Hope and Typography
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Evolving to survive the 'new normal' of teaching and learning Typography during COVID-19.

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Abstract: The focus of this paper is to have a comparative study of learning behavior between the second and the final year BFA Applied Art students of Rachana Sansad College of Applied Art & Craft, Mumbai. Based on an online survey done with 66 students (56 students of the Second year and 10 students of Final year elective Typography) in April 2021. The objective of this paper is to understand the hurdles experienced by students which has an impact on effective learning and to discuss the contribution of a teacher to improve the online learning experience.

To teach practical subjects like Typography the teacher needs a lot of inputs from the students to understand their needs on an online platform. The study of Typography must be methodological, as it is the most integral part of Graphic Design and has an influence on the students' overall understanding of form and layout as well.

Key words: Typography, Covid-19, pedagogy, new normal, Online Education

1. Introduction

For the one last year, the world is perpetually in a shutdown state. The World Health Organization has declared Covid-19 as a pandemic, and it has forced work from home for many, including educational institutions. In India the first lockdown (From March 2020) was without any warning, before one could analyze the given situation, everyone was already learning online in the new academic year. But the second lockdown was much anticipated and everyone had a good experience of a lockdown.

If we look at the past there are a few examples that give us some hope. Andrew P. Kelly and Rooney Columbus in their research article, "College in the Time of Coronavirus CHALLENGES" state,

"At the onset of the global outbreak of corona- virus, writers searched for any silver lining amid escalating uncertainty and tragedy. One source of optimism: Past plagues have given rise to some of the most important works of literature and science. William Shakespeare penned several seminal plays—King Lear, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra—during the bubonic plague in the early 1600s. Similarly, Isaac Newton's annus mirabilis ("year of wonders") occurred during another outbreak in the mid-1600s, when he pioneered scientific understanding of light and optics, invented early calculus, and theorized motion and gravity—all from his childhood home after Cambridge shuttered temporarily." (Kelley 2020)

The achievements mentioned by these meritorious people are extraordinary. We cannot ignore the fact that they were geniuses. It tells us a story of a dark cloud with a silver lining. Compared to these intellectuals our achievements are small but not negligible.

The transition from physical teaching to virtual was not easy. Initially, the students struggled with a lot of issues. Many students did not have art material in stock at home. Many outstation students were stuck in Mumbai due to the lockdown. They lived alone for a long period. Most of them did not have digital devices like compatible mobile phones or laptops. They also had to share the devices with their siblings. Network connection issues, mainly the rural students who went back to their hometown after the lockdown faced this issue. They had to come far away from their home to get the network. They or their family members were detected covid-19 positive. Mental health issues faced by the students. Students with small houses and many family members had to struggle for space and solitude at home for learning. It is absolutely important to have space to concentrate in the class. The students had to help in the domestic work also as all the household help was stopped during this period. This was an added responsibility that never bothered them earlier.

2. Methodology

An observational, descriptive study based on a questionnaire designed was conducted amongst 66 students, 56 students of the Second Year, and 10 students of Final year elective Typography studying at Rachana Sansad College of Applied Art & Craft, Mumbai in April 2021.

The questionnaire was prepared in the form of Google forms and the link was sent to the students through the mail. The questionnaire designed for the students consisted of 22 questions regarding the socio-demographic characteristics and questions to assess whether they like studying online and what are the reasons for their like and dislike about online classes.

All the participants were from the 18-21 years age group. 48 female and 18 male Under Graduate students participated.

2.2 Questionnaire and Results
Following are the 22 questions asked to the students with their responses.

Sr. No.	Question	Yes	No	Sometimes /maybe
1.	Are you enthusiastic about attending online lectures?	26	7	33
2.	Do you attend online classes regularly?	53	9	4
3.	Guidelines are provided (ex. how to use relevant online tools) before starting online lectures by your lecturer	49	13	4
4.	Frustration and lack of interest in learning while being in lockdown	28	5	33
5.	Do you get enough space to work at home?	37	4	25
6.	Online lectures are effective than traditional/live classroom lectures?	5	23	38
7.	Gained experience of learning in a new online environment.	29	1	36
8.	Are you happy about the student-teacher interaction during online teaching & learning	34	11	20
9.	The home environment is suitable for participating in online lectures?	21	6	39
10.	Possibility of distractions from other family members during online lectures?	32	3	31
11.	Do you think the class teachings will be helpful for the growth of your career?	43	1	22
12.	Were there any COVID-positive cases in your family?	34	32	_

13.	Were you COVID-positive during the session 2020-21	14	52	_
14.	Do you think the lockdown was good in a way?	28	12	26
15.	Do you interact during the class discussion?	25	7	32

Apart from the objective-type questions, there were few subjective questions too.

Question 17. Reason for remaining absent:

Response:

1.	Health	50
2.	Network issue	8
3.	Laziness/boredom	4
4.	To cut down excess screen time	1
5.	Work not ready	1
6.	Other distractions like social media and Netflix	2

Question 18. Which device do you use to log into your classroom?

Response

1.	Mobile	28
2.	Laptop/ Desktop	30
3.	Ipad/ Tablet	8

Question 19. How did you cope up with the COVID positive situation in your family? 34 Students responded they had a positive case in the family.

1.	Faced the situation with a positive attitude/ meditation/ yoga/ family cooperation. Kept on doing college work simultaneously.	29
2.	Took a break from assignments.	1
3.	Went into depression	1
4.	Distracted myself with Netflix and social media and focus on other things.	3

Question 20. Do you think the lockdown was good in a way? Can you justify your answer?

1.	Learned new skills, like software and drawing skills, reading, share market and management studies	25
2.	Got more 'me time' and family time too.	6
3.	It was absolutely not good as we need lot of guidance from teachers in our field.	4
4.	Missing friends and college environment and college activities apart from studies, like annual exhibition, sports day etc.	6
5.	It is keeping us safe.	10
7.	Not able to maintain a healthy lifestyle, because of restrictions on going out and gyms are also closed.	5
8.	Got a break from traveling.	8
9.	Trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle. No junk food/ street food.	2

Question 21. Do you interact during class discussion? What is the reason for not interacting? 25 students said yes, 7 said no and 32 students said sometimes.

1.	Lack of self-confidence	3
2.	Fear of being judged	6
3.	Afraid of talking in front of family members.	4
4.	Introvert/ shy	13
5.	Social anxiety	12
6.	I participate actively	26
7.	Nil	2

2.3 Observations and Discussion

From the above data, it is evident that the majority of students do believe in the education system and truly want to continue their education. Financial losses and health issues could not stop them. The majority of the students living in the metro city for sure have small houses, the data shows only 4% of the students have no space issue at home. Rest all are struggling to adjust for space.

Despite having so many difficulties the students, this year gave some spectacular results in their classwork. Every year in the final year the students have to design a

font (Roman/ Devanagari) as it is a part of their syllabus. Usually, the students develop the design from scribbles and finally draw it on Illustrator.

It was just because of the lockdown students had ample time, internet connection, and laptops to explore the trial version of Fontlab Studio at home. Usually, college would have been a place where there would be many obstacles like traveling time, friends, canteen breaks, lack of Wi-Fi connection, etc. The students learned the software on their own with various YouTube tutorials and blogs. This made them design their font in a workable format. They published it as a .ttf file and used it in their designs and presentations. The students learned collaborative learning with their classmates. They shared ideas and insights about their design process which helped others too.
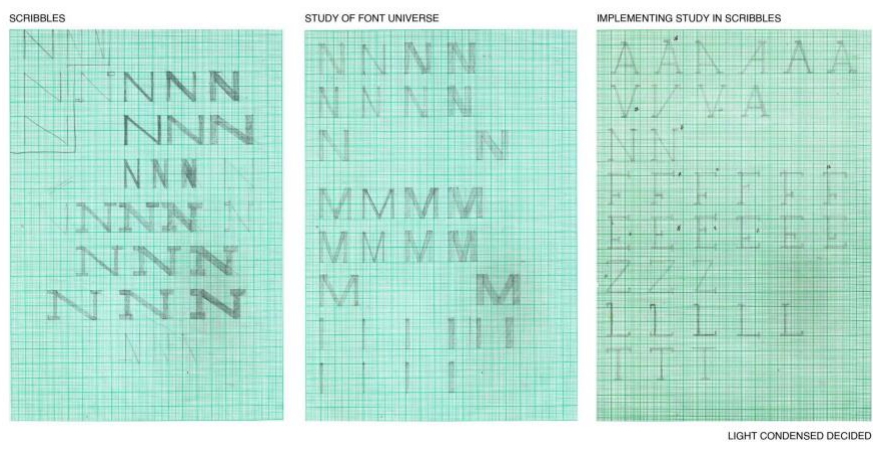
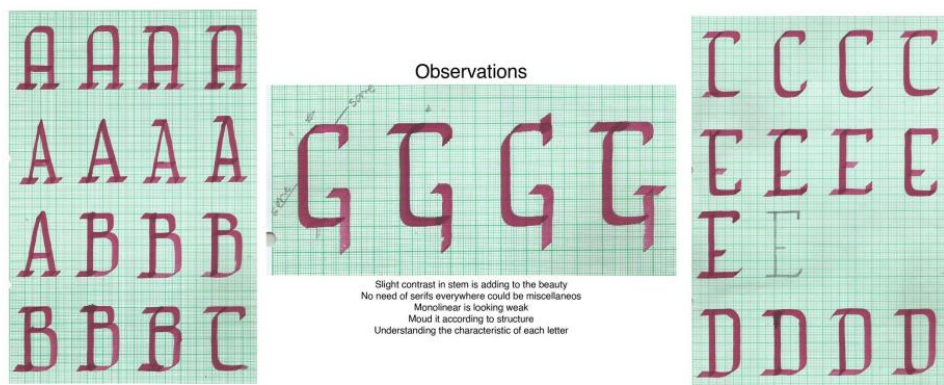Figure.1 Scribbles to finalise the character of the font.
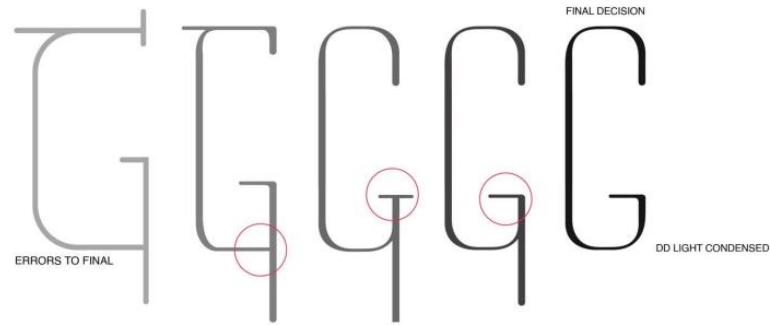

Figure. 2 Explorations with a calligraphy tool.

FINAL DECISION

GGGGG

ERRORS TO FINAL   DD LIGHT CONDENSED

Figure. 3 Working on the design of each letter.

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
PQRSTUVWXYZ
1234567890
.,?!:&

Figure.4 The final font (Name of the font-DD Condensed) designed on Fontlab Studio
by Ms. Disha Desai.

The objective of teaching typography to the second year and final year is very different from each other. The former stresses more upon learning the basics and understanding typography as a form, its expressive qualities, experimenting with new ideas, and using grids. The latter focuses on using Typography as a tool to communicate effectively through projects and designing serious typefaces. Yet, few things remain common in both, the contribution of a teacher and the efforts of the student. The teacher-student interaction and students interacting with their peers is what makes the quality of education more hybrid and impactful.

To teach practical subjects like Typography the teacher needs a lot of inputs from the students to understand their needs on an online platform. The study of Typography must be methodological, as it is the most integral part of Graphic Design and has an influence on the students' overall understanding of form and layout as well.

Due to the pandemic, the students were allowed to use digital media for many subjects and it proved to be a blessing in disguise. They learned new techniques and understood

the importance of self-study. The students who have faced this lockdown have become more self-dependent.

Figure.5 Second-year students' work exploring experimental Typography and grid system.

In the beginning teachers did face the problems of students not responding, it surely is a major turnoff for any teacher. But eventually teachers figured out various techniques to engage the students, like asking quizzes, making them present their work through screen

sharing, building confidence by engaging with the students, being available to them. This had a negative impact on the boundaries we have set as teachers. But I believe this is a transition phase, we all will learn and evolve to survive the situation.

4. Conclusions

Online Education is keeping the students and faculty safe at home. The flexibility and convenience of online classes are an advantage. But network connectivity issues in rural areas make it a challenge for students to participate in online learning initiatives who due to the lockdown have migrated to their native place.
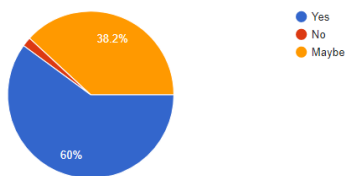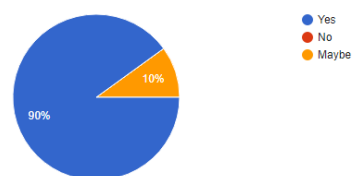
Figure.6 Responses of SYBFA

Figure.7 Responses of Final year students.

The results indicated that the majority of the students (74.5%) are attending the online classes regularly during this pandemic, despite being not enthusiastic about attending them. Based on the survey it is evident that online education is different than the physical one and students do think that online education is going to be helpful to shape their future and career. 76.5% of students agreed that the class teachings will be helpful for the growth in their career. That is a very positive sign, though it is a time of crisis and students are facing numerous problems in continuing their education, they are still hopeful. Somehow the pandemic has become a part of our life. In and all, the quality of work in online education is not compromised. Students have gotten to learn more things. This does not make up for the physical classrooms. We must go back to college soon.

It is needless to say that online education is going to be a major part of our future education system. But slowly we all are getting a hold of this situation. Adapting to the 'new normal' was slow but a very important shift in everyone's life. This shift gave us power over the uncontrollable. If you cannot change it adapt to it, is the most important lesson of survival our generation has ever learned.

Acknowledgments

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