

# **DIGITAL Education in Higher Education, Environment Consciousness and Green World Movement During Pandemic in West Bengal and Bangladesh**

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**Abstract:** The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has put the world of higher education, in Europe and worldwide, under great threat. This crisis has forced Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to swiftly change their status quo, their ways of working and their environments, dramatically shaking up our communities. At the same time, this situation has also brought to light the rigidity of our current higher education system, a rigidity we are now confronted with and which will inevitably have to change as a consequence of current or future lockdowns. Corridors and lecture rooms are empty, and most students are following their courses by online and digital means. International mobility as we know it is under threat. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), over 800 million learners from around the world have been affected, 1 in 5 learners cannot attend school, 1 in 4 cannot attend higher education classes, and over 102 countries have ordered nationwide school closures while 11 have implemented localized school closure.

**Key Words : Environment , Pandemic, Global Campaign For Education , World Health Organization**

## **Introduction :**

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) acknowledges the public health decision to close schools; they believe that contingency plans should be in place to ensure the right to education even in times of crisis. GCE is convinced that all learners no matter where they live and circumstances have a right to education. Education is an essential right for children, young and adults in emergencies and must be a priority from the very beginning of any and all emergency responses. The outbreak of COVID-19 impacted public health and safety and the educational systems worldwide. For fear of the further spread of diseases, most educational institutions, including Bangladesh and West Bengal have postponed their face-to-face teaching. This paper is going to discuss on paperless education in higher education, environment consciousness and green world movement in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, the first Covid-19 patients were tracked on March 8 in the capital, and in west Bengal first positive case of corona virus found 15 March in the capital, and as a result, the country went into general lockdowns from March 26 in Bangladesh and from 24 March in West Bengal. Since then, people are keeping themselves at home except for emergencies while educational institutions and most industries and business centers remain shut. According to the government decision, direct educational activities are stopped in Bangladesh due to the dreadful effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thinking of the present situation, the University Grants

Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh allows public and private universities to take online classes for continuing educational activities. In West Bengal Higher Education Institutions announced online classes for higher class students. As the pandemic forced education institutions to abandon face-to-face teaching, educators turned to technology for everything, right from conducting entrance exams and course delivery to assessments and managing their knowledge repositories. Digital whiteboards, hybrid classrooms, adaptive tracking camera systems, display equipment and audio-visual technologies are the new buzzwords at education institutes. Covid-19 has given a fillip to digital transformation in higher education. Virtual classrooms enabled by Zoom, apart from short videos, simulations, case studies in virtual classes and polling apps are some of the tools being widely used to extend physical class to a virtual setting. They use video-conferencing tools (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, and Google Meet), instant messaging tools (WhatsApp, Telegram) and educational apps (Google Classroom) along with platforms such as Cisco WebEx, Go To Meeting and Microsoft Teams.

New technology is constantly making its way into the classroom in an attempt to improve the learning experience and many universities and schools in West Bengal and Bangladesh are using computers and mobile devices in the classroom to enhance students' academic performance. This use of technology can create a paperless classroom. Colleges, universities and schools have different approaches when putting in place the paperless classroom. One way is by using iPods instead of books, paper and pens, and supplementing the iPads with Blackboard software as well as using an overhead projector.

In Bangladesh and West Bengal education sector needs to head now is towards going paperless, i.e. replacing all paper-based processes with smart document solutions. The most immediate and significant benefit of going paperless would be establishing an effortless communication network among teachers, students and school or college administrations. The digitization of documents provides all stakeholders easier and quicker access to large and different sets of data, including a massive bank of User Generated Content. This is crucial as we cannot rely on machine-generated content for education processes. Undoubtedly, the transfer of notes and other documents between students and teachers, and also among peers, would become fast and simple.

Educational institutions undertake much paperwork every year to comply with various policies and legalities across multiple matters. Institutes with many branches and board members spread across the country also spend a massive amount of money transferring the papers to get signatures or approvals. Therefore, embracing paperless process and approvals will empower institutes to execute work swiftly and cost-effectively. It will also make the entire process of initiating and concluding the approval work hassle-free.

Furthermore, many educational institutes have huge space dedicated to storing archived information on paper. Irrespective of a paper's importance, it is well maintained to avoid any issues that may arise in the future. Digitizing the archived documents will allow institutes to utilise their space for more productive work. Today, the concept of a paperless classroom is more than just a trend. Schools across the country are now opting for apps and other software as a replacement for traditional pen and paper. And as technology improves, so do the benefits for teachers, schools and, most importantly, students.

Even before the pandemic, the admission process in most higher education institutions had gone online. Right from the point where the student expresses interest in the university, fills the form, pays the application fee, speaks to the counsellor and finally gets enrolled. But due to pandemic it becomes more important to go with paperless work. Now of most entrance exams are now computer-based, which helps managements avoid issues like cheating, paper

leaks, lost answer sheets, negligent or unfair evaluation, etc. It has also helped authorities save considerable time and resources which previously had to be spent to conduct physical exams.

### **Environment sustainability**

By eliminating or reducing paper usage, businesses can legitimately position themselves as “green” while also preserving the environment for our future generations. The use of paper at schools, colleges, universities is a long-standing issue and has been a focus of concern for environmentalists for many years. Recent research has shown that universities’ paper consumption is often wasteful and is causing increasing costs for institutions. Plus, it is thought that schools use an average of 1,000 sheets of paper per pupil per year. Imagine how much more that could be for university students studying subjects with lots of reading or administration!

The majority of universities in India and Bangladesh have moved all teaching online, as it is a requirement during the government-enforced national lockdown. The desire to make higher education paperless has received traction in the last year, but has been campaigned for by environmentalists and students for many years. With a growing international awareness of the cost of waste on the planet’s environment the pressure is now on to reduce the carbon footprint of universities. Many large campaigns across the world are urging schools, colleges, and universities to become more sustainable for the future of our planet. With substantial pressure from students, students’ unions, governments, charities and the press, universities are slowly but definitively making the move to being more environmentally-friendly. This includes reducing paper wastage and making the move to paperless education.

### **Green World Movement**

The COVID-19 pandemic has evolved from a major public health crisis to become also a major economic and jobs crisis, the full extent of which is still unfolding. The economic impact is enormous, as we are facing the most severe recession in nearly a century, with long-lasting repercussions for people, firms and governments. The pandemic is also inextricably intertwined with global environmental issues such as biodiversity loss, climate change, air and water pollution, and waste management, both in terms of its origin and the implications for environmental outcomes and the future well-being of societies around the world.

Many environmentalists believe that wave of smaller disasters like climate change, deforestation, toxic, pollution and biodiversity loss already destroying the planet. Green space positively influences health and well-being; however, inequalities in use of green space are prevalent. Movement restrictions enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic could have worsened existing inequalities regarding who visits green space.

The novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has revealed people’s lack of preparedness for a global health emergency. The pandemic may not last forever, but human response to it will shape the future of their cities for the coming decades. In history, the aspect of public health evolved in high-density urban areas over a period of time. The link between public health and urban planning is not complex as the intention is common to provide safe and healthy environments in which citizens can live and work. This also includes the role of land use and built environment (public buildings, mixed land uses, pedestrian walkways open spaces and water bodies) and its impacts on the health of population. Every pandemic in the past has taught us lessons over the importance of our responses and preparedness, the most important one being this will not be the last one.

Air quality is an important factor that any government needs to manage and control. Increased levels of air pollutants will affect human health, causing respiratory and skin problems.

According to data supplied by the World Health Organization, air pollution and poor air quality result in 5.5 million unnecessary deaths annually (WHO, 2016). The main sources of air pollution in urban areas are combustion from vehicles, power generation plants, landfill sites, wastewater treatment plants and unsustainable farming. The emissions of air pollutants such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (PM) need to be monitored at high resolution in urban areas since these compounds will deteriorate human health if present at high concentrations.

Use of renewable energy can lower the demand of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas, which can play an important role in reducing the Green House Gases emissions. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, global energy demand is reduced, which results in the reduction of emission and increased ambient air quality in many areas. But, to maintain the daily needs and global economic growth, it is not possible to cut-off energy demand like a pandemic situation. Hence, use of renewable energy sources like solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal heat and biomass can meet the energy demand and reduces the Green House Gases emission. To control the challenges of water pollution, both industrial and municipal wastewater should be properly treated before discharge. Besides, reuse of treated wastewater in non-production processes like toilet flushing and road cleaning can reduce the burden of excess water withdrawal. To reduce the burden of wastes and environmental pollution, both industrial and municipal wastes should be recycled and reused. Hence, circular economy or circularity systems should implement in the production process to minimize the use of raw material and waste generation. Moreover, hazardous and infectious medical waste should be properly managed by following the guidelines. It is now clear that majority of the people have a lack of knowledge regarding waste segregation and disposal issues. So, government should implement extensive awareness campaign through different mass media, regarding the proper waste segregation, handling and disposal methods. For ecological restoration, tourist spots should periodically shutdown after a certain period. Moreover, ecotourism practice should be strengthened to promote sustainable livelihoods, cultural preservation, and biodiversity conservation. To reduce the carbon footprint and global carbon emission, it is necessary to change the behaviour in our daily life and optimum consumption or resources like; avoid processed and take locally grown food, make compost from food waste, switch off or unplug electronic devices when not used, and use a bicycle instead of a car for short distances. To meet the sustainable environmental goals and protection of global environmental resources, such as the global climate and biological diversity, combined international effort is essential. Hence, responsible international authority like United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) should take effective role to prepare time-oriented policies, arrange international conventions, and coordination of global leaders for proper implementation. Directly or indirectly, the pandemic is affecting human life and the global economy, which is ultimately affecting the environment and climate. It reminds us how we have neglected the environmental components and enforced human induced climate change. Moreover, the global response of COVID-19 also teaches us to work together to combat against the threat to mankind. Though the impacts of COVID-19 on the environment are short-term, united and proposed time-oriented effort can strengthen environmental sustainability and save the earth from the effects of global climate change. Once the COVID-19 pandemic is under control, more holistic approaches are needed. Cross-disciplinary collaboration of public policies, urban planning and design using open public spaces, parks, urban forests and integrated blue and green infrastructure are needed as tools to make cities healthy.

It is important to think about our responses at the end of the pandemic, while at the same time being ready for urgent issues like community disintegration, social disconnection and

inequality, human waste and sanitation issues and water shortage. A healthy city is one that continually creates and improves physical and social environments and expands community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life. Bangladesh has followed the same trend; however, there is an ongoing debate as to whether measures have been adopted adequately and implemented efficiently. **June 19, 2020**—The World Bank today approved \$1.05 billion for three projects to help Bangladesh create quality jobs and accelerate economic recovery from the COVID-19 (corona virus) pandemic as well as build resilience to future crises.

### **Conclusion**

Monitoring the impact of recovery and stimulus measures on environmental outcomes through measurable, comparable and timely indicators is key to ensuring that the green recovery is well-targeted and effective in its execution. In addition, when designing and implementing green recovery measures, countries should systematically develop evaluation frameworks with clear criteria and robust methodologies in order to assess the environmental effectiveness and economic efficiency of stimulus measures. Such evaluation will also allow governments to adjust programmes and policies in response to changing circumstances or new evidence and data.

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