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Research Paper

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the Context of Online Education

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ABSTRACT

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a renowned theory known as an essential component of motivation. Students will only reach their highest academic potential when all their needs are fulfilled. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the nature of education changed drastically. Schools shifted to the online mode of education. The present study aimed to identify the fulfilment of needs in online classes on the basis of 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'. It examined the relationship between these needs being met and the level of understanding in online classes. A convenience sampling method was used to send out the survey to students studying in private schools which follow an Indian educational board's curriculum (CBSE/ISC/ICSE). Sixty-four students from Delhi-NCR responded to the survey. A positive correlation was found between the fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the level of understanding in online classes. Differences in the fulfilment of needs of male and female students and younger and older students were also observed. This paper can be used in making curriculums for online classes while considering the different needs required by the student.

The pandemic has had an unprecedented effect on global industries and sectors. Due to lockdowns and other restrictions implemented by governments all over the world, remote learning became the norm. Over 100 countries implemented nationwide closures and lockdowns, impacting more than half of the world's student population ("COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response", 2020). Schools shifted to the online learning mode, and due to the digital divide, the equitability of education was reduced. This was the first-time online classes conducted in India on a massive scale. Teachers and students alike were not familiar with the process of learning taking place online.

Over the last few years, digital education in India has been evolving rapidly and changing how students obtain an education. In fact, the digital education industry in the country is projected to be a $4 billion industry by 2026 with an annual Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 17% (Markets, 2022). This growth has also been apparent through the ed-tech start-up boom in India. The pandemic and the government's increasing policy initiative surrounding digital education have facilitated the online education mode in India. Policies like the New Education Policy released before the pandemic has emphasised digitising the

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education sector. Education as an industry had been going through massive digital transformations pre-pandemic. The pandemic acted as a catalyst in this process of digital transformation. As remote learning becomes popular, it is expected that pure or hybrid online education will be the norm in the future.

Online learning has many ramifications on a student's mental and physical health ("Mental Health Effects of Online Learning", 2021). It has been seen that online classes cause fatigue, students suffer from social isolation due to the lack of interaction with their peers, and they experience increased stress and anxiety. It has also been noticed that students lack motivation and inspiration during online classes (Stringer, 2020).

Certain needs need to be fulfilled irrespective of whether the mode of learning is online or offline. Motivation is a crucial force behind a student's learning. If a student is not motivated, then the chances of them learning well are less than a motivated student. Interpersonal relationships and emotional well-being are essential for student learning (American Psychological Association, Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015).

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has rightly established the theory of human motivation. It talks about how the fulfilment of certain needs leads to greater motivation for any individual to perform (Maslow, A.H., 1954). Maslow spoke about how when physiological, safety, belongingness, and esteem needs are fulfilled, a stage called self-actualisation is reached. It is at the point of self-actualisation that a person has the most motivation. In a study conducted by Wu, 2012, it was found that there is a linear relationship between Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and incentives to learn ("COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response", 2020). Thus, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be applied in educational psychology to map a student's motivation. A report by Burleson and Thoron, 2017, found that fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs leads to student academic success (Burleson & Thoron, 2014). This theory has been elaborated upon in the study conducted by Freitas and Leonard, 2011 which was conducted for in-person learning (Freitas & Leonard, 2011).

This theory has been elaborately explored in traditional in-person learning. However, after the covid pandemic, it is essential that the implications of this theory be seen in online learning as well. The fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs can be correlated with the level of learning in online classes. Students' environments have been very different when they attend classes online compared to offline ones. Sinha, 1977 and Bronfenbrenner, 1979 have both spoken about the atmosphere of a child; however, they both took into account a child who goes to school in person. They spoke about how their environment included both their homes and schools. In comparison, for a student who attends class online, their environment includes their home. So, the needs which need to be fulfilled are different.

Maslow's Hierarchy in the Context of Online Education

Self Actualization

Esteem Needs
(Recognition of hard work, time for self-reflection, encouragement to take risks, equal opportunities)

Social Needs
(Interactions with friends, group projects, access to role models. one-on-one attention)

Safety Needs
(Facilitating environment, comfort level, no cyber bullying, access to school counselor, freedom of expressing and sharing)

Physiological Needs
(Adequate sleep, breaks between learning for drinking water and to eat)
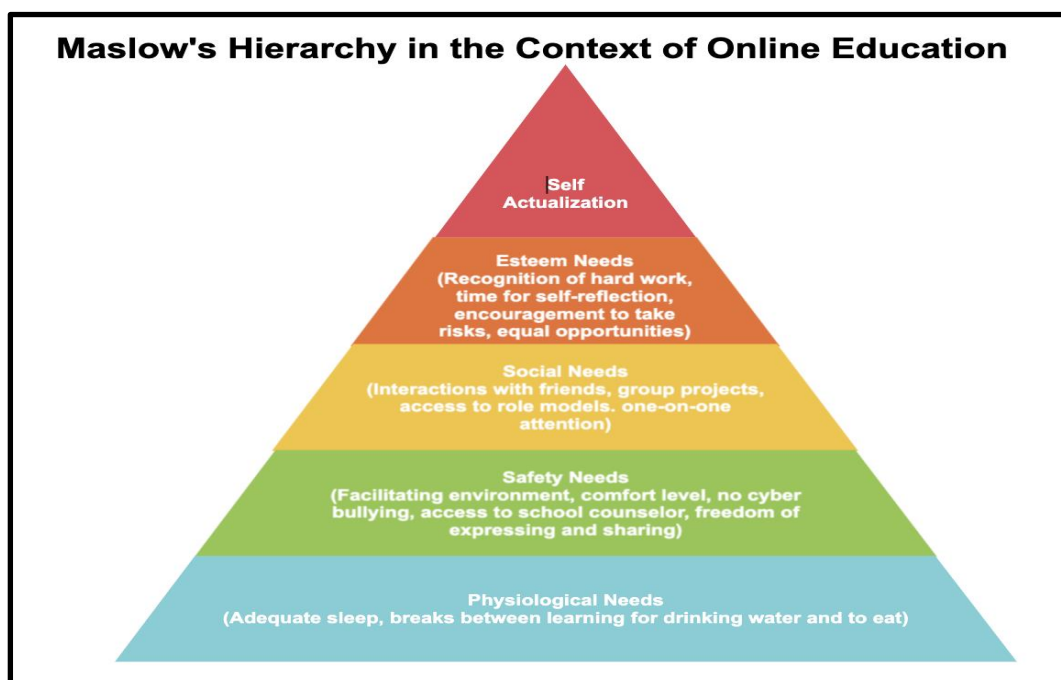
Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in the Context of Online Education (Kline, n.d.)
(Guditus, 2013)

When Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is applied in the context of online education, the needs are a bit different. The needs of a student attending online classes are as follows:

- *Physiological needs* include proper food and water breaks, proper sleep schedules, clean clothes, safe and sound learning environment.
- *Safety needs* include physical and mental safety. Safety needs also include an environment where students feel free to share ideas and ask questions without being teased by their classmates or reprimanded by the teacher. They also include safety from all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying.
- *Belonging needs* include the presence of advisors, adult role models, friendship groups and peers. Students need to identify with their peers, need to feel that they fit in and must not feel alienated.
- *Self-esteem needs* include positive classroom culture, which means positive feedback, time for self-reflection, encouragement to take risks and recognition of achievement.
- At the *Self-Actualisation level*, the student can learn at their best potential. Self-actualisation becomes the students' motivating factor. The student will now proactively look for ways to fulfil potential for learning and seek fulfilment. They will strive for higher learning goals and seek to achieve them.

There was a knowledge gap in the industry. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has not been applied in the school setting before, especially to the online mode of school education. However, after the pandemic, it is essential to look at the hierarchy from the perspective of online classes as well. As technology improves, remote learning is going to be even more popular. Thus, it is essential for educators to build pedagogy and teach students keeping in mind the needs of the students in an online classroom.

METHODOLOGY

Aim of the Study

The study explores the relationship between the fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the level of understanding students have in online classes. It further analyses the implications of this relationship.

Research Design

This research was a combination of quantitative and exploratory. The independent variable in the research was the fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and the dependent variable was the level of understanding in online classes in comparison to offline classes.

Consent and Ethical Issues

All ethical considerations were followed for the current study. The study was voluntary to participate in. No participant was forced or put under duress to answer the questionnaire. Informed consent was taken from all the participants who answered the questionnaire for data collection. The confidentiality and privacy of the respondents were maintained. No data has been and will be disclosed to a third party. No identifiers such as name, school's name, or email address were disclosed in the article or any publication. Ethical guidelines of research were followed.

Sample

A convenience sampling method was used to send the questionnaire around. It was sent online through various social media platforms. The sample consisted of sixty-four respondents studying in private schools that followed the curriculum given by an Indian educational board (CBSE/ISC/ICSE). The respondents identified as male or female. The male-to-female ratio was 7:9. They were between the age of 14 and 18 and were studying in high school (9th - 12th grade). The ratio of 9th and 10th graders to 11th and 12th graders was 15:17. All participants belonged to Delhi NCR and had sufficient knowledge of English. The respondents belonged to well-off families. They belonged to different religions.

Instruments Used

The Questionnaire Survey Method was used for data collection. The survey instructed all respondents to fill out their demographic data (age, gender, class) and information about their school (location, mode of teaching, the platform used to teach, and educational board followed). Then the questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section analysed the level of learning in online classes compared to offline classes. The second section analysed the fulfilment of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Both sections had three-point opinion questions (Agree, Neutral, and Disagree). In some questions, the option "agree" pointed toward the needs being fulfilled or a higher level of understanding. On the other hand, in some questions, "disagree" pointed toward that. The answers were valued:
1. if the response pointed towards needs being fulfilled or a higher level of understanding
2. if the response was neutral
3. if the response pointed towards needs not being fulfilled or a lower level of understanding

The highest score in section 1, which analysed the level of understanding, is 9, whereas the lowest score is 3. A higher score indicates lower understanding in online classes compared to offline classes.

The highest score in section 2, which analysed the fulfilment of needs, is 39, whereas the lowest score is 13. A higher score indicates fewer needs fulfilled while the student attended online classes.

Data Collection Procedure
Data was collected through a questionnaire made on Microsoft Forms. The responses were then converted into a spreadsheet where they were enumerated. Statistical analysis was conducted on the enumerated data, a correlation between the two variables was observed, and the results were graphed.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics, such as range, mean, median, mode and standard deviation, and inferential statistics, such as independent-sample t-tests and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, were carried out.

To check the internal consistency of the survey, *Cronbach's alpha* was conducted. The Cronbach alpha value was found to be 0.83, which depicts that the survey is fairly reliable.
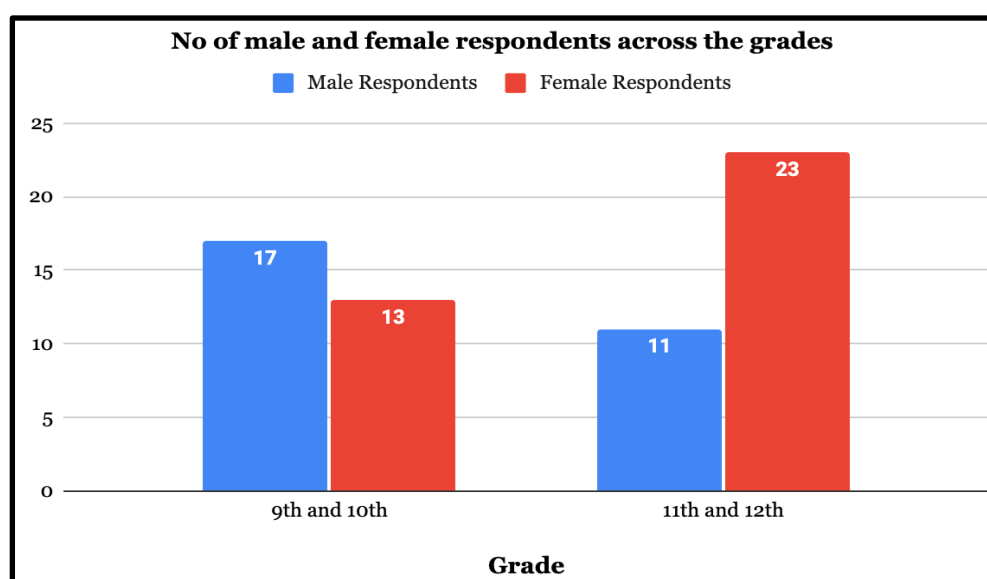

Figure 2: Number of Male and Female Respondents from different classes/grades [N=64]

Figure 2 shows that the number of male respondents (i.e., 17) was greater than the number of female respondents (i.e., 13) from 9th and 10th grade, whereas the number of female respondents (i.e., 23) was greater than the number of male respondents (i.e. 11) from 11th and 12th grade.

Table 1 Mean, Range, Mode, Median and Standard Deviation on the measure of understanding and learning in online classes in comparison to offline classes and fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Students in Online Classes [N=64]

	Level of Understanding	**Fulfilment of Needs**
Mean	7.875	26.25
Range	6	26
Mode	9	26
Median	8	26
Standard Deviation	1.44	6.25

Table 2 Mean, Range, Mode, Median and Standard Deviation on the measure of understanding in online classes in comparison to offline classes and fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Male and Female Respondents [N=64]

	Female Respondents		**Male Respondents**	
	Understanding in Online Classes	*Fulfilment of Needs*	*Understanding in Online Classes*	*Fulfilment of Needs*
Mean	7.89	27.64	7.86	24.46
Range	6	24	5	24
Mode	9	31	9	26
Median	8.5	29	8	25
SD	1.49	6.11	1.41	6.07

Table 2 depicts the descriptive statistics conducted on male and female respondents. The mean score (M= 7.89, SD= 1.49) of female respondents is similar to the mean score (M= 7.85, SD= 1.41) of male respondents under the understanding of online classes. Thus, on average, there was not a difference between female and male understanding in online classes. Both genders understood better in offline classes in comparison to online classes. The mean score (M= 27.64, SD= 6.11) of female respondents is greater than the mean score (M= 24.46, SD= 6.07) of male respondents under the fulfilment of needs in online classes. Therefore, female respondents' needs were less fulfilled than male respondents.

Table 3 Mean, Range, Mode, Median and Standard Deviation on the measure of understanding in online classes in comparison to offline classes and fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Younger and Older Students [N=64]

	9th and 10th Graders		**11th and 12th Graders**	
	Understanding in Online Classes	*Fulfilment of Needs*	*Understanding in Online Classes*	*Fulfilment of Needs*
Mean	7.83	23.37	7.85	28.97
Range	4	21	6	26
Mode	9	21	9	34
Median	8	22.5	9	31
SD	1.26	5.27	1.59	6.05

Table 3 depicts the descriptive statistics conducted on respondents across various grades. The mean score (M= 7.83, SD= 1.26) of 9th and 10th graders is similar to the mean score (M= 7.85, SD= 1.59) of 11th and 12th graders under the understanding of online classes. Thus, on average, there was not a difference between their understanding in online classes. Both genders understood better in offline classes in comparison to online classes. The mean score (M= 23.37, SD= 5.27) of 9th and 10th graders is lesser than the mean score (M= 28.97, SD= 6.05) of 11th and 12th graders under the fulfilment of needs in online classes. Therefore, the needs of 11th and 12th graders were less fulfilled than male respondents.

Figure 3: Range of scores of male and female respondents under the fulfilment of needs [N=64]
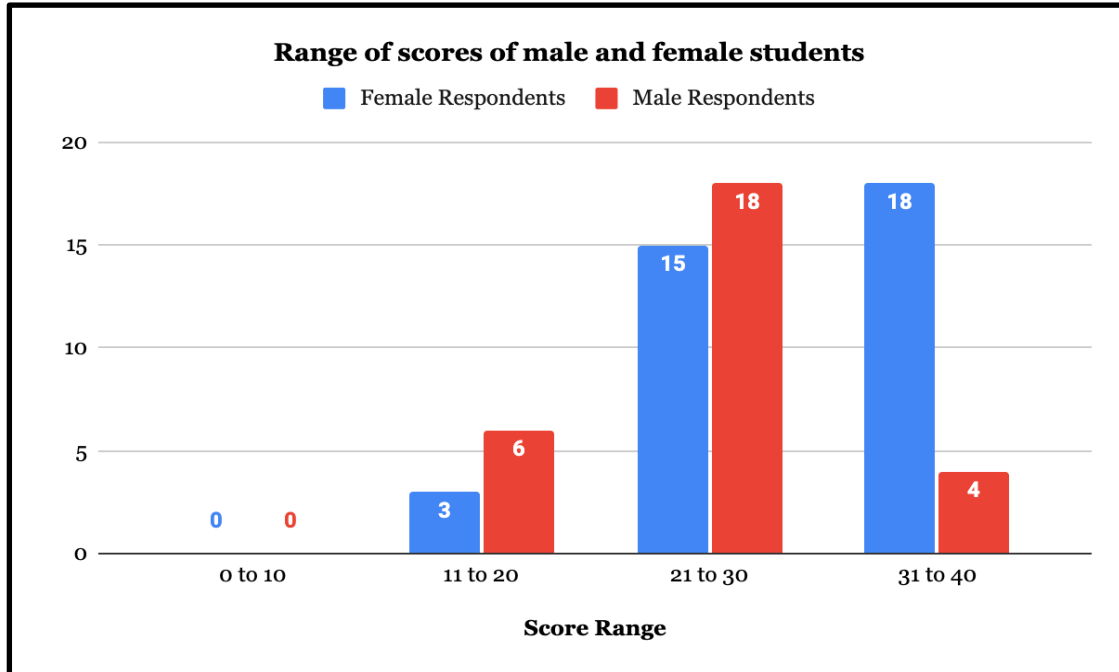

Figure 3 shows that the number of female respondents (i.e., 18) is much more than that of male respondents (i.e., 4), whose very few needs were fulfilled.

Figure 4: Range of scores of respondents studying in different classes (9th and 10th Grade, 11th and 12th Grade) under the fulfilment of needs. [N=64]
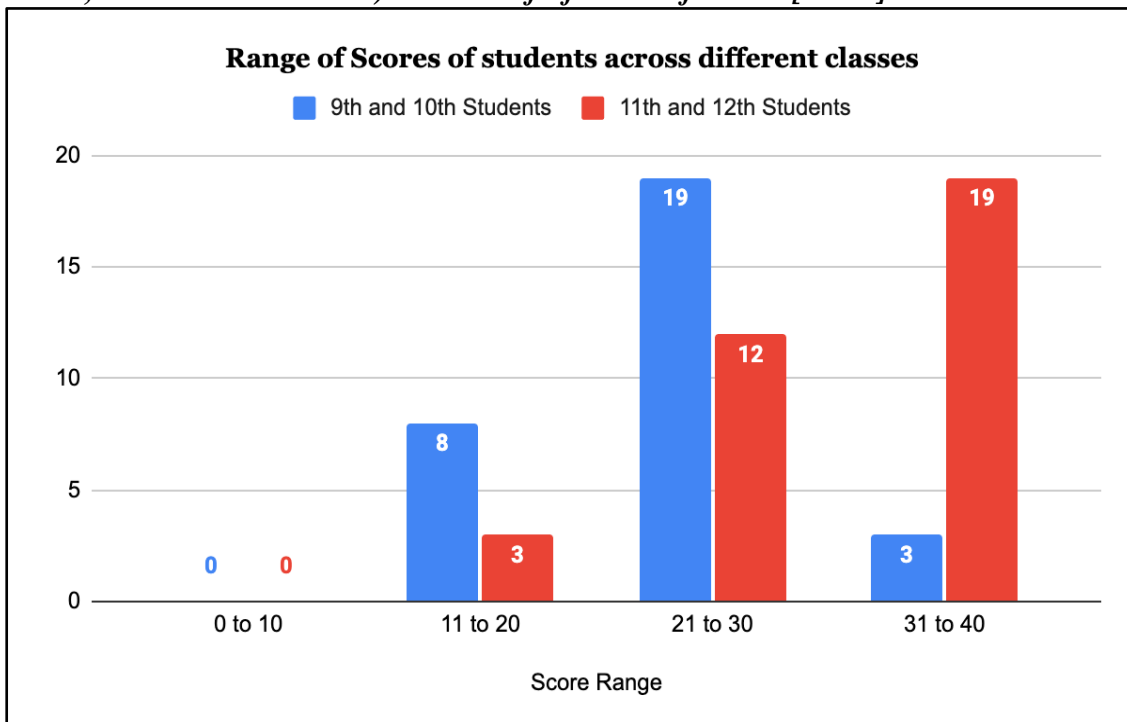

Figure 4 shows that the number of 11th and 12th graders (i.e., 19) is much more than that of 9th and 10th graders (i.e., 3), whose very few needs were fulfilled.

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r-value) between Understanding in Online Classes and Fulfillment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (N=64)

	Understanding in Online Classes	**Fulfilment of Needs**
Understanding in Online Classes	1	0.33*
Fulfilment of Needs	0.33*	1

*Note p<0.05**

Table 4 highlights a moderately-strong positive correlation (r=0.33) between a student's fulfilment of needs and their understanding in online classes. The p-value is 0.008, indicating that there is only a 0.8% chance that this correlation was found by chance.

Table 5: Summary of t-Test Analysis between male and female respondents on variables measuring the fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in online classes (N=64)

Source	**Female Respondents**		**Male Respondents**		**t**	**p**
	M	SD	M	SD		
Fulfilment of Needs	27.64	6.11	24.46	6.07	2.07	0.041

*Note p<0.05**

Table 5 depicts that Female Respondents (M= 27.64, SD= 6.11) reported significantly lower levels of fulfilment of needs in comparison to Male Respondents (M= 24.46, SD= 6.07), t(58)= 2.07, p< .05.

Despite female respondents' needs being less fulfilled in comparison to male respondents', they understood as much as male respondents in online classes. It was observed that female students pay more attention to online learning than male students. Female students also are more likely to follow their teachers' instructors (Liu et al., 2021). This can be attributed to higher emotional intelligence in females in comparison to males (Mayer et al., 1999) and higher emotional self-regulation in females (Haron et al., 2010).

Table 6: Summary of T-test Analysis between younger student and older student respondents on variables measuring the fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in online classes (N=64)

Source	**9th - 10th Graders**		**11th - 12th Graders**		**t**	**p**
	M	SD	M	SD		
Fulfilment of Needs	22.37	5.27	28.97	6.06	-3.95	0.0002

*Note p<0.05**

Table 6 depicts Older Student Respondents (M= 28.97, SD= 6.06) reported significantly lower levels of fulfilment of needs in comparison to Younger Student Respondents (M= 23.37, SD= 5.28), t(61)= -3.96, p< .05.

Although older students' (11th and 12th grade) needs were less fulfilled in comparison to younger students' (9th and 10th grade), they understood almost as much as the younger students in online classes. It was found that high school students are much more stressed in

comparison to 8th-grade students ("Increased Stress Levels Among Middle and High School Students Revealed | Emerson Health", 2016). This stress added to the stress due to the pandemic led to the unfulfillment of the needs of older students in comparison to younger students (American Psychology Association, 2020) ("Student stress during the pandemic", 2021).

All Indian educational institutions were shut down abruptly in March 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic ("Govt announces closure of all educational establishments across India till March 31", 2020). The public had not anticipated this step and was unsure of how education was going to continue. A month later, very few schools started online learning. News reports of how the transition to online learning was abrupt and very sudden and how students were unaccustomed to online learning started coming in. Additionally, practical learning such as sports, lab work and manual skills were not being taught online ("Online learning forfeits the very purpose of education", 2020) (Richars, 2020).

When online classes were being conducted, it was found that students did not have a proper sleep schedule due to the blue light emitted from electronic devices on which students attended classes (Khare et al., 2021). Additionally, it has been found that the usage of the internet has significant social, psychological and academic consequences for a child (American Psychology Association, Jackson et al., 2003). It was also found that students' mental health has been affected due to limited social interactions during online school (Elmer et al., 2020). Students' safety needs were not fulfilled because cyberbullying increased as online classes started (Talasila, 2020) (Joseph, 2021) (Mock, 2020). Overall, there was a learning gap in the online mode of learning (Gohain, 2021).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs forms the base for humanistic psychology and has been cited by numerous researchers as an essential aspect of motivation (Cherry, 2020). This research paper will be beneficial in making curriculums and pedagogy in school, especially for online classes. It will help educators understand the perspective of students in online classes, and they will be able to keep in mind the needs of these students whenever schools have to conduct online classes. Teachers can adopt this theory in the classroom and focus on fulfilling different levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs so that students are highly motivated to learn and are able to achieve their best. This has implications not only for high school students but for students of all ages. Their needs may vary by age, but the principle remains the same.

Educational institutions need to keep in mind that distinct teaching styles affect genders in different ways. Thus, the teaching methodology for different genders and classes must be adjusted accordingly. Additionally, this theory can be used to assess student motivation and satisfaction through the fulfilment of needs. Most importantly, the teaching style cannot be the same in online and in-person classes.

Models of Development in Children made by Sinha and Bronfrenbrener focused on students attending school in person. They did not consider the possibility of an online classroom where a student's environment is limited to their home. Future researchers could look into how a child's development is affected when they only attend online school. During a future pandemic or calamity when schools have to shift to an online mode of education, it will be easier for governments to address the learning gap and formulate guidelines for schools.

CONCLUSION

It was found that the fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs correlated with understanding in online classes. Additionally, it was observed that the needs of female students were less fulfilled in comparison to male students', but the level of understanding in online classes was similar for both groups. It was also observed that the needs of 11th and 12th-grade students were less fulfilled in comparison to 9th and 10th-grade students, but the level of understanding in online classes was similar for both groups.

Educators need to keep in mind the students' needs in online classes and make curriculums accordingly. Since students of different genders and ages have different needs, curriculum and teaching styles must vary accordingly. In case educational institutions have to shift to the online mode of education in the future, they have somewhat of a framework upon which they can rely.

Limitations

Since a convenience sampling method was used to send out the survey, the sample may not be representative of all students attending online classes. The sample size was very small (64 respondents), which catered only to a small section of society. Moreover, the distribution of the sample across genders and ages wasn't even. Although best efforts were made to make the questionnaire reliable and valid, it wasn't tested for its validity and reliability before it was administered. The research was quantitative, and thus their personal experiences were not taken into account.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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