

Effects of Online Classes during Covid-19 at Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

In this modern era of digitalization, connecting people virtually is a state-of-the-art concept and demand of the time. Changing era demands improvisation of technologies and we must change not only to survive, but also to thrive. Besides, due to this unprecedented pandemic situation, online classes have become an indispensable part of teaching and learning system across the globe. However, every coin has its flip part and every benefit comes with its own limitation and online classes face some difficulties as well. Both the teachers and the students are going through novel online experiences either beneficial or challenging for them. Thus, by embracing the benefits and overcoming the obstacles all the stakeholders of teaching learning system can achieve their goals. In this paper, a study has been done with teachers and students through questionnaire survey. The purpose of this research is to study the benefits and challenges of online classes during Covid-19 pandemic at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The results suggest that, all the benefits and challenges discussed in the article are relevant and create impacts online classes. Besides, from the open-ended question asked to the teachers and the students, the research also provides some suggestions and recommendations to bring about some positive changes the online classes.

Keywords: Online class, Covid-19 Pandemic, Benefits, Challenges

Introduction

The outbreak of corona virus pandemic has created dangerous effects on our society and environment in all sectors (Verrma and Prakash, 2020). The disease created in the Chinese province's Wuhan took the lives of numerous people since its finding in September 2019 (Saladino et al., 2020). Education sector is one of the sectors affected most by this pandemic situation. Nearly 1.6 billion learners across the world have been affected in education systems by the COVID-19 pandemic. By the World Health Organization (WHO) this newly emerged viral infection was declared a worldwide health emergency On March 11, 2020 (Rogowska et al., 2020). Many countries worldwide introduced different policies that include total lockdown, smart lockdown, health monitor system, and quarantine to contain the virus (Alwan et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, all educational institutions have gone into unscheduled closure since March 17, 2020 due to unprecedented COVID-19 (Hasan et al., 2020). Thus, about 39 million students from primary to tertiary levels in

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Bangladesh are going through multiple challenges and obstacles caused by this pandemic situation (UNESCO 2020) In Bangladesh, there are 94 universities (public and private); among them 60 are private universities. Out of 8,53,267 tertiary students, 3,98,737 students read in those private universities. The University Grants Commission (UGC) permitted the universities to continue their semester classes via online media like Zoom, Google Meet, etc. to teach online 147 out of the 153 public and private universities in Bangladesh are receiving support from Bangladesh Research and Education Network (Aziz and Ahmed, 2020). In Bangladesh, most of the private universities have shifted from physical classroom to online mode during this unprecedented pandemic situation. All the private universities are run by the tuition fees of the students; seem to be badly affected by the pandemic due to massive financial losses. On the other hand, in this crisis, some private universities are also forcing students to pay the semester fees. Students are anxious to overcome financial loss during Covid-19 (Emon et al., 2020).

In this pandemic situation, social distancing is a novel experience for the educational institutions and they have incorporated Information and Communication Technology more than ever. Thus, both the teachers and the students are facing various difficulties each and every day. On the other hand, in this modern era of digitalization, connecting students virtually is a demand of the time. Thus, both the teachers and the students are getting some advantages during this pandemic in their online classes as well. This research intends to identify the challenges and benefits of online classes during this COVID-19 situation faced by both teachers and students. This article also tries to recognize some strategies and recommendations that can be applied on an online class. The research questions are as follows:

- What are the benefits of online classes during COVID-19 situation?
- What are the challenges of online classes during COVID-19 situation?

Literature Review

Online learning is defined as “learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access. In these environments, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students” (Singh & Thurman, 2019). Virtual classrooms permit students and teachers to communicate synchronously using features such as audio, video, text chat, interactive whiteboard, and application sharing. (Martin & Parker; 2014). According to Dhawan(2020) due to the severe outbreak of this global pandemic Covid-19 the major part of the world is on quarantine and therefore, many cities have turned into phantom cities and its effects can be perceived in schools, colleges, and universities too. Betwixt all this, online

teaching and online learning can be termed as the panacea for the crisis. The Corona Virus has made institutions to shift from offline mode to online mode of pedagogy. Virtual classrooms let instructors and students to interact online synchronously. Most virtual classrooms support audio, video, application sharing, and content display. (Roughton, Martin, Warren, Gritmon; 2011).

Benefits of Online Classes:

During the COVID-19 lockdown period, many universities across the world were forced to follow online teaching and learning in order to avoid lockdowns, social distancing and other public health interventions.(Kaisaraand Bwalya, 2021).Although online classes encounter many challenges and obstacles, it can confirm manifold assistances for both students and teachers to support teaching and learning as well. But to achieve the benefits of online classes, both teachers and students have to utilize online classes as positive assets. An online class ensures the following advantages:

1.Lower Expenses

During COVID-19, educational institutions do not require any infrastructure (premise rent, utility charge, administrative cost) for taking online classes. They do not require any transportation cost as well. In Bangladesh, most of the people live in the rural areas. Students living in the rural areas left their mess or flat in Dhaka and went back to their hometown that minimizes their housing cost. Students do not require to purchase books always as they can avail digital version which also cuts costing.

Flexible Schedule and Environment:

Online education has become increasingly more accepted due to its flexible access to content from any place at any time. (Roughtonet al, 2011) An online class has flexibility in time and space. Both students and teachers can continue the class from any flexible places: cozy bedroom, any part of the house convenient to them, cybercafé, rooftop, garden, restaurant etc. In Dhaka city there is a huge problem of traffic jam, and teachers and students have to stick in the jam. Thus, sometimes, they miss their on-campus classes or exams. On the other hand, during this Covid 19 situation, they can join class on time. Even morning class is also easier online. Besides, natural calamity, like storm or rain does not hamper online classes. Sometimes the class gets recorded which helps the students to make up their study who missed the class. Besides, it is easier to focus online classes as there is less distractions. They can also review the lectures and discussions. Online classes are more suitable for working students, professionals can attend the class easily.

Self-Discipline and Responsibility:

In the online classes, teachers are not monitoring the students physically. Thus, students need more time management and motivation skill. In an online class student become independent and learn on their own without physical monitoring of the instructors. Besides, in an online program, students have to communicate and collaborate through different software programs which make them ready and strong for their future professional life.

Multiple Ways of Communicating the Instructor:

It is not always possible to meet the course instructor physically face to face and take counseling or feedback from them. But online classes, students have more opportunities to take counseling or feedback from the course instructors through different platforms like email, cell phone, or live chat, or messenger. Online classes improve the teacher student relationship as there is more transparency between them.

Orientation with Varied Digital Communication Platforms:

Online classes offer the opportunity for teachers and learners to be exposed to diversified communication tools and apps, that eventually help them improve their technological know-how & skill set and prepare them better to acclimatize with the ever-changing digital world. Different technology applications are being applied to support different models of online learning (Roughton et al, 2011). This digital transformation is very new to many of the groups with no prior or additional trainings. Teachers and students have to download various apps both in small & big screens, like messenger, zoom, Google classroom, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. Therefore, their real-life online experience eventually helps them improve their technological know-how & skill set and prepares them better to acclimatize with the ever-changing digital world.

Challenges of Online Classes

In this novel COVID-19 situation, both teachers and students are facing various difficulties and obstacles to run online classes. If the educational institutions want to confirm maximum potential during these online classes, they have to identify the challenges and deal them accordingly. The following factors act as the challenges of online classes:

Lack of Interaction

In Bangladesh, all the educational institutions are closed for the safety and security during this pandemic situation. This unprecedented situation has multiple adverse impacts on psychological aspects of both teachers and students. Through E-learning, direct communication and human touch are missing that can hamper the

communication between the learners and the educators (Favale et al., 2020). They feel demotivated and loose interest in teaching and learning. Students do not have any kind of physical communication with their friends. Even their social interaction has become limited. They cannot make eye to eye contact, nonverbal communication; share their experience which is hampering their social lives badly.

Connectivity

To run the classes digitally, internet is the only option. Till date, though the internet penetration across Bangladesh is very high, but still the coverage of mobile data, ISP and its cost are not affordable to many of the target groups, particularly students. Moreover, the internet speed and connectivity uptime are still not up to the mark to ensure a flawless digital class which is causing serious video and audio interruptions. Another massive challenge in our country is, except metropolitan or megacities, there is very less availability of ISP service providers in rest of the country resulting demotivation among the mobile data users due to its affordability. Again, those who use mobile data very often face connectivity problems. It becomes more challenging in the remote areas of Bangladesh. Sometimes, there is power failure that hampers internet connectivity as well. Sometimes students have to go to cybercafé or to faraway place to their house to get internet connectivity risking their lives in this COVID-19 situation. If the students get disconnected from internet, they miss the whole or part of the class. Thus, interruption in internet connectivity hampers the smooth learning and teaching. In addition, students do not appear for the exam on the scheduled time for the same reason. Most of the times, student miss their study related information which might hamper their future study or job opportunities (Zaman, 2020).

Gadgets Shortage

For Online classes each student requires a Smartphone or a personal computer which might not be possible to avail for everyone. Thus, same gadgets are shared by parents, children and siblings and it is difficult to keep the track. At the same time, because of excessive usage of these gadgets, both teachers and students require continuous servicing which is difficult and money consuming during this Covid-19 situation.

Perilous for Health

A significant factor for the risk of poor physical and psychological health should be controlling feelings when people face the challenges of the pandemic (Low et al., 2020). A recent study has identified that during the COVID-19 pandemic globally relatively high rates of symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and stress have been detected in the general population and health care professionals (Xiong et al., 2020). Prolonged online classes create difficulties

with visualization as teachers and students have to look at the screen for a long time at a stretch. They suffer from difficulties of body postures, hearing problems, and sleeping disorders as well. Besides, both teachers and students put on weight as there is no physical activity. In addition, students get bored, and depressed as they have to look into the screen without real life interaction with friends. Even students cannot participate in games and sports which challenges their physical fitness. This situation is very dangerous for a healthy life.

Organization of Work Processes & Time Management

As different platforms are used online classes, both teachers and students need active engagement in the class. Online classes require more time than on-class campus. Specially teachers need good time management skill. They have been shifted from traditional classes to virtual classes without proper training, and thus they have gone through struggle in to adapt in new teaching learning environment. Still both teachers and students have poor literacy to handle the smart phone or computer. According to Jaques & Salman (2007) acclimatizing to online setting can be challenging for both teachers and students.

Methodology

A descriptive research methodology has been applied to conduct this study. A survey was conducted to a selected sample from undergraduate non-English major population from various departments of Stamford University Bangladesh. Both primary and secondary data have been used to conduct the study. In order to collect primary data, two separate sets of structured questionnaires were designed. The first set of questionnaires was planned for the students, and the second set of questionnaires was planned for the teachers. The sources of secondary data collection process are publications, research studies and journals. After the data were analyzed, the responses were calculated in percentages. Recommendations were made based on the opinion and feedbacks of the respondents and also on researcher's class teaching and observation experiences. Some limitations of the study need to be mentioned for further development. For data collection, only one private university (Stamford University Bangladesh) has been selected. Inclusion of public universities might present a different scenario. Monetary and time constraint acted as a barrier to conduct the research in a large scale. Study was conducted only in a small group of students (50) and teachers (15). The research of this limited context can be used as a sample parameter to carry out future research at a large scale.

The Respondents

For the questionnaire survey, 50 undergraduate students from the Department of CEN, EEE, CSE and 15 teachers from Stamford University Bangladesh have been selected. The experience of the teachers differs from 6 to 17 years.

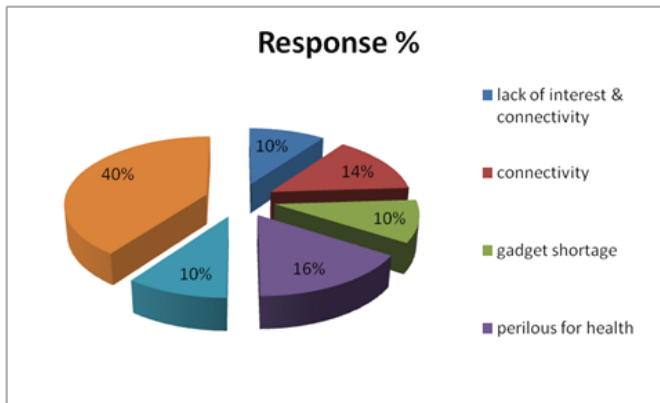
Instruments

In order to collect information, a questionnaire methodology was adopted for both the students and the teachers. Both the questionnaires designed for the teachers and the students contained 2 fixed alternate questions to elicit teachers' and students' benefits and challenges online classes and one open ended question where both teachers and students were asked to deliver their valuable observations and suggestions. In order to interpret the collected data, two tables, and few pie charts and bar charts have been used.

Analysis of Students' Information

The first question of the students was asked to know about the benefits they get online classes during this Covid-19 situation. In reply it has been identified that 10% students recognized lower expenses, 5% students identified multiple ways of communicating the teachers, 10% students replied lower expenses, flexible schedule and environment, and multiple ways of communicating the teachers options, 20% students identified flexible schedule and environment, multiple ways of communicating the teachers, and orientation with varied digital communication platforms options, 5% students selected flexible schedule and environment, and self-discipline and responsibility options, 10% multiple ways of communicating the students, and orientation with varied digital communication platforms options, and 40% students identified they get all the advantages online classes during this Covid-19 situation. Thus, majority of the students identified they get all benefits online classes during this Covid-19 situation.

The second question was asked to know about the challenges students face from online classes during this Covid-19 situation. In reply it has been found that, 10% students identified lack of interest, connectivity, 14% students identified connectivity, 10% students replied gadget shortage, 16% students identified perilous for health, 10% selected organization of work process and time management, and 40% students identified all identified they face all challenges online classes during this Covid-19 situation.



(Total number of students sampled: 50)

Figure 1: Challenges faced by the students online classes during Covid-19

Analysis of Teachers' Information

The first question of the teachers was set to know about the benefits they get online classes during this Covid-19 situation. In reply it has been found that 6.66% teachers identified lower expenses, 6.66% teachers identified multiple ways of communicating the students, 6.66% teachers replied lower expenses, flexible schedule and environment, and multiple ways of communicating the students options, 6.66% teachers identified flexible schedule and environment, multiple ways of communicating the students, and orientation with varied digital communication platforms options, 6.66% teachers selected flexible schedule and environment, and self-discipline and responsibility options, 6.66% teachers identified flexible schedule and environment, multiple ways of communicating the students, and orientation with varied digital communication platforms options, 13.33% teachers selected multiple ways of communicating the students, and orientation with varied digital communication platforms, and 46.66% teachers identified they get all the advantages online classes during this Covid-19 situation. Thus, majority of the teachers identified they get all advantages online classes during this Covid-19 situation.

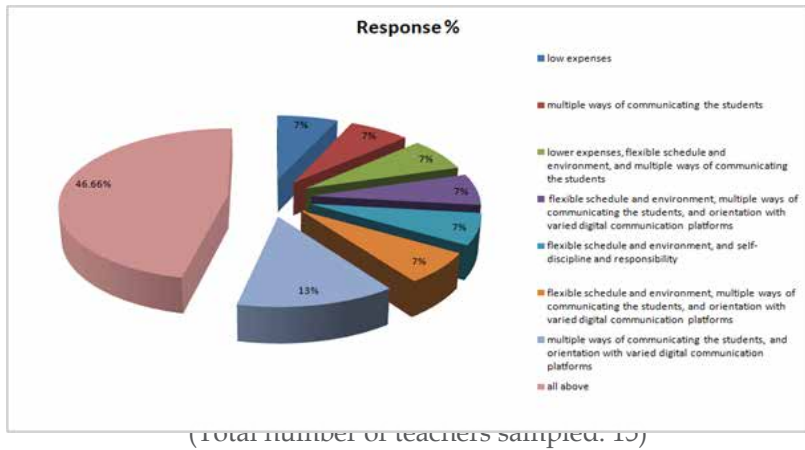


Figure 2: Benefits faced by the teachers online classes during Covid-19

The second question of the teachers was set to know about the challenges they face online classes during this Covid-19 situation. In reply it has been found that 13.33% teachers identified lack of interaction, connectivity, and perilous for health option, 6.66% teachers identified lack of interaction, connectivity, gadget shortage options, 6.66% teachers replied lack of interaction, connectivity options, 6.66% teachers identified lack of interaction, 6.66% teachers selected organization of work process and time management options, 6.66% teachers selected gadget shortage and perilous for health options, and 53.33% teachers identified all are the challenges they face online classes during this Covid-19 situation. Thus, majority of the teachers identified all challenges are responsible for online classes during this Covid-19 situation.

Findings

From the response of the teachers, it has been identified that most teachers agreed that all factors are responsible to be the challenges of online classes. Simultaneously, most of the teachers considered all factors as the benefits of online classes.

On the other hand, from the response of the students, it has come to the light that most students agreed that all factors are responsible to be the challenges of online classes. Simultaneously, most of the students considered all factors as the benefits of online classes.

Recommendations

Based on the analyzed data and the findings, and the open-ended questions designed for the teachers and for the students the following recommendations can be proposed. The application of the following recommendations may benefit to bring about some positive changes in practicing online classes.

1. University can create a university based own online class platform more accessible and convenient for them. The platform should be more users friendly, secured, and more convenient and interactive for both the teachers and students. Google classroom can be used to submit assignments, tests, exams which is more convenient than other platforms.
2. Teachers can improve personal connection with all the students by motivating them and by increasing student engagement. They can identify and support the students struggling online.
3. One of the major obstacles during this Covid-19 situation is online connectivity interruption which is a big barrier for online education. So, steps should be taken to improve the connectivity.
4. More teacher training workshops, seminars, programs (in house) should be organized for both the teachers and students in order to help them to learn to manage online classes in an organized way.
5. Even after the pandemic is gone, partial syllabus can be done online using various online platforms as both teachers and students have online orientation practice. Both physical and online class can be run side by side to complete the syllabus more skilled fully.
6. Both teachers and students should be taken care of mental and physical health as we are going through an unprecedented situation. They should do physical exercise and take nutritious food regularly.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of the study need to be mentioned for further development. For data collection, only private university has been selected. Inclusion of public universities might present a different scenario. Monetary and time constraint acted as a barrier to conduct the research in a large scale. Study was conducted only in a small group of students (50) and teachers (15). The research of this limited context can be used as a sample parameter to carry out future research at a large scale.

Conclusion

The lockdown has created adverse impacts on the educational institutions from primary to tertiary levels. But still at tertiary level (Private Universities) in Bangladesh all the academic stakeholders- the teachers, students and authorities are trying their level best to cope up with the new normal situation by continuing online education. If teachers and students co-operate online classes it can also bring about target learning goals for all the stakeholders as well.

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