

Transforming Face-to-Face Tertiary Level Teaching and Learning into Online Modalities in the Context of Bangladesh

Rudaba Afrin Zitu*

Abstract

In this globalized world, intellectual capital (IC) becomes highly valued by people and governments, and tertiary education has undergone significant changes in both advanced and emerging countries. The transition is related to diverse elements of online modalities and how those factors differ from the face-to-face (f2f) mode. This shift to online teaching and learning is still at the initial stage for teachers and learners. In Bangladesh, transforming f2f tertiary-level teaching and learning into an online modality has bright prospects. But there are substantial challenges in bridging the gap between f2f and online modalities and ensuring fair access. Many institutions have transformed by using existing resources, while many struggle due to limited access to technology, poor digital literacy, and the high cost of the internet. Thus, this study discloses the start of online education with the use of technology. It also unveils the impact of tradition-bound brick-and-mortar campuses that fail to use new strategies and leadership for tertiary face-to-face teaching and learning in Bangladesh. We anticipate an integrated approach that will promote both f-to-f and online tertiary education as well as create the right academic environment.

Keywords: Distance teaching learning, Dispersed teaching learning, Face-to-face teaching learning, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

In this globalized world, people and governments highly value intellectual capital (IC), and tertiary-level teaching and learning have become extremely essential. Tertiary-level teaching and learning can produce critical scholars and innovators, as well as a healthy, informed, and passionate nation.¹ Educators, intellectual persons, and society have been increasing their enhanced interest in tertiary education for the metamorphosis in our knowledge-based society.² COVID-19 shows the urgency of online education throughout the globe, specifically developing countries like Bangladesh.³ However, in Bangladesh, transforming face-to-face tertiary teaching and learning to online distance modalities is still facing substantial challenges, especially in bridging the technical diversity and ensuring impartial access. While some academic institutions have successfully transformed using existing resources, many still struggle due to several issues, such as limited access to technology, deficient digital literacy, and concerns about the quality of online interactions.

Distance or online teaching and learning is a form of education in which the essential features include the physical space between instructors and learners during instruction and the use of multiple transmission know-how to promote learner-instructor and

* PhD Fellow, Institute of Education and Research, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi 6205, Bangladesh; E-mail: rafrin1982@gmail.com

learner-learner exchanges. Online teaching and learning focused on non-traditional students, full-time workers, people employed in military service, and isolated locations. However, online distance teaching and learning have evolved into a domain of academic arenas that prefer continuous growth. It involves increasing access to education by defeating the geographical barriers that separate educators from learners.⁴ Distance Teaching and learning are sometimes considered Dispersed Teaching and Learning (DTL), which encompasses technology-guided education in which the mixture of modalities depends on the nature of the curriculum and the learners. DTL is an open model that holds most of the formal teaching and learning. As a result, the concept has been good for many educators in referring to the fundamental changes that are part of the internet revolution. Although the American Council on Education (ACE) made it clear that the two terms “distributed teaching-learning” and “distance teaching-learning” are identical it is vital to note that they handle distinctly diverse cases depending on the context.⁵ Distance teaching and learning are about access rather than the modalities used in delivering appropriate learning experiences for learners. Distance teaching-learning can be a subset of a particular approach to transmitted education. Yet, as access becomes the focus, distance teaching-learning evolves into a subset of distance education since separate modalities may control access. We can learn about the changes in teaching and learning styles when learners use the Internet in online education, as well as non-distance teaching and learning modalities.

Learners can now participate in the same class even if they are thousands of kilometers away from their teacher and in different time zones. But it was not feasible in the past. The enhanced direct access to the internet and, thus, teaching-learning webs around the globe now provide choices for learners and faculty members living in two separate places—a choice that was not possible before the advent of the internet. Learners and faculty members can be from anywhere and outside their direct teaching and learning places.

Learners and faculty members can interact with each other at any time from their separate places and diverse time zones when Internet access and teaching-learning aids are available to learners and faculty members. By endorsing the online teaching and learning approach, this research reveals that online learners can achieve more than those in formal face-to-face classrooms.

Fruitful outcomes are evident through the use of a new road to online teaching and learning. Online teaching-learning providers can create a new domain that might hold new limits for conduct and new codes to act and succeed. Education policy planners can promote market-driven new online programs. We need to follow their guidance and utilize the power of the Internet to boost modern teaching and learning domains.

2. Methodology of the Study

The study is based on secondary sources of information collected from the websites and published reports of University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Open University (BOU), and published research papers on online higher education in Bangladesh and abroad.

The study is qualitative in nature, based on published information and studies regarding the online tertiary teaching and learning in Bangladesh and abroad, as well as information and materials available on the websites of the UGC and BOU. This study has utilized a descriptive and analytical approach to demonstrate the present state of online tertiary education in Bangladesh. This research delineates the current state of online education (platforms used, readiness), and an analytical approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the transformation from offline to online education modalities.

3. Two Useful Models for Online Teaching and Learning

While examining online distance teaching and learning as practiced around the globe, two basic models have emerged. These are the Mass Communication Model and the Synchronous Learning Network Model. These models promote real-time interactive teaching and learning, both online and offline, that learners and faculty members need to fulfill simultaneously. The broadcast model depends on the premise of influencing knowledge dissemination from educators to learners. However, the asynchronous learning web model depends on the constructivist learning theory, where learners are actively engaged in acquiring knowledge.

Broadcasting distance learning is a familiar setup for a classic university class, primarily involving faculty members who give lectures to learners.⁶ Reading lessons, group discussions, films, quizzes, etc., often accompany the centerpiece lectures. Lecturing with other concurrent activities, where the focus is on the dispatch of learning, is an example of broadcast teaching. The Internet can disseminate information quickly. Extended bandwidth websites can deliver live classes in video and audio setup, along with study text (for students with poor homework skills). The posted curriculum and lectures are now readily available to learners both on-campus and off-campus in remote areas. From there, learners can download the curriculum and lectures and print the lecture notes even before the class officially begins. More complex and interactive schedules can also be made available in broadcast mode, such as individualized teaching packages and self-assessment tools for learners (including quizzes, data banks, etc). Indeed, many corporate training programs utilize this form of broadcast distance learning, allowing employees to receive training modules without leaving their homes or workplaces. The broadcast approach is attractive to many administrators since it presents options to drastically lower the costs of education by expanding class sizes and by providing more rigid, pre-packaged teaching and learning for learners. Some classic institutions also employ the broadcast model of teaching online courses by videotaping lectures and making them publicly available through traditional media, digital media, webcasting, and live streaming media on the Internet. In some cases, the presentations in the broadcast model are both talks and online dialogues. In learning web courses, the focus shifts from devising detailed web-based teaching and learning materials to more details of the college experience that could lead to the evolution of a society of learners by facilitating learner-to-learner and learner-to-teacher exchanges.

Using this model, lecturers are free to use the same course materials they use for on-campus classes for their off-campus distance teaching and learning. However, they are to modify their instructional plans to acknowledge the full potential of new transmission

technologies. By shifting the focus away from the lecture method, there are many fantastic options to make teaching and learning more interactive. The educators become mentors, moderators, and facilitators rather than conveyors of knowledge. The leading feature of distance teaching and learning in tertiary education is the shift in focus from posting to interactive learning in web communities. The focus shifted from an instructor's inputs to learners' outcomes is a motive why promoters prefer the term Distance Teaching and Learning to Distance Education.

Though online education is a new dimension in Bangladesh,⁷ the most optimistic and engaging form of online distance teaching and learning is one that spotlights instructors and learners working in a teaching and learning grid using ongoing exchanges. Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN) is the term developed by A. Frank Mayadas of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, a well-known philanthropic institution and pioneer in working with universities to fund innovative online distance learning projects. ALN funded some schemes that include broadcasting, but the primary aim is to encourage schemes that explore the potential for vibrant exchange among learners as well as between learners and faculty members in small groups. It is a mode of teaching and learning practiced in a legal setting by the best educators. Teaching and learning programs based on the existing network doctrine inspire learners to become actively involved in the wisdom process—a role that promotes self-study and participation in online activities with other course players.

As the concurrent dialog is in documented form, learners are more likely to complete reading tasks before reacting to fellow learners and faculty members in online dialogues. Learners evolve more sharply as the session is typically archived. The contributions of the teacher and learners are thus open to all participants in the teaching-learning process; an option to refer to earlier talks is not readily open in a live class. The teaching and learning pedagogy boosts the vanguard in courses based on the ALN Model. The focus is on how the teacher works to foster active learning of the learners in the course through the expert use of homework and discussions. At times, it may be best for the teacher not to interfere in conversations and allow students to resolve issues or problems that they are engaged in resolving. At other times, it may be necessary to insert a comment or question to steer discussions away from matters that are irrelevant to the topic. Skills in mediating and boosting evolved more useful than the direct dispatch of expert knowledge—the broadcast function.

4. More Exhaustive Convergence in Tertiary Teaching- Learning

The growth in online tertiary teaching and learning institutions emerges at this moment when traditional universities are experiencing a new crisis due to the rising costs of tertiary education, and there is a massive number of not-for-profit institutions. The challenges of online teaching and learning in traditional universities have grown and are contributing to the transformation of the landscape of distance teaching and learning.

The rising costs of tertiary teaching and learning at universities and post-graduate colleges have been growing at a rate higher than inflation, while state support has been falling. The primary reason for the inflated costs is the use of technology. More and more tertiary-level

institutions are increasingly adopting cutting-edge technology, including the costs of upgrading and upkeep, to deliver the most valuable support for their researchers, faculty members, and students. To meet inflated costs, both government and private universities have been raising tuition fees at alarming rates over the last two decades. At the same time, the govt willingness to keep tuition and other regular fees low creates new challenges in fulfilling the need for wide access to tertiary-level teaching and learning institutions. As tuition and other charges have been increasing gradually, many students from economically weak backgrounds cannot afford them. The democratic idea of providing equal opportunities to all eligible learners has been declining as tuition and other fees have increased in all types of tertiary institutions.

The growth of for-profit institutions is another significant shift in tertiary-level teaching-learning that has taken place over the last two decades. These institutions have impacted online distance teaching and learning. The number of for-profit tertiary institutions is growing slowly, and many of those are regionally accredited multi-campus institutions that target the vocational job needs of senior learners at the tertiary level.

Vry Institute of Technology has 19 campuses that spotlight teaching and learning related to the digitization of the economy. It suggests a curriculum to prepare learners for jobs in the digital world. The phenomenal growth of the University of Phoenix has been documented in the press and elsewhere.⁸

It has evolved as the largest tertiary-level teaching and learning institution in the USA, with over 116,300 learners on 116 campuses in 22 states. Many other tertiary-level teaching and learning institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, offer distance courses. Those campuses have been offering a more customer-oriented package at times that are suitable for their target learners. Classic geographic boundaries of universities and tertiary colleges are rapidly disappearing as online distance teaching and learning options evolve. The University of Phoenix Online has nearly 45,000 students in degree programs from each of these states in the USA and several foreign countries.

A small group of well-paid faculty members set the course curriculum. Class sizes are small, typically consisting of 12 to 14 students, and taught by faculty members who receive lower salaries than faculty at research-led institutes. These for-profit institutions are known for their efficiency in nursing learners as well as their faculty members, and for lowering costs. They held the mission of instructing adult learners and proposing programs in areas that have high market demand. They pose a special threat to land-grant universities as they can provide multiple continuing teaching and learning programs that have huge market demand. Earnings from these programs could support other extension programs at higher educational institutions. This has led to a reconsideration of the practice among state universities and colleges for funding extension services at no cost or a modest cost. It has also encouraged those institutes to explore the chance of online distance teaching and learning as a way of keeping up with their more cost-conscious for-profit rivals. To make tertiary teaching and learning marketable and to cope with rising costs and declining state support, public universities, especially those that are extensive, have responded by embracing good governance to

make these institutions more efficient and market-oriented. Most tertiary teaching-learning institutions have even formed a profit centre in which those institutions become the beneficiary. The evolution of privatization involves converting publicly owned or government entities into privately owned corporations. The privatization of tertiary-level teaching and learning has also created anxiety and tension in academic institutions. Faculty members become concerned about the loss of peace in campus life and the nostalgic moments of scholastic exposition in tertiary-level teaching and learning. The increased rate of commercialization of universities is also evident.

There are insufficient resources that have yet to be used to improve the quality of tertiary teaching and learning, or to fund more expensive research programs. Based on the above discussion, the question arises that deserve proper addressing: should funds be invested to meet the needs of undergraduate students, especially through online distance modalities or offline f2f modalities?

There is a need for more access to tertiary teaching and learning to be provided to more students in junior colleges and non-research, four-year colleges/universities. Those institutions are less costly to operate, and the repositioning of resources could contribute to the financial crises felt by large public universities. In addition, as students pay higher tuition, they increasingly demand more services and return for their educational spending.

5. Conventional Tertiary Teaching -Learning Colleges and Universities

The rise of attraction in online teaching and learning has emerged at a time when there are growing pressures due to the rising cost of university education. Whether tertiary teaching and learning institutions help enhance access to learners while fulfilling those challenges is a question now. Online teaching and learning are not inexpensive, and as such, the query also arises about the benefits of these modalities. Stakeholders can pick at least four economic benefits.

- The online teaching and learning options help reduce funding needs for new capital investments such as classrooms, hostels, campus centres, and athletic installations.
- The need for minimal and proper technical know-how is readily open to an ever-increasing number of learners. Access to the Internet has evolved into an essential part of human lives, workplaces, and higher teaching and learning institutions.
- Academic institutions have already invested in media, venues, outlets, program control systems, and the essential hardware and software to run a 21st-century university. These investments are for on-campus residential as well as distance teaching and learning.
- Many of the technical innovations have emerged as essential for online teaching and learning. Legacy systems of distance teaching and learning refer to the chronological evolution of providing tertiary education to learners separated from their teachers. This concept spans from early forms of mail (postal) courses to modern online education media. Key aspects include the use of diverse media for teaching, the role of technology, and a focus on flexibility and accessibility for learners.

The heritage system of distance teaching and learning is costly to support, and as such, it should be closed gradually.

In contrast, the corporate approach to teaching and learning assumes academic efforts that have several advantages; as such, course enrollment and learner oversight need to be automated, integrated, and learner-friendly. The cost per learner declines as the number of learners grows. The economies of scale benefit the centrally coordinated support functions of an academic institution. Tertiary teaching and learning institutions can avoid the cost of f2f classes by using online modalities.

Developing countries, including Bangladesh, can bypass the weaknesses of the corporate model to run an educational institution. The broadcast part of teaching and learning can also be better organized to free faculty members from more active exchanges with students. Most emerging countries have been relying on outsourcing these tasks to commercial vendors, including the publication of textbooks. It implies cost reduction due to scale benefits and nurturing of academic and executive bureaucracies. Besides, emerging countries may promote off-campus teaching and learning for learners who have access to distance modalities and services.

Online teaching and learning have transformed the landscape of tertiary-level education in new formats that are still growing, possibly in problematic ways. The Western Governors University (WGU) is an example of such a step. The governors of 19 states, including Hawaii and Guam, in the USA founded WGM. In its current form, WGU links courses and offers both grades and certificates to its students. The WGU is a competency-based institution that requires students to exhibit their learning and skills in specific subject areas to earn degrees and certificates rather than through traditional credit hours or course completion.

Another example is E-Army Access Online, run by the Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC). It entered into a several-million USD contract to coordinate tertiary teaching and learning options for the U.S. Army. The E-Army Access Online, partnering with conventional universities and various technology firms, serves as a course, program, and support service provider. The rise of these estimating machines poses a threat to the autonomy of traditional higher teaching-learning institutes. In effect, they demote institutes to the status of mere providers or even vendors of courses, thus deteriorating their capacity to incorporate the scholarly knowledge of their students into their own specific and coherent degree programs.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

As more and more higher learning institutions, both for-profit and not-for-profit, offer online distance teaching and learning programs and courses across state boundaries, the circulation of funds from tuition and other fees within an individual country may increase or decrease. Some higher teaching-learning institutions will benefit; others will not. For example, learners from a specific country enrol in online courses proposed by a university located in another country. The success of online stores, such as Amazon.com, is a clue to what may transpire for online education providers. If online higher education

providers of a particular country can offer high-quality online tertiary-level teaching and learning to their learners at a fair but competitive cost, their foreign currency reserves would increase gradually. The net earnings or loss of tuition fees across state lines may be little at the moment. Online tertiary teaching and learning across state boundaries using modern technology could increase the volume of foreign exchange inflows into the host country, and that could help improve its financial health.

As stated earlier, Bangladesh, an emerging economy, should formulate and enforce clear plans for the digital revolution in tertiary-level teaching and learning. There is a need to create an interactive online teaching and learning support system, diverse pedagogical strategies and ensure access for all learners. But there is a lack of digital literacy among most faculty members and a significant portion of the learners, which can hinder effective online teaching and learning. Some faculty members may face difficulties while using online platforms and providing learning materials, while learners may face challenges in navigating online learning environments.

Hence, the lack of digital literacy among a good number of learners and faculty members can hamper effective online teaching and learning. Some instructors may struggle with using online platforms and providing teaching and learning resources, such as lecture notes with clarifications of complex issues. Students may face challenges in navigating online learning environments, including easy access to the internet and other supporting aids.

As such, an all-out national plan for the digital shift in tertiary teaching and learning, outlining explicit goals, policies, and enactment policies, is required. Bangladesh can change its tertiary-level teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of the 21st century and provide quality education for all by addressing challenges and capitalising on prospects. It is high time for Bangladesh to react positively and take advantage of online tertiary teaching and learning, as well as to capitalise on the demographic dividend.

This study suffers from some limitations. Firstly, we derived the research results from published secondary sources, which may not represent the actual motives of academic stakeholders, such as tertiary-level academic institutions, learners, educators, and government policy planners. Moreover, a strong push is crucial from social enterprises to create an upscale shared value for all stakeholders of tertiary teaching and learning in Bangladesh, for example, learners, faculty members, higher education policy planners, and society at large. We believe that future researchers will overcome such limitations through extensive interviews with different stakeholders in higher education to validate the findings.

Notes and References

- ¹ Shakhawat Hossain Sarkar, Shohel Rana, and Rudaba Afrin Zitu, Challenges of quality higher education in Bangladesh: A study on public universities, *Journal of Education and Practice* 4, No. 8 (2013): 151-160. ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper) ISSN 2222-288X (Online). www.iiste.org
- ² Syed Zabid Hossain, Md. Anwarul Haque, and Md. Tahidur Rahman, Matching accounting curricula with market demands: A Study on the University of Rajshahi in Bangladesh, *Archives of Business Review* 8, No. 11 (2020): 232-247. DOI: 10.14738/abr.811.9399

- ³ M. Mahruf C. Shohel et al., Preparedness of students for future teaching and learning in higher education: A Bangladeshi perspective, *Innovation in Higher Education Teaching and Learning* 41 (2021): 29-56. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-364120210000041006>
- Sagun Shrestha et al., Preparations for and practices of online education during the Covid-19 pandemic: A study of Bangladesh and Nepal, *Education and information technologies* 27, No. 1 (2022): 243-265. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10659-0>
- ⁴ Kathleen Matheos and Walter Archer, From distance education to distributed learning: Surviving and thriving, *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration* 7, No. 4 (2004): 1-13.
- ⁵ Diana Oblinger and James Oblinger, Is it age or IT: First steps toward understanding the net generation, *Educating the net generation* 2, No. 1-2 (2005): 20.
- ⁶ Carol A. Twigg, Innovations in online learning, in *Moving beyond no significant difference: The PEW Learning and Technology Program (symposium monograph)*. Troy, NY: Center for Academic Transformation, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. 2001.
- ⁷ Goutam Roy et al., Response, readiness and challenges of online teaching amid COVID-19 pandemic: The case of higher education in Bangladesh, *Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 40, No. 1 (2023): 40-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20590776.2021.1997066>
- ⁸ Richard S Ruch, *Higher Ed, Inc.: The rise of the for-profit university*, JHU Press, 2003.