Survey Report on Student Perception of Schools' Shut-down due to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Uganda

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Africa Policy Centre, a policy research centre within Uganda Christian University embarked on a research project on the Impact of the COVID-19 disruptions on Higher Education in Uganda. It is this project that inspired the carrying out of this survey.

We were able to gather 427 responses from students in Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) around Uganda between 29th May 2020 and 11th June 2020.

This survey was distributed online, sending the link to as many different student social media platforms as possible. Respondents were thus limited to those with access to mobile phones and internet making it a convenience sample. This was a main restriction which may have limited the number of responses from students with low or no access to internet or no cell phones.

Part 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Sex

The sex distribution of the respondents can be seen here below;

Figure 1: Sex of Respondents (n=424)

Male
n=231
54%

Female
n=193
46%
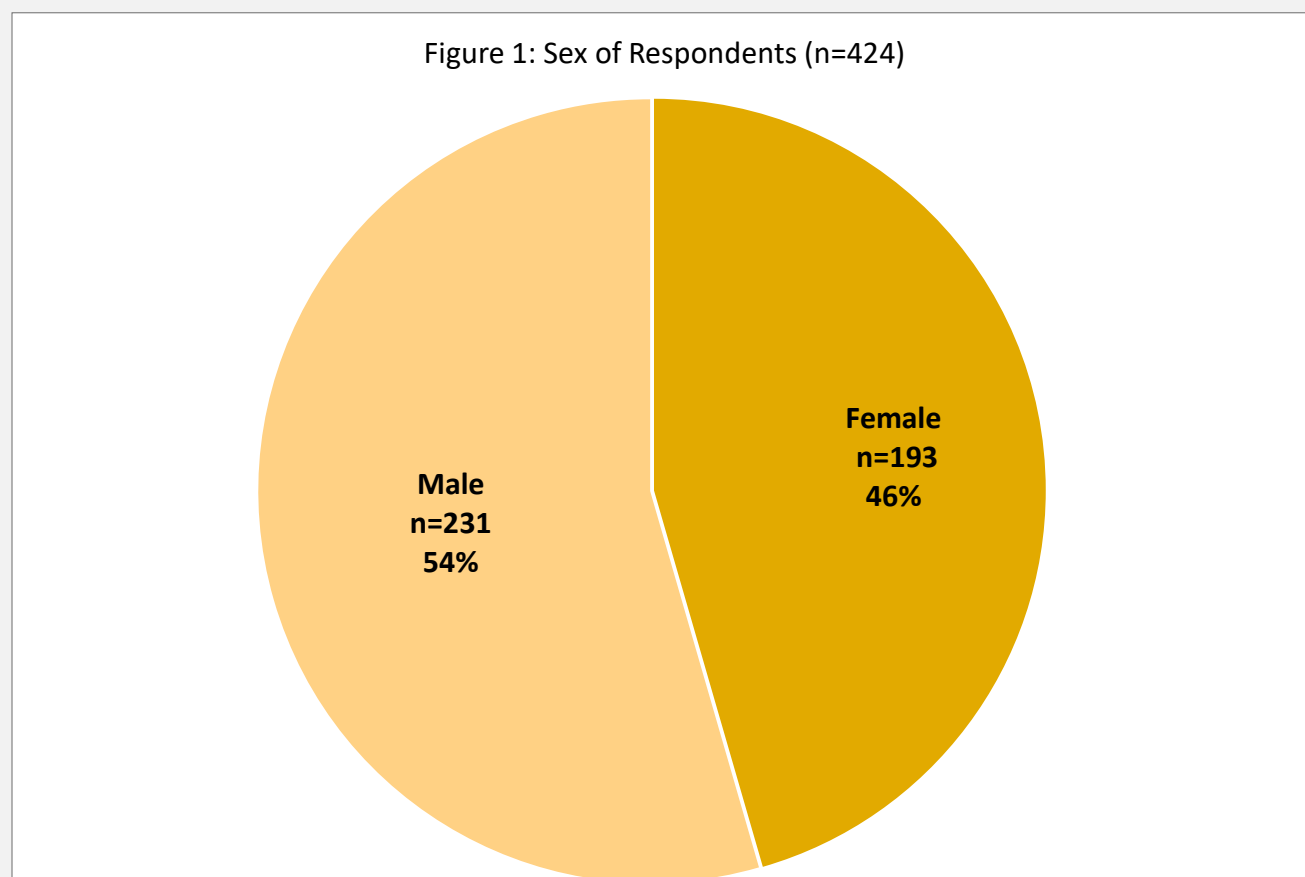
Age

The age distribution of the respondents can be seen here below;

Figure 2: Age Range of Respondents, in Years (n=424)

Age Range	Percentage
16-20 (n=55)	13%
21-25 (n=277)	65.3%
26-30 (n=57)	13.4%
31-35 (n=21)	5%
35+ (n=14)	3.3%
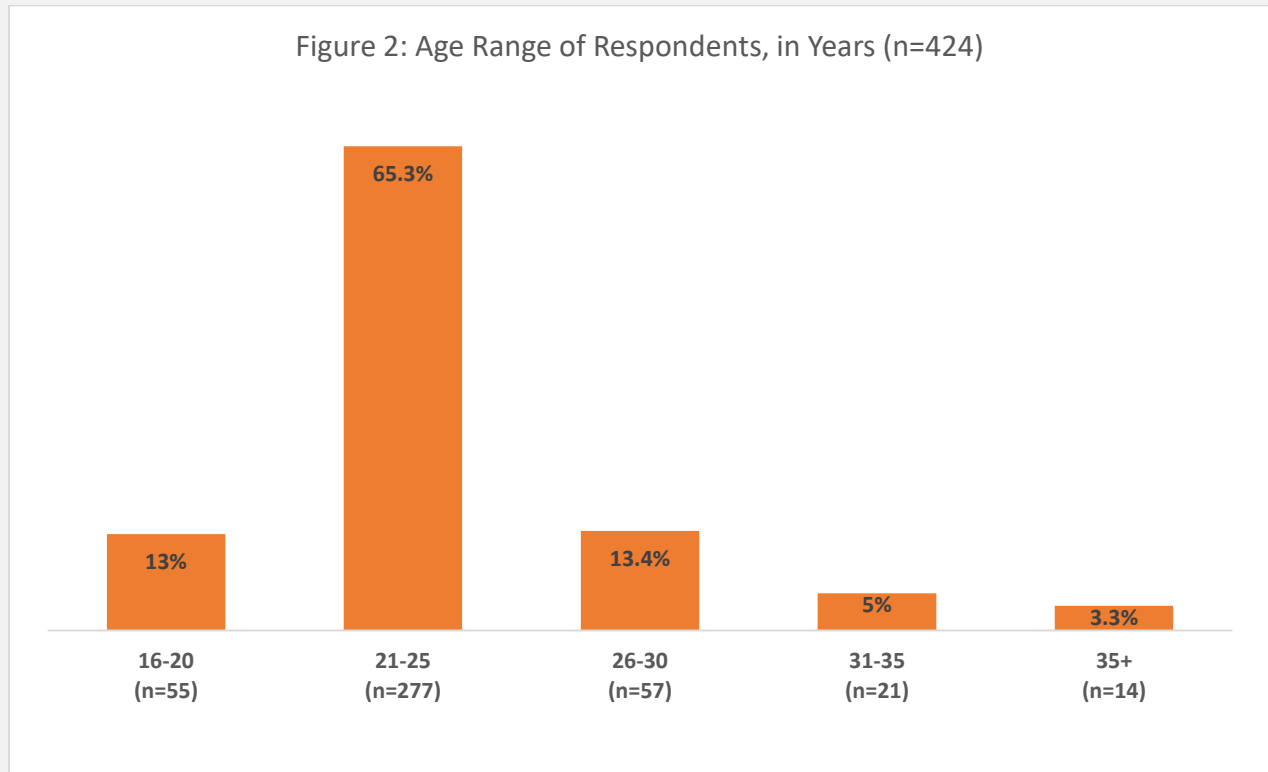
Nationality

The nationality distribution of the students can be seen in figure 3 below. In a few instances, we had Ugandan students studying abroad.

Figure 3: Citizenship of Respondents (n=427)

International Students (n=57) 13%

Students with Ugandan Citizenship (n=370) 87%
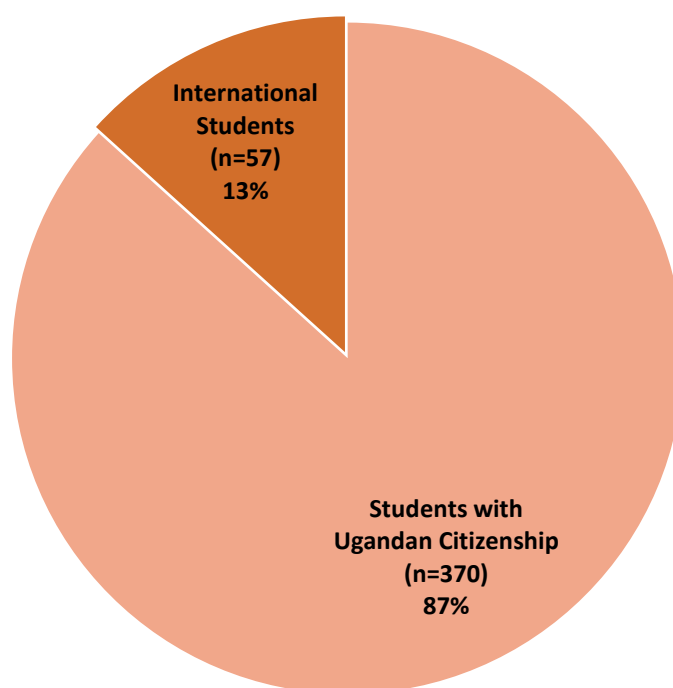
*Percentages are Rounded

Of the 62 international students, 56 were Africans and 6 were non- Africans. Of the Africans, majority were from the countries bordering Uganda.

Of the Ugandans, 106 districts were represented by the respondents. The districts with the most numbers of students were as follows; Kampala (12.4%), Wakiso (8%), Mbale (5.2%) and Mbarara (4.7%).

Institutions

Majority (214) of the students came from Uganda Christian University which, because of its online presence, makes the sampling quite biased, creating a larger online-education presence in the results.

The rest of the students came from Makerere University Kampala, Kampala International University, Gulu University and other institutions. With 258 registered IHEs in Uganda, the survey did not reach all the institutions because of time and physical movement constraints. Because it was relied on online forwarding, it was mainly students in the same social circles who were able to receive it, this means and shows why majority of our respondents were university students.

Part 2. Students' Perception of Studies during the Schools' Shut-down

The Continuation of Studies after Schools were Closed

50.1% of the respondents said they had continued learning after the lockdown whereas 49.9% said they had not continued studying after schools closed.

This was lecturer-directed studying in particular. The results are as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Have you continued studying your course work after the schools' shut-down? (n=425)

No
n=212, 49.9%

Yes
n=213, 50.1%
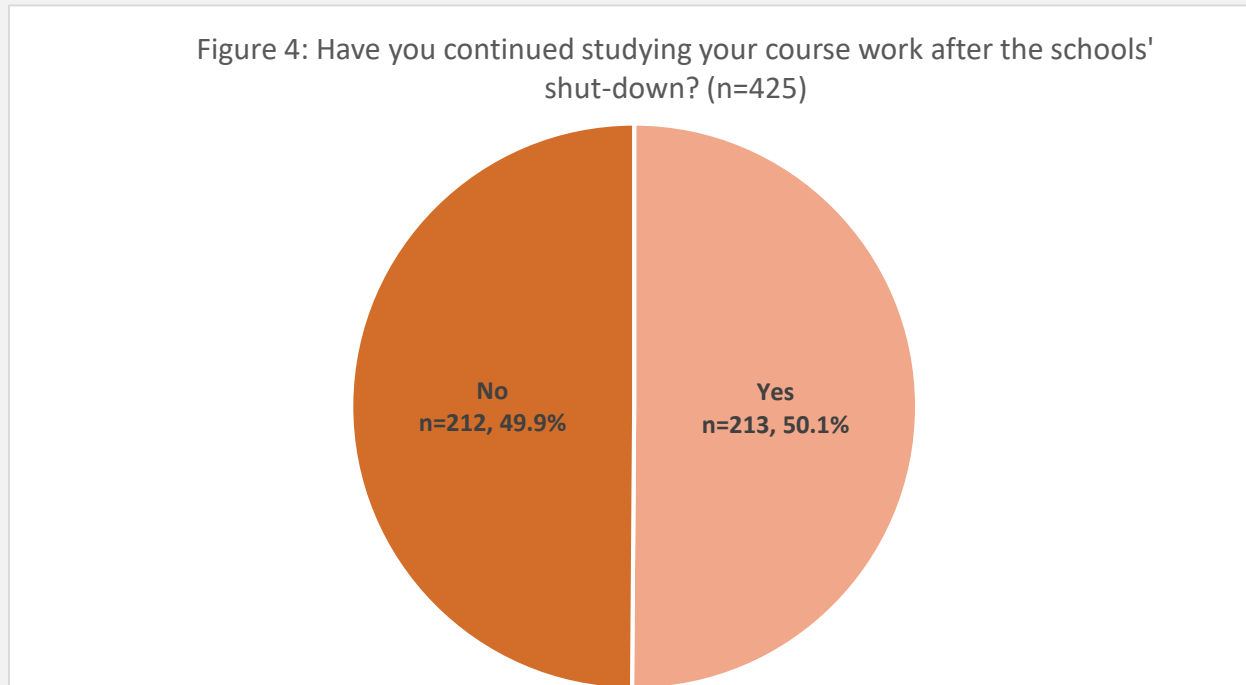
However, 224 (55%) of these who did not continue receiving instruction from their lecturers decided to engage in self-study, using text books, bringing the actual academically idle students to 36 and the total of those having some form of continued study to 391, as seen in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Those who actually continued some form of studying. (n=426)

No
n=36, 8%

Yes
n=390, 92%
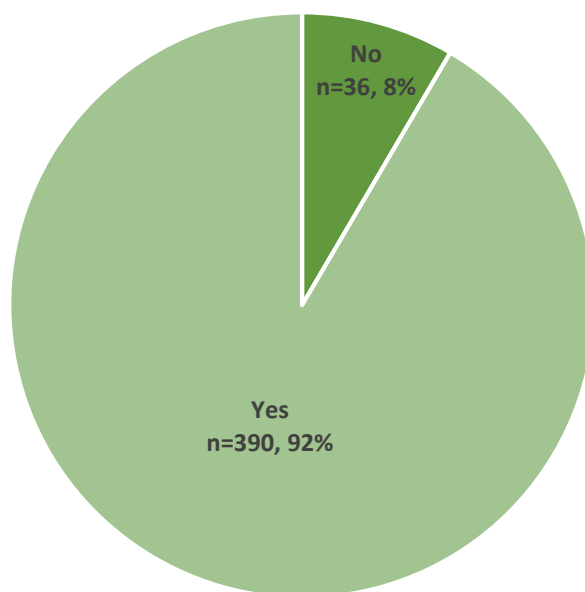
This is a very good testament to the self-initiative of students. It shows that when students actually want to learn, and their home environments are supportive of their academic endeavors, they are able to achieve so much better academically. It also suggests that when parents are proactive and more involved with their children's academic experiences, the child will learn more and chances of being academically idle will be much lower. It could also mean that some students have no access to electricity which would play a big role in failing to access study material electronically.

Research done in 2017 and 2018 shows that the mobile phone coverage in Uganda is at 70.9% as of 2018[1].

Do you own a mobile phone?

	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Yes	60.7%	75.7%	73.7%	78.5%	67.2%	51.1%	64.6%
No	39.3%	24.3%	26.3%	21.6%	32.8%	48.9%	35.4%

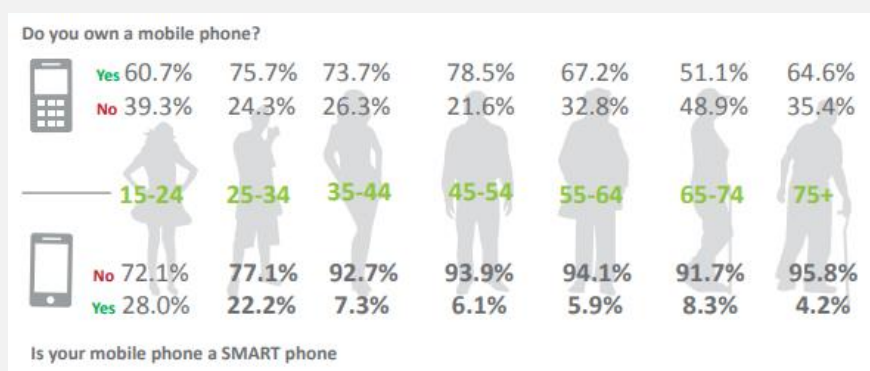|	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
No	72.1%	77.1%	92.7%	93.9%	94.1%	91.7%	95.8%
Yes	28.0%	22.2%	7.3%	6.1%	5.9%	8.3%	4.2%

Is your mobile phone a SMART phone

NITA 2017/2018 IT survey report

Only 60.7% of all 15-24 year olds had a mobile phone and only 28% of these mobile phones were smart phones. The proportion of students who have no access to laptops is expected to be much less than this as laptops are more expensive than smart phones. Moreover, only about 1.8% of all

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[1] NITA, "National Information Technology Council," *Natl. Inf. Technol. Surv. 2017/18*, no. March, pp. 1–151, 2017.

households owned a working laptop and only 1.3% of all households owned a working desktop computer- this shows the very low coverage of computer devices in households.

Modes of Study used after Schools Closed

Of these who had continued to study, 241 (58.4%) did so by self-initiative, using with textbooks and other resources. Another 141 (34.6%) studied hardcopy notes that had been handed out at the onset of the schools' closure. 116 (28.5%) relied on receiving coursework to study through email and social media platforms. Only 67 (16.5%) received online lectures. This means that of the 427 students, 324 received lecturer-supervised coursework. Below is Figure 6 depicting these results.

Figure 6: "What modes of instruction have been used to teach you? [For Those Who Continued to Study after the Lockdown] (n=565)
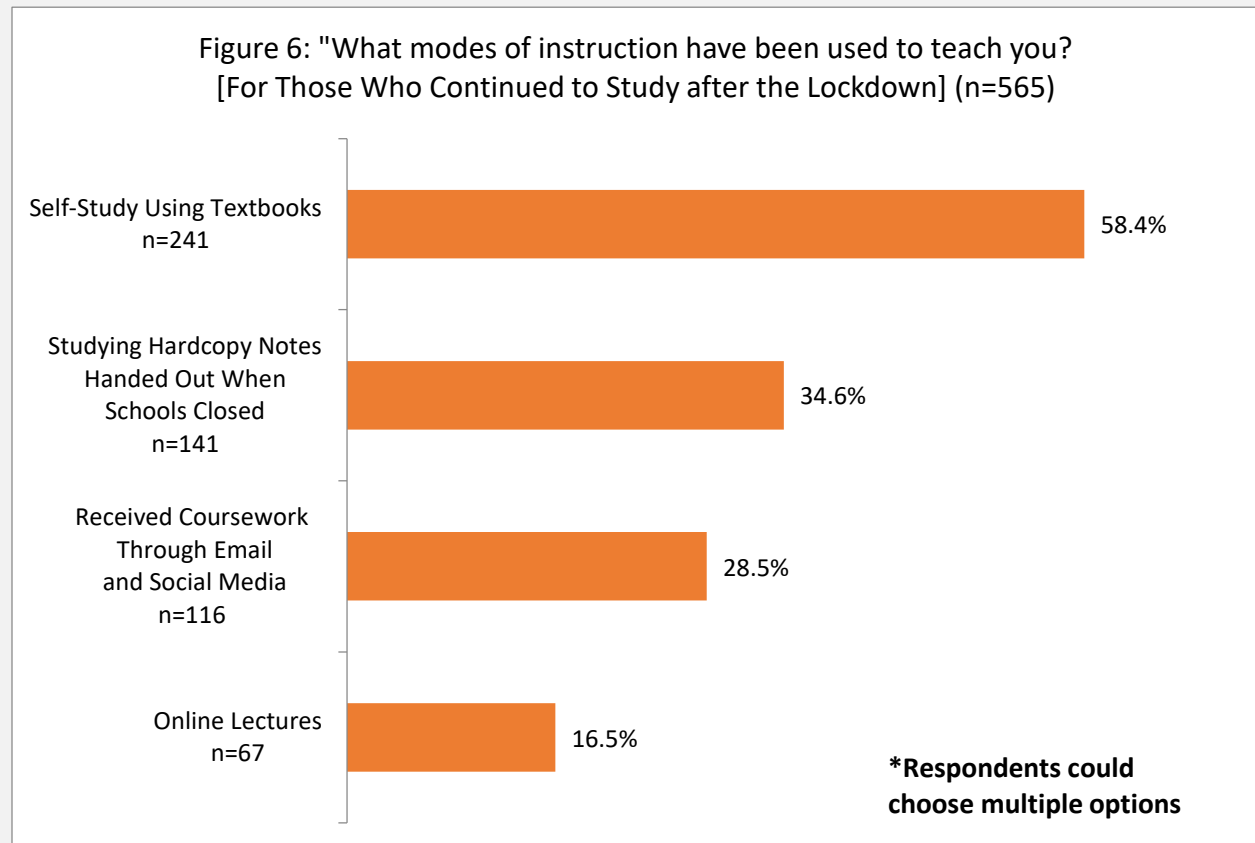
Ease of Knowledge Assimilation

On ease of assimilation of the coursework being given during the lockdown; the majority, 205(50.5%), found the material just fairly understandable. 100 (24.6%) said it was hard to understand and only 101(24.9%) found it easy to understand, as shown in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: "Has the new study material been easily understandable?"
(n=406)

Category	Percentage
Fairly Understandable n=205	50.5%
Difficult to Understand n=101	24.9%
Easily Understandable n=100	24.6%
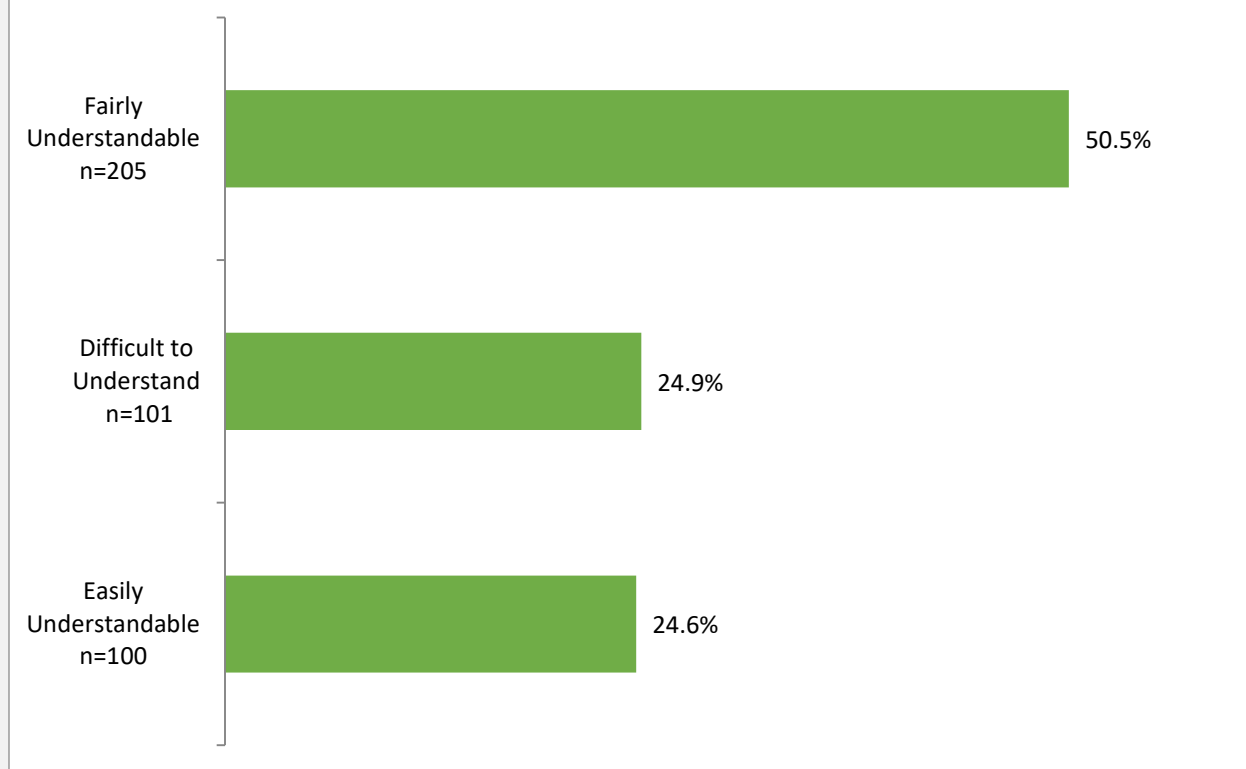
These results could be because students may learn better when in a group (social synergy) or when they can easily ask their lecturers or instructors for clarification to clear their doubts and knowledge gaps. The school setting also usually provides an ambience for peer to peer lear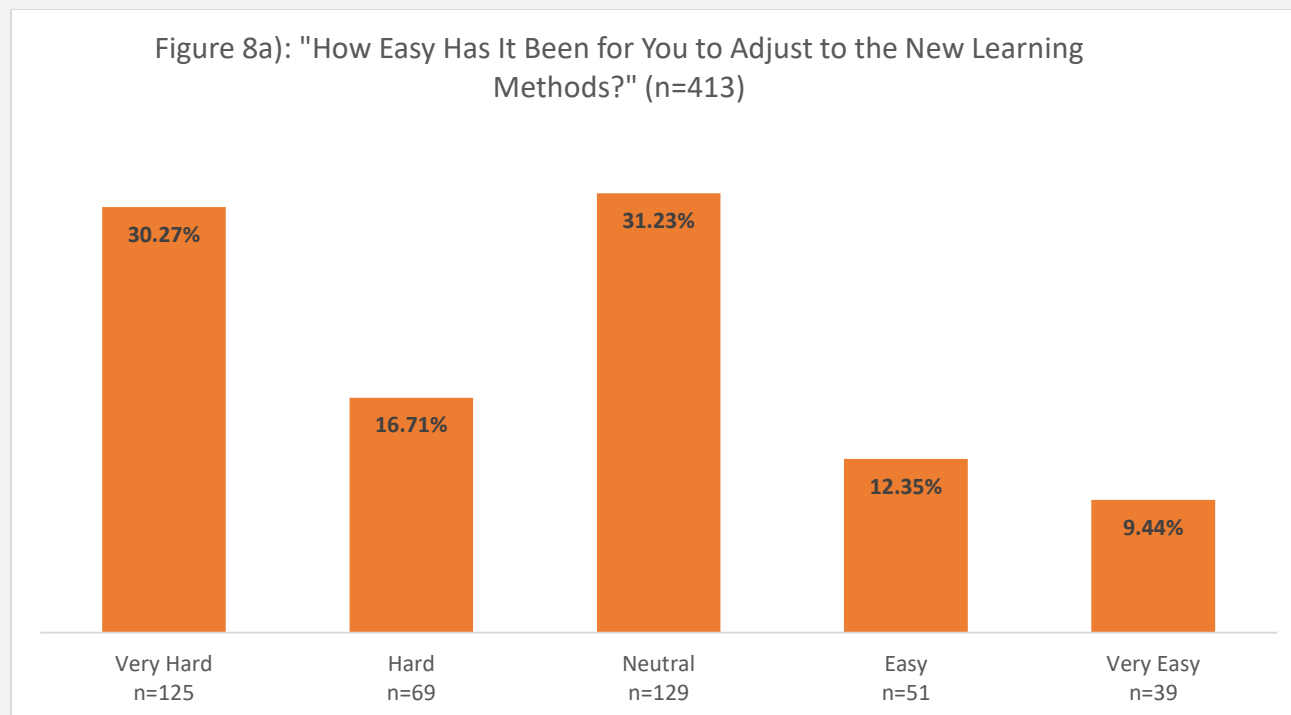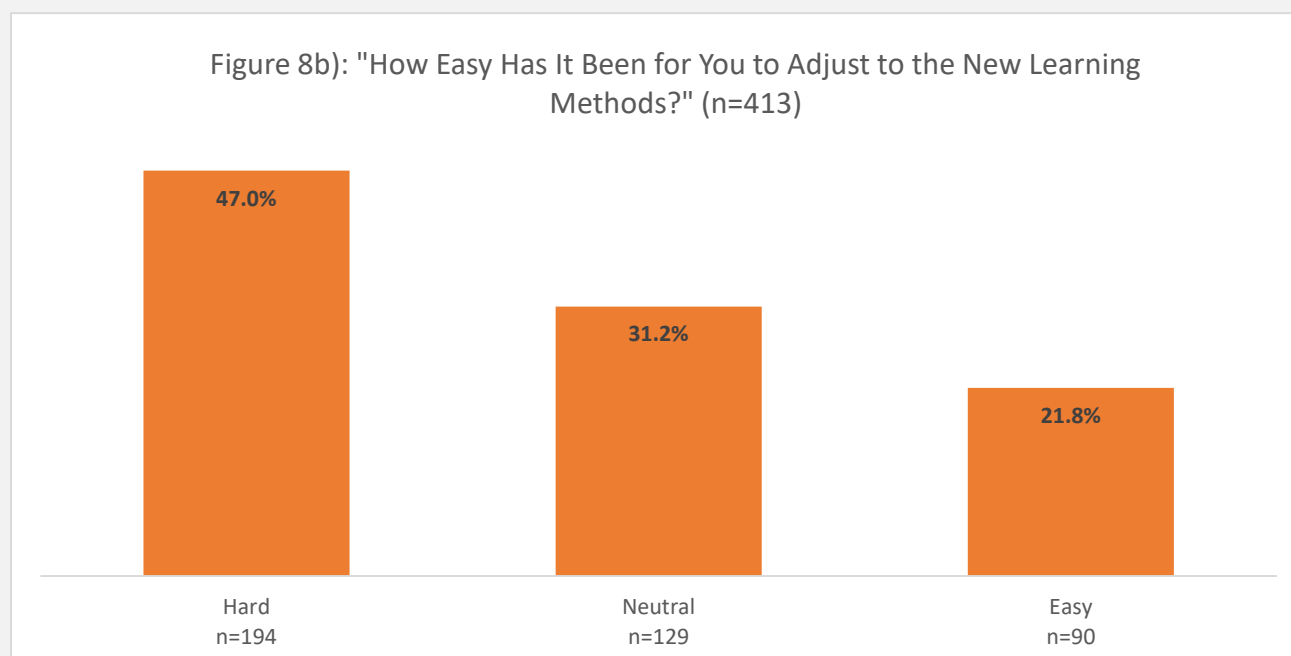ning, where students meet to hold discussions and further cement their ideas and knowledge. This is a great contributor to learning. Furthermore, the expression of the instructed knowledge makes a big difference. Some students are visual learners who would find text upon text harder to understand if they cannot visualize it themselves, something a lecturer or instructor would easily clarify and help them to visualize through explanation. Other students learn better when hearing the instructor's voice. For these two categories, videos of instruction would serve better than written course-work. This should not go without saying that for practical courses, where hands on approaches are the required for instruction, coursework in text or audio or video would not do thorough justice in delivering those lessons. In this cases, face to face classes are the best option. Future learning systems should put these considerations into account.

Ease of Adjustment to the New Learning Methods

As for ease of adjustment to the new learning methods, 125 (30.3%) of respondents found it very hard to adjust to the new learning methods while another 129 (31.2%) found it neutral. Only 39(9.5%) found it easy to adjust to the new learning methods. This was done on a linear scale of 1-5, 1 being 'very hard' and 5 being 'very easy'. The results are shown in Figures 8a and 8b below.

Figure 8a): "How Easy Has It Been for You to Adjust to the New Learning Methods?" (n=413)

30.27%	16.71%	31.23%	12.35%	9.44%
Very Hard n=125	Hard n=69	Neutral n=129	Easy n=51	Very Easy n=39

When the hard categories are merged and the easy categories are merged, we get results in the figure below;

Figure 8b): "How Easy Has It Been for You to Adjust to the New Learning Methods?" (n=413)

47.0%	31.2%	21.8%
Hard n=194	Neutral n=129	Easy n=90

The reasons for these statistics may be because there was no smooth transition or counselling or planning to prepare students for these new modes of instruction. The school closures were an abrupt shift which caused a shock not only to students but to lecturers, parents and all stakeholders. No party was totally prepared unless they had enough resources beforehand to make the transition smoother.

Comparing Learning Methods

When compared to the old-normal way of learning, majority of the students, 73%, found the new learning methods harder than the old-normal, as shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9: "Are the new learning methods easier to understand than the normal methods of instruction used before the schools' closure?" (n=415)

Yes
n=110
27%

No
n=305
73%
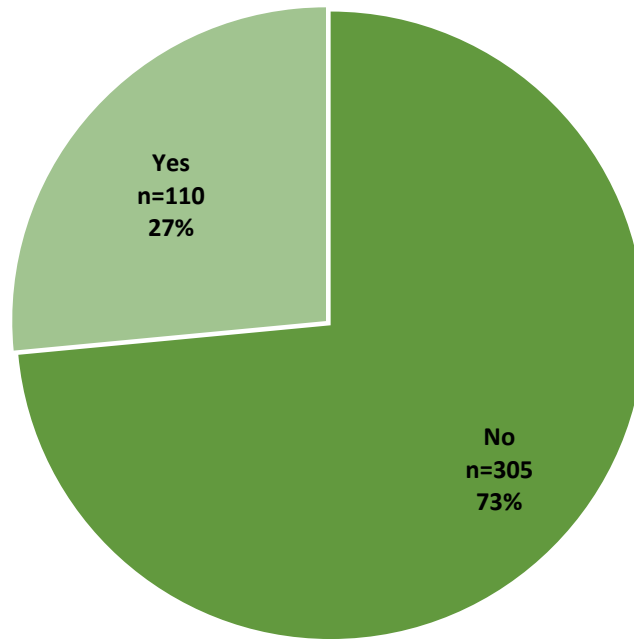
The reasons for this could be the same as the reasons given for Figure 5 in the above section. Unpreparedness for the school shut-down.

Communication with Lecturers

Majority of the students, 349(83.7%), found it harder to communicate with their lectures during the school closure while 68(16.3%) found it easier to communicate with their lecturers as seen in the Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: "Is it easier for you to communicate to your lecturer now than before the schools' closure?"
(n=417)
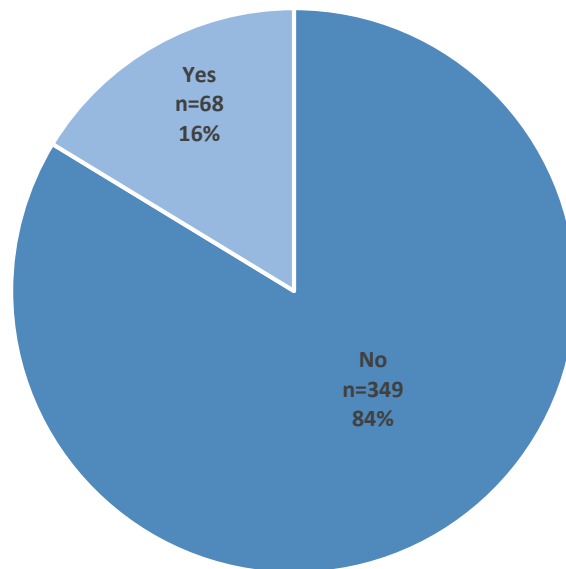
This may be because majority of those who continued studying did not have access to online lecturers. So those who did have online lectures probably had an easier time connecting to their lecturers. And indeed the numbers agree, 67 students attended online lectures while 68 students found communication with their lecturers easier.

Costs of Continued Study

With regards to changes in learning costs, the highest number of students, 158 (38.2%), found the new costs of learning much higher than before, and 75 (18.1%) found the costs just a little higher. A possible explanation for this is the cost of internet access. 52 (12.6%) found the costs of learning much cheaper, and 38 (9.2%) found the costs a little cheaper. This could be because of reduced transport and feeding costs while students had while staying in their own homes. Only 91(22%) found no difference in the cost. This was also a linear scale of 1-5, with 1 being 'much more expensive' and 5 being 'much cheaper'. The average score here is 2.4, fairly more expensive. Below is Figures 11a and 11b showing these results:

Figure 11a): How have the costs of learning changed for you now that you are staying at home? (n=414)

38.2%	18.1%	22%	9.2%	12.6%
Much More Expensive n=158	More Expensive n=75	No Difference n=91	Cheaper n=38	Much Cheaper n=52
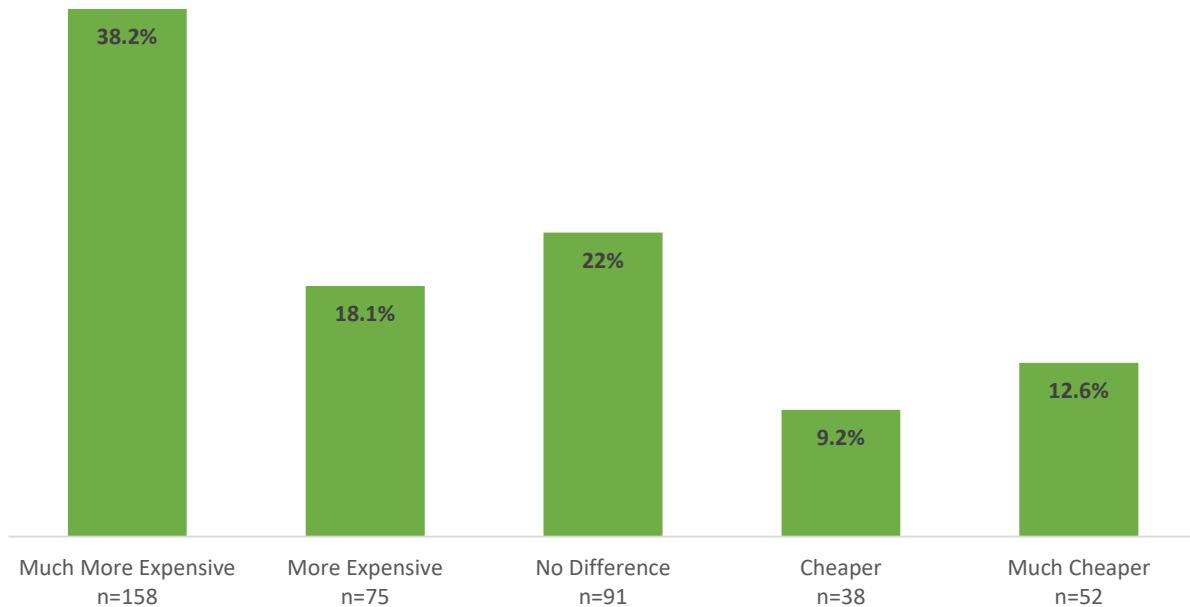
When the expensive categories are merged and the cheaper categories are merged, we come up with the categories below;

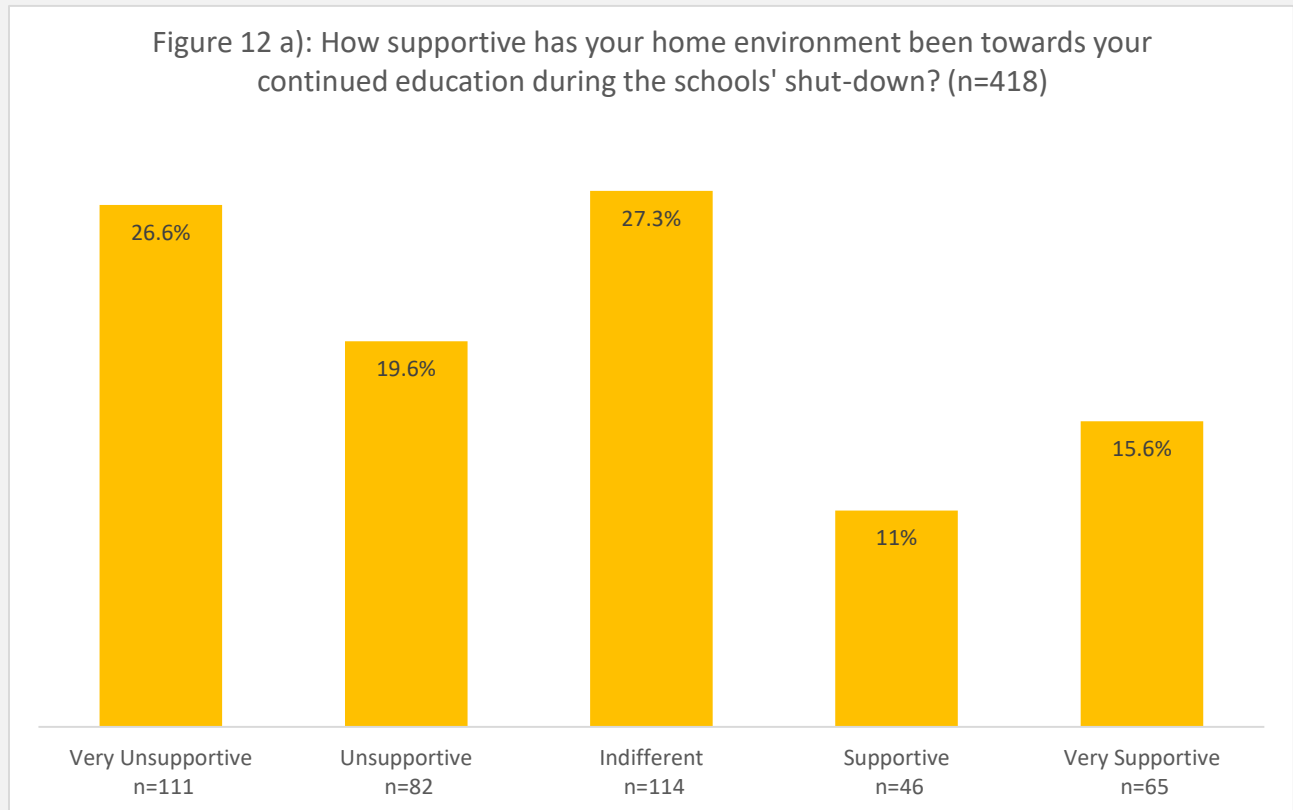**Figure 11b): "How have the costs of learning changed for you now that you are staying at home?" (n=414)**

|		
56.3%	22%	21.7%
More Expensive n=233	No Difference n=91	Cheaper n=90
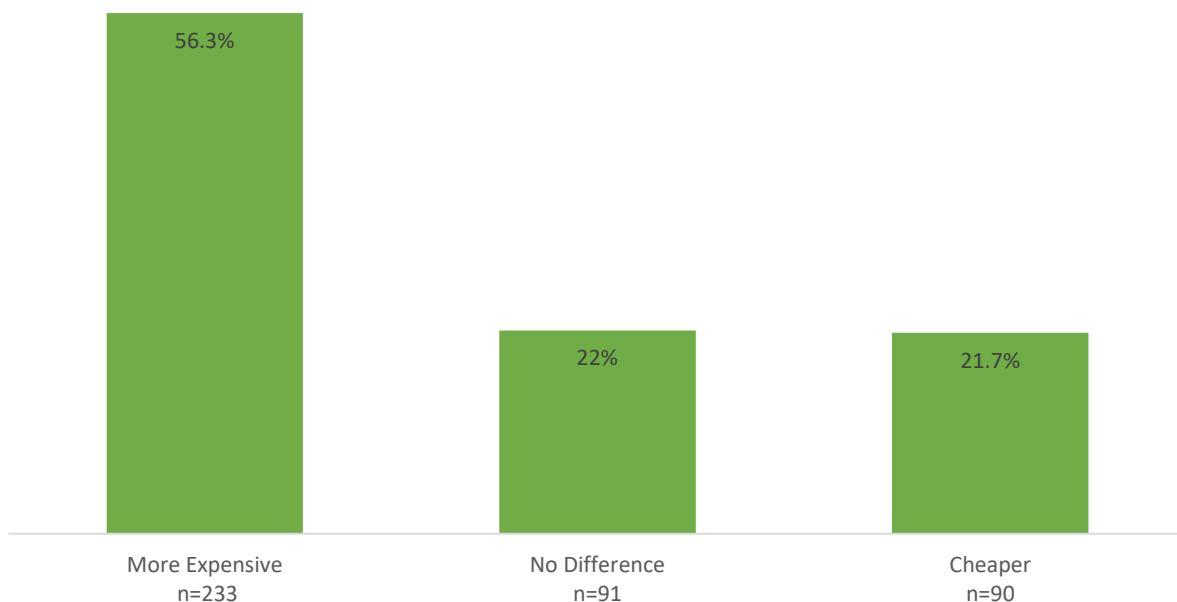
Home Environment Support

On how supportive their home environments have been towards their studies, an appalling 111(26.6%) found their homes very unsupportive. Another 82 (19.6%) found their homes fairly unsupportive, and 114 (27.3%) found their homes indifferent. Only 65 (15.6%) found their homes very supportive while 46 (11%) found their homes fairly supportive. The average score on a scale of 1 to 5-where 1 is for very unsupportive and 5 is very supportive - was 2.6, slightly worse than indifferent. The results are shown in Figures 12a) and 12b) below.

Figure 12 a): How supportive has your home environment been towards your continued education during the schools' shut-down? (n=418)

Very Unsupportive n=111	26.6%
Unsupportive n=82	19.6%
Indifferent n=114	27.3%
Supportive n=46	11%
Very Supportive n=65	15.6%

When the unsupportive categories are merged and the supportive categories are merged, we get the results in Figure 12b) below:

Figure 12b): How supportive has your home environment been towards your continued education during the schools' shut-down? (n=418)
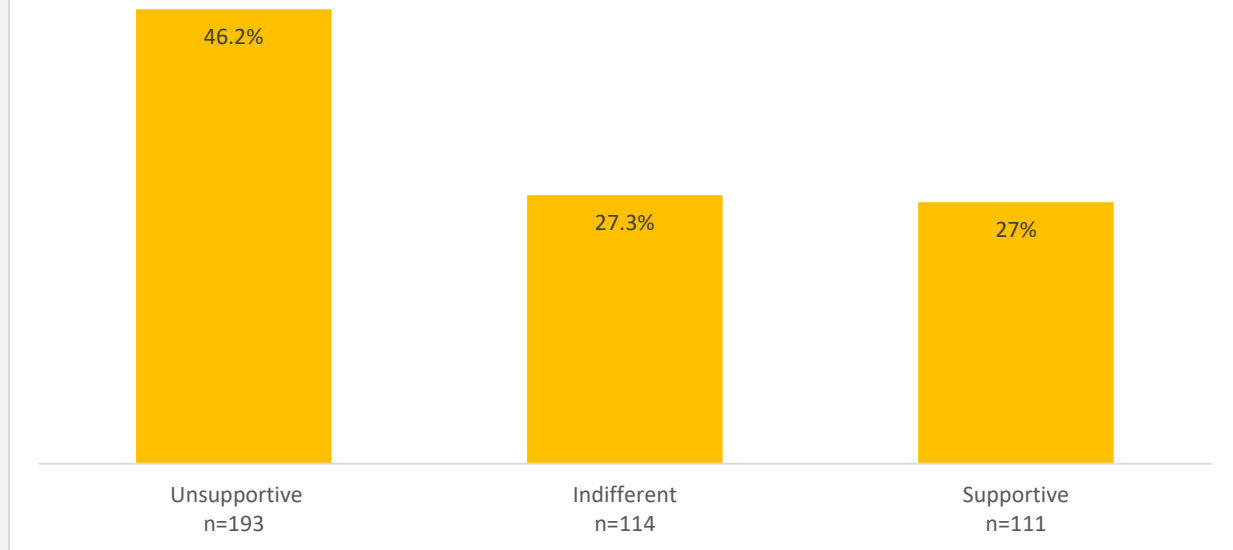
The reasons for these results could include: the house-work burden older children have in their homes, meagre resources in the home so that the parents/guardians cannot afford to support their children with internet, necessary appliances and a conducive study environment at home. In addition to these, a home facing domestic violence of any kind wreaks havoc on the emotional and physical state of family members. A student living in such an environment will definitely find it very hard to concentrate and will by far prefer a school environment to a home environment. Notwithstanding, girls are the most vulnerable in such homes, making the damage they face much greater than that for boys. In addition to this, girls shoulder the largest house-work burden given we live in a patriarchal society. The girl child will thus have less time and energy left over to study than the boy.

Preferred Modes of Instruction in the New-normal

Asked what modes of instruction students would prefer when schools resumed, majority 313 (74.2%) preferred in-class lectures. 136 (32.2%) preferred online lectures and 108 (25.6%) preferred self-study. The other 12 (2.4%) preferred combinations of those three main modes of learning. The main reason for these results mainly included the fact that the synergistic learning environment, that classrooms provide, this helps students understand their course work best. Another important reason is that several courses require physical involvement in their practical sessions. In this case, online learning would just play a supplementary role.

Reasons as to why some students preferred online education:

Some students preferred online education for the new-normal because it is the safest and most sustainable method of education during this pandemic which may take longer than expected to subside. Online education also provided easier access to lecturers; students were able to contact their lecturers whenever necessary which would provide more contact frequency than in-person settings.

Online lectures also provide students who are shy a 'less-intimidating' platform to express themselves, and some students are better able to concentrate on the lecture content than when they are in class setting. Online classes are also much easier and cheaper to access and attend than in-person lectures as less or no costs of transport are required, and students from districts far away or different countries can freely attend.

Reasons as to why some students preferred in-person education:

Students who preferred in-person lectures did so because of the benefits the whole school environment provides for their learning. Being able to communicate with lecturers and fellow students at great length, bouncing ideas off each other makes learning much easier for some students. Moreover, proximity to the library, which provides more reading resources than the internet and provides great ambience for concentration, makes personal study more effective. Schools generally provide less distracting environments than homes and are therefore preferable to many students. Household responsibilities at home also make studying harder because housework and/or farm work require considerable time and effort which leave students with less-than-required strength and head space to tackle their academic assignments effectively. For students who are not well equipped financially, the technical requirements for in-person lectures are way more affordable than having the right devices for online lectures and suffering internet costs. In addition to this, online studies require very good internet connection without which watching lectures can be a stressful experience, require much stricter self-discipline than studying at school because so many attractive online feeds easily distract students.

Reasons for students who preferred self-study:

The (fewest) students who preferred self-study do so because most study is already self-driven study. It is also the most important aspect of study and yet is less expensive than online lectures and physically going to school.

Reasons for the levels of satisfaction with IHE's handling of school closure.

Majority of the students were dissatisfied because of several reasons: Firstly, the Government prohibited online exams which hampered learning in universities like UCU which were well prepared to tackle long distance learning.
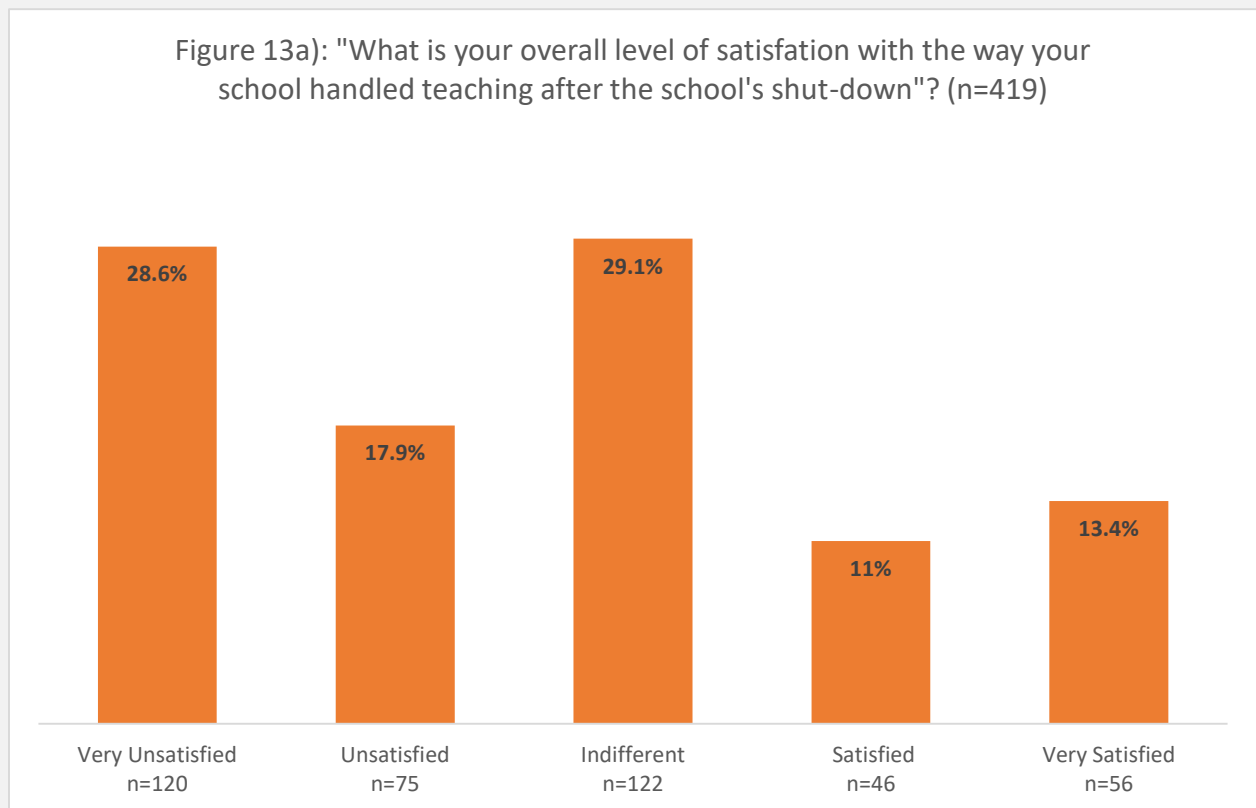
Secondly, the abrupt school closure also caught many institutions off-guard; they were thus unprepared for all the ramifications that came with closure including the continued education of their students. Only versatile institutions soon adapted to different avenues of remote learning. Many institutions, however, experienced a complete stalling of education delivery.

Thirdly, some institutions had not actively used blended learning methods (online and class lectures), many e-learning platforms had not yet been tried and tested, thus students were not conversant with the use of these platforms and some were not well equipped with the devices or internet needed to carry on online education.

Despite all these thoughts, some students were appreciative of how their institutions had carried on with remote learning through conducting lectures online and sending them coursework.
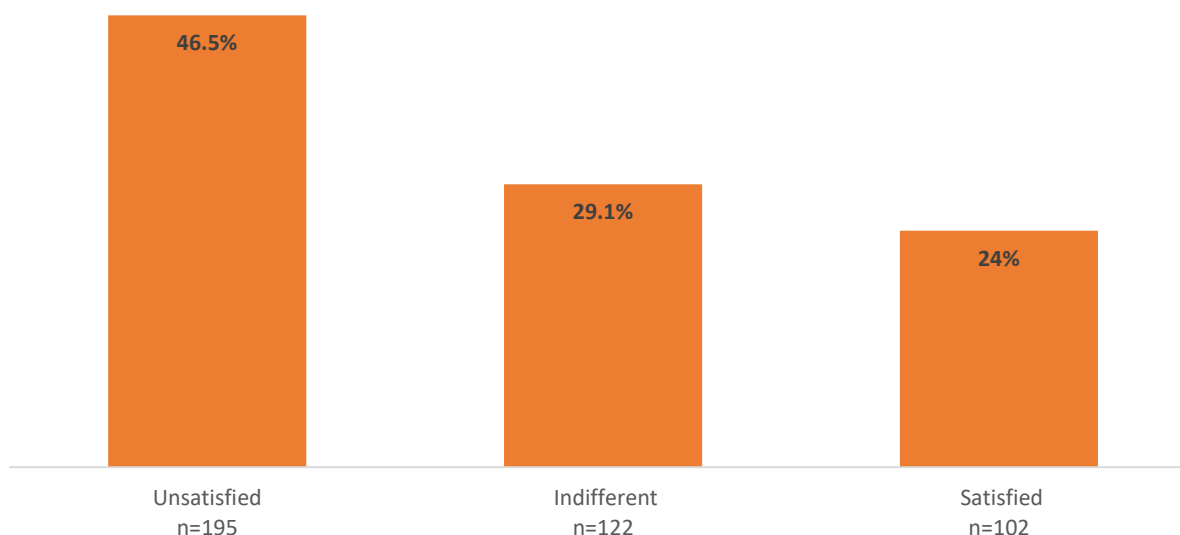
Reactions to the IHEs Handled the Abrupt Closure

About students' satisfaction with the way their schools handled the closure, 122 (29.1%), the majority, are indifferent. 120 (28.6%) are very unsatisfied whereas 75 (28.6%) are somewhat dissatisfied. Only 56 (13.4 %) are very satisfied while 46 (11%) were quite satisfied with the way the school closures were handled by their Institutions. This could be because many institutions were unprepared to handle the abrupt closure. Resilience to external shock is one of the several capacities that IHEs need to build. Below is the figure showing students' satisfaction on a scale of 1-5, 1 being 'very dissatisfied' and 5 being 'very satisfied'. The average score is 2.6, which is-quite dissatisfied.

Figure 13a): "What is your overall level of satisfation with the way your school handled teaching after the school's shut-down"? (n=419)

When the unsatisfied categories are merged and the satisfied categories are merged, we get the results in figure 13b) below.

Figure 13b): "What is your overall level of satisfation with the way your school handled teaching after the school's shut-down"? (n=419)

46.5%	**29.1%**	**24%**
Unsatisfied n=195	Indifferent n=122	Satisfied n=102

Recommendations about teaching methods when schools resume.

Majority of the students would prefer to return to the class room setting when the new-normal studying routine starts. Another proportion of students would prefer online lectures especially now that schools are closed until further notice. A few of the students prefer blended learning, an effective combination of both online and in-person lectures.

Several students advocated for online examinations to be carried out as initially planned in institutions which were ready to conduct them.

Students generally recommend that health measures can be put in place and observed by institutions and students. These would require considerable restructuring of classes in order to observe social distancing. Students also hope that they can catch up on the lost learning they have experienced. Many long for more quality time with their lecturers during study time and for generally better learning experiences.