Chapter 6
Transition to Blended Learning in a Limited Resource Setting:
Administrators' and Teachers' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

From the online learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the higher educational institutions of Bangladesh are considering integrating online education into traditional face-to-face learning. Research showed several challenges in implementing blended learning strategies, including having limited resources. This chapter explores how the administrators and teachers at the higher education institutes of Bangladesh could start blended learning with limited resources. The administrators and teachers of two universities in Bangladesh, who were directly involved in the decision-making process, were interviewed. The findings showed that while the administrators and teachers were willing to start blended learning, there were several challenges due to the limited resources aligned with the problems of online education. Administrators and teachers considered blended education as a way to respond to an education disruption caused by emergencies such as natural disasters, political unrest, and pandemics. This chapter provides some recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, technology has made blended education more manageable and accessible. The advancement of technology over the past few decades has been rapid (El-Ghalayini & El-Khalili, 2011); therefore, the technological explosion affects daily life activities in several ways. However, technology has also had a more significant impact on education. Across the world, educational institutions have more access to

technology leading to a shift toward integrating it into education (Alijani et al., 2014; Roy et al., 2021). Due to more accessibility of technology, the transition from traditional learning to online and blended learning has accelerated.

In most cases, traditional learning refers to the teaching and learning process completed in real-time in both teacher and student presence in a specific infrastructure (Nortvig et al., 2018). Online learning refers to the teaching-learning process using various online or technological tools where the location of the teacher-students and time of the day will be flexible (Jnr et al., 2019; Nortvig et al., 2018; Senn, 2008). In addition, online learning provides flexibility to both the teacher and the student and creates a self-learning environment for the student.

Although students are very interested in various teaching methods of online learning, there are several challenges to online learning (Allen et al., 2007). Teaching-learning activities like field work, group collaboration and observations are better conducted directly in the classroom. Besides, students who are not skilled in technology may face problems in online learning (Senn, 2008). Such challenges are observed for the teachers too. Therefore, to take advantage of traditional face-to-face and online learning, many teachers have incorporated both simultaneously (Woodworth & Applin, 2007). Combining online and blended learning has significantly reduced traditional face-to-face learning time (Garrison & Vaughan, 2012).

Blended learning refers to the combination of traditional face-to-face and online learning (Alijani et al., 2014; El-Ghalayini & El-Khalili, 2011; Nortvig et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2014;). Blended learning is also expected to improve students' communication, information literacy, creativity, collaboration skills, and ability to use digital technologies (Zurita et al., 2015).

Blended learning has several advantages. It develops various skills among students, increases their interest and satisfaction in learning, and provides opportunities for peer learning (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018). Learning activities incorporating 21st Century skills with blended learning may also provide meaningful education since learners can integrate new information with their existing knowledge and ideas (Zurita et al., 2015). Several studies showed that students prefer blended learning for its easy access to teaching-learning resources, efficient and faster contact with instructors, and capacity to pay attention in class (Szadziewska & Kujawski, 2017). Blended learning also gives students flexibility in learning and accelerates learning outcomes. It also develops various skills for students to use resources effectively (Poon, 2013). Similar to this, blended learning can engage students in building and applying their knowledge in real-life situations (Smyth et al., 2012). It is also stated that blended learning strengthens the connection between student participation and experience in learning (Ghazal et al., 2018).

Education is considered as a process of acquiring and imparting knowledge through teaching and learning. Blended learning means imparting and gaining knowledge through traditional face-to-face and online methods. This learning system emphasises many aspects and ways of learning and teaching. Blended learning has become an umbrella term (Hrastinski, 2019). Additionally, it was stated that blended learning had evolved a variety of concepts and approaches, including various pedagogical theories, teaching strategies, technological advancements and real-time duties (Driscoll, 2002). However, these mixes do not accord with the most popular definitions of blended learning.

Although there are many advantages, it may be challenging for administrators and teachers to transition to blended education, particularly in a low-resource setting. The Bangladeshi universities faced various challenges in running online teaching-learning activities during COVID-19 due to the lack of preparedness and experience and shortage of resources (Roy et al., 2021). As one of the features of blended learning is online learning activities, therefore, to succeed in blended learning activities, there

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