SOUTH ASIAN WINTER CAMP

RESEARCH

predesign

REPORT

20/21

SAWC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

section one

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

ABOUT SAWC

South Asian Winter Camp (SAWC) is a free online winter camp during which college students teach interactive classes in non-traditional subjects to South Asian secondary school students, and provide personal, academic, and pre-professional mentorship.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

SAWC is designed by students, of students, for students. To ensure that the programming is best tailored to the needs and interests of the students, SAWC conducted a pre-design research plan. This consisted of a questionnaire survey and focus group discussions. The pre-design research aimed to identify the current experiences of students in their educational journeys alongside their dreams, hopes, and interests for the future. Having a better understanding of their current and aspired educational experiences allows SAWC to develop a program which is relevant, significant, and worthwhile for its students.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL DESIGN

Methodologically and theoretically, this pre-design survey is a participatory action research (PAR) project. Participatory research has four elements: participation of the people being studied; use of the personal experiences and the perceptions of community members as data; a focus on "empowerment"; and the final product, action by the community and community members to change the conditions causing the problems (Arcury et al. 2001).

This project would not have been possible without the participants in the survey going beyond the role of interviewees and instead serving as co-designers of their own SAWC experience. It is essential that those in educational research, design, and policy engage the communities that they serve in the process of design and development. This pre-design survey serves as a reminder for future educational programs to ensure that the needs, interests, and experiences of participants are kept at the core of any educational interventions or resources.

Cited: Thomas A. Arcury, Sara A. Quandt, & Allen Dearry. (2001). Farmworker Pesticide Exposure and Community-Based Participatory Research: Rationale and Practical Applications. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 109, 429–434. https://doi.org/10.2307/3434791

METHODS

SAWC adopted a mixed-methods approach in its pre-design research plan. The aim was to understand the shared experiences of the students while also providing the space for them to discuss their personal insights, journeys, and aspirations. The research tools which were utilized were questionnaires and focus group discussions.

Given that SAWC is open to all South Asian secondary school students, the questionnaire was shared with students across the region. Students were contacted via their institutions, such as schools or other programs they were enrolled in. The questionnaire was anonymous to encourage expression of thought without hesitation. In total, 84 responses were collected of which 56.63% identified as female and 40.96% identified as male. Responses were predominantly collected from India (n = 26) and Pakistan (n = 56) due to difficulties in accessibility and lack of responsiveness from other countries. At the end of the questionnaire, students were able to leave their contact details in the case that they would like to participate in a focus group to discuss their educational experiences with SAWC representatives.

Interested students were chosen at random to participate in focus group discussions where they were asked in detail about their educational experiences and the potential role of SAWC as a supplemental educational program. 3 focus groups were hosted, each of which had an average of 4 students. The focus groups were separately held for female and male identifying students.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

This report is divided into two main sections: academic experience and mentorship experience. These two sections are aligned with and inform SAWC's dual mission to provide non-traditional academic classes and culturally-tailored mentorship to secondary school students in South Asia.
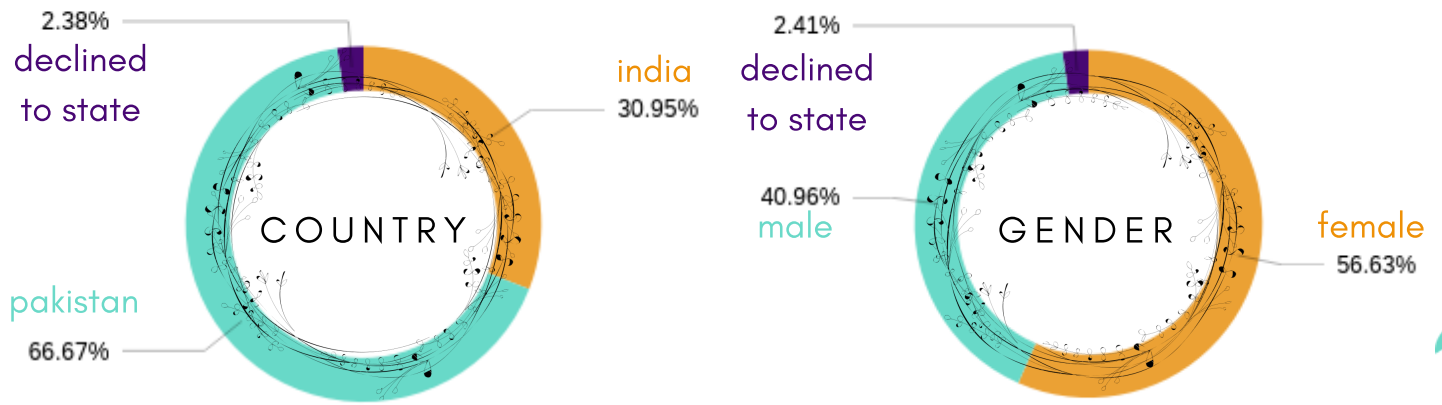
The **Academic Experience** section seeks to understand the relationship of students with the content they are learning at school and the style in which it is being taught to them. This section includes the students' self-reported satisfaction with subjects they are learning at school, interest in subjects not taught at school, their experience of learning in the classroom, and their perceptions of their own abilities and contributions in the classroom.

The **Mentorship Experience** explores the students' experiences of navigating their lived and aspired academic and professional lives. It highlights their current certainty of the path they wish to take within their own lives, the difficulties they've faced when making major life decisions with respect to future-planning, and the kind of mentorship they would like to be made available to them.
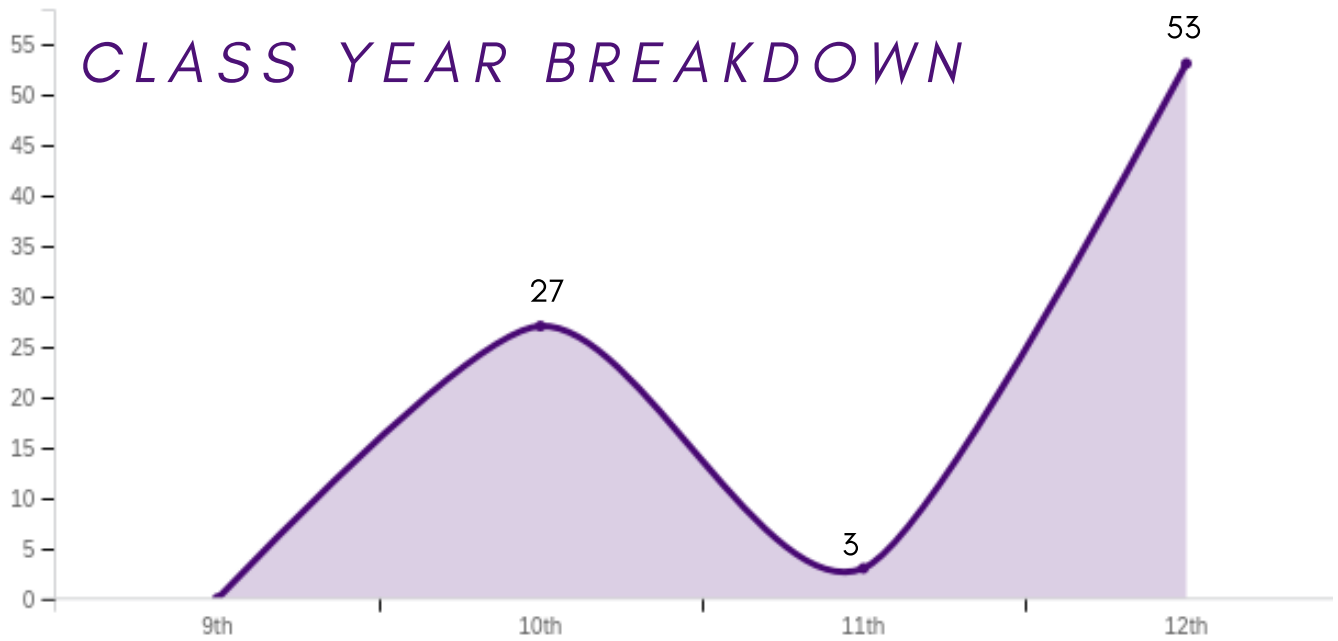
Together, the two sections provide us with insight into the lives of students as they navigate their personal, academic, and professional journeys. With quantitative visualizations to identify larger trends as well as qualitative excerpts to highlight the nuances of experiences, this pre-design research report gives us an in-depth look into the lives of students and helps position SAWC to make informed, effective, ethical, and empathetic decisions as we design and develop the program.
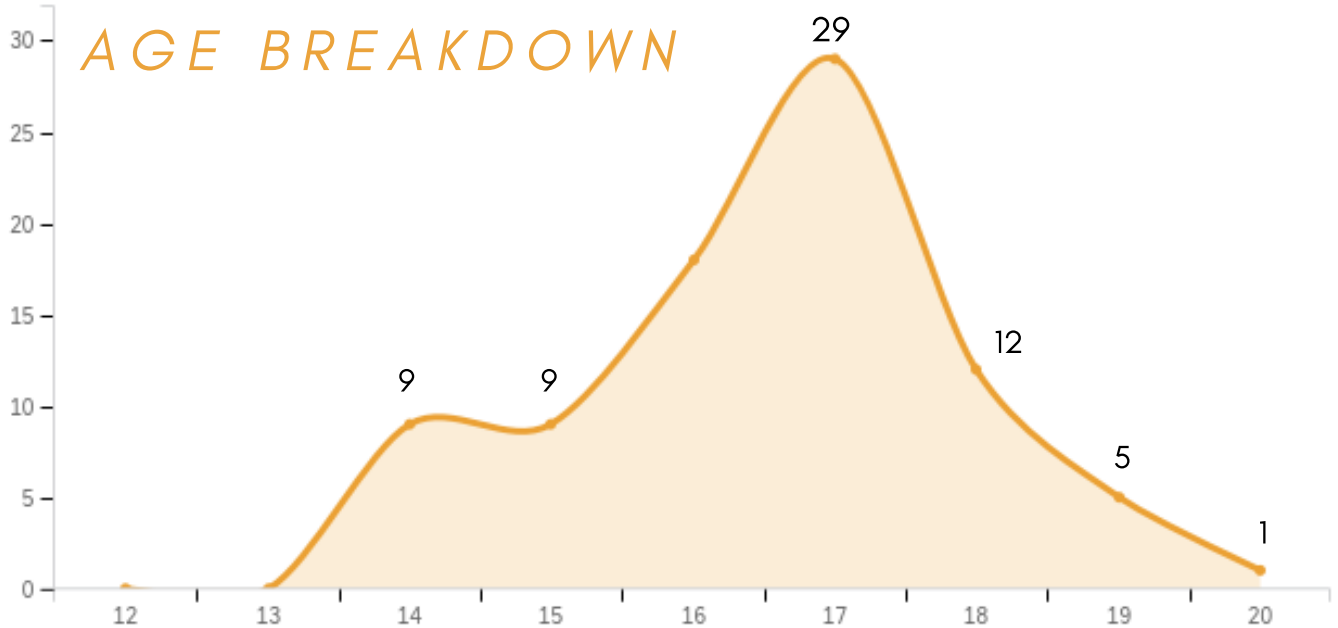
DEMOGRAPHICS

COUNTRY

2.38%
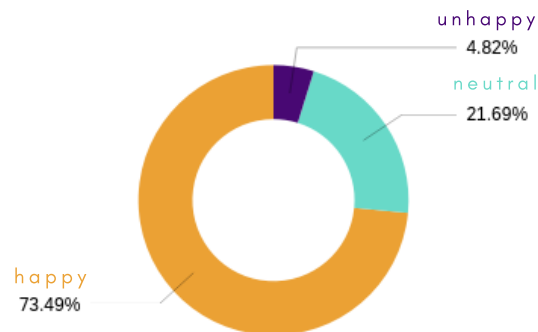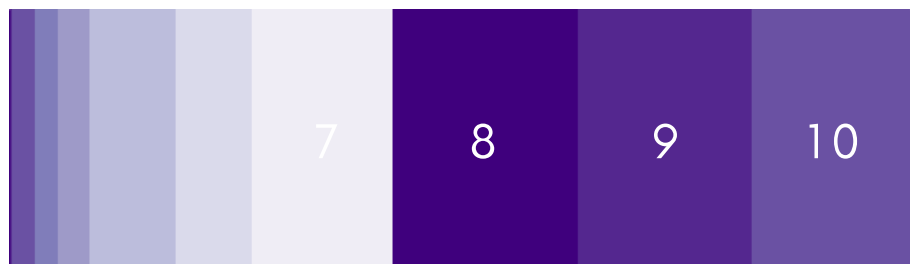declined
to state

india
30.95%

pakistan
66.67%

GENDER

2.41%
declined
to state

40.96%
male

female
56.63%

CLASS YEAR BREAKDOWN

53

27

3

9th   10th   11th   12th

AGE BREAKDOWN

29

9   9

12

5

1

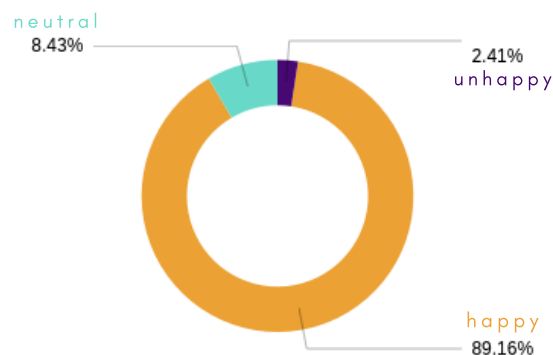12   13   14   15   16   17   18   19   20

QUICK SNAPSHOT OF THE STUDENTS' CURRENT EXPERIENCE

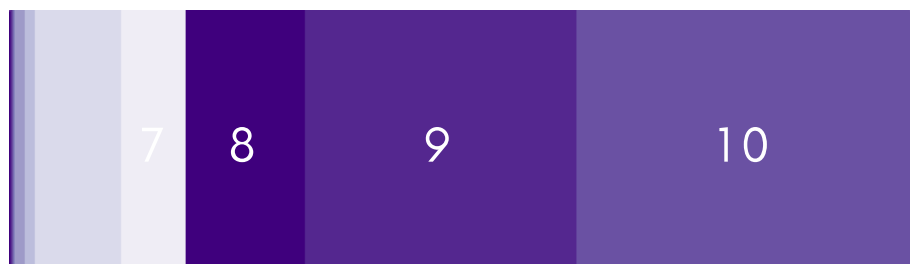## how satisfied are you with current classes/education

| | | | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

unhappy   neutral   happy

unhappy
4.82%

neutral
21.69%

happy
73.49%

how satisfied are you with the teaching in the classroom

| | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

unhappy neutral   happy

neutral
8.43%

2.41%
unhappy

happy
89.16%
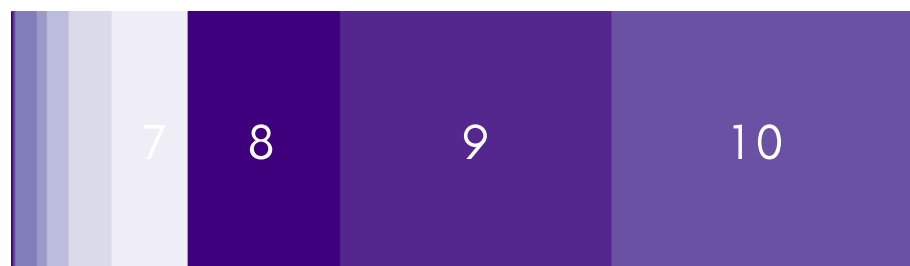
how satisfied are you with the guidance and advice you receive from your teachers

| | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

unhappy neutral   happy

12.05%
neutral

happy
87.95%
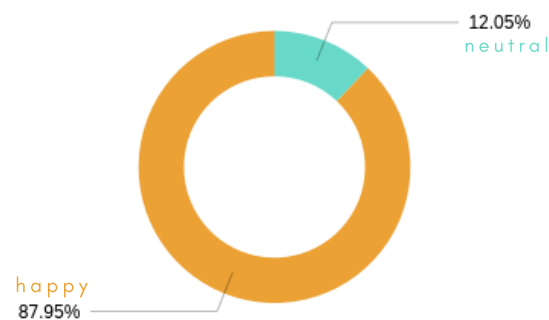
section two

ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

SATISFACTION WITH VARIOUS SUBJECTS

music

very unhappy
8.82%

very happy
35.29%

23.53%
neutral

happy
32.35%
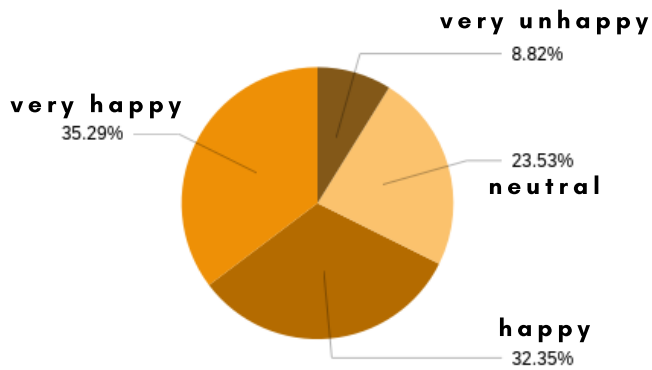
students not studying this subject: **55.84%**

geography

2.50%
unhappy

25.00%
very happy

27.50%
neutral

happy
45.00%
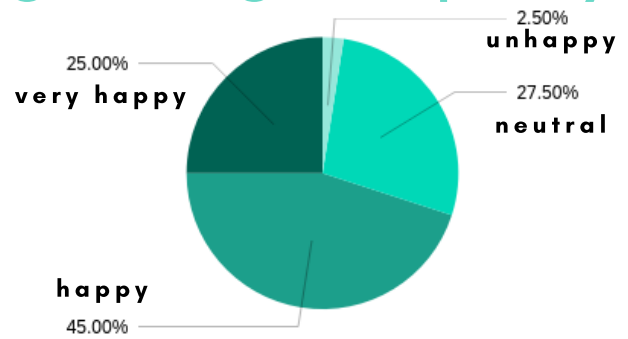
students not studying this subject: **48.05%**:

english

very unhappy
2.50%
neutral
10.00%
1.25%
unhappy

very happy
42.50%

happy
43.75%
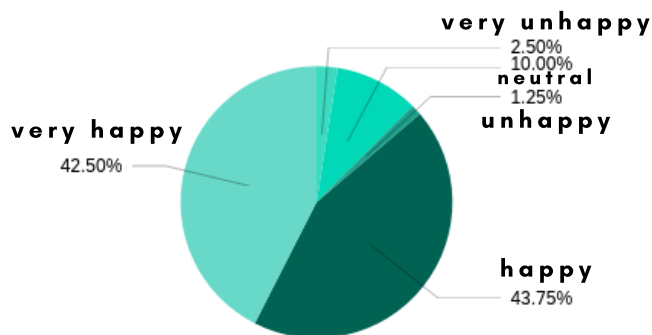
students not studying this subject: **0.00%**:

languages

unhappy
1.59%

23.81%
very happy

neutral
30.16%

3.17%
very unhappy

happy
41.27%
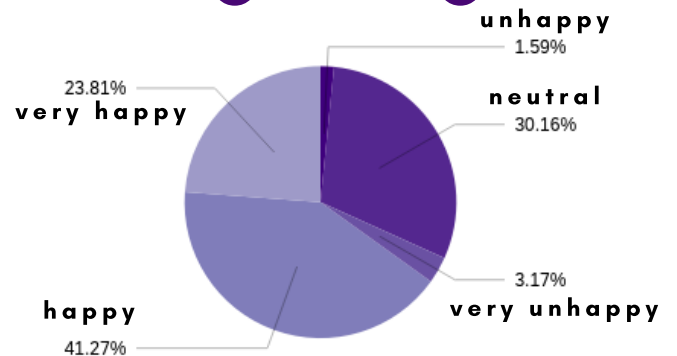
students not studying this subject: **18.18%**:

civics

very unhappy
1.52%

22.73%
very happy

24.24%
neutral

happy
51.52%
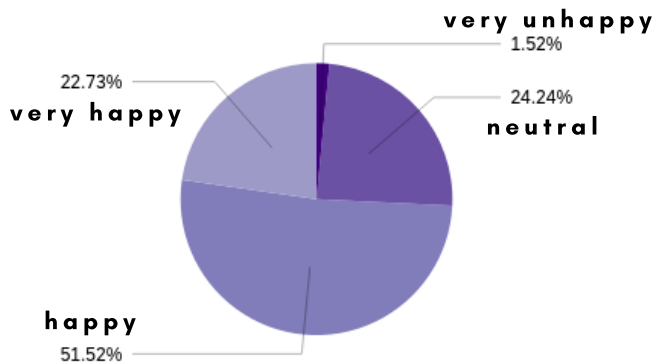
students not studying this subject: **16.46%**

commerce

4.17%
very unhappy

12.50%
very happy

25.00%
unhappy

happy
25.00%

neutral
33.33%
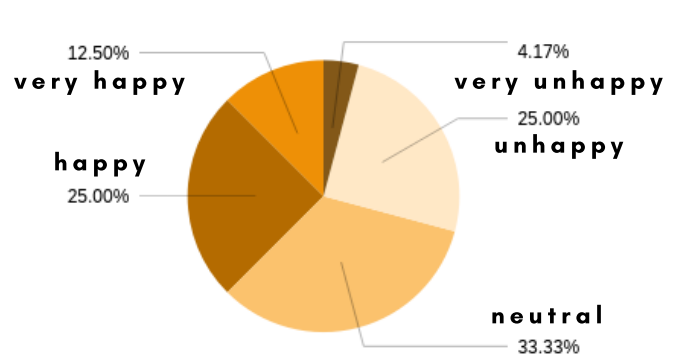
students not studying this subject: **69.23%**:

SATISFACTION WITH VARIOUS SUBJECTS

philosophy

very happy
20.00%

unhappy
12.00%

neutral
24.00%

happy
44.00%
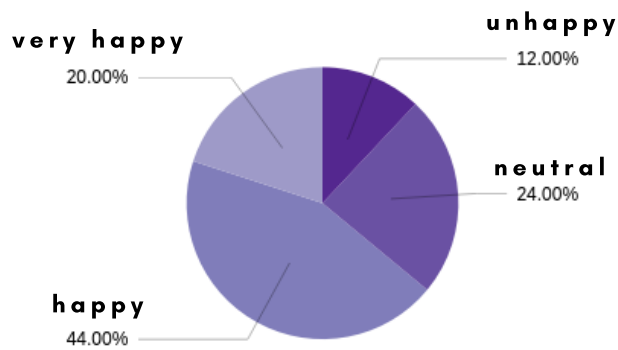
students not studying this subject: **67.95%**

maths

unhappy
6.33%
2.53%
very unhappy

very happy
34.18%

22.78%
neutral

happy
34.18%
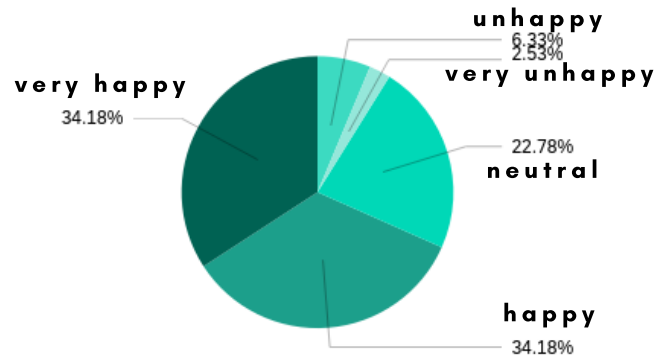
students not studying this subject: **1.25%**:

arts

very happy
28.57%

5.71%
unhappy

40.00%
neutral

25.71%
happy
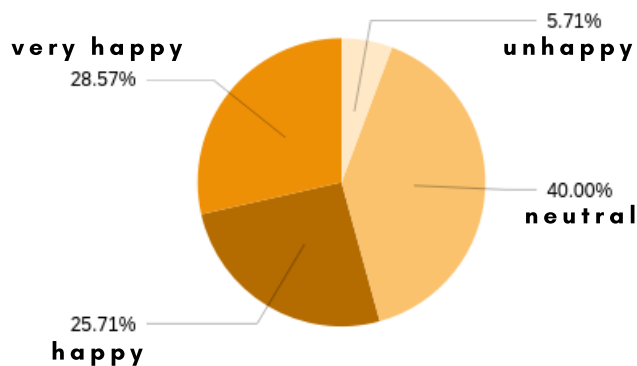
students not studying this subject: **56.25%**:

science

very unhappy
1.41%

happy
33.80%

very happy
36.62%

unhappy
2.82%

neutral
25.35%
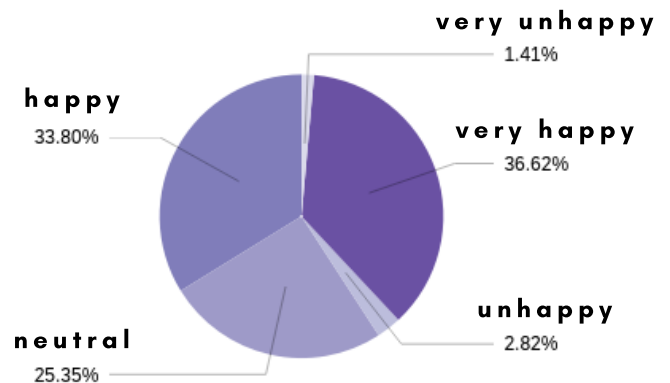
students not studying this subject: **10.13%**:

"PARHNEY KE SAATH SAATH KARNEY KA SHOQ"

[fondness of doing, along with learning]

Within the conversations held with students and in the analysis of their written responses within the survey, a reiterative theme of practical learning emerged. Students both from Karachi and Delhi were keen on incorporating an element of practicality to their current boards and exam heavy syllabi taught through a less exciting lecture style of learning. A student, when asked what is something she wished she was taught at school, remarked that she wanted everything taught practically. Throughout the survey similar thoughts were communicated, with one student saying "concepts are easy to learn if we did practically," and such recurring sentiments show a need for the integration of practical learning within the classroom.

WHICH SUBJECTS DO YOU WISH YOU COULD STUDY MORE OF/ GET A CHANCE TO EXPLORE
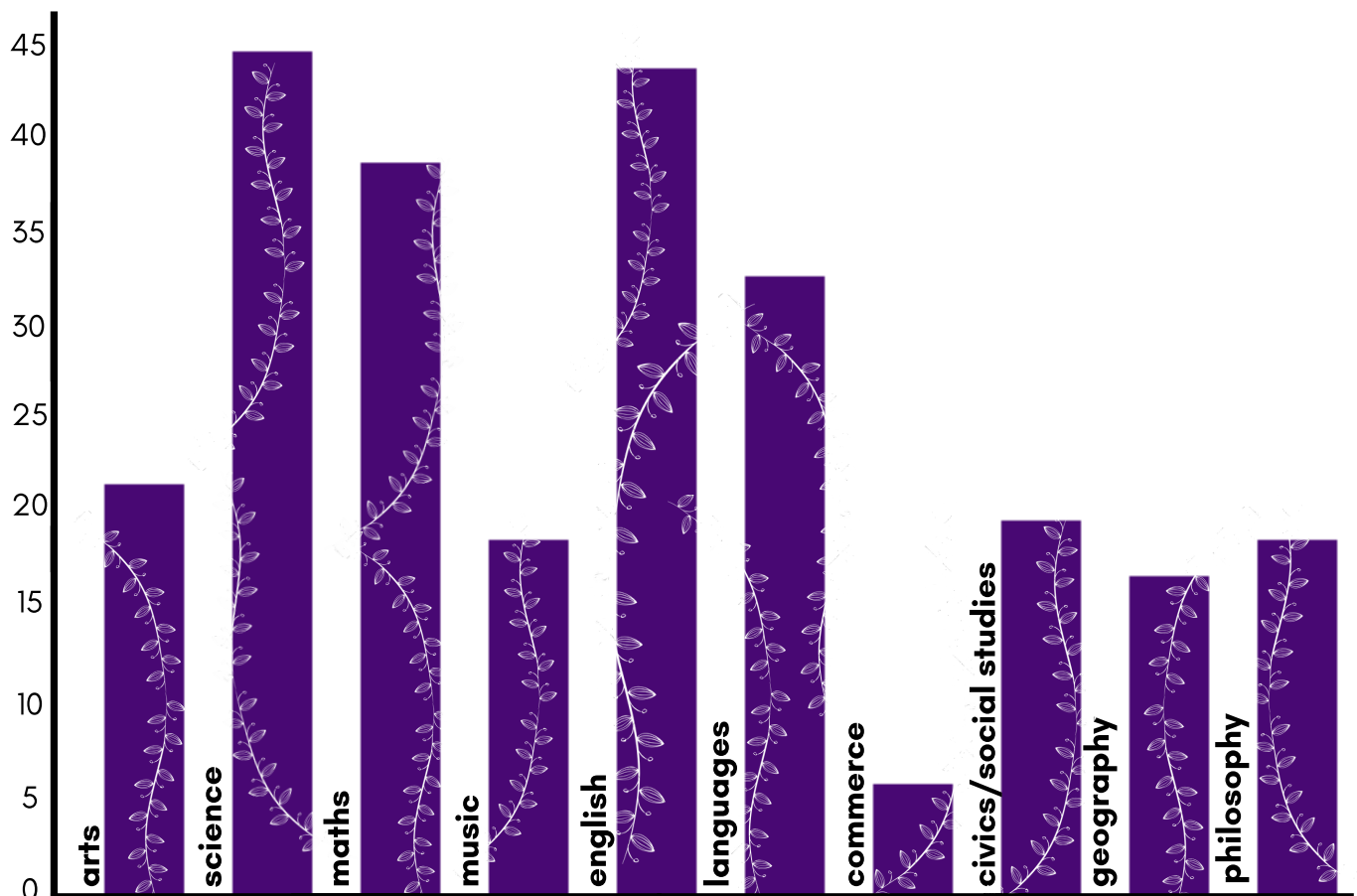
other subjects: computer science/ programming, 'life orientation,' sports, mechanics

Students seem to want to learn the subjects that they are already engaging with during the school year, but they wish to learn them in a way that goes beyond the boards level and exceeds the exam syllabi. In the short answer questions, many students focused on wanting critical thinking to be incorporated into their dream school curriculums. One respondent commented 'subjects shouldn't be based on syllabus, all the questions and queries should be conceptual,' Within the focus groups, students felt that subjects that they had been taught in school like science and math had progressively become less engaging and exciting and they wanted to learn them less. In terms of chemistry, when they were younger it was taught through experimentation but now it is the memorization of a series of formulas and that no longer makes them want to be scientists. Math is now taught in a pressured environment that is contained in derivations rather than critical thinking. Students in multiple focus groups expressed a gradual disenchantment from the maths due to its divergence from critical thinking into rote memorization. They feel like board exams are constantly hanging over their head and they are just repeating the same content without learning anything.
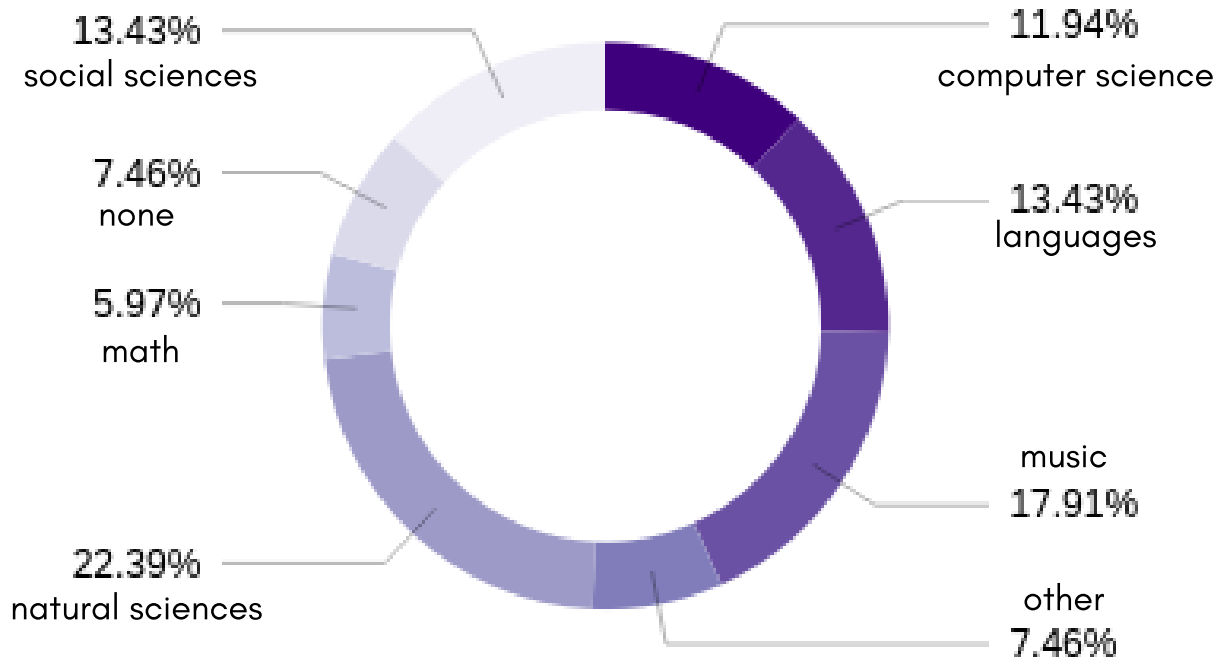
"HUM BAHUT SARI PADHAI KAR RAHI PAR KUCH HAT KE SEEKH NAHI PAA RHEY HAI"

[we are studying a lot but we are not being able to learn something out of the ordinary]

WHAT IS A SUBJECT YOU HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO LEARN BUT HAVEN'T HAD THE CHANCE TO

SHORT ANSWER

13.43% social sciences

11.94% computer science

7.46% none

13.43% languages

5.97% math

music 17.91%

22.39% natural sciences

other 7.46%

WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS MOST MISSING IN YOUR EDUCATION

SHORT ANSWER

interest in subject/ ability to concentrate
3.17%

poor learning/ lack of general knowledge
20.63%

12.70% nothing

lack of specific subject
17.46%

confidence
4.76%

access to information
7.94%

access to/quality of facilities
4.76%

1.59% fun
3.17% communication

mentorship 4.76%

4.76% time management

14.29% practical learning
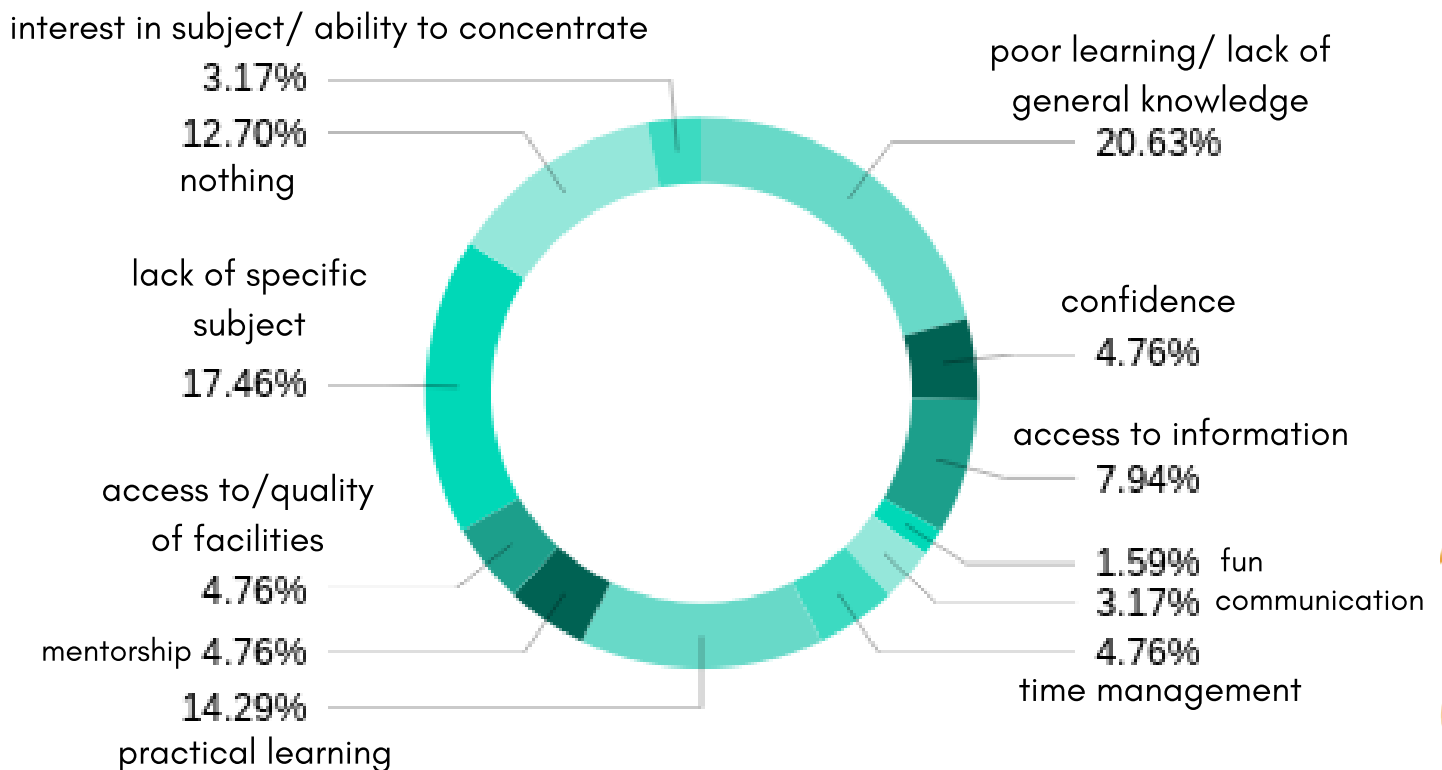
WHAT DO YOU WANT MORE OF IN THE CLASSROOM

critical thinking
19.70%

open communication
with the teacher
18.94%

memorization
12.12%

18.56%
creativity

14.39%

class discussion
16.29%

lecture style
teaching
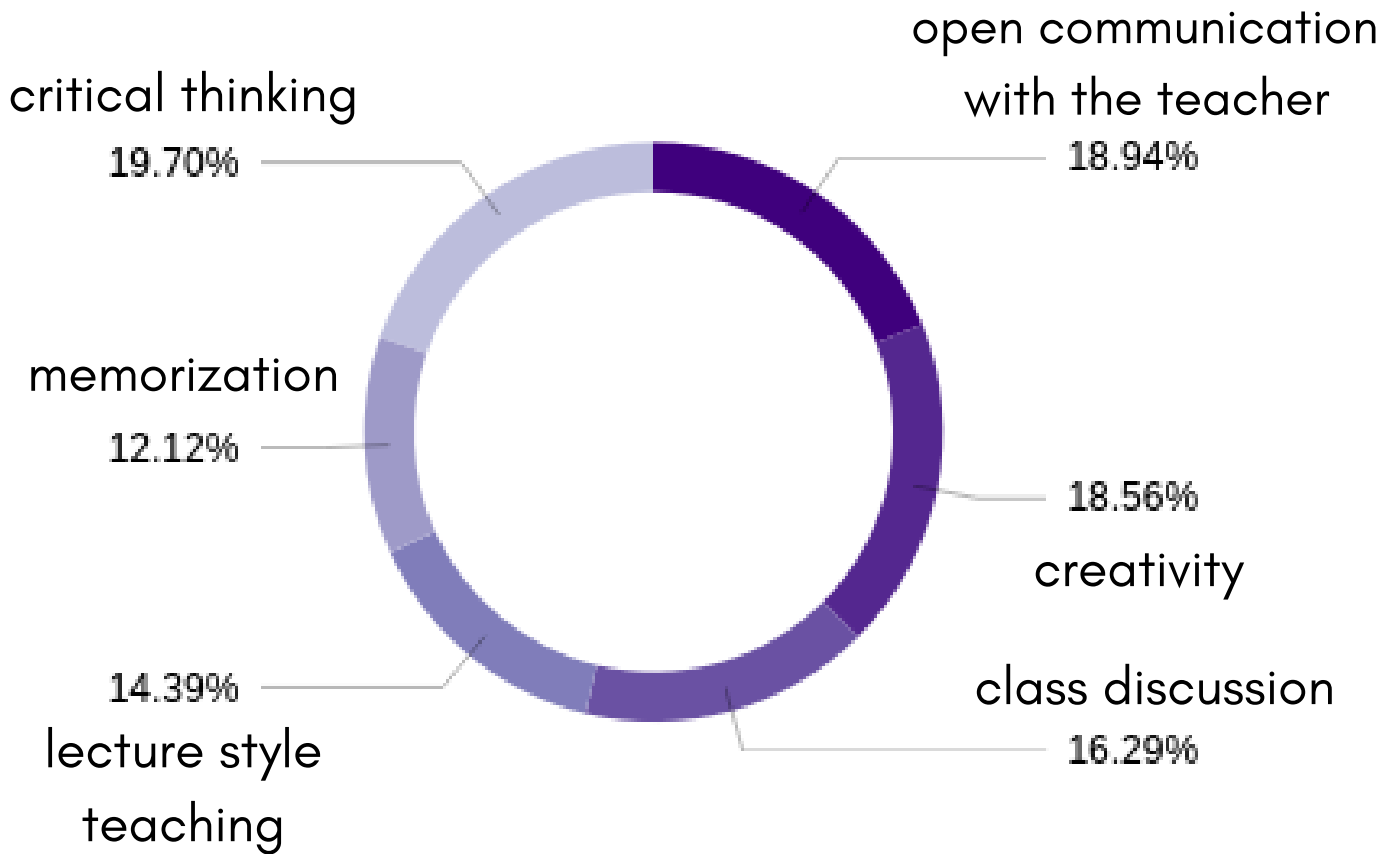
WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IN THE CLASSROOM

highest ranking

lowest ranking

■ Open Communication with the Instructor   ■ Creativity   ■ Class Discussion   ■ Lecture Style Teaching
■ Memorization   ■ Critical Thinking
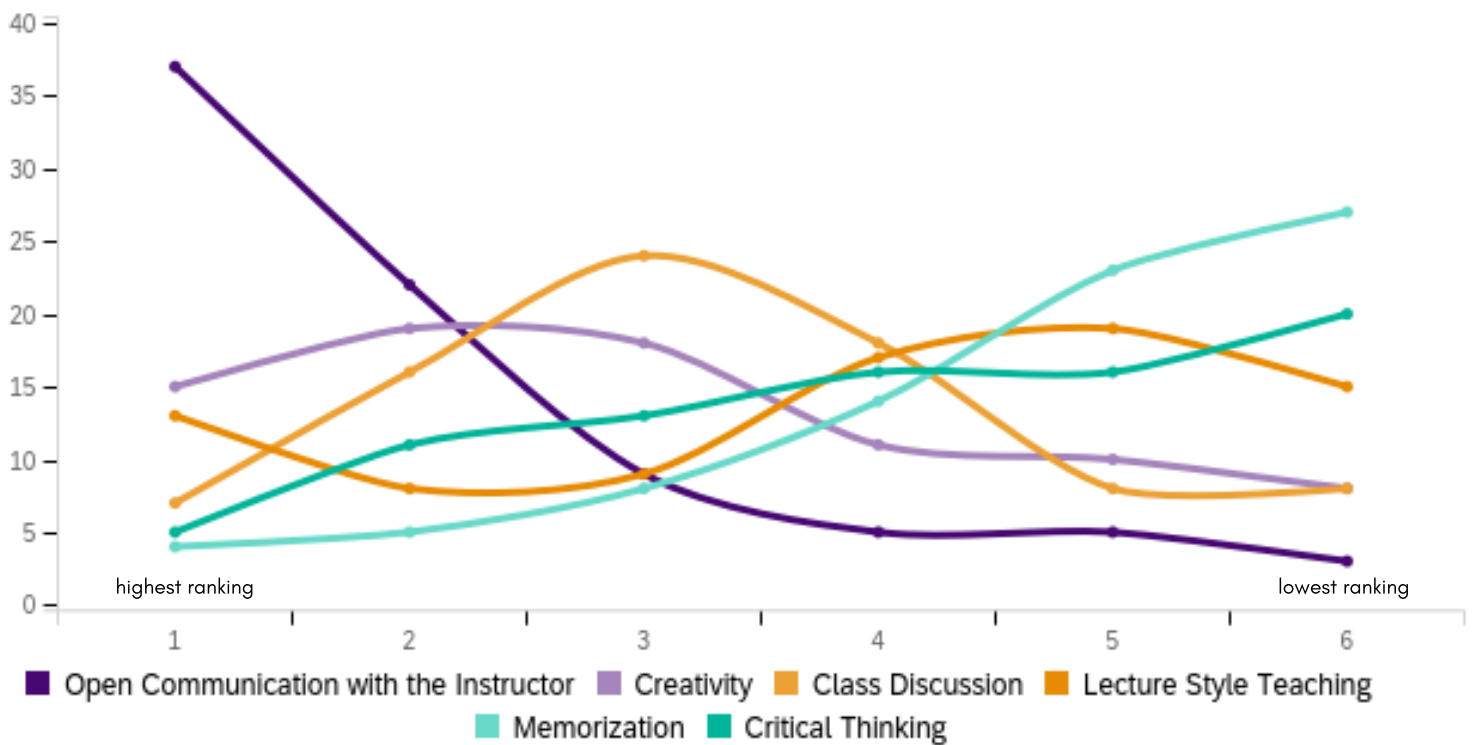
"I WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH AND I WANT... [IT] TAUGHT [TO] ME AS A NORMAL FRIEND"

A key component of the students' desire in the classroom was to have an avenue for open communication with the teacher. They consistently ranked open communication with the teacher highly important and wished that it was more incorporated into their classrooms. Students we spoke to from Delhi spoke highly of a particular SST teacher; a teacher they referred to as "*didi*." They spoke of her willingness to always help and explain concepts even when they don't understand them. They remarked that this teacher helped them in school life & personal life. It was clear, through the love and care in their voice, that this teacher had surpassed the category of just a removed being but entered a more kinship existence with them as almost their sister/di in a way that advised them in multiple dimensions.

Within the survey itself, when asked to further elaborate on what they felt was most missing in their education, students remarked they wanted 'student interaction' and a way to easily understand the material. If they were to design an ideal space to learn, students wanted subjects to *"be taught...very politely and peacefully so the student can learn"* by teachers who are good at explaining and can teach in a way that clears confusion. To further the air of open communication, it must exist not only at the personal level, at the classroom level to create a comfortable environment. Students from the focus ideal experience of SAWC from them would be one that replicates the *"mahual"* [environment] created during the call, in which one student remarked that she wasn't feeling nervous and everyone on the call, both facilitators and participants, were very friendly. As one respondent on the survey put it: *"I want to learn English and I want... [it] taught [to] me as a normal friend"*

HOW DO YOU LEARN BEST

SOCIAL
learning in a group helps your understanding grow

SOLITARY
you like to learn in your own company and self-study

VISUAL
pictures, diagrams, images help you learn

VERBAL
use words to learn through speech and writing

MUSICAL/AUDITORY
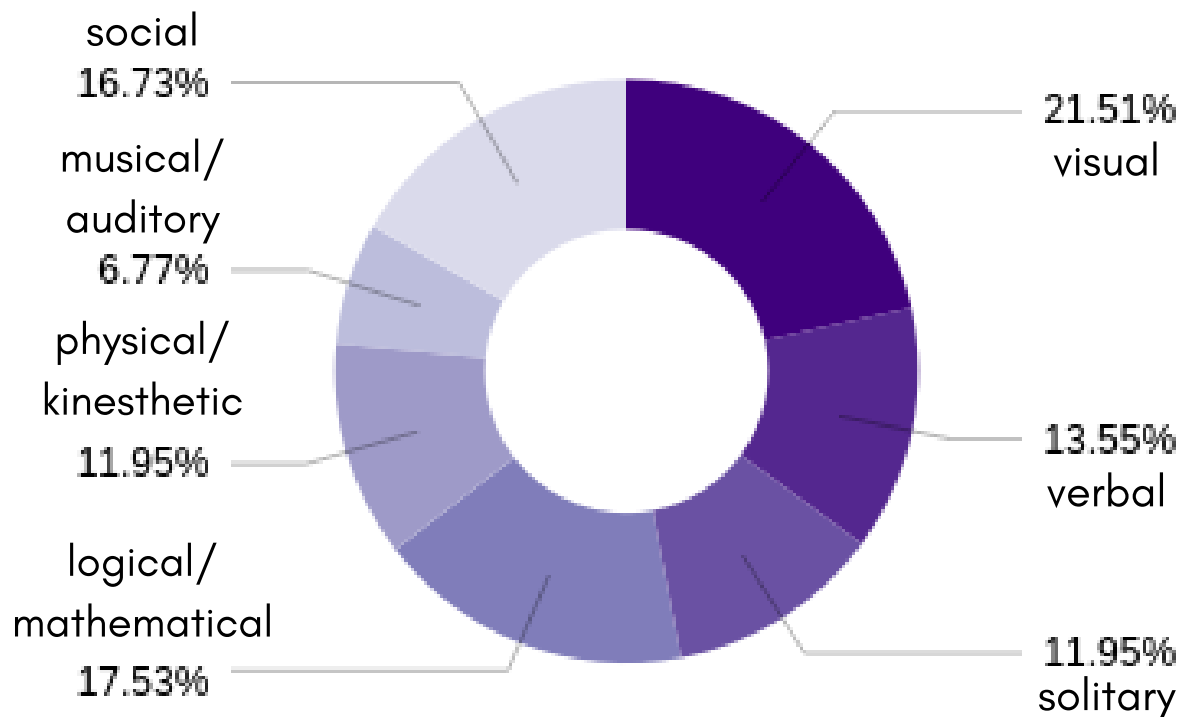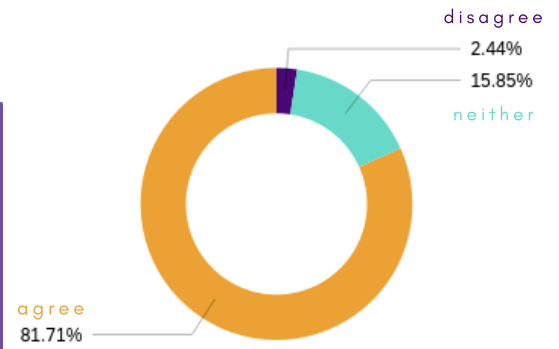*sounds, music, and rhythms help you learn*

PHYSICAL/KINESTHETIC
using your hands, body, sense of touch, and 'acting things out' helps you learn
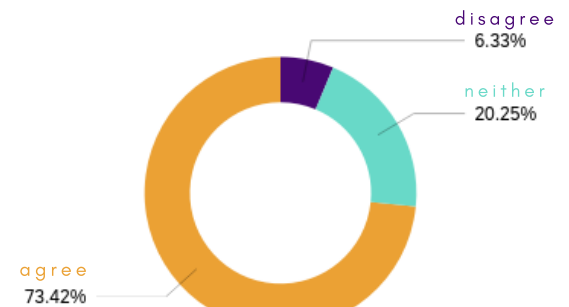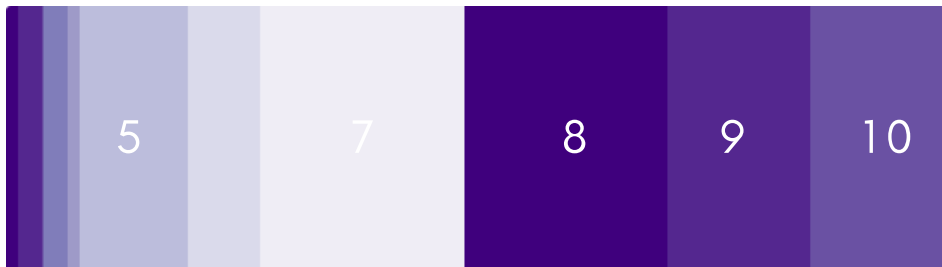
LOGICAL/MATHEMATICAL
learn through logic and reasoning, systems and sequences

social
16.73%

musical/
auditory
6.77%

physical/
kinesthetic
11.95%

logical/
mathematical
17.53%

21.51%
visual

13.55%
verbal

11.95%
solitary

i am confident i can achieve my academic goals

disagree neither   agree

disagree
2.44%
15.85%
neither

agree
81.71%

i have valuable contributions to make in classroom discussion

disagree neither   agree
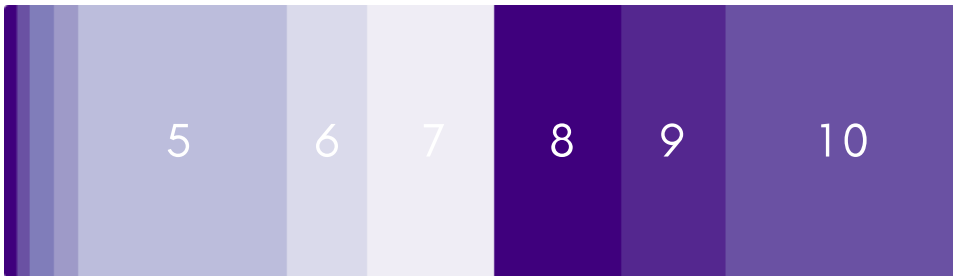
disagree
6.33%

neither
20.25%

agree
73.42%

"SCHOOL OF DREAMS AND CONFIDENCE STUDENTS WHERE EVERY ONE CAN EASILY SHARE THEIR OWN OPINIONS AND IDEAS.. WHERE STUDENTS CAN SHOW NOT ONLY THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE BUT ALSO THEIR INNER TALENTS. THIS SHOULD BE ONLY POSSIBLE WHEN THE SCHOOL SCENARIO IS IN HEALTHY AND ADVANCED ENVIRONMENT."

When asked to design their own school & curriculum - one that is the ideal for them - students remarked upon integrating critical thinking along with interactive and practical learning within the classroom. They wanted different senses to be used within the curriculum through visual and video learning and the incorporation of discussion throughout the course. From the teachers they asked that the lessons be fun, clearly communicated and explained and the learning be gradual, rising from basic fundamentals to higher level applications. Amongst the subjects they envisioned were math & business, English and other languages, science and engineering, the social sciences & religious studies, creative pursuits like dance, music, and art, computer science and electronics, and sports.

section three

MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCE

i have a strong idea of what i want to study in the future

| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

disagree   neither   agree

disagree
4.88%

neither
32.93%

62.20%
agree
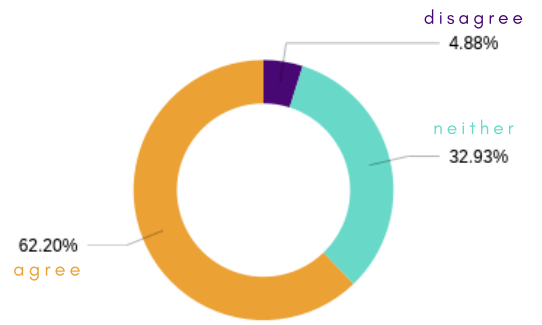
i have a strong idea of what i want to do in my career

| 5 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

disagree   neither   agree

disagree
4.88%

neither
28.05%

67.07%
agree
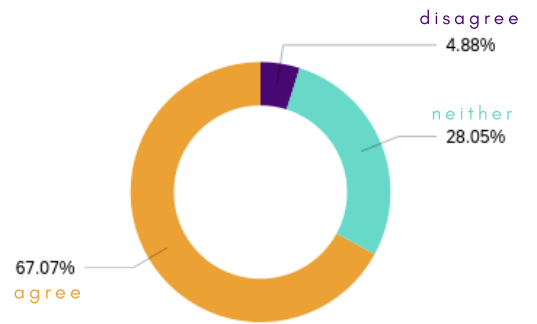
i can achieve the academic and career goals that i have set

| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

disagree neither   agree

disagree
2.53%

17.72%
neither
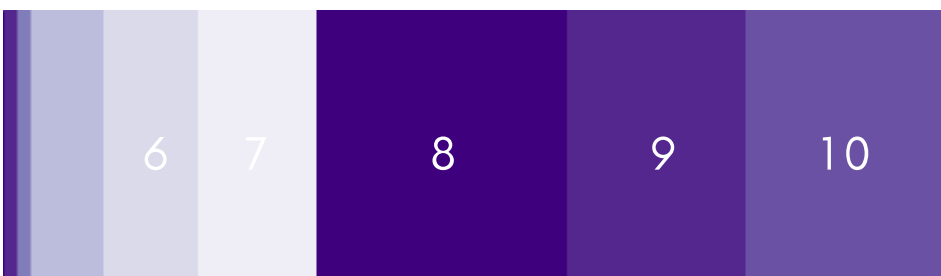
agree
79.75%
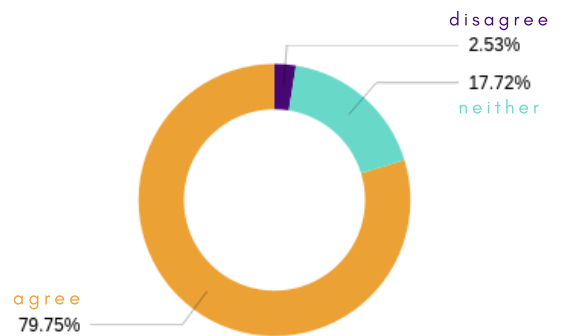
THINGS THAT MAKE LEARNING AND FUTURE PLANNING DIFFICULT

10.42%

lack of mentors

8.33%

parental pressure

20.14%

lack of exposure

36.11%

financial concerns

lack of information

25.00%
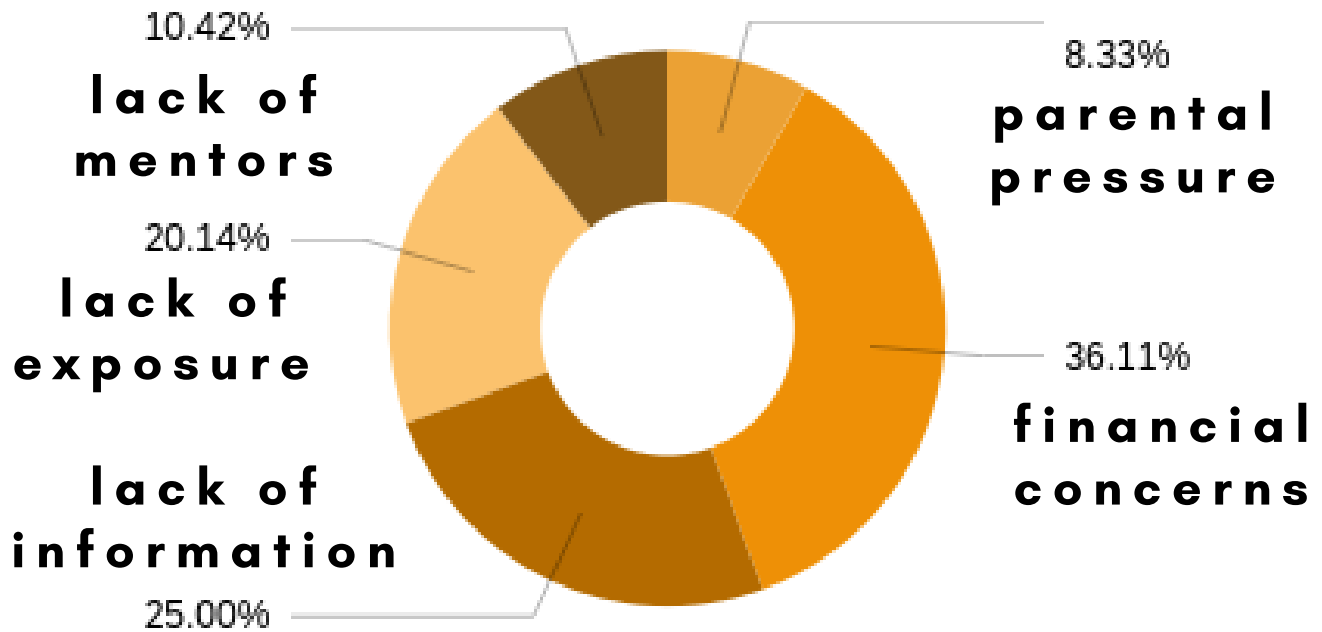
other concerns: online classes, pressure from many people, creativity, time shortage, mental health, tiredness

Amongst the various other barriers, one of the concerns written in was the barrier produced by "online learning." Students elaborated on this within the focus groups, as they remarked about the difficulties in accessing network and devices to participate in even in the conversation, and such difficulties may continue into the program. One of the main barriers was that their hand became numb from holding the phone for an hour and he said providing a recording would be nice because you can have a conversation on Zoom but not learn on Zoom. In other groups, the call often dropped or cut out in a manner that made it diff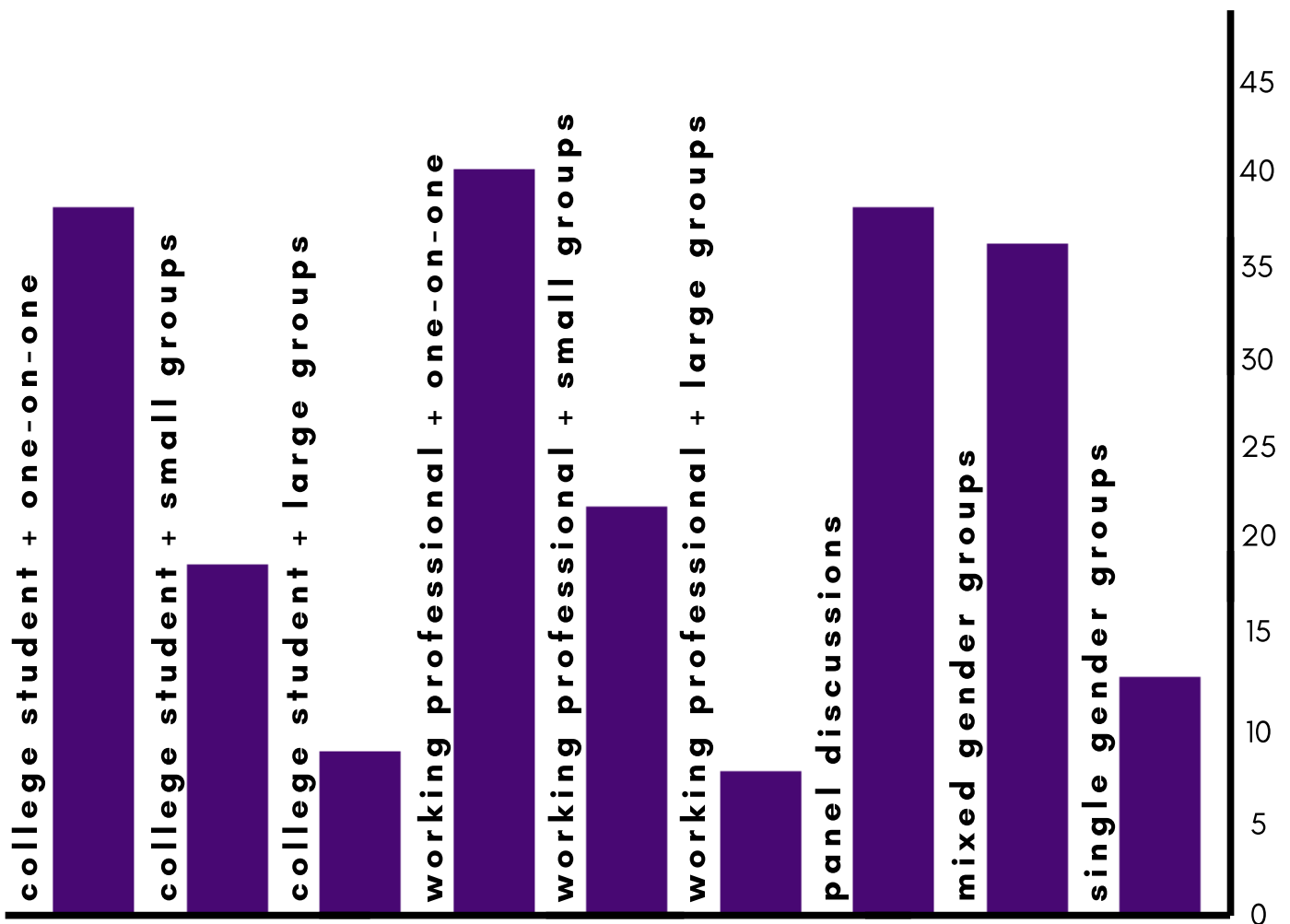icult for them to understand the conversation wholly. With this unique barrier presenting with the format of an online instruction platform, there may be a need to employ various mediums to ensure that information is communicated effectively and without detriment to select students.

MENTORSHIP FORMAT

do you think talking **college students** about your learning and future decisions/planning would help

do you think talking **working professionals** in your area of interest would help

35.90%

60.26%

3.85%

20.51%

2.56%

76.92%

■ no   ■ maybe   ■ yes

college student + one-on-one

college student + small groups

college student + large groups

working professional + one-on-one

working professional + small groups

working professional + large groups

panel discussions

mixed gender groups

single gender groups
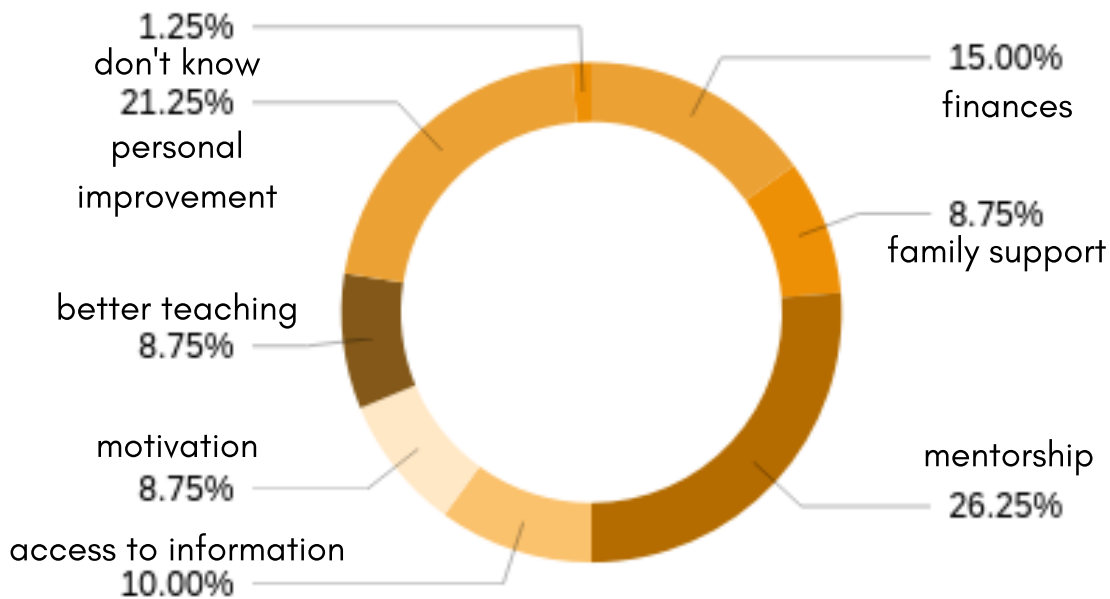
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
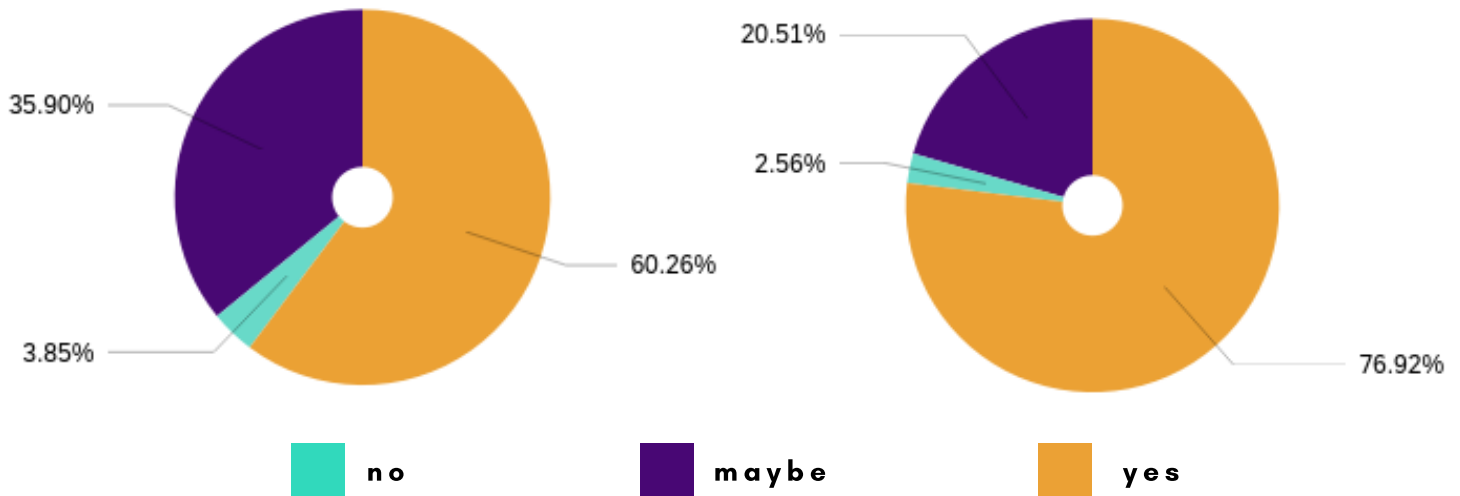
"HUM UNSE KHUL KE BAAT KARSAKTEY."

[we can talk openly with them]

When asked about mentorship, students often remarked that a variety of delivery (group and one-on-one) and mentors (college students and working professionals) would be ideal. They wanted a variety so that they could understand on different levels what it means to be in different phases of the future and could gain insight from other's questions in the groups, while also getting personalized attention during one-on-one sessions. They remarked that talking to seniors closer in age would be more comfortable and allow them to share openly: "hum unse khul ke baat karsaktey." For students, their ideal experience of SAWC from them would be one that replicates the environment ["mahual"] created during the call, in which a student said she wasn't feeling nervous and everyone on the call was very friendly.

WHAT WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO SUPPORT YOU IN ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

SHORT ANSWER

- 1.25% don't know
- 21.25% personal improvement
- better teaching 8.75%
- motivation 8.75%
- access to information 10.00%
- 15.00% finances
- 8.75% family support
- mentorship 26.25%

section four

CONCLUSION

DISCUSSION

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- While students indicate they are satisfied with their current educational experience, there is room for improvement in the subjects that they are taking by integrating different modes of learning, and non-exam focused syllabi. Students discussed multiple subjects and skills they would like to learn but have not had the opportunity to do so.

- The stress and rigidity of learning for the sake of scoring well in board exams stunts the learning experience of students. There is a desire to learn for the sake of learning without consequences.

- Where there is a lack of communication and open discussion between students and teachers in the classroom, students express a high importance of these factors in their classroom. Students expressed a desire to have open conversations about personal and academic matters.

- Practical learning, skill development, and conceptual thinking are a priority for students; there is a current disconnect between academics and relevant employable skills.

DISCUSSION

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Lack of access to information, difficulty finding a mentor, and financial constraints make it difficult for students to learn and plan for their future. Such difficulties are compounded by the introduction of online learning. Knowing these barriers, the curriculums and instruction developed must be flexible and creative to reach a variety of students - employing both synchronous and asynchronous engagement design.

- Students expressed a keen interest in being connected to mentors who can guide them through their personal, academic, and professional lives. Mentors should be easy to talk to, empathetic, and unintimidating. The delivery of the mentorship desired by the students was through group and one-on- one conversations with both college students and working professionals.

DISCUSSION

LIMITATIONS

- Due to sample size and demographics, our pre-design research findings cannot be generalized to all South Asian secondary school students.

- Every student was not able to participate in a focus group; thus elaboration on and deeper understandings of their choices were not elucidated.

- Concepts that are more convoluted, like "mentorship," needed to be asked through a series of simpler straightforward questions in order to fully gauge the students experience and hopes.

- While focus groups were conducted in the first language of students, the questionnaire was only available in English. Since English is not the native language of any of the participants, this could serve as a potential barrier to understanding.

IMPLEMENTATION

SAWC 2020 came to a close with more than 400 students from across 5 different countries, 33 teachers spanning 11 institutions, and 100 mentors from all around the world.

Collectively, there were over 200 hours of mentorship, 100 hours of in-class activities, and friendships that will last a lifetime. For a complete list of class offerings and mentorship events, please refer to our website *www.sawc.info*

SAWC was designed by students for students. In ensuring that every design decision was made in accordance with the findings from this report, we were able to bring the students' envisioned program to life.

thank you

TO ALL THE **STUDENTS** WHO PUT IN THE CARE TO SHARE THEIR TIME, EXPERIENCES, AND INSIGHTS WITH US; SAWC IS OF YOU, FOR YOU.

TO **THE CITIZENS FOUNDATION** (TCF) AND **FREEDOM EMPLOYABILITY ACADEMY** (FEA) FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE THROUGHOUT THE RESEARCH PROCESS. SAWC HAS TRULY BEEN BUILT ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS.

HAVE QUESTIONS?

reach out to us, we love hearing from the community

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RESEARCH *predesign* REPORT

20/21