

ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES IN ONLINE CLASS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to present the key challenges in attending the online classes faced by the students. Challenges have been categorized by different aspects. In conducting the study primary data have been collected by using a well-tailored online questionnaire. Total 508 responded to the online survey where snowball sampling technique was adopted. SPSS software and simple cross-tabulation were used to analyze the collected data. The study found that although highest percentage of students are attending the online class from metropolitan city or divisional city, 30.7% are attending from village area which is a dominating portion of the students. 68.9% respondents are using mobile data which is not cost effective for them. The study also resulted that network and facility related challenges, student-teacher interaction related challenges and personal & socio-psychological challenges are the prioritized challenges complained by the students. Considering the results the study recommended some suggestions that might help for the policymakers to eliminate the challenges of online classes in the future. Regulatory bodies like UGC, government, individual universities and other concerned authorities have many roles to play.

Keywords: Online Class, Policymakers, Internet in Education, Socio-Psychological Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic online education is an unavoidable alternative for education system. Some raise questions about the regularity or quality of it while some others compare it with on campus or face to face education. However learners of the whole world today are looking for flexible education format like any time or anywhere. Especially a group of learners having particular obstacles are demanding online learning opportunities and education providers are also positively responding (Schrum & Hong, 2002). Quality and popularity of online education are not same in all the countries or in all the institutions. Learning and teaching styles, personal motivation and infrastructure facilities are dominating factors for the smooth online teaching (Eom et al., 2006). Some higher education institutions have been able to prove successful delivery in online teaching (Fredericksen et al., 2000). In spite of having some difficulties, online teaching and learning is an opportunity for existing unavoidable problem. Since the beginning of the spread of coronavirus, the educational institutions of all levels all over the world had to shut-down there on campus traditional face to face delivery system. Some institutions are conducting the academic activities online while some others are not. Those who are actively conducting the academic activities online are

facing some questions. Particularly in the developing countries where information technology is not available to all yet and internet is not easily accessible from everywhere and by everybody. Both students and teachers may have drawbacks and both the parties may have challenges in continuing the online classes. Presently the use and acceptance of the internet is increasing everyday which indicates a better prospect of online teaching and learning (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005). So the challenges faced by the students need to be identified and analyzed for the strategy development of smooth and quality online teaching and learning.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Students may have insufficient skills and strategy to meet up the expectation of online teaching and learning. The research found that educators pointed out that tools, technology experience, learning preference, study habit and skills, life style and personal characteristics are some important dimensions that are influential for the smooth and effective online teaching and learning (Schrum & Hong, 2002). Communication and social supports were found to be the leading factors of online teaching where teacher's energetic delivery plays vital role (Gorsky & Blau, 2009). Business schools found to be the pioneers in initiating online courses with better integrated and flexible opportunities to the students. Continuous interaction is necessary for the effective online teaching which may take place in variety of ways from e-mail to student's group collaboration (Bennett & Monds, 2008). A research on Montana State University identified that interaction between teacher & students, mutual students' cooperation, active learning and time on task are very influential factors for smooth and effective online learning (Bangert, 2006). Psychological challenges of the students are influential factors for their education no doubt. But Goto & Martin (2009) mentioned that these challenges are rarely addressed by the instructors or the authorities. Psychological factors are dominated by family members, peers and also by fellow students. Muilenburg & Berge (2005) mentioned technological ability of the learners and possibility of taking online courses in the future along with status of completion of the courses and enjoyment of the classes are useful independent variable for conducting research on online learning. Since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic when the pandemic showed the symptoms to stay for longer, 60% universities started to continue their academic activities online and UGC, the regulatory body of the universities in Bangladesh encouraged holding classes online (Jasim, 2020). UGC reports that 63 universities in Bangladesh including 7 public universities are holding classes online with 60-70% students' attendance (Sujan, 2020). This low attendance rate is surely alarming for online learning. So the challenges faced by the students behind this low attendance need to be analyzed which might be helpful for developing academic strategies of online teaching and learning.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the current study are to investigate and analyze the major challenges faced by the students in online classes, to categorize the students challenges from different aspects so that different stakeholders can be addressed about their respective roles in improving the education quality during the pandemic situation, to suggest some useful measures to eliminate the challenges and thus to continue and maintain the standard of higher education through online classes during a pandemic situation like COVID-19 pandemic, and finally, this research intends to way out further research in the field of online classes.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study is descriptive in nature. From the last week of March 2020 the students were facing diverse challenges in attending online class. Keeping this thing in mind the researchers designed a self-administered structured questionnaire and distributed online among the students of different private and public universities with a view to collecting primary data. The snowball sampling procedures were used to design and collect the data. A total of 508 samples of different universities responded properly to the survey and after collecting the data, cross tabulation and SPSS software have been used for data analysis. Statistical tables have been used to display the outcome of the research. On the basis of the previous literature and experience survey the challenges faced by the students in online class have been catered and categorized as facility and network related (4 items), students- teacher interaction (2 items), socio-psychological & personal (2 items), course curricula & learning related (3 items) and other perceived challenges (1 item with non-exclusively 13 options).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that 80.7% respondents of the study are the students of business schools like BBA, Real Estate, BTHM or MBA program while 18.9% respondents participated from science or engineering programs. The table also shows that highest percentage of (32.7%) respondents attends the online classes from the metropolitan or divisional city followed by 30.7% respondents from the village area of Bangladesh.

Background of the students	% of Total	Participants' location during class	% of Total
Business school	80.7	Metropolitan city/Divisional City	32.7
Science or Engineering	18.9	District town	17.7
Humanities or Social sciences	0.4	Upazila/Thana/ Equivalent	16.9
		Village area	30.7

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Challenges Faced By the Students in Online Classes: Facility and Network Related Challenges

From Table 2, 68.9% students attend online class by using mobile data of different mobile phone operators while 57.9% students get the 3G internet. Who are staying in village and district level area are mainly dependent on costly and unfriendly mobile data.

Types of internet connection	% of Total	Devices for online classes	% of Total
Data package of mobile phone operators	68.9	Smart phone	83.5
Broadband connection	26.8	Laptop	12.6
WiFi	2.4	Desktop PC	2.4
Others	2.0	Others	2.0
Cyber café	0.0	Technical challenges regarding connection	
Network coverage		Poor internet speed	64.2
2G	16.5	Poor mobile network coverage	40.2
3G	57.9	High cost of data package	39.4
4G	22.8	Load shading	27.6
Above 4G	1.2	No technical issue	3.9
Others	1.6	Other issues	2.0

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

In a study of Basilaia & Kvavadze (2020) during pandemic in Georgia reported that 54.71% student used PC whereas 45.29% used mobile phone. They also argued that their online education system at the school was successful. Conversely, internet speed is found most challenging to 64.2% respondents while 40.2% respondents reported that poor mobile network coverage is the great challenge and to 39.4% students, high cost of the data package seemed to be most challenging. Load shading is reported as main challenge by 27.6% which is 3rd in rank but the figure of the percentage is vital because it hinders the education of these percentages of students which might deteriorate their knowledge level and the education quality and eventually they may face challenge in their professional life after completing their degree.

Student-Teacher Interaction Related Challenges

Student- teacher interaction is one of the leading contributory factors in pedagogy and quality education. Sometimes the teachers feel hesitation to introduce online class instead of offline. An alarm forced a jump across higher educational institution that resistance and inertia into online learning in instructional delivery (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020). Through this interaction students gradually grow-up and enrich themselves with better knowledge. Here the study (Table 3) shows that 35% respondents faced excessive academic pressure in online teaching and other 32.3% students' responded lack of cooperation from the teacher. Besides, a large group of students (59.4%) reported that the online is not user-friendly while 40.2% think that teaching materials are not easily understandable. Sometimes, academic focus is on the practical components in delivering online courses not on creating and implementing a support system for online learners (Kop et al., 2011) and it may hinder the purpose of online class.

Academic issues on course teacher	% of Total	Academic challenges	% of Total
Excessive academic pressure	35.0	Online tool is not user-friendly	59.4
Lack of cooperation from the teacher	32.3	Teaching materials are not easily understandable	40.2
Teacher's poor delivery quality	16.5	Difficulty level of the subjects	17.7
No response/No issues	11.4	Lack of question- answering scope	17.7
Everything is all right/all good	3.9	I don't find any challenges	1.2
Other issues	0.8		

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Socio-Psychological and Personal Challenges

Concentrating on education itself is a big challenge, especially during a global pandemic. Research reported that medium to high levels of psychological distress affecting over 30 percent of the students who participate in online class (Stallman, 2008).

Challenges on personal issues	% of Total	Socio psychological challenges	% of Total
Adaptability with this system	44.5	Anxiety regarding family's financial crisis	41.7
Lack of computer literacy	19.7	Anxiety regarding own future & career	26.8
Digital literacy	16.1	Anxiety regarding global crisis	17.7
Lack of self- motivation	15.7	Lack of personal interest	9.4
Other reasons	3.9	No response	4.3

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Here in the Table 4, it's seen that 41.7% students cannot concentrate on online classes due to the financial crisis of their family whereas 26.8% respondents are worried about their career and future stability. Besides, 17.7% students responded their anxiety about the global crisis as main challenge. Apart from these, 44.5% students face challenges in adapting with the online system while 19.7% of them even have lack of computer and technological literacy. At the same time 15.7% students are suffering from self-demotivation. However these issues may lead to qualitative challenges in the long run if proper importance is not given by the respective authorities and regulatory bodies.

Course Curricula and Learning Related Challenges

Nature and complexity level of the courses are different as per the course requirement. 78.7% students (Table 5) find the mathematical courses like accounting/ finance/ statistics most challenging. Theoretical courses and the social science courses are seemed to be more challenging only by 8.7% and 5.9% students respectively while conceptual courses are responded as most challenging by 3.9% students only. Further, 61.4% students think that different tasks based assessment instead of on campus examination is a top challenge in achieving their target result at the same time 10.2% students reported the online classes boring. In achieving the target result post class issues are also responsible and the study found that 40.2% students think that unavailability of face to face group study with the fellow students is main challenge although 27.6% and 18.5% students make the lack of concentration on study and lack of effective counseling from course teacher most challenging respectively towards proper learning.

Challenging in online learning	No of Res	% of Total
Subjects with big mathematical problems	400	78.7
Theoretical subjects with lot of discussions	44	8.7
Conceptual theoretical subjects with critical thinking	30	5.9
Subjects with conceptual small mathematical	20	3.9
Other courses	15	2.8
Challenging to achieve students' target result		
Different tasks like- quiz, presentations, assignment	312	61.4
Probability of improper assessment	64	12.6
Large class size makes the class too noisy	60	11.8
Lectures are boring	52	10.2
Other challenges	21	3.9
Post-class challenges		
No scope of face to face group study with friends	204	40.2
Lack of concentration on study due to anxiety	140	27.6
Lack of effective counseling from the teacher	94	18.5
My own time management problem	54	10.6
Other issues	16	3.1

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Other Perceived Challenges

Besides the above described challenges the study also focused some perceived challenges faced by the students in online classes. From Table 6 it can be interpreted that other challenges supported by substantial number of respondents.

Other perceived challenges	% of total	Other perceived challenges	% of total
Your friend/classmate didn't participate	44.1	Lack of feedback from class teachers	32.7
Lack of feedback from classmates	41.7	Lack of individual accountability	31.5
Misunderstanding of the topic	39.4	Lack of common learning goal	29.5
Absence of real time feedback	38.6	Work load not distributed properly	23.6
Lack of time to participate	38.2	Classes are dominated by few students	22.0
Difference in skills and knowledge in students make trouble	34.3	Off-topic discussion & other challenges	21.4

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Most Challenging Issues *versus* Locality of the Students

	Metro city/ Divisional city	District town	Upazila/Thana/ Equivalent	Village area	Total
Poor internet speed	29%	19%	16%	36%	100%
Poor mobile network	14%	17%	28%	41%	100%
High cost of internet	24%	22%	24%	31%	100%
Load shading	28%	16%	33%	24%	100%
No technical issue	40%	25%	25%	10%	100%
Other issues	20%	10%	0%	70%	100%

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Challenges of online class tend to be changing with the change of locality. Table 7 shows that those who are facing poor internet connection are mostly (36%) from the village area followed 29% from metropolitan city or divisional city and 19% and 16% are from district town and upazila area respectively. In village and metropolitan city internet speed is very poor. In the metropolitan city and divisional city internet speed is supposed to be better but the study finds it poor. This may happen due to over pressure by the internet users in these areas. In the village and upazila area mobile network is seen to be challenging by 41% and 28% respondents respectively. 31% and 24% participants from village area reported high cost of internet package and load shading respectively as their main challenge. Those who faced other problems like lack of suitable device, unfriendly educational environment, unavailability of mobile recharge shop are 70% from village area.

Program/Discipline Wise Challenging Courses

Program/ Discipline Nature of challenging courses	Business	Science and Engineering	Humanities & Social science
Subjects with big mathematical problems	85%	52%	0%
Theoretical subjects with lot of discussions	9%	8%	0%
Conceptual theoretical subjects with critical thinking	2%	19%	100%
Subjects with conceptual small mathematical	2%	13%	0%
Other courses	1%	8%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

Among the students of the business related programs 85% reported (Table 8) the mathematical courses challenging while 9% reported the theoretical courses challenging that needs lots of discussion. In case of science and engineering students 52% responded the mathematical or lab related courses most challenging and 19% reported the theoretical courses challenging. Students of humanities and social science programs all the (100%) respondents reported conceptual theoretical courses most challenging.

Personal Challenges and Post Class Issues

Table 9 shows that 38% and 28% students respectively feel the face to face group study and lack of concentration on study due to anxiety challenging. At the same time 16% and 10% of the students having lack of computer literacy responded that ineffective counseling from teacher and time management problem respectively are challenges in their online class while 26% of the students having lack of digital literacy couldn't concentrate on study due to anxiety.

	Face to face group study	Concentration on study with anxiety	Ineffective counseling	Time management problem	Total
Adaptability with system	38%	28%	21%	13%	100%
Lack of computer literacy	57%	16%	16%	10%	100%
Lack of digital literacy	51%	26%	21%	3%	100%
Lack of self- motivation	20%	53%	13%	15%	100%

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

On the other hand 53% and 20% students having lack of self-motivation responded anxiety and absence of face to face group discussion as challenging issues in online class. Counseling from teacher and time management problem are claimed to be challenging by 13% and 15% of the respondent having lack of self-motivation. Table 10 shows socio-psychological issues based on locality where it is found that 48% respondents of Metropolitan/Divisional city anxious about their own future and career while and 50% students of village area have lack of personal interest towards online class.

	Metro city/ Divisional city	District town	Upazila/ Equivalent	Village area	Total
Anxiety for family's financial crisis	25%	20%	20%	35%	100%
Anxiety regarding own future & career	48%	16%	15%	21%	100%
Anxiety regarding global crisis	33%	22%	16%	29%	100%
Lack of personal interest	25%	8%	17%	50%	100%

Source: Compiled by authors from survey data

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study suggests a number of ways to reduce the challenges of online classes, Firstly, since the major number of students attends the online classes from village, upazila area and district town and 68.9% students depend on the mobile internet, the respective authorities should take the drives to ensure better uninterrupted internet service at affordable costs. University authorities' along with the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Education may convince the mobile phone operators to offer special internet package for the students during class time. In this regard, ministry of education could utilize

the authority of BTRC to convince the mobile phone operators. Secondly, teachers can play the main roles by providing well organized teaching & study materials easily readable by using the mobile phones. Classes should be more interactive and flexible. Teacher controlled online group discussion may be suggested. Teachers should also provide psychological and motivational support to the students. Finally, the anxieties of the students are to be focused in short run like financial crisis of the family, global crisis and uncertainty about their future career. However, the study concludes that if the suggestions are considered in formulating strategies and proper initiatives are taken by the respective authorities, quality and effectiveness of online classes will improve. Finally it is believed there are significant opportunities to learn for the academics in order to strengthen the collective response to COVID-19 now and in the future.

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