

Digital Transformation in Higher Education PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES OF THE FUTURE

High-speed internet for digital learning



To realise the full potential of digital technologies high-speed internet is a basic requirement. According to a recent report of speedtest.net Bangladesh is ranked 120th among 122 countries in terms of mobile internet speed while the country stands at 78 among 133 countries in terms of broadband speed. This connectivity gap is seriously impeding digital learning in the country.

To address this gap currently the government is implementing a project named BdREN (Bangladesh Research and Education Network) under Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) with assistance from World Bank. It is a high-speed data-communications network that is dedicated to meeting the needs of the academic and research communities of both public and private sectors by

bringing together institutions, scholars and libraries across the world. Educational institutions have to pay a certain amount of money to buy bandwidth from this high-speed network. The significant difference between BdREN and other commercial internet networks is that, BdREN is connected to several international research communities in the Asia Pacific, Europe and North America, via the Trans-

Eurasia Information Network, informs Dr Gauranga Chandra Mohanta, Project Director of HEQEP. Researchers connected to BdREN are able to communicate and collaborate with their counterparts overseas over the virtual workspace at improved network performance and lower network latency, he adds.

As of now, 36 public and private universities in Bangladesh are connected to this network. IUB and North South University are the only two private universities in the list. Dr Mohanta attributes this gap to the lack of adequate infrastructure in private universities e.g. own campus and awareness about the benefits of being connected to this network.

BRAC University Vice Chancellor Professor Syed Saad Andaleeb underscores that three things are needed to expand BdREN: It must be "sold" more persuasively to the universities, many of which probably still don't know how to utilise this resource; these institutions must then be trained on how to use the available resources; and finally, connectivity needs to be made available to the private universities. He hopes that private universities will be given the same privileges as public universities in terms of access to this high-speed communication network. BRAC University is currently in the process of being connected to BdREN.

Library of the future

In the digital age libraries are no longer archaic rooms of dusty books, but a gateway that provides seamless digital access to content—both text and audio-visual. With the establishment of UGC Digital Library (UDL) Bangladesh has made a qualitative leap in this regard. UDL started its journey in June, 2012. It is hosted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh and is largely funded by the World Bank's Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP).

Dr Gauranga Chandra Mohanta, Project Director of HEQEP, shares that the main aim of the UDL is to advance teaching, learning and research in the member institutions through collaborative subscription to electronic resources such as online full-text journals, e-books, bibliographic databases,

datasets and reference resources at lower rates of subscription fees. Currently, UDL provides access to 3,100 journals and 31,000 e-books provided by the world's leading publishers such as ACM, Emerald, IEEE, SAGE, Springer, Oxford University Press and JSTOR. He also informs that UDL is now providing high quality e-content to 84 educational and research institutions including 34 public universities and 46 private universities.

Professor M Omar Rahman, Vice Chancellor, IUB shares that in the ever-changing educational environment digital library is a reality. UDL is a great beginning; now it should expand its resource base by subscribing to e-content from other reputed sources such as ScienceDirect which is not affordable for a single university, says Professor Rahman.



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