

WALK THE TALK

FROM PAGE S2

Professor Dr Shahid Akhtar Hossain
Vice Chancellor, Eastern University

Now, after gradual decline of the Covid infections, we have started blending the teaching-learning methodology that is the combination of online classes and on-campus classes to reduce the learning gap and to ensure health directives from the government.

It is certain that not only higher education but also our lifestyle has changed after the pandemic. After 18 months, shifting back to on-campus we are facing some problems. Students, who had grown used to online methods, are now a bit unsure to start in-person classes. They couldn't shake hands or hug their friends and have adda as they used to during pre-pandemic times. Due to lack of writing practice during online classes, they are now slow in writing and are mentally traumatized. Considering all these challenges, our university has started a blended approach and we are also providing them with psychosocial counseling.

Most students appraised the facility of having the recorded file of the class lecture that they could access several times after class. They also specified that they have grown familiar with many technological learning tools that they have used in their in-class and out-of-class study. Another significant "study-habit" that the students claimed to have achieved is the collaborative learning practice. This has been one of the positive milestones of the pandemic that they will continue to practice in the post-pandemic world.

Dr Mahfuzul Hoque Chowdhury
Vice Chancellor, Chittagong Independent University

Chittagong Independent University (CIU) always stands to proliferate the level of international standard education. Situated outside Dhaka, we are always committed to ensure the quality education in Chittagong.

Like all other educational institutes, due to the coronavirus pandemic, we have been suffering from March 2020 to maintain the schedule regarding class and evaluations. We run our institution according to the instructions from UGC. This was a completely new experience. We were apprehensive; however, we were not in despair. We took lessons and kept hope.

We inaugurated a software named "CMOS" in order to keep normal academic work. We gave special scholarships for our students who were suffering from financial crises for Covid-19, when they were unable to express their need. We thought it was our moral obligation to stand by our students.

We must recognise that there is a difference between online and offline classes. Earlier, many faculty members had no experience of online teaching methods but gradually they have accommodated themselves since both teachers and students are eager and sincere about learning.

All other private universities in Chittagong run on student fees. Unlike them, the trustees of CIU don't receive any honorariums from the university fund. By publishing journals, maintaining international levels, appointing faculties who have obtained Ph.D. or M.Phil. degrees with bright academic experience and connecting an academic network with foreign universities, our university is significantly ahead.

These activities, however, received setback during the pandemic. Therefore, incentive is highly needed for the education sector. Now students are heading towards online learning which I appreciate because education would be easier. We tend to see an increase in the standard of education along with securing research. At CIU, we have excellent research centres such as Institute of Governance, Development and International Studies, Institutional Quality Assurance Cell, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Journal of CIU with many others.

Whatever the extent of the Covid-19 pandemic, we can't step back now. We have to be more responsible to cope with this present.

Professor Dr AFM Mafizul Islam
Vice Chancellor, Southeast University

At Southeast University, we were forced to cancel in-person classes in response to the growing Covid-19 outbreak. We switched to online learning, and students were encouraged to return home. Urgent steps were taken to provide technical resources and impart technical training to the faculty members, and improve internet connection for ensuring uninterrupted online education to fulfil the educational needs of students.

We did not find any serious learning gap in business and social science classes as we provided standard class notes online, and all lectures were recorded so that students can access anytime. What was affected were the science classes, particularly laboratory classes. We are now taking lab classes on weekends in addition to normal lab classes of the semester, and thus minimizing the learning gap of lab classes.

It is true that e-learning was unutilized or underutilized in the past, especially in a country like ours. However, the current crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic forced not only Bangladesh but also the entire world to rely on it for education. In this pandemic crisis, online education has emerged as an immediate alternative to the traditional higher education system around the world, even in Bangladesh. Though online learning has its share of issues, it is a popular innovative method for providing education. Higher education will not remain same after the pandemic. The pandemic gave us lot of experience and skills on how to tackle the situation through innovations. We will supplement on-campus learning by e-learning. For example, now a teacher can use software like Any desk, Chrome Remote Desktop, etc to conduct computer-based practical classes from home. Teachers and students can enter into e-resources library from home if they have VPN (Virtual Personal Network) connection.

We have already adapted remote learning to some level. To begin with, we will continue some Master courses online as most of the Master students are service holders who are living outside Dhaka city. They will attend classes online, and will only sit for examinations on-campus. For all other courses, it is our experience that most of the students leave Dhaka city a week before their Eid vacation, and come back after a week. During these two particular weeks, learning is affected. That is why we will conduct online classes for these two weeks. Hartal is another time when we may take online classes as well.

With our advanced technology, knowledge and experience gathered during the pandemic, we will go ahead either with in-person, or online classes, or even a combination of both on-campus and e-learning depending on what suits the course. We will continuously analyse what has worked, what hasn't worked and how to tackle the challenges we will face going forward.

Professor H M Jahirul Haque, PhD
Senior Advisor, Board of Trustees, Canadian University of Bangladesh (CUB)

I would say that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on higher education in Bangladesh. Bangladesh was already lagging behind in terms of online education, but the pandemic forced us to shift to remote learning.

One impressive side to Bangladeshi people is that we can quickly adapt to any challenge thrown our way. As soon as the pandemic hit, private universities in Bangladesh began the online teaching-learning process with great success. Our universities are still maintaining high-quality online education. The pandemic has given us tremendous opportunities to compete with top educational institutions worldwide by improving our online education.

Our founder Dr Chowdhury Nafeez Sarafat invested a lot into online education when he established the Canadian University of Bangladesh (CUB). He ensured the quality of higher education and research activities remained high.

CUB has been using Moodle, an online teaching-learning platform, for a long time. Therefore, transitioning to online classes in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in March 2020, was not as challenging for our teachers.

The pandemic is almost over, but we are continuing to use a blended approach to education. There is no way to avoid blended learning because teachers and students have already adjusted to online education. Currently, at CUB, we ensure our physical classes on campus are available live online for students who are staying in remote areas or whose guardians are not allowing them to go to physical classes just yet. We will continue this blended approach even after the pandemic ends. Besides this, we are also making some certificate courses available online for participants interested in gaining training on a certain skill or learning different topics online. For example, we are offering online certificate courses on medicine, management, and leadership.

In addition to this, we are also organising many online conferences, webinars, meetings, and research activities. We will continue to reap the benefits of having online





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