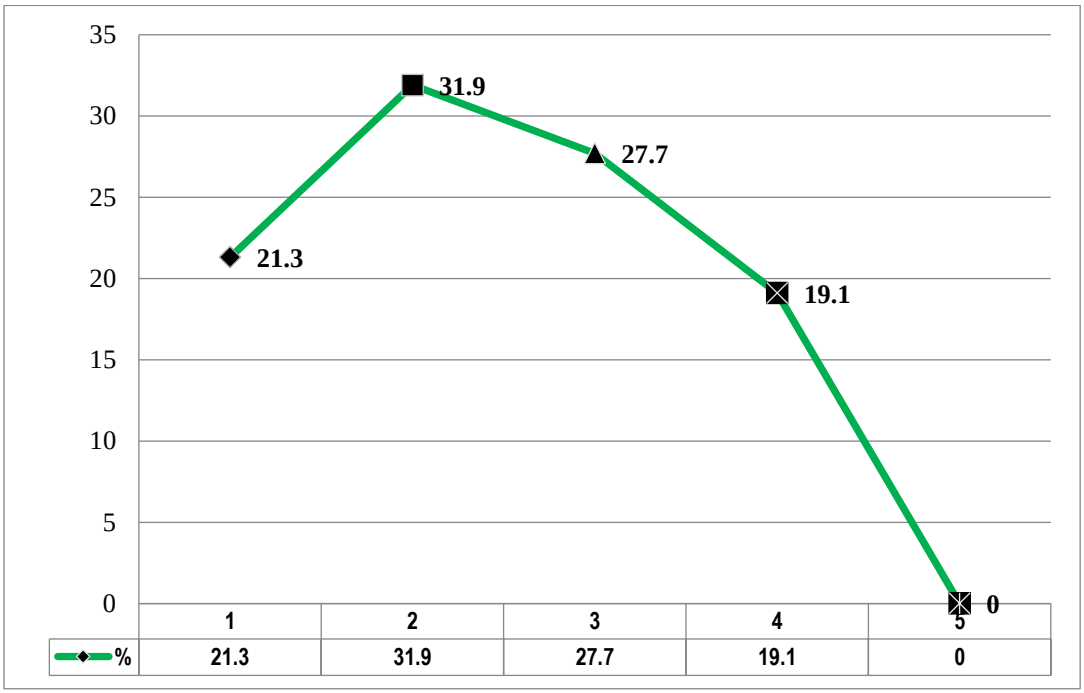

Figure 13: In a scale of 1-5 (1 as the least and 5 as the maximum), How would you evaluate your overall E-learning experience during the Pandemic lockdown?

Numerous journalism and mass communication students experienced low-level e-learning during this pandemic shutdown, as shown in Figure 13 above.

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DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that the move to remote learning has not been easy for journalism and mass communication students. The overall remote learning experience of a majority of the students has been minimal. Even for a professional course such as journalism and mass communication, access to e-learning was assisted by freely available applications such as Google Classroom, Email, and WhatsApp. The use of institutional LMS was significantly low. Smartphones play a significant role as a tool for students to have access to e-learning.

It is interesting to note that the choice of media technologies to satisfy educational demands influenced the selection of educational technology during this time period. The current study supports the notion that simplicity of use and convenience are important elements in their broad use in education and that they are growing more versatile to the point where they are displacing more traditional technologies, as postulated by Flavin (2017) and Gikas and Grant (2013). It also backs up Castells' claim that any technology that is easy to use and gets the job done is more likely to be used than others (Castells, 2015). Furthermore, Rosengren's (1974) elaborative theory of the use and gratification approach to media consumption appears valid in this context. Again, the selection and use of technologies for e-learning during the pandemic lockdown support Castells (2015) and Christensen et al., (2003)' notion that the purpose of technology is constructed, not predetermined, and that information and communication technologies are predominantly receptive to societal use of technology itself (Castells 2015; Christensen, C.M, and Raynor 2003).

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Many elements influence online learning efficiency, the most important of which is the physical environment (Harwood and Asal 2007). The majority of students use mobile data to obtain study materials and participate in online classes. However, e-learning is hampered by a lack of constant internet connectivity, which results in a discrepancy in learning. According to Castells (2009), the global network society is characterised by digital exclusion and inclusion, resulting in inequity. The availability of ICT resources does not guarantee access to education.

This study found that approximately 70% of students do not have an appropriate atmosphere in which to take online lessons. It also discovered that e-learning is limited to presenting students with reading content with minimal possibility for involvement. The teaching-learning process remains identical, with lectures dominating and exams serving as the sole form of assessment. This limits the ability of technology to improve e-learning. Inadequate content and delivery during the lockdown contribute to pupils' lack of excitement and participation. Finally, technology is restricted by the existing educational system. The study backs up Flavin's (2017) notion that when confronted with the existing instructional system, technology becomes consumed by it (Flavin 2017).

CONCLUSION

The pandemic's closure of educational institutions has had a negative influence on education. The majority of students and teachers of journalism and mass communication struggled with e-learning and were unprepared for the transition. Papers that require field-based and collaborative learning suffered a major blow. Though technology-assisted learning is the new way forward, mere access to technology is not enough. Warschauer (2003) notes that there must also be a balance of social and institutional resources to facilitate its utilisation. Recognising how to efficiently employ technology in education is more important than merely determining which technology to use. As society takes into account the requirements, values, and preferences of its users, technology is shaped in a significant way. As we near approach the ultimate stage of man's expansion, it becomes clear that the medium

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through which technology operates is critical to its success; indeed, the "*medium is the message*" (McLuhan, 1964). (3151 words)

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Declaration of conflict of interest

The Author has nothing to declare

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