

INCORPORATION OF BLENDED LEARNING CLASSROOM AFTER CORONA-PANDEMIC IN THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF BANGLADESH: POTENTIALS, CHALLENGES AND PROBABLE SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Integrating internet and technology based learning education is a demand of modern age. We cannot deny the significance of traditional text book based classroom learning. But as per the demand of modern times or after pandemic period, incorporation of blended learning in education and its vast necessity is really inevitable. This article attempts to trace the potentials of incorporating the blended learning classroom after corona virus situation in the public universities of Bangladesh as well as tries to seek the related challenges and proposes probable suggestions. What we see during pandemic is that, a large number of students of many public universities are encountering numerous impediments to accelerate their studies. It is a very thought-provoking phenomenon at present how the education system can keep its continuation properly amidst corona-pandemic situation. To carry on the study, the researchers reached 50 students and 12 teachers from 6 public universities in Bangladesh through providing questionnaire. Based on the feedbacks of the interviewees, data are analyzed and explained in a descriptive manner. Finally the researchers try to put some suggestions to assist the educational think-tanks about the importance and recent relevance of incorporating blended learning after corona-pandemic in the public universities of Bangladesh.*

KEYWORDS: Blended learning, potentials, challenges, incorporation, students success, teachers benefits

INTRODUCTION

The present time is an era of e-learning. It has revolutionized the conventional method of chalk and board style learning method. With the changing technology, the field of education has experienced vast changes in itself. Incorporation of blended learning in the educational system is not new. Blended learning refers to teaching and learning conducted via a combination of face-

to-face classroom learning and technology-based online learning approaches. Combining the advantages of e-learning and traditional learning environments has led to a new learning environment often referred to as “blended learning”, which brings together traditional physical classes with elements of virtual learning (Finn & Bucci, 2004; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

The term “blended learning”, “hybrid learning”, “technology-mediated instruction”, “web-enhanced instruction”, and “mixed-mode instruction” are often used interchangeably in research literature (Martyn & Margie, 2003). The concept of blended learning first developed in the 1960s thought it gained formal terminology to describe it until the late 1990s. In many developed countries, blended learning has become the most favored model of learning with the flourishment of internet all over the world. In the other side, countless research papers are being conducted by the educationists to initiate blended learning in the Asian regions. This appears a big challenge as these countries carry a large number of students. Moreover, the adoption of technology in developing countries is much praiseworthy. They are always engaged in integrating techno-based education system to keep pace with that of developed countries. The researchers predict that corona virus can prevail its existence upcoming few years. In this case, educational institutions may face the risk mostly. So, the education researchers have to ponder over that issue and attempts to discover new model for future education. As Bangladesh is a developing country, for its educational system implementing blended learning with sufficient technical support and well-designed infrastructure is tough (Hossain, 2013).

The implementation of blended learning in the public universities seems difficult as they depend on only government funding in a broader scale. This study will give an eye on the potentials of blended learning and identify the challenges and suggest some probable solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, integration of technology in classroom is indispensable. Today’s students are growing up with internet and communication technology. To make them engaged with internet, it is necessary to the enhancement of using technology in the classroom. Feng Su and Namrata Rao (2020) carried a study on blended learning and said that the blended online pedagogy will combine face-to-face synchronous learning (such as Zoom, Google Classroom, Flipped Classroom etc.) with asynchronous learning to offer opportunities for cognitive participation which allows students to process the learning and reflect on the learning. They suggest some key factors to consider for successful blended learning design. They talk about the development of a community of learners and learning which involve assigning students to mixed ability grouping to work on online tasks which may encourage them peer learning. Academics have to be present in the learning journeys of students. Teachers may get opportunity to make presence and do their duty either virtually via Zoom or in-person. A weekly structure would be effective to make the blended learning classroom activities successful.

Faieza (2020) in her paper tries to suggest that virtual classrooms can also be utilized to conduct online quizzes, short exams and other forms of assessments. Academic institutions in Bangladesh can organize awareness programs, seminars and discussion forums on the concept of blended learning to create the right mindset for its successful implementation.

Hani (2018) conducted a study on blended learning. She recommends that both teachers and students should enhance their acceptance towards the new dimensions of teaching and learning. As two-way learning is more effective that's why it has to be monitored that students cannot take chance of it. Students can get opportunity to make a balance between their academic and professional career. Finally she suggests the university authority to manage proper infrastructure and training program on blended learning if possible for ensuring the better result.

Belal (2013) conducted a study to identify several types of drawbacks of blended learning. Lack of technical knowledge, political instability, insufficient funding, inadequate power supply, poor infrastructure has been shown as the barriers in implementing blended learning in Bangladesh. He proposes blended learning requires high quality support at all levels: organizational infrastructure, course and faculty development as well as consistent student learning support mechanisms.

Zeynep *et al.*, (2011) investigated the potentials of blended learning in an English Language Training Program. They opine that combining online classes and face to face learning, a teacher education program is able to increase its convenience, flexibility, access, and efficiency while maintaining the quality of the program.

Harrell and Harris (2006), and Young and Lewis (2008) discovered that teachers generally have positive feedback to blended learning in terms of overall satisfaction and enjoyment. Students' satisfaction was also found in the findings of this study.

Kupetz and Ziegenmeyer (2005) attempt to explain that using various multimedia-based case stories and electronic tools such as 'e-interview' is needed for the development process for a blended learning approach. Each of these activities was designed to support different aspects of student learning and to be flexible enough to respond to the needs of different types of learners. They concluded that the blended learning approach can "support the integration of declarative and procedural knowledge, thus supporting the learner when constructing professional knowledge and skills."

Objective of the Study

The objective of the research is to find out the prospects, challenges and suggest some probable, effective and well-timed solutions in the path of incorporating blended learning classroom in education after corona-pandemic situation.

Research Questions

There are two research questions are determined on a broad line. These are as follows:

- What are the potentials of incorporating blended learning classroom in education after corona-pandemic?
- What are the challenges of incorporating blended learning classroom in education after the pandemic?

Significance of the Study

The result of the study will help both the teachers and students why to incorporate blended learning after corona-pandemic and what would be the benefits of this education system. Blended learning instructions would be more effective than face-to-face or online classes. It would create enough time for the learners to conduct part time jobs simultaneously with their studies. They would be efficient in communication and information technologies. It would be make them more presentable, autonomous, self-regulated and independent to order succeed. On the other hand, this paper would help the teacher to overcome the limitations of traditional face-to-face classroom or purely online classroom.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher has adopted the qualitative method for this study because the objective is to find out the potentials and challenges of incorporating blended learning after corona in the public universities of Bangladesh.

Participants

This study is carried out in six public universities in Bangladesh. Both the teachers and the students were the interviewees and have techno-dependency. The University Grants Commission has marked a low internet cost for conducting online classes during pandemic. 50 students and 12 teachers from 6 public universities are taken as participants and shared their views about the incorporation of blended learning after corona.

Instrumentations

A questionnaire has been used as the instrument to conduct the study. The responses of the participants were presented in using pie charts and explained as their respective feedbacks. All the questions of the questionnaire were much related to the main research questions. The data collection procedure took five consecutive days.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the questionnaire's responses, the potentials and the challenges of incorporating blended learning are sort out and data has been shown through some charts and also discussed below.

Responses of the students about incorporating blended learning

Question: 1. Do you have any idea on blended learning education system?

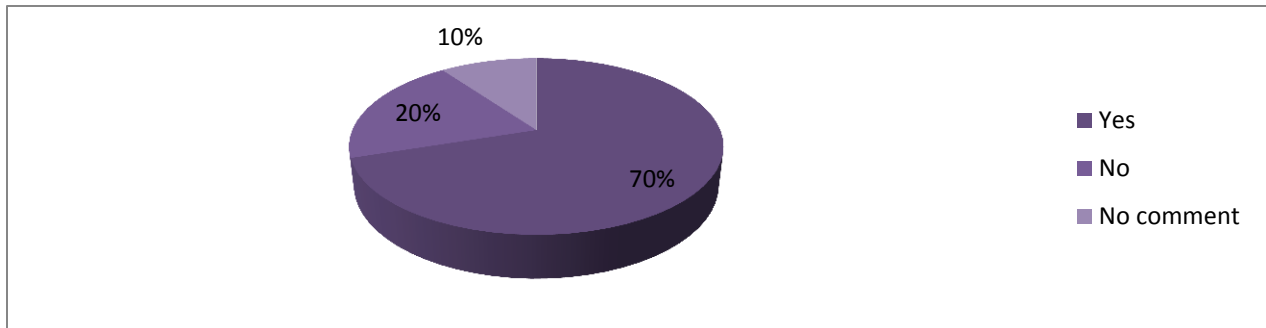


Figure: 1

Discussion: This question was asked to know the opinion of the students of the public universities whether they know anything about the blended learning system in education. 70% of them responded positive as they have a little idea on it. On the other hand, 20% of the students do not have any knowledge on that topic. And the rest of the 10% students put no comment about it (Figure-1).

Question: 2. Do you think blended learning program differ from traditional classroom instruction?

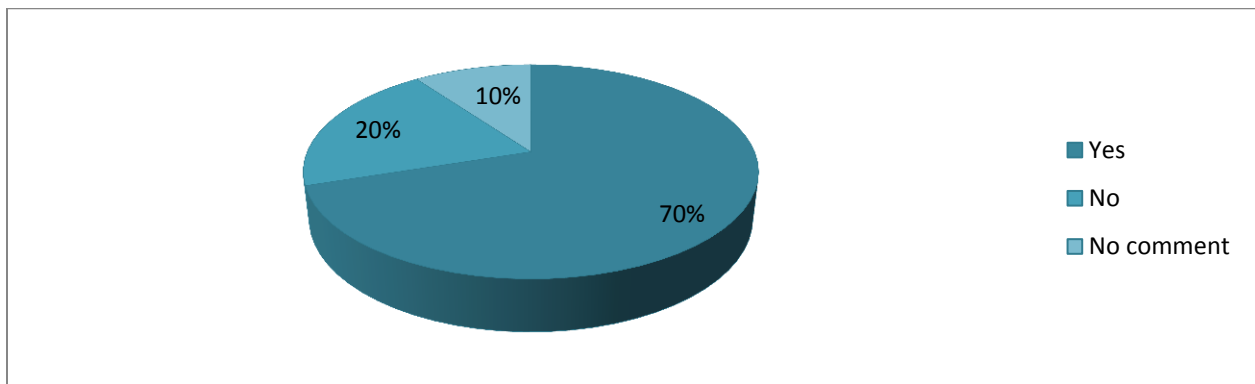


Figure: 2

Discussion: Students were asked to respond whether blended learning program differ from traditional classroom instruction. 70% of them responded 'yes' that they think it is true. 20% of the students do not agree with it and answered negative. And the other 10% of them remained throwing no opinion (Figure-2).

Question: 3. "As blended learning program is a mixture of both online based and traditional face to face learning, it would be a preferable learning medium after corona period."- Do you agree with it?

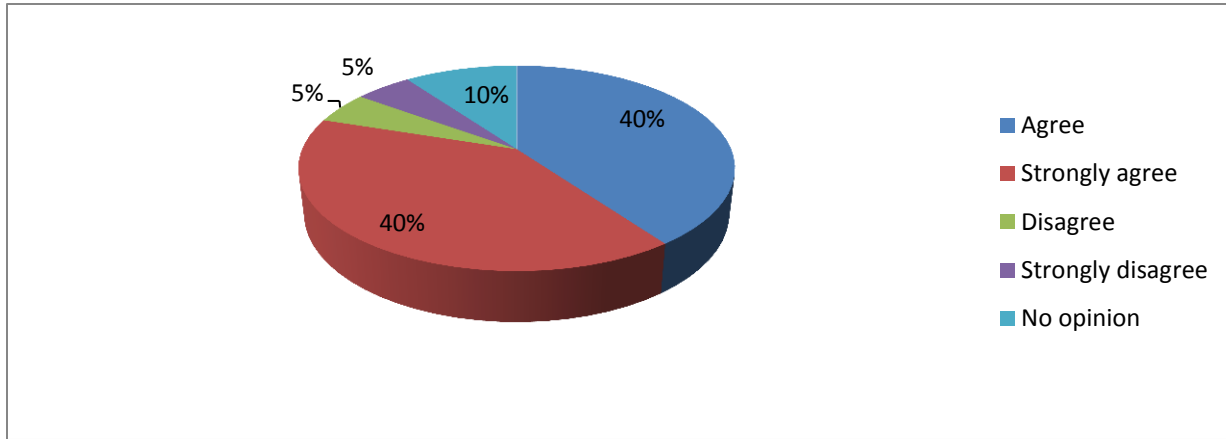


Figure: 3

Discussion: “Blended learning would be a preferable learning medium after corona period as it is a mixture of both online based and traditional face to face learning.” 40% students responded that they are agreed with it. Another 40% of them expressed their responses as they are strongly agreed with it. 5% of the students disagreed and more 5% of them are strongly disagreed. And the rest of 10% left no opinion (Figure-3).

Question: 4. “Blended learning can offer the flexibility of accessing the class content at your convenient time.”- What is your view on this regard?

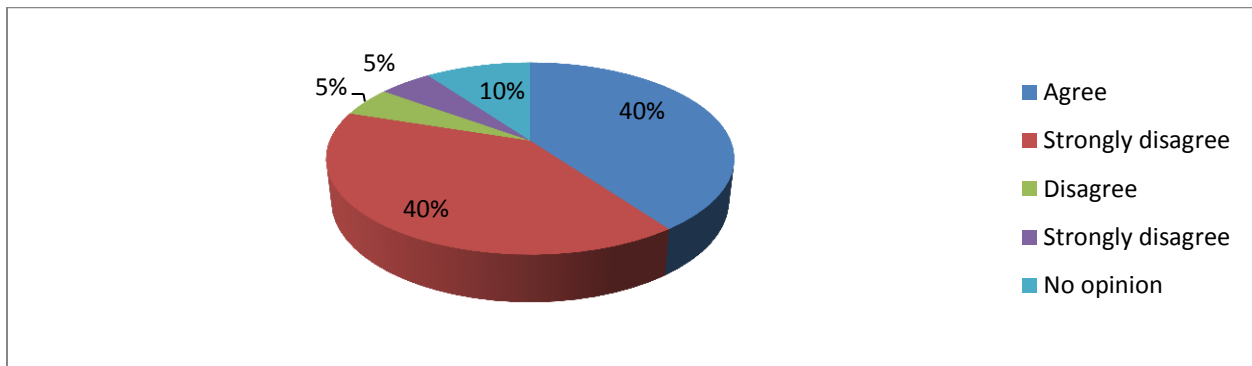


Figure: 4

Discussion: Students were asked to put their comment on that statement “Blended learning can offer the flexibility of accessing the class content at your convenient time.” 40% students responded that they are agreed with it. Another 40% of them expressed their responses as they are strongly agreed with it. 5% of the students disagreed and more 5% of them are strongly disagreed. And the rest of 10% were in neutral position (Figure-4).

Question: 5. Do you think that you would feel any difficulties to carry your class through blended learning instruction in comparison with traditional learning system?

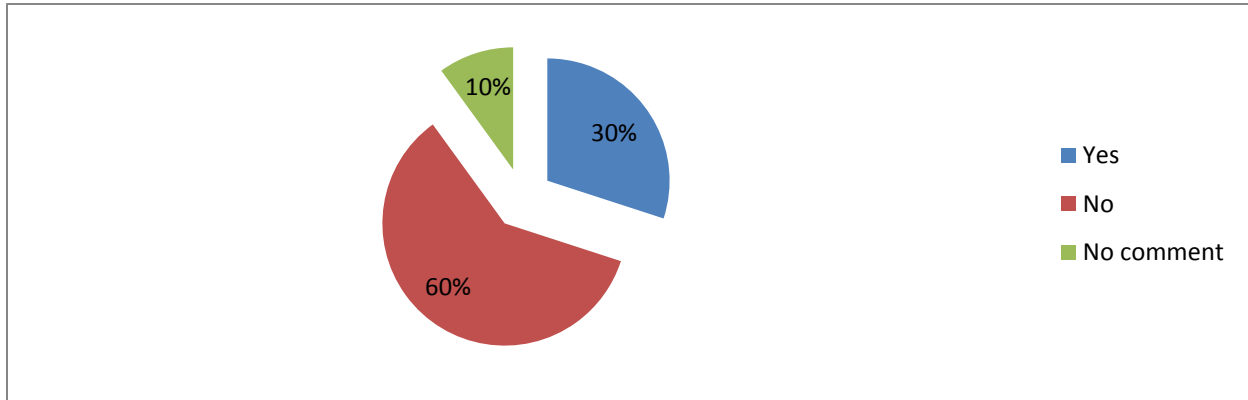


Figure: 5

Discussion: A question was thrown that the students would feel any difficulties to carry their classes through blended learning instruction in comparison with traditional learning system or not. 30% of them responded as 'yes' that they would face many difficulties. 60% of the students think that they will enjoy and expect a better learning outcome through integrating this method. And the rest of the other 5% kept no opinion (Figure-5).

Responses of the teachers about incorporating blended learning

Question: 1. Do you have interest in incorporating blended learning education system in your classroom?

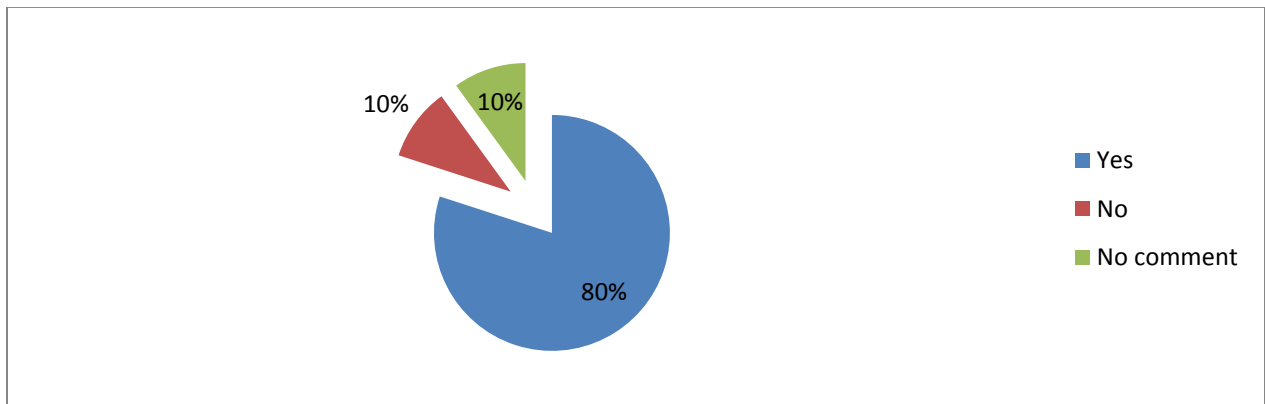


Figure: 6

Discussion: Teachers of the public university were asked if they have interest in incorporating blended learning education system in their classroom or not. Most of the teachers put positive answer. 80% of them are interest in establishing it whether 10% of them are reluctant to make this initiative successful. And the rest of the 10% teachers kept them silent in making any comment (Figure-6).

Question: 2. Integration of blended learning in classroom would be more effective than traditional face to face or only online classes.”- Do you agree on that?

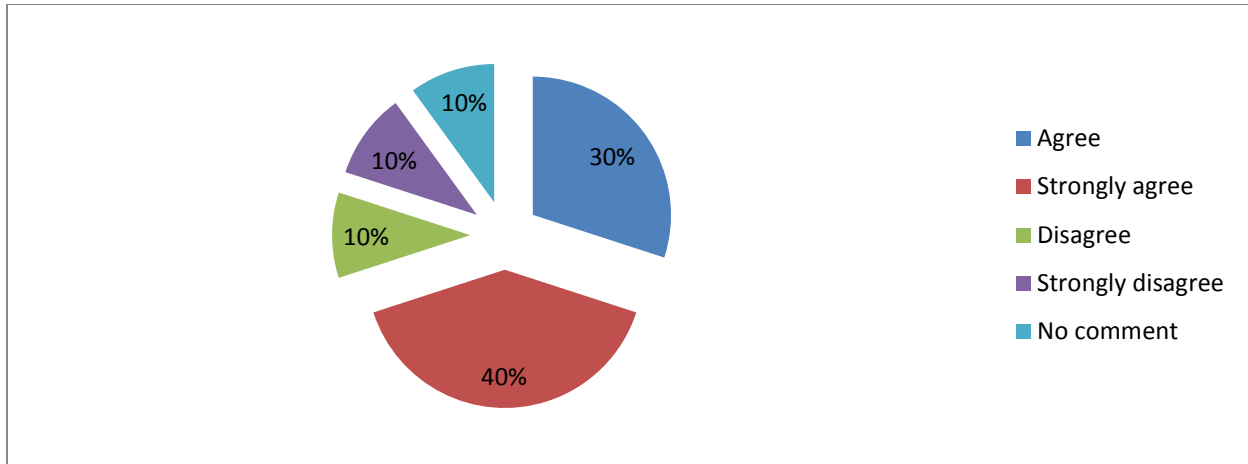


Figure: 7

Discussion: Teachers were asked to know what they think about implementing blended learning whether it would be more effective than traditional face to face or only online classes. 30% teachers responded that they are agreed with it. Another 40% of them expressed their responses as they are strongly agreed with it. 10% of the teachers disagreed and more 10% of them are strongly disagreed. And the rest of 10% were in neutral position (Figure-7).

Question: 3. Do you think that blended learning system can develop the techno-skill of the students and create an opportunity for the students to continue part time job?

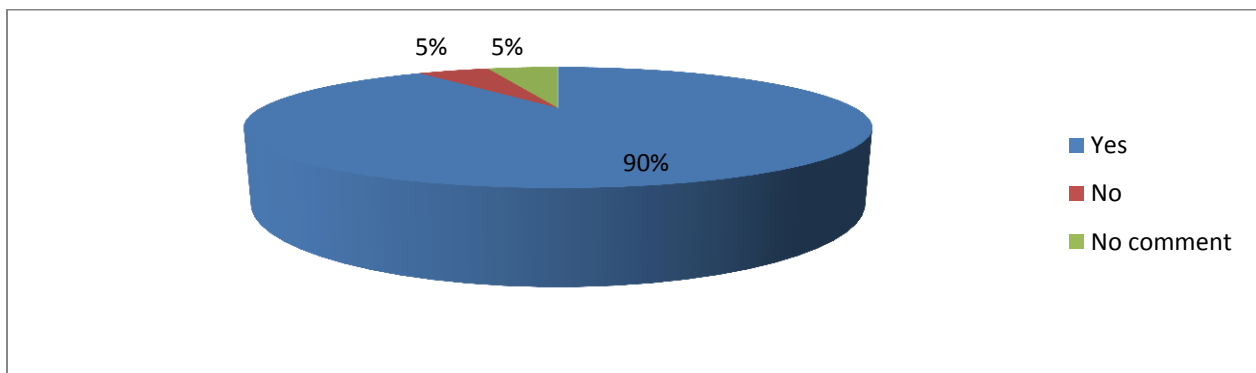


Figure: 8

Discussion: A question was put to the teachers that blended learning system can develop the techno-skill of the students and create an opportunity for the students to continue part time job or not. 90% of the teachers responded as ‘yes’ that it would be very helpful for the students. 5% of the teachers think that it will not work. And the rest of the other 5% kept no opinion (Figure-8).

Question: 4. Do you think that your university has sufficient funding for infrastructural support to incorporate blended learning education system?

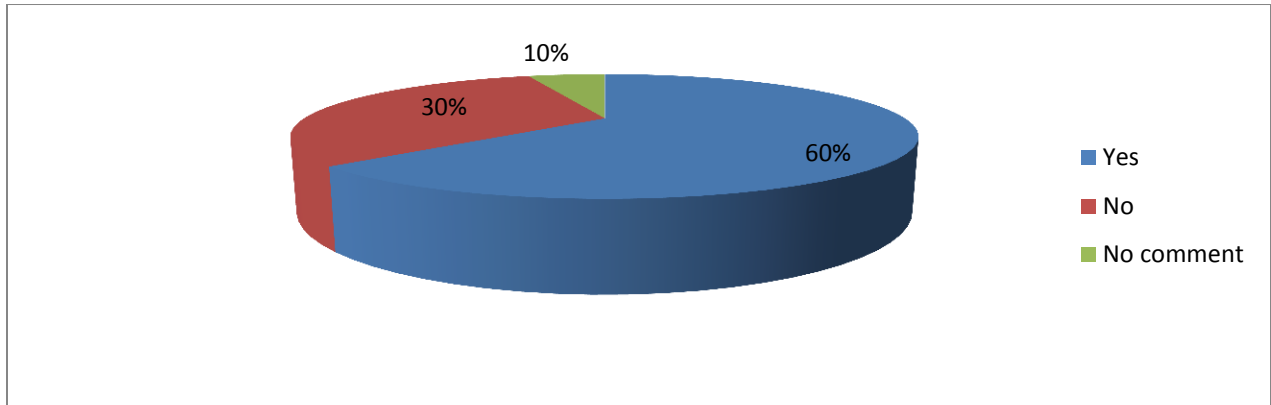


Figure: 9

Discussion: Teachers were asked to answer if their university has sufficient funding for infrastructural support to incorporate blended learning education system or not. 60% of the teachers responded as 'yes' that they have enough infrastructural support. 30% of the teachers pointed out their lacking in funding and responded negatively. And the rest of the other 10% kept no opinion (Figure-9).

Question: 5. "Blended learning program can introduce students with an updated education system."- What is your viewpoint on this regard?

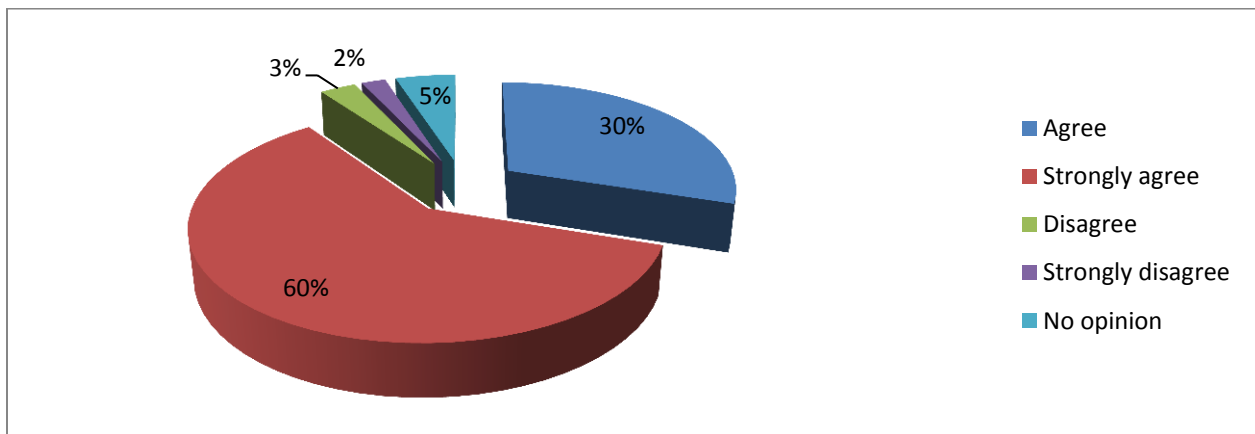


Figure: 10

Discussion: "Blended learning program can introduce students with an updated education system." In this regard, 30% teachers were agreed with it and 60% of them were strongly agreed. Of the total 3% were disagreed and 2% were strongly disagreed. And the rest of the 5% were neutral to make any comment (Figure-10).

POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF INCORPORATING BLENDED LEARNING IN THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF BANGLADESH AFTER CORONA-PANDEMIC

Potentials

At present incorporating blended learning teaching method in the public universities is a highly wanted phenomenon. Like all other sectors, education sector is getting updated and developed day by day. Education researchers are always trying to bring novelty in teaching methods. In this list, blended learning is one of them. There is no single model to implement the blended learning approach. It depends on lectures and teachers who and how will deliver his/her classes. Scholars believe that blended learning which refers to the systematic and integrated combination of online and offline teaching and learning activities (Goeman & Van Laer, 2012), holds the potential to make higher education more attractive, accessible and effective for adult learners. Bangladeshi classrooms hold a large number of students. To teach all students at a time seems very difficult for the teachers. Blended learning can contribute to lessen this load. Blended learning has some models such as- face-to-face model, driver model, rotation model, flex model, labs model, self-blend model, online driver models etc. Teachers can use these models or can also blend these models to make his/her lectures. Blended learning can also reduce educational expenses, if it would be implemented properly. Sometimes one click through internet can save money and time. This learning method can make the students to make them technologically and technically skilled. As it is an era of internet and technology, they must have to gather these updated skills. Blended learning system would create this opportunity for the students mostly. By integrating online learning instruments, teacher can achieve the benefits of both traditional and online learning. Students get materials both from online and face to face classroom. Thus they are much engaged in learning and keep themselves in dynamic learning. Thus learning outcome improves through blended learning. As a consequence, education system be upgraded and achieve a better quality.

Challenges

The public universities of Bangladesh are facing countless challenges in integrating blended learning teaching method. First of all, there is no way to implement blended learning without ensuring infrastructural establishment. Moskal *et al.*, (2013) opine that reliable and robust infrastructure must be in place to support students and faculty. Slow internet connection, insufficient online learning tools, inadequate electricity supplies are the main impediments here. Moskal *et al.*, (2013) point out that blended learning requires strong IT infrastructure and network services supported by highly qualified technical staffs. To manage proper funding is a big problem here. University Grant Commission has to allot sufficient funding to make the teachers trained up and purchase internet based learning tools. There are few teachers who have rigid mindset about incorporating blended learning. They are reluctant to initiate new method in teaching-learning. They find using technology in classroom is the wastage of time. They consider the traditional chalk and board classroom method easier. It sometimes hinders the progress of initiating this method. Awareness programs, seminars, webinars, workshops on the benefits of blended learning are very rare. As our prime minister dreams to make Bangladesh

digital, it is important to use latest innovative teaching and learning method as well as information technology in our education system.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

The researchers try to seek the prospects and challenges of incorporating blended learning at the public universities of Bangladesh. Based on the findings, some probable suggestions could be taken for attention to incorporate blended learning effectively. First of all, both the teachers and students have to fix a positive mindset about the acceptance of new dimensions of teaching-learning. As blended learning system possesses numerous potentials in teaching-learning arena, both the teachers and students have to attempt to introduce and practice this new method. Our government should give much attention on infrastructural development. Low speed internet service, inadequacy of internet-based learning tools, insufficient electricity connection, poor financial status of the students cause impediments against organizing and learning tasks. These challenges must be taken into consideration and work on that without any delay. Relevant training program should be arranged to enhance the skills of the teachers. These programs must be required both to produce and to use elements at the blended learning content. This initiative may create interest to incorporate blended learning among teachers. They would feel flexible and try to adapt with that new method. Blended learning creates opportunity for the students to bridge the gap between their academic and professional life. Education policy makers should be considerate to launch this method. Students would feel relaxed to maintain their study and any part time job simultaneously. To sum up, learners sometimes get bored or lose interest on traditional face to face class, In this case, two-way input method or both virtual and traditional classroom can bring a better result in the entire learning outcome.

Conclusion

Modern technology has opened a new dimension in our education system. But we cannot deny the necessity of traditional classroom learning. To accelerate both the teaching and learning, we have to merge both the online and traditional in- class learning method. Covid-19 has made everything stuck and our education system gets collapsed for a long time. To recuperate previous flow and to keep pace with the upgraded and quality education system, the policy makers should integrate novel teaching-learning methods. By incorporating blended learning in the public universities of Bangladesh, effective learning outcome has to be ensured obviously. To conclude, the researchers attempt to point out the potentials and challenges of incorporating blended learning after corona period at all the public universities of Bangladesh as well as try to put some considerable suggestions to implement it.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Questionnaire for students:

Name:

Semester:

Name of the Department:

Name of the University:

1. Do you have any idea on blended learning system?
a. Yes b. No c. No comment
2. Do you think blended learning program differ from traditional classroom instruction?
a. Yes b. No c. No comment
3. "As blended learning program is a mixture of both online based and traditional face to face learning, it would be a preferable learning medium after corona period."- Do you agree with it?
a. Agree b. Strongly agree c. Disagree d. Strongly disagree e. No comment
4. "Blended learning can offer the flexibility of accessing the class content at your convenient time."- What is your view on this regard?
a. Agree b. Strongly agree c. Disagree d. Strongly disagree e. No comment
5. Do you think that you would feel any difficulties to carry your class through blended learning instruction in comparison with traditional learning system?
a. Yes b. No c. No comment

Questionnaire for teachers:

Name:

Designation:

Name of the Department:

Name of the University:

1. Do you have interest in incorporating blended learning education system in your classroom?
a. Yes b. No c. No comment
2. Integration of blended learning in classroom would be more effective that traditional face to face or only online classes."- Do you agree on that?
a. Agree b. Strongly agree c. Disagree d. Strongly disagree e. No comment

3. Do you think that blended learning system can develop the techno-skill of the students and create an opportunity for the students to continue part time job?
a. Yes b. No c. No comment
4. Do you think that your university has sufficient funding for infrastructural support to incorporate blended learning education system?
a. Yes b. No c. No comment
5. “Blended learning program can introduce students with an updated education system.”-
What is your viewpoint on this regard?
a. Agree b. Strongly agree c. Disagree d. Strongly disagree e. No comment