

The Issues With Online Classes From The Point Of View Of Undergraduate Students In Bangladesh

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Abstract

Covid-19 has had a devastating effect on the academic study curriculum because educational institutions have not been able to hold face-to-face classes and have been forced to start classes online. This is an investigative study that sheds light on the issues that Bangladeshi undergraduates did not attend, were left behind or were not interested in participating in their online classes before the end of the class. A total of 100 undergraduate students from different universities in Bangladesh located in Dhaka city were selected following the convenient sample model. Based on their opinions, the study found that the lack of necessary devices, internet connection and lack of electricity made their classes unnecessary for most reasons. It was also found that universities reduced their class time, but increased the stress of lectures, homework and exams which created stress because students had very few opportunities for counselling and they could not even go outside to refresh their minds as the lockdown continued. Students also had problems using online applications because most of them were using the applications for the first time, as a result, it was difficult for them to be present when logging in, opening webcams and submitting assignments and exam answers. Although educational institutions have recently resumed face-to-face classes, they should also prepare a compact package to alleviate students' problems so that institutions can provide a better online experience for students if such uncertainty arises again in the future.

Keywords: Online classes; Covid-19 impact; issues of students; Bangladesh and online education.

Introduction

Coronavirus (Covid-19) is a transferable sickness that has plagued many people in many ways till now. The World Health Organization (WHO) labelled Covid-19 a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. When the first case was reported on March 8, 2020 (Islam et al., 2020), the Bangladesh government's major concern was ensuring public health safety since Bangladesh is densely populated and medical facilities are limited. One significant move, among others to fight the spread of coronavirus, was the closure of educational institutions, which has been a common approach in the global campaign against Covid-19.

Within months of educational institution closure, the education of about 1.5 billion students began to be endangered (Web Foundation, 2021). Therefore, after obtaining permission from the University Grants Commission (UGC) on March 26, 2020, to prevent the spread of the virus and to protect students from getting infected, educational institutions have moved towards virtual learning to maintain access to education (Shammi et al., 2020). 63 out of 151 public and private institutions, according to the University Grants Commission (UGC), launched online courses in less than two weeks. The economics of online education, however, must be evaluated against Bangladesh's digital preparedness. Bangladesh ranks 105th out of 134 nations in the 2020 Network Readiness Index (NRI). According to

BBS statistics, just 5.6 percent of Bangladeshi homes have a home computer in 2019, with 37.6 percent having a home Internet connection.

Students, teachers, and parents initially had trouble accepting classes online because that experience was the first of many, but most educational institutions tried to solve the problem using some trusted online platforms (for example, Zoom Meeting and Google Classroom). So far, few studies have analysed the problems that students or institutions have faced in their online classes. Some of them are found in student satisfaction (Liguori and Winkler, 2020), while others find problems with online classes (Deimann and Bastiaens 2010; Lamagna and Sultana, 2020). More in-depth research shows that the digital divide based on wealth and gender affects students' online classroom experience (Priyo and Hazra, 2021). However, the government of Bangladesh has failed to reopen the school in several attempts since 2020. Therefore, students have not been able to provide face-to-face lectures in their classrooms for a year and a half. After being closed for almost 1 month, educational institutions in Bangladesh have reopened for face-to-face classes on 12 September (Bdnews24.com, 2021).

Since the pandemic has taught us to use online classrooms in emergencies, it is necessary to understand the challenges from students' points of view so that educational institutions may resolve the found issues for future emergencies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and problems that undergraduate students face when participating in online classes organized by their universities during the pandemic to provide detailed information on topics that impede the determination and satisfaction of the students.

Literature Review

Because Covid-19 might pose a threat to Bangladesh due to population density, it was time to evaluate increasing health and social concerns and protect public health and social security when the first corona patient was founded on March 8, 2020 (Islam et al., 2020). To that end, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has announced vacations for all educational institutions, government and non-government organizations, businesses, and workplaces commencing March 26, 2020. (Shammi et al., (2010). Direct education efforts were halted as a result of the government's decision due to the terrible consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. A study, conducted by Emon et al. (2020), highlighted how Covid-19 affects the education sector and students in Bangladesh. They found that in Bangladesh, nearly 40 million students were unable to attend school before the pandemic returned to normal. The deprivation of learning outside the school also depends on the social and economic status of the public, their access to technology, and the skills of their parents. The researchers also made it clear that the most direct impact of Covid-19 on Bangladeshi students is the sudden interruption of learning opportunities in many other fields. Other countries that had encountered the same difficulty with education were already focused on taking virtual lectures and tests to tackle the problem (Agarwal and Kaushik, 2020). Similarly, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) allows public and private educational institutions in Bangladesh to continue their educational operations by providing online lessons (Alamgir, 2020). Since then, colleges have chosen the appropriate platforms (online apps such as Zoom meeting and Classroom) for their students and updated their online classrooms to continue their courses.

Online learning is more suited to learners than face-to-face learning. Virtual lectures are deemed superior across countries since universities treat huge numbers of students and have ceased face-to-face lessons so that students do not get the virus by meeting in their classrooms (Liguori and Winkler, 2020). The online courses that were taken before the Covid-19 pandemic are also popular with students since they are efficient, cheap, and flexible (Schwartzman, 2007; Horspool & Yang, 2010). Vitoria et al. (2018) revealed that students feel that online modules may assist increase comprehension, independence, self-discipline, and drive to learn and interact with classmates and professors. Students that participated in their study indicated that the web-based e-learning module is beneficial and easy to use. They agreed that the module helped them enhance their comprehension of course subjects, time management, mutual contact, and interaction with professors and that e-learning was fun. In their research results, they recommended that the construction of e-learning should keep pace with current trends.

On the other hand, online classes are not suitable for all students as they have different background and their attitudes and perception regarding online classes differ from each other based on their interests because [Deimann and Bastiaens \(2010\)](#) found that a lack of self-motivation and interest of students can negatively affect performance or completion online. Moreover, excessive flexibility may also create less engagement with instructors and peers ([Shedletsky & Aitken, 2001](#)). Additionally, during the Covid-19 pandemic, [Lamagna and Sultana \(2020\)](#) studied students' perceptions of online learning in private institutions in Bangladesh. Few students feel that online courses are inferior to classroom courses in terms of quality, participation and evaluation. Additionally, it was noted that some persons were unable to participate owing to Covid-19-induced dread, concern and tension. Due to the complexity of the familial environment, studying from home is also harmful. In general, the participants are persuaded that studying on campus is vital to promote learning, engagement, assessment and interaction.

A World Bank (WB) research was performed in 2020 that highlights the Bangladesh government's attempt to mitigate the harmful impact of the closings of educational institutions that were begun to safeguard children from being impacted by Covid-19. Through television, mobile phones, radio and the internet, the government of Bangladesh established distance education for students, but the majority of the students do not have access to all these tools ([How nations are utilizing edtech, 2020](#)). Because the study revealed that the availability and acceptability of these alternate study techniques are limited. Approximately fewer than 50 percent of the kids do not have access to the study resources among the school attending youngsters (aged 5 to 15 years old) questioned in that WB research. Although the majority have a mobile phone connection, they do not have internet access at the same time. The survey also reveals that there is a digital disparity between affluent and poor households. Compared with the richest households, 9.2 percent of the poorest households do not have a Television, whereas 91 percent of the richest families do. Similar trends have been found in numerous alternative learning media. Another survey indicated that just 2 percent of families can access online learning programs ([Rahman & Ahmed, 2021](#)).

Even in this post-Covid-19 stage (when fewer patients have been found and the Bangladesh Ministry of Education has recently decided to open its educational institution by vaccinating students), educational institutions are gradually starting to provide face-to-face classes for students, but there are still some limitations and it can take a long time to get face-to-face classes to start correctly, and institutions can keep their classes online until then. However, the pandemic has taught us about the need for online classes, although most students, colleges and universities have learned it without any prior experience, many challenges they faced, among these challenges, some are already revealed and others not, but all this must be taken into account for the future. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on the overall problems that Bangladeshi undergraduate students have faced while attending their online classes during the pandemic so that institutions can take possible solutions to facilitate their online class process in the future during any case of disasters.

Methodology

The exploratory research technique is used to uncover the problems that students face when attending online courses. A survey questionnaire is being developed to collect feedback from approximately 120 undergraduate students currently are studying in universities located in Dhaka (the capital of Bangladesh). The survey is distributed to respondents using instant social messaging applications (i.e. Whatsapp and Messenger). Since it started in April and ended in August 2021, the interview procedure has taken a long time. In addition, these 120 respondents were chosen through a convenient sampling method, and 100 were ultimately chosen for the study because they answered correctly and also to produce respondents who were equal in terms of gender, so that the study may present concerns for both males and female students.

The survey questions were structured using open type questions to get student feedback in only four sections. First, the student was provided with a few closed questions to collect demographic data (such as gender, age, and undergraduate programs that they are pursuing). In the next section, the questionnaire contained a few closed questions to understand the students' perceptions and to know the ways students conducted their online classes. Finally, the questionnaire

included a section to write a brief note with the three main problems that each student encountered during their online classes, as well as an explanation of their problems. The survey ended with an alchemical statement, in which students were asked to provide a brief note of possible solutions that students would use to resolve their difficulties.

As mentioned earlier, this study was prepared based on feedback from 50 male students and 50 female students. Among them, most of the students are from a business background, and the rest have a background in CSE, EEE, fashion designing, etc. The overall age of the students is between 21 to 30 years old. After receiving the feedback, it is estimated that 100 undergraduates would answer 300 problems. However, because open-ended questions provide more independence, few students focus on one or two rather than writing about three problems. As a result, a total of 269 problems are found in the 100 respondents. Since all the problems are not unique, their problems are divided into 10 groups.

Findings and analysis

Although the decision, to launch online classes during the lockdown period to continue student learning, is highly appreciated by Bangladeshi students, as 72% of the students are very engaged from the beginning, it lost its appeal with several major and minor issues in just a few months. In terms of at least one missing/leaving class, it is found that 88% of students had at least one absence/left class in the last semester. In terms of online class participation in the last semester, most students did not care about their classes, because it is found that 22% of students used proxies (shared class ID with friends) to participate in their classes; 37% of students participated in their online classes but left the classes before the end of their lectures. Only 41% of students attended and completed all classes of a course on their own. However, among the 269 problems and issues raised by the students, most of them stated that they could not access the internet, had problems with electricity, did not understand the online classroom application, were sick during the pandemic or their family members were sick. Although different students' three problems are also different from each other and after the collection of all problems, several are found similar and therefore, generalised into 10 categories in Table 1.

Table 1. Issues (generalized into 10 categories) regarding attending online classes during Covid-19

Serial No.	Generalized problems	Total response received	Percentage
1	Issues for electricity and internet connections	41	15.24%
2	Family related problems	32	11.90%
3	Lack of devices	30	11.15%
4	Mental challenges	29	10.78%
5	Job-related problems	27	10.04%
6	Poor class scheduling and Time management	25	9.29%
7	Unbearable homework pressures	24	8.92%
8	Lack of technological know-how	23	8.55%
9	Challenges regarding performance evaluation and marking criteria	21	7.81%
10	Challenges related to exams	17	6.32%
Total		269	100.00%

Lack of internet connection or interruption

Due to the rise of the pandemic, equal opportunities are not secured for students from all backgrounds in online classes. Following the transition to online learning, some participants reported that they were unable to access digital course materials. Also, there is a difference in the ability to take higher education at home, which leaves many students behind due to digital poverty. Students complained that they could not attend several classes or charge their devices

properly due to lack of electricity. Although the electricity problems have been solved on a larger scale, it is still not possible for students to take online classes from the countryside because the electricity problem in the countryside is still not completely fixed. In addition, urban students mostly use Internet connections spending BDT 500 per month for only 5-10 Mbps from Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and connections are not guaranteed by ISPs in terms of their stability. At the same time, the problems become even bigger when a student leaves their hostel and moves to their town located in the countryside during the lockdown. This is because rural areas do not have adequate mobile networks that can provide a continuous internet connection when students had to rely on their mobile networks. But unfortunately, not all mobile service networks are equally available all the time, all over Bangladesh and during rainy days or storms, the connection gets worse. Students need to buy a new SIM card or even smartphones to get internet service. Few students also complained that even after buying a new SIM card, students face problems with poor internet connection. Therefore, approximately 15.24% of students had to give up their class lectures because of poor internet connection. Moreover, even if they joined the classroom through an encrypted application (e.g. Zoom, Google Classroom), they lagged on their servers. This situation gets worse when many students talk at the same time or open the video of those applications, they face more problems concentrating in their classes.

Family-related problems

Many students or their parents are suffering from cough, fever, and dengue fever, even Covid-19, in lockdown situations, which have affected the health, time, and mood of the students. Few students had also lost their parents or close relatives, which makes them feel frustrated and leave online classes because they cannot withstand the pressure of the classroom. In addition to family issues, some female students also got married during the pandemic. Due to the new family atmosphere, they cannot meet the classroom requirements. In addition to this inconvenience, most students, whether in the city or the countryside, do not have a dedicated learning space for them, from where they could attend their online classes by turning on their webcam or mobile phone camera. Having a separate study room is very important because it is conceivable that students are not willing to show their dirty living environment, as most people want to share a pleasant environment with their peers. In addition, most universities instructed that all students are required to wear correct or formal clothing for online classes. If they are not dressed properly, this would reduce student participation. In this case, although the students participated in their online classes, they chose not to respond or participate on their webcam.

Lack of devices

Students must have a desktop computer, laptop or at least a smartphone to participate in online classes using the Zoom or Google Classroom application. Also, online classroom applications (such as Zoom Meetings and Google Classroom) have some basic requirements that need to be compatible with a smartphone. A total of 11.15 percent of students said they did not have a smartphone or their laptop did not meet the minimum application criteria. It was also difficult for students to buy a new smartphone or desktop computer because they were expensive and their families had to spend a lot to survive the economic crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, due to the lockdown situation, the market was closed and they couldn't buy new devices.

Mental challenges

Online classes put students under a lot of mental stress because they are more prone to eye problems, migraines, and backaches than face-to-face courses. The respondents stated that their organization no longer provides the consultation time they previously received. Due to the relatively large number of tasks provided by teachers, the student's learning process was very difficult. Despite an overall reduction in classroom time of 10 to 30 minutes, students said that the teaching process has grown quicker, putting pressure on their learning process. Due to the lockdown, students are not permitted to play or go elsewhere to relieve the burden of studying, which also keeps them in the class-study-class process day after day. In addition, students are becoming less interested in attending online classes as a result of a lack of counselling and mental difficulties. Moreover, some students participating in the class also commented that notifications from other applications diverted their attention from their lectures. In most cases, these notifications come from Facebook applications (such as Facebook, Messenger and Instagram). Students usually open messenger

discussion groups and when the lecture becomes quite necessary, the necessary or unnecessary discussion is written by the coursemates, which draws the attention of the students from their lectures. Even if they see the messages and return to their class lecture, they often messed up the speech of their lectures. Students further complained that submitting assignments too fast and preparing for exams with little knowledge also put mental pressure on them.

Job-related problems

Although most graduating students are not engaged in any work, their living expenses and tuition costs are mainly managed by their families in Bangladesh. But still very few students take part-time jobs to cover the cost of their education. In lockdown situations, most companies allow their employees to work from home while maintaining an Internet connection from the office; some companies do not allow their employees to work from home. However, it was found that 10.04% of students experienced work-related problems. Due to the intense pressure of study, working in an organization becomes very tiring for them and most of their organizations do not allow them to leave their job responsibilities and attend classes. Since most universities have afternoon classes, working students have to attend classes even if they have to drive on the way home from work.

Poor class scheduling and Time management

Attendance of some students during class was considered difficult while others complained that they had inadequate time management in online classes which did not help them understand all their lectures. Although universities try to meet their course requirements, the quality of lectures in online classes is not very effective because classes are strictly scheduled and since there is less time than face-to-face lectures, 9.29% of students find it difficult to attend classes or understand their ideas properly.

Unbearable homework pressures

As most universities have reduced class time so that students are not bored in online classrooms during the closing period, they have increased the pressure of homework or assignments so that students can utilize most of their time at home. 8.92% of students find it too difficult to submit assignments and homework along with the pressures of attendance and online lectures. The students explained that they do not have enough time to prepare their assignments, term papers and presentation for each course since they must attend at least three classes (those who have taken three courses in their last semester). After their online classes, they should also review their lectures. As a result, if they properly focus on preparing their assignments, they cannot take new learnings from the online classes, which also creates tension between them and then encourages them either to submit plagiarized work or to leave their lectures to prepare their assignments appropriately. Another thing that works as great pressure on students these days is checking assignments with plagiarism software, where if universities find a certain portion of plagiarism in student assignments, they will face penalties. All of this is creating enormous pressure on students to run like a horse, but as all students are not equal, some students start to fear attending their online lectures.

Lack of technological know-how and other issues

Using applications that allow students to participate in their online classes, some technical knowledge is also required that every student should know. But some students (approximately 8.55%) have problems with the applications they use online for online classes because they have no prior experience using those applications. Often they cannot log in to applications by registering their login details. Emoticons, especially in 'zoom meetings', are rarely used when those emoticons reach students and help faculty understand something they may not understand. Most of the students complained that their universities usually accept their course assignments or exam answer sheets through the 'Google Classroom application while taking classes in 'Zoom Meeting'. Students who submit their assignments or answer sheets at the last minute are often unable to upload them properly due to a lack of technical knowledge of the software. Students also said that they often mistakenly upload their assignments to the Google Classroom dashboard, which they share with all their peers, and ultimately got rejected or poor marks for the inappropriate submission by their faculties. In addition to that, it is found that 7.81% of students have problems with performance evaluation and grading criteria. Students mentioned that their classes are not adequately evaluating their performance and some of them also

mentioned that few students are passing their lectures and exams in various unethical ways, but they are getting good grades on performance evaluations as faculties are not aware of their unethical practices. Finally, there is also 6.32% of students who faced problems with their online exams mentioned that they have to answer lengthy answers in less time, and since the delivery time of the answer scripts is also between the time of the exam, via email or Google classroom, the students have difficulty submitting their answer scripts within the exam time.

Conclusion

Schools and universities in Bangladesh were declared closed to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and to protect students from the virus. But as a result of this closure announcement, the educational institutions could not conduct face-to-face classes as before. The students were anxious to finish their studies and exams at the right time and they were going to face a session jam. To overcome this problem, educational institutions started conducting classes online. These online teaching activities were new to most students and teachers. As a result, they faced various problems. The purpose of this study was to give a complete picture of the problem in the online class considering the undergraduate students' perspectives.

Among the problems identified, the study found that the majority of students faced a crisis of digital poverty such as lacking adequate devices, Internet access, and energy to attend classes when educational institutions asked them to attend online classes for a reduced period. Additionally, students are discouraged from attending their classes online due to a variety of family problems, such as some students abstaining from taking classes online due to illness of their own or family members; some students did not attend class because their room was cluttered or they did not have a separate study room. Students have a variety of mental problems as a result of their participation in online programs. Although educational institutions reduced class hours and curriculum, they did not provide students with time for counselling and recreation. In addition, they significantly improved the stress and effectiveness of students' learning, putting them under greater pressure than regular study. The survey also found that working in an organization becomes very exhausting for working students and that most of their organizations do not allow them to leave their work duties and attend classes. Next, while universities do their best to satisfy course requirements, the quality of lectures in online classrooms is not particularly successful, as classes are carefully planned and, with less time than face-to-face lectures, students have trouble attending or understanding their concepts correctly. At the same time, the stress of listening to fast-paced lectures, studying for midterm and quarterfinals, and completing assignments, semester assignments, and presentations for each course was extremely difficult on lockdown days as students were not even allowed to leave their homes to reduce their mental pressures. Some students are also struggling due to a lack of technological expertise, which seems difficult due to a lack of previous user experience with the online applications used for their online lessons.

Future research may be performed to discover more appropriate classes options for students by comparing the issues of face-to-face and online classrooms. Researchers may also utilize a large sample size to analyse the issues of online classes, but they are likely to discover the same overall conclusions with a few outliers. A similar study may be conducted by obtaining input from faculty and institutions to compare the difficulties with those of students.

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