![logo]   Print

Education: What lessons can we learn from Covid-19 crisis?

To produce graduates required for this century, teachers need to train on modern teaching and learning. The Bangladesh government can provide grants to universities to improve their IT sectors and training
M. M. Shahidul Hassan

The world experienced many pandemics before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. Cholera, the first global pandemic, broke out in the year of 1881 and killed more than 1.5 million people worldwide. The 1918 influenza pandemic was the most severe pandemic in recent history. This pandemic lasted for two years, but it took away a significant number of lives only in three months from September to November 1918. This influenza virus killed an estimated 20 million to 50 million victims, including some 675,000 USA lives. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, which appeared in 1981, is still considered an active pandemic. This HIV/AIDS has killed more than 36.7 million people (NIH). There were also two major epidemics, one MERS in 2012, which affected 22 countries but had fewer than 2,000 cases, and the other called West Africa Ebola that erupted in 2013 and had about 30,000 cases only in ten countries.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published a review report on the readiness of various countries in the world to deal with the pandemic. The report explicitly states that countries, even the developed world, are not prepared to respond to a severe influenza pandemic or any such global, sustainable and public health threat (WHO, 2011). But the world's power hungry leaders did not heed the WHO's warning and took any preparation for protecting their people against the eruption of such epidemic.

 What people are observing during Covid-19 pandemic is mismanagement and broken health care system in highly developed countries. As of today, 159,000 people died in the USA, 41686 in the UK, 35171 in Italy, 30296 in France and 14351 in Russia. The death toll is rising, with thousands dying every day. People in power never pay attention to the welfare of the

common people, and they are also not doing that now. Superpowers are spending their public paid tax money on sophisticated weapons and ammunition development. They have lost the sense of social welfare; human values are ignored. They do not show interest in spending money on improving health care and education for the people. The suffering is growing among people, and they have now publicly become vocal against their governments. If we peep into history, we can see how the people gain their power and destroy the rulers. World leaders need to realize from Covid-19 that they must have to do good for their people.

Advances in technology do not hurt the education sector much in developed countries. But in this context, we cannot forget what Bill Gates stated in an interview with CNN. Bill Gates said that the use of technology for remote learning has made the inequity in education even worse. The Covid-19 pandemic has pointed to the deplorable state of health in Bangladesh. The people hope that the Bangladesh government will pay more attention to the development of this sector. On the other hand, the technology in Bangladesh is at an early stage. Considering the uncertainty of returning to normalcy and the long separation of students from their studies, universities have made the right decision to take online classes. However, university teachers are conducting classes without prior experience of teaching online and only short-term preparation. They have learned to use online teaching platforms and tools from internet on their own initiative.

Online teaching is more challenging than classroom teaching. The teacher must acquire the skills to translate classroom teaching materials in ways, so that the students can understand the online environment because they cannot rely on eye contact or other facial expressions to determine whether students can understand and are showing interest in a lesson. Various synchronous and asynchronous tools are continuing to develop that increase the possibilities for interaction, decreasing feelings of isolation and increasing a sense of community in the online classroom. For their online programmes, universities around the world use learning management system (LMS) software.

University teachers in Bangladesh are having trouble conducting online classes, and those are basically; (i) technological infrastructural inadequacies both at the senders' and the receivers' end; (ii) poor or no internet connectivity and also disturbances/disruptions on the Internet; (iii) tools for real-time monitoring of the class and to provide personal guidance to individuals; (v) creating environment in promoting peer-to-peer/small-group interactions and discussions; (vi) difficulties with the case-method of teaching, where the class has to actively interact, and the ideas proposed by different participants are to be constructively critiqued and integrated for building the final solution; (vi) difficulties in proctoring examinations, especially in ensuring the credibility of evaluations and grading; (vii) imposing extra burden on the students, and teachers in paying the cost of the Internet data.

It is worth noting that some universities are trying to overcome those constraints by developing innovative ways of managing their educational activities in the online format, i.e. platforms and tools for teaching, learning, and assessment. Faculty members deserve appreciation from university management authorities for their enthusiasm and firm commitment in providing quality education even at this trying time.

For the sake of giving value to human lives, our health care sector must be overhauled, and get it free from corruption. Our higher education system is traditional, and it is also outmoded. It needs revamping. Technology upgrades of universities are urgently needed. To produce graduates required for this century, teachers need to train on modern teaching and learning. The Bangladesh government can provide grants to universities to improve their IT sectors and training. Covid-19 has raised our vulnerable sectors, and we should repair those areas to ensure that our nation can successfully manage future epidemics.

The writer is Vice Chancellor, East West University, Dhaka. Email: vc@ewubd.edu

Print