UPSC aspirants going digital: their ordeals & solutions

Saumya Shashi / 15th March 2019

🗒 SURVEY REPORT

🔬 Key Findings

**We surveyed a sample of 14 UPSC aspirants and the survey findings are quite coherent with the interview findings.**

Around 28.6% of the students use e-learning apps to study for UPSC a few times per day. Adding to that a whooping percentage of 42.9% use e-learning apps at least once per day.

This make it evident that **e-learning app is a need of the hour amongst the UPSC aspirants.**

2. In the past week, how often did you use a mobile app to study for UPSC?
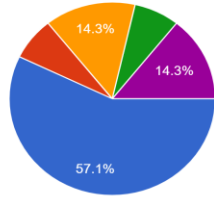
14 responses
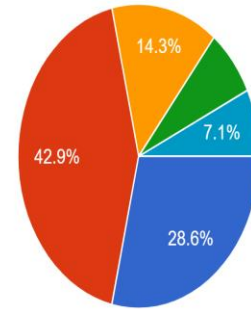
- a. A few times per day
- b. About once per day
- c. 4-6 times per week
- d. 2-3 times per week
- e. Once per week
- f. I didn't study for the exam last week

14.3%

42.9%

7.1%

28.6%

Survey Finding #2

9. Which one of below is the biggest loophole of e-learning
14 responses

- a. Not as interactive as offline classes
- b. Less/No peer communication to compare your progress with
- c. Peer group forums are not regularized
- d. Doubt resolutions are delayed
- e. No/ Less one to one query resolution with the teacher

57.1% 14.3% 14.3%

About half of the sample consider online classes **less interactive** compared to offline classes
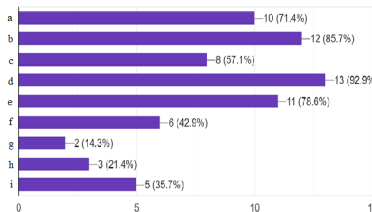
50% of the surveyed aspirants would prefer if the answers posted by students on discussion forums be **authenticated by teachers**. Approx. 21% want **quick resolution of the queries**.

11. Which one of these irritates you the most regarding query resolution on a discussion forum?
14 responses
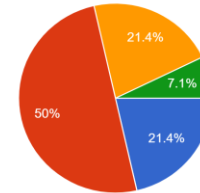
- a. Query not being resolved for days on a discussion forum
- b. No one to confirm if the answers given by students on your query is right or wrong
- c. Students debating on useless topics
- Not used it.

50% 21.4% 21.4% 7.1%

3. Which 5 of the choices given below are the most important issues you want to be addressed in an e-learning app for UPSC CSE preparation. (select any 5)
14 responses

a — 10 (71.4%)
b — 12 (85.7%)
c — 8 (57.1%)
d — 13 (92.9%)
e — 11 (78.6%)
f — 6 (42.9%)
g — 2 (14.3%)
h — 3 (21.4%)
i — 5 (35.7%)

0   5   10   15

a. Downloadable Notes of the online classes
b. One to One Query Resolution with the teacher
c. A regulated discussion forum with peers
d. Quizzes
e. Progress report
f. Comparative report with toppers/peers
g. Regular pat-on-backs in case of achievements
h. Podcasts
i. A fixed study plan

When asked about 5 most important issues to be addressed, about 85% opted for **one-to-one query resolution with teachers.**

Survey Finding #3

While talking about the top 5 pain points to be addressed most of the students selected **some or the other forms of motivation** as at least one of the 5 preferences.

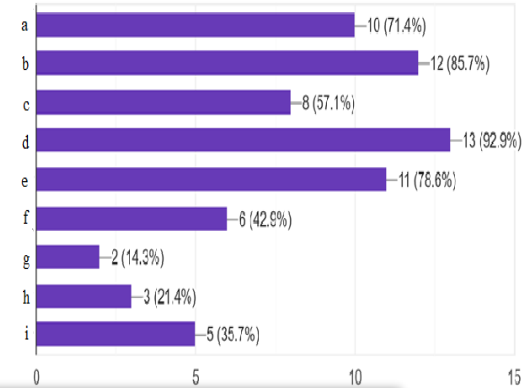78% student wanted a **progress report** to keep them on track.
A 14% opted for **regular pat-on-backs** for small achievements.
42% wanted **comparative reports** with the toppers/peers.

When asked about the most preferred mode of motivation. Most of them believed in self-motivation. A 21% wanted **small encouraging messages** when they achieve a task. And 14% needed **progress report**.

3. Which 5 of the choices given below are the most important issues you want to be addressed in an e-learning app for UPSC CSE preparation. (select any 5)

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e. Progress report
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g. Regular pat-on-backs in case of achievements
h. Podcasts
i. A fixed study plan

10. Which of the following would you prefer to motivate yourself through the entire process of the exam?

14 responses

14.3%
21.4%
64.3%
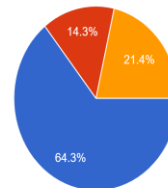
a. Self-motivation, I do not need any external source to motivate me.
b. Progress report as I move towards my targets
c. Small encouraging messages when I achieve a task
d. Comparative report with my peers/ toppers
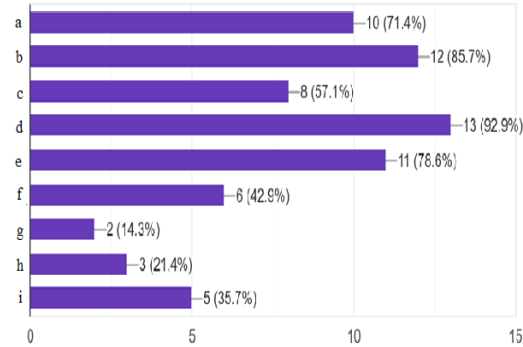e. Streaks & stars whenever I login the app to help me coming back.

🔬 Survey Finding #4

A considerable 75% required downloadable notes.

When asked about preferred form of notes. 42% preferred downloadable pdfs.

3. Which 5 of the choices given below are the most important issues you want to be addressed in an e-learning app for UPSC CSE preparation. (select any 5)

14 responses

- **a.** Downloadable Notes of the online classes
- **b.** One to One Query Resolution with the teacher
- **c.** A regulated discussion forum with peers
- **d.** Quizzes
- **e.** Progress report
- **f.** Comparative report with toppers/peers
- **g.** Regular pat-on-backs in case of achievements
- **h.** Podcasts
- **i.** A fixed study plan

12. Which of the following will be the best form of notes of the lesson for you?

14 responses

- a. Pre-made lecture notes in the form of downloadable pdf
- b. Self-made notes that I jot down during lecture
- c. Physical copies of the notes (no pdfs required)

🔬 Survey Finding #5

Most of the aspirants (93%) wanted quizzes. And they were divided almost equally on either **daily/weekly quizzes.**

3. Which 5 of the choices given below are the most important issues you want to be addressed in an e-learning app for UPSC CSE preparation. (select any 5)
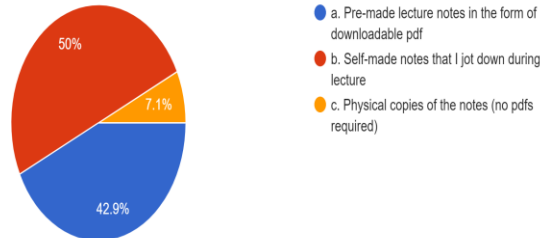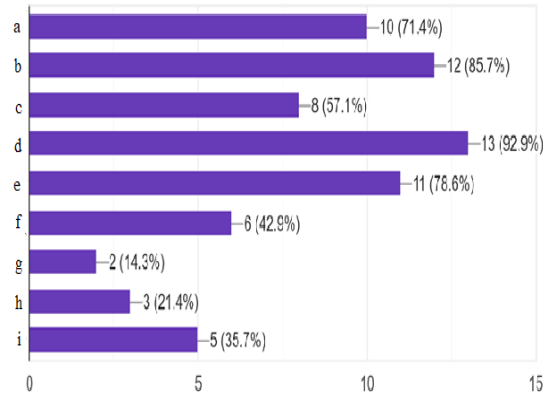
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5. What should be the optimum frequency of quizzes?

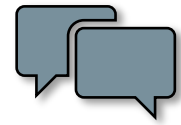14 responses

- Daily 57.1%
- Weekly 42.9%
- Bi-monthly
- Monthly
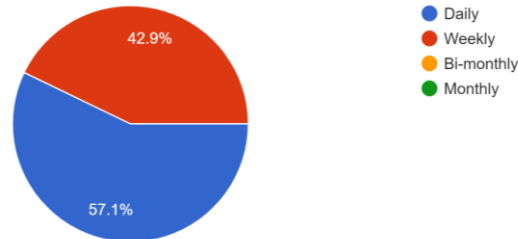
Next Steps

- Validate findings with interviews & gain an in depth-understanding of pain points & motivations of students.

- Conduct a market research of existing e-learning apps.

- Run a design sprint for brainstorming

Interview Report

Executive Summary

Digital learning has become the need for the hour, more so in COVID situation.

The client RR Campus Coaching Institute (who runs offline classes for UPSC civil services exams' aspirants) is interested in making digital presence through a mobile app "MySuccess". [UPSC exam is one the toughest exams to crack in India and requires a rigorous study of at least 1.5 yrs]

The product being in a very early stage, we are interested in exploring e-learning avenues for competitive exams preparations. 4 aspirants enrolled in the client's offline classes were interviewed regarding their expectations, pain points, and how they use digital products (if any) for Civil services exam preparations.

Key Findings

- Apart from ease of access & on-demand class videos, **interactive learning** for **better doubt resolution** is the need of the hour.

- **Visual motivations**, including progress reports, comparative analysis with toppers/peers and pat on back for small achievements go a long way in keeping them upbeat for the competitive exams.

Other Findings

- **Downloadable notes** help them revisit what was taught in class. Also if they require to take print of anything they can do it easily.

- Weekly quizzes with **score results and correct answers provided soon after submitting the test,** are necessary to keep the students prompt and to let them know the real status of their learning.

Research Objectives

To learn about how UPSC aspirants use digital tools to access online class, solve their doubts and download class materials. What goals they try to achieve and what are their disappointments while using these tools.

To determine what opportunities and needs might exist for an e-learning app, so that we can use these findings to help us shape the direction we take in developing our product.

Key Research Questions

[Needs]

1. Why students need an app to cater to their learning?
2. What are their primary expectations from the app?
3. What are their current pain points?

[Behaviours]

1. How do they currently study in absence of a dedicated app for coaching institute?
2. Why don't they keep continuing with the existing setup provided to them?
3. How do they interact with other e-learning platforms, if they are using it?

👥 4 Participants

We recruited our participants from amongst the enrolled students of RR Campus Coaching Institute, through random sampling.

	Background	Digital products they currently use for e-learning	Study Frequency
Participant 1	Sit-at-home self learner	Unacademy, IAS baba, Insights	Daily (5-6 hrs) early mornings / noons
Participant 2	Working professional	Duolingo, Unacademy	Weekdays(2-3 hrs) : early mornings / evenings Weekends: (6-7 hrs)
Participant 3	Working professional	Unacademy, Duolingo, Insights, Podcasts	Weekdays(2-3 hrs) : early mornings / evenings Weekends: (6-7 hrs)
Participant 4	College student	Insights	Weekdays(5-6 hrs) : evenings / late nights Weekends: (6-7 hrs)

🔬 Key Findings

'More interactive' Online learning for better doubt resolution

🔬 Findings:

Aspirants find a gap in their queries getting addressed online.

Most of the market players have a common forum where students can put their queries in comment. However, delayed / no / unsure / incorrect responses result in disappointments for the aspirants. It hampers there understanding of such a vast syllabus.

> *"Sometimes days go by till someone notices your query and responds. One's speed & quality of learning dampens due to this!"*
>
> -Participant 1

> *"Students(peers) do answer each other, but there is no one to confirm what is the right answer for the same! A one-to-one interaction with teachers or at least someone to review the answer of students can help a lot."*
>
> -Participant 4

Recommendation #1

Apart from on-demand topic–wise videos, our new product could focus on interactive doubt resolution, simulating offline classes as closely as we can.

Things to consider:

- One to one query resolution with teachers must be provided. Availability of teachers could be timed.

- A discussion forum for group study should be there

- Mechanism to provide affirmation from teachers for the correct answer should be there.

Udemy Learners app
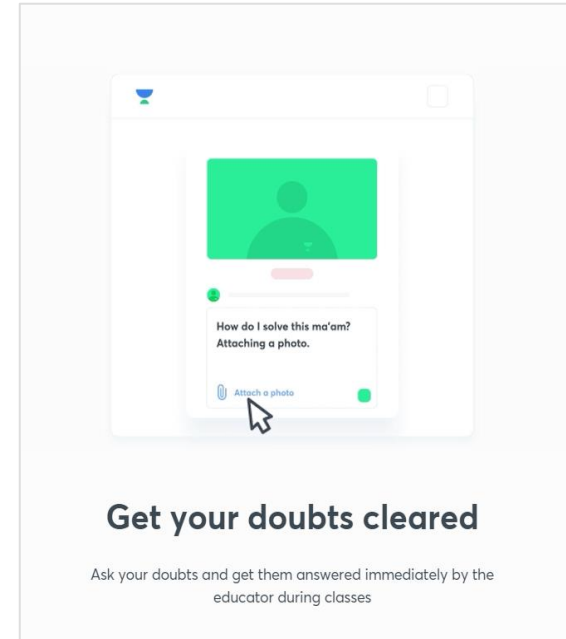
*One of the students showed this useful feature in an app she used.*

Seeing progress and achievements is the key motivation for learners to keep learning

🔬 Findings:

All the participants said little celebrations from the app encourage them to continue to study.
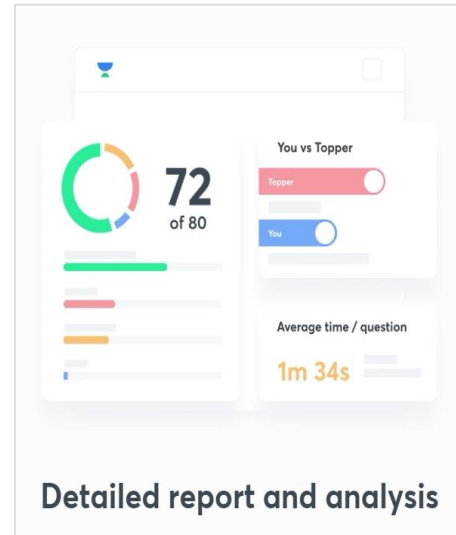
UPSC exams takes 1.5+ yrs of preparations. Such a long period of online preparation with no constant human touch gets drab for students, in such cases emotional encouragement help them feel validated and enthusiastic to keep going

You're 27 XP away from your daily goal!

Practice complete! **+20 XP**

Combo bonus! **+3 XP**

CONTINUE
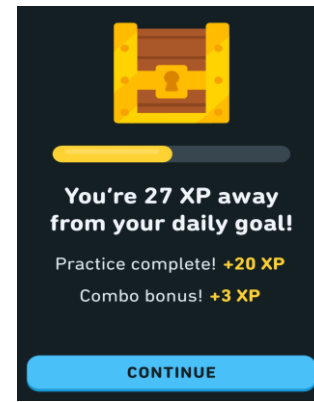
Duolingo language learning app

"It might sound stupid but knowing that I have completed something & in return I am awarded something, even if it is trivial, keeps me going."

- Participant 2

72
of 80

You vs Topper

Topper

You

Average time / question

1m 34s

Detailed report and analysis

Udemy Learners app

"Getting to know how much I lag in comparison to a topper makes me want to push myself harder."
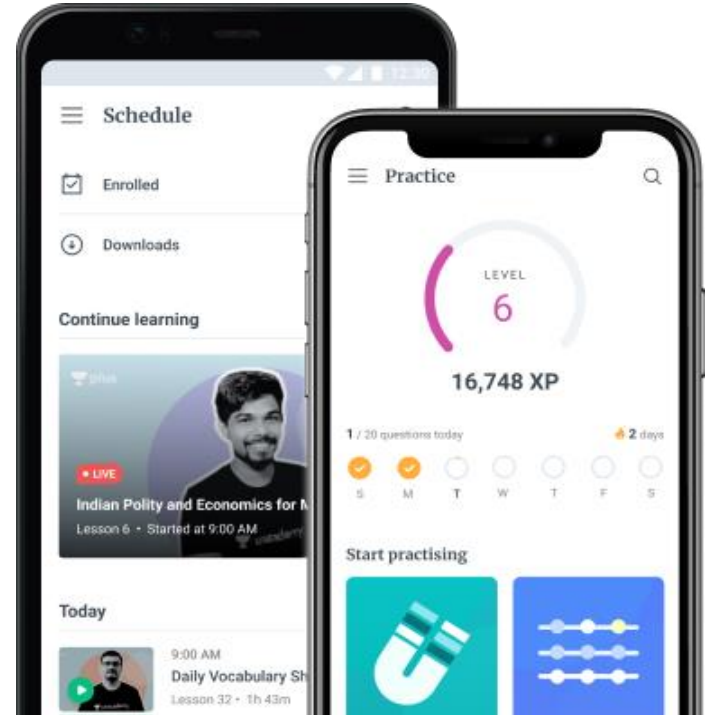
- Participant 3

💬 Recommendation #2

We can include certain incentives to encourage aspirants to keep going.

Things to consider:

- A Progress Bar of their performance compared to that of the topper/peers.

- Small encouraging messages when complete a session or perform on quizzes.

- Streaks for everyday, so that they stay regular.
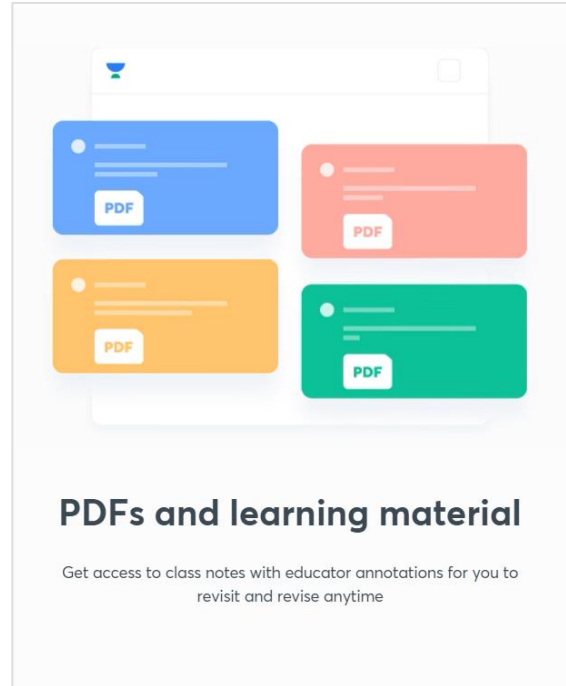

Udemy Learners app

Other Findings 🔍

Other Finding #1

Downloadable notes are handy and quick when it comes to revising during exams

🔍 Findings:

3 out of 4 participants pressed on having downloadable notes of the lectures.

Lecture notes in pdf format helps the participants to revise. They can also mark new information regarding the topic, if any, in the same notes and use it for quick revision just before exams.

PDFs and learning material

Get access to class notes with educator annotations for you to revisit and revise anytime

Udemy Learners app

"Knowing that you have pdfs of the lecture helps you to focus more on what is being taught than getting diverted while jotting it down."

- Participant 1

"Ready-made lecture notes saves me the time I would invest in making my own notes. I can anytime add new information, if any, in the same notes.."
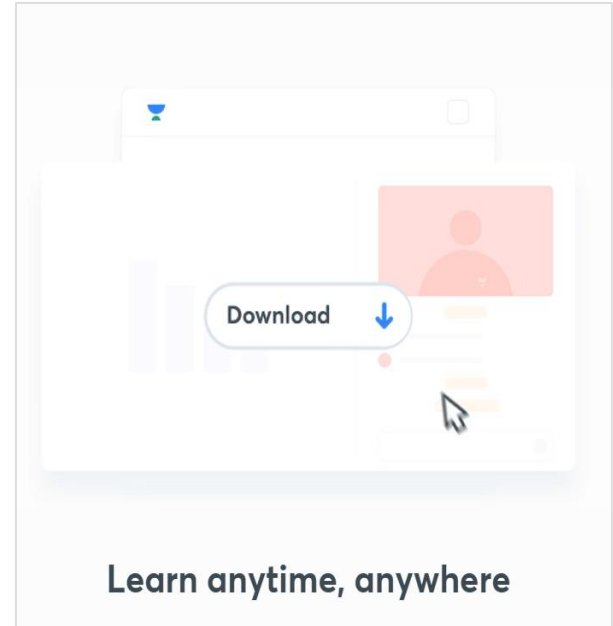
- Participant 3

Recommendation #3

Every lecture can have an option for notes downloadable in pdf format.

Things to consider:

- A downloadable pdf of the lectures' notes which the student can access anytime and as many times they require.

Learn anytime, anywhere

Udemy Learners app

Weekly Quizzes that immediately show scores and correct answers with explanations.

🔍 Findings:

Score, correct answers & explanations of the quizzes must be provided immediately after the test is submitted.

Knowing your mistakes immediately after a test helps to retain the concept better.

> *"Knowing your mistakes immediately after a test helps to retain the concepts better.."*
>
> - Participant 1

> *"Daily tests are not taken seriously & monthly tests make me complacent, It is best to take a test every week. It keeps me on toes."*
>
> - Participant 2

💬 Recommendation #4

Scores, correct answers & explanations must be provided promptly after the students take a test.

Things to consider:

- Score card of student maybe compared with average score.

- A downloadable pdf of all the answers/explanations.

Results
0 of 5 questions answered correctly

Your time: 00:00:42

You have scored 0 points out of 10 points, (0%)

Average score	0%
Your score	0%

Your result has been entered into leaderboard

Name: Name   **E-Mail:**

E-Mail

SEND

Restart test   View questions

Show leaderboard

IASBaba App

Appendix

Affinity diagram

Digital Tool vs Offline Classes

Need Digital Tools (web/mobile app) over Offline Classes

(P1/P2/P3) On-demand classes for college goers & working professionals

(P1/P2/P3/P4) Handy/ Comfortable: Everything at one place

(P1/P2/P3/P4) Due to COVID, for safety reasons.

(P2& P4) Revisiting the lesson gets easier

Benefits of Offline Classes

(P1/P2/P3/P4) Better query resolution in offline class. Delayed in digital

(P1/P2/P3) Student Discussions less regulated & less faciisted

Available digital tool by institute not enough (youtube)

(P1/P2/P3/P4) If they pay the fees it must be personalised.

(P3/P4) Query resolution is difficult. Often the doubts in comments are missed out by teachers

(P3) No Regulation/ authentication in case of Student's Discussion on chats

User Behavior

When & Where

(P1/P2/P3) Morning, evening & short breaks if any. Weekends for longer durations

(P1/P2/P3) Pre-COVID during travel to college/office: handy and comfortable.

(P1) followed own time table, app targets are only for reference

(P4/P3/P1) Took time to search the required item due to large number of elements

How use (if any digital device already being used)

(P2/P3) Frustrated- OTP not received the 1st time.Recurrent problem. Prefer option for login through password also

(P2, P3, P4) Largely follow app's targets, with a little customization

(P4) Login tab is not easily accessible, forgets how to reach there

User Needs

Motivations Required

(P1/P2/P3/P4) Progress report Motivates. Pat on back encourages to stay put

(P1/P3) Streaks & Targets help to stay on track

(P1/P3) Need for comparitive data with other students

(P1/P2/P3/P4) Weekly/monthly quizzes were preferred. The correct answers and the score should be shown immediately

Query Resolution

(P1/P2/P3/P4) Want 1 to 1 query resolution with the teacher either in message or call.

(P1/P2/P3) Discussion forum with other students

Ease of Access

(P1/P2/P3/P4) prefer on-demand topic wise segregated short classes

(P1/P2/P4)prefers pdf download too. for printouts, if needed for some topics only.

(P2/P3) prefers small audio lessons like podcasts to listen to during office breaks

Recommendations

Most of the findings are in line with the survey results.