

## REACTIONS OF STUDENTS TOWARDS CLASS CANCELLATION, CLASS RESCHEDULING, INADEQUATE CLASSES AND CLASSES FOR LESS THAN DESIGNATED DURATION IN DHAKA UNIVERSITY

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*Key words:* Class Cancellation, Rescheduling, Inadequate Classes, Inadequate Duration

### Abstract

A serious departure from the norm in taking classes has been a regular phenomenon in the University of Dhaka in recent years. The present study aimed to investigate perceptions, reactions, and grievances of students towards class cancellation, class rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for less than duration at the University of Dhaka. Data were collected online from 522 students (51.5% male and 48.5% female, mean age = 21.74 years) of the university using a mixed-method design. The quantitative data were analyzed by *t*-test, Chi-square test, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients in SPSS version 24. The results of the *t*-test demonstrated no significant gender differences in perception towards the main variables. The Chi-square test reveals that the frequencies of occurrences of these phenomena significantly differ among the faculties of four hierarchical positions. The content analysis of the qualitative data revealed 12 major themes namely the four factors across academic units, the favorable impact of these phenomena, increased absenteeism, the sources of stress, anxiety, and frustration, lack of priority, teachers' disinterest in teaching and learning, a sense of punctuality and responsibility, mutual understanding, timetable of the rescheduled classes, teacher's accountability and students' feedback, introducing training for teachers, and the role of authority. The findings of the study suggest a clear lack of administrative control over the teaching behavior of the faculties. The study recommends that the university authority should immediately address these issues to redress the grievances of the students and thereby ensure a quality culture in teaching, learning and research.

### Introduction

Universities play a central role in teaching-learning, research, and technology. After the limited academic edge of primary and secondary education, the young intellectuals nourish a dream for enriching themselves through higher-order learning, cognition, skill, and development in University. The government of Bangladesh has taken initiatives to

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improve the quality of tertiary education and prepare university graduates in such a way that they can successfully enter into the context of a global environment which is fiercely competitive.

Researchers have increasingly stated that students' emotional reactions to learning should be addressed in higher education<sup>(1)</sup>. Learning is not a purely cognitive process; rather it is a process involving various situated settings<sup>(1)</sup> and emotions. For an overall unprecedented intellectual development and psychological well-being, well-disciplined university culture is essential. In this regard, taking the classes in time as well as adequately by respective university teachers are of vital issues. But nowadays this has become a burning question in Dhaka University, the leading educational institution of Bangladesh. Education here is now suffering from a new culture of class canceling, class rescheduling, inadequate classes, and so on.

The cancellation of classes at short notice might cause dissatisfaction among students. There might be instances when classes must be canceled but the teacher concerned has to be in place to make effective arrangements for communicating with students in such circumstances. For example, the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in the UK has the policy to ensure that there are clear and transparent procedures in place concerning all canceled, postponed, and rescheduled classes<sup>(2)</sup>. Where classes have had to be canceled at very short notice, staff from the faculty may meet the class to inform the students and explain the reason for the late notification<sup>(2)</sup>.

The University of Cincinnati surveyed if the students would like to be notified about their class cancellations immediately and 98% of students answered *yes*<sup>(3)</sup>. The survey also asked if a live-up-to-date calendar populated with all of their class times and class cancellations would help them manage their time. Nearly 96% of students voted *yes*. Another question the survey asked was if a 'Status Report' of their upcoming week would help them organize their schedule. 94% of students answered *yes* to this.

One of the outcomes of class cancellation can be 'class rescheduling' which means rescheduling the canceled classes for a new time and date. When a previously scheduled class is rescheduled it may have a significant impact on the students. Often, rescheduling classes may be stressful because students have to bear the burden of makeup classes along with other scheduled classes. Like class cancellation, frequent rescheduling decreases the interest of the students towards that particular subject and they lose their reliance on the class routine.

Another pertinent phenomenon being studied is "Inadequate classes" which means conducting a classroom activity that is not sufficient according to the course content. For example, when there is a need for at least 15 classes to cover the content of a course but the educator could not conduct in scheduled time before the session ended then it may be considered as inadequate classes for the respective course. It increases the chances of dissatisfactory results of students of that particular course.

Every course has a designated time for the completion of the course content. But due to classes for less than the designated time or 'classes for inadequate duration, students may face a lack of academic guidance from the teachers. For example, if a class of 40 minutes is conducted in lesser time then the needed lesson could not be provided to the students properly. If a class of inadequate time is conducted, the students might not acquire enough knowledge in the relevant subject matter. It is a hindrance to completion of the syllabus of that particular subject in time which may lead to a dissatisfactory result for the students.

There is no evidence so far about how the aforementioned phenomena are perceived by the students of the University of Dhaka. The present study aims to explore students' perception, outcomes, or feedback about frequent class cancellation, class rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for less than designated time. The findings of this study will help the University authority and policymakers to identify the perception of students towards those factors being studied here and develop a framework for taking essential steps to safeguard students' learning needs and academic performance.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study adopted a mixed-method research design. Within the mixed-method research design, this study incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to better understand the relationship between variables in the research problem. Data had been collected from 539 participants. However, some students did not answer all parts of the questionnaire. Hence, valid data from 522 participants (51.5% male and 48.5% female) of 78 different departments, 18 faculties, and institutes of the University of Dhaka were analyzed for the study. All of them were from BS 2<sup>nd</sup> year to MS (second year = 37.7 %, third year = 29.9 %, fourth year = 20.1 % & MS = 12.3 %), and their age ranged from 18 to 26 years ( $M = 21.74$ ). They were selected by employing purposive sampling technique.

A Bangla questionnaire was developed and used as the research instrument to measure students' perception towards class cancellation, rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for less than designated time. The questionnaire consists of 49 items where 34 items were on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The response options include: "1 = strongly agree", "2 = agree", "3 = disagree", "4 = strongly disagree". The possible score for students' perception towards class cancellation ranges from 9 to 36. Likewise, the possible ranges of the score for rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for less than designated time are 11-44, 6-24, and 8-32 respectively. For all four factors, the higher the score, the more negative perception students hold about these factors. There is also an open-ended question in the end to get a better understanding of the view of the participants towards class cancellation, rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for less than designated duration.

A pilot-testing was administered to 43 students from different departments, faculties, and institutes. In the pilot phase, internal consistency was measured for the four factors, which value was above 0.75. Finally, an electronic version of the questionnaire was prepared and circulated via Google form. The link to the electronic questionnaire was shared in social media accounts and groups. The electronic version of the questionnaire was also shared via e-mail with the participants. The data collection process lasted for 2 weeks in total.

### Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics (i.e., mean & standard deviation), independent sample "t" test, Pearson correlation coefficients, and Chi-square test were performed to analyze data. Content analysis was performed to categorize the opinions and suggestions from the students received through the open-ended question. A number of categories of perception and recommendation were extracted from the responses of the participants.

The analysis of items indicated that the value of corrected item-total correlation ranges from  $r = .475$  (item no. 8) to  $r = .794$  (item no. 28). The reliability analysis also indicated that this questionnaire has an internal consistency of 0.97 (coefficient alpha) which indicates an excellent internal consistency and the factor-wise reliabilities were found to be acceptable.

**Table 1. Internal consistency reliability of the factors**

| Factors                         | Coefficient Alpha |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Class Cancellation              | .88               |
| Class Rescheduling              | .92               |
| Inadequate Classes              | .88               |
| Classes for Inadequate Duration | .93               |

According to the responses, 49.6% of students reported cancellation of one class per day, and only 35.4% said that they get the message in time about the canceled classes. More than fifty percent of students agreed that class cancellation causes the development of a negative attitude towards the concerned teacher, decreases their interest in that particular subject, causes difficulty in maintaining and planning their day-to-day schedule, and also that they lose their confidence in the class routine. In the case of rescheduling, canceled classes are rescheduled 13.2% on that day, 46.4% in the next one week, 19.5% in one month, and 20.9% classes are held in the exam preparation time. Around 60% of students believed rescheduling classes decreases their interest in attending classes and increases absenteeism in classes.

Being asked about the percentage of the scheduled classes in a semester that was never held, nearly 80 % of students choose the option that said the percentage is less than 25. Almost half of the respondents agreed that an inadequate number of classes obstruct the completion of the syllabus according to the academic calendar. On the other hand, more than 60% of respondents held that the classes for an inadequate time can reduce the interest in learning leading to poor academic performance.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the perception toward class cancellation, class rescheduling, inadequate classes and classes for inadequate duration**

| Variables                       | No of Items | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Possible Range | Actual Range |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| Class Cancellation              | 9           | 18.65    | 4.95      | 9 - 36         | 9 - 36       |
| Class Rescheduling              | 11          | 22.61    | 5.78      | 11 - 44        | 11 - 44      |
| Inadequate Classes              | 6           | 11.32    | 3.23      | 6 - 24         | 6 - 24       |
| Classes for Inadequate Duration | 8           | 16.02    | 4.49      | 8 - 32         | 8 - 32       |

We computed descriptive statistics of the responses for perception towards 'Class Cancellation', 'Class Rescheduling', 'Inadequate Classes' and 'Classes for Inadequate Duration' which is presented in Table 2. For all the factors, the mean score is lower than average. We calculated independent sample *t*-test to see gender differences in the major variables.

**Table 3. Gender differences in perception towards class cancellation, class rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for inadequate duration**

| Variables                       | Male ( <i>n</i> = 269) |           | Female ( <i>n</i> = 253) |           | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
|                                 | <i>M</i>               | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>                 | <i>SD</i> |          |          |
| Class Cancellation              | 19.02                  | 4.81      | 18.26                    | 5.07      | 1.77     | .08      |
| Class Rescheduling              | 22.73                  | 5.82      | 22.48                    | 5.75      | .49      | .62      |
| Inadequate Classes              | 11.46                  | 3.38      | 11.17                    | 3.07      | 1.04     | .29      |
| Classes for Inadequate Duration | 16.30                  | 4.67      | 15.72                    | 4.27      | 1.49     | .14      |

The results that are presented in Table 3 show no significant differences between male and female students regarding their perception towards class cancellation, class rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for inadequate duration. The respondents were asked using four different items in the questionnaire about who are more likely to cancel and reschedule class, take inadequate classes, and classes for inadequate duration among faculties with four hierarchical positions (i.e., Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor). As reported by the respondents, Assistant Professors (35.44%) tend to cancel a class the most, and the second prime percentage (28.35%) is for

the Professors. The percentage is 17.82 and 18.39 respectively for Associate Professors and Lecturers. These differences are statistically significant. A similar pattern of perceived differences can be observed for the rest of the factors.

**Table 4. Perceived difference on the factors among faculties with four hierarchical positions**

| Factor                          | Position of the Faculty | <i>n</i> | %     | $\chi^2$ |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-------|----------|
| Class Cancellation              | Lecturer                | 96       | 18.39 | 45.00*** |
|                                 | Assistant Professor     | 185      | 35.44 |          |
|                                 | Associate Professor     | 93       | 17.82 |          |
|                                 | Professor               | 148      | 28.35 |          |
| Class Rescheduling              | Lecturer                | 101      | 19.35 | 39.39*** |
|                                 | Assistant Professor     | 183      | 35.06 |          |
|                                 | Associate Professor     | 94       | 18.00 |          |
|                                 | Professor               | 144      | 27.56 |          |
| Inadequate Classes              | Lecturer                | 93       | 17.81 | 69.10*** |
|                                 | Assistant Professor     | 178      | 34.10 |          |
|                                 | Associate Professor     | 74       | 14.18 |          |
|                                 | Professor               | 177      | 33.91 |          |
| Classes for Inadequate Duration | Lecturer                | 120      | 22.99 | 34.52*** |
|                                 | Assistant Professor     | 169      | 32.37 |          |
|                                 | Associate Professor     | 81       | 15.52 |          |
|                                 | Professor               | 152      | 29.12 |          |

\*\*\* $p < .001$

*Analysis for qualitative data:* Three-step analysis has been carried out: coding, conceptual categorization, and theoretical categorization. Participants responded to an open-ended question. In the first step, the grouping of conceptually similar words and texts was completed. It was undertaken independently by each of the authors to ensure inter-rater consistency in coding. In the next step, conceptual categorization was being outlined by grouping the initial codes together based on their 'semantic fit' (i.e., the way ideas were similar and related to each other). Finally, a set of major themes of perception and recommendations of the students was extracted. These themes are described below:

- 1. The four factors across academic units:** There have been differences across the departments and institutes in the frequency of occurrences of these phenomena as per the statements from the respondents. Some of them reported that class cancellation and rescheduling are not much frequent in their department. They

described their teachers to be very punctual and conscientious who seldom cancel their classes. And if they do, on the logical ground, they try to compensate for this as early as possible through 'make-up classes'. On the contrary, some respondents stated that class cancellation, rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for inadequate duration are so common in their departments or institutes that they are used to these. According to one (ID no. 319) of them, *"Class cancellation is a very common incident in our department. Often we come to class at 8 or 9 in the morning, wait for the class to be started, and suddenly receive the information about the cancellation of that class. This makes our life very hard."*

2. **The favorable impact of these phenomena:** Participants spoke of the excitement to do something enjoyable during the free time they get as a result of unexpected class cancellations and classes for inadequate time. They have reported utilizing the time in group study when any class is canceled. One respondent (ID no. 458) mentioned, *"These are really problematic, but I have never thought about them seriously. Although class cancellation puts me in a problem at times, it proves beneficial for me occasionally."*
3. **Increased absenteeism:** Students often fail to attend rescheduled classes without prior notice. That is because the students who reside far from the University campus have to depend on the University vehicle for transportation which follows a fixed timetable. And so, they choose going home in time over attending the class. Their lack of motivation to attend classes results in a high rate of absenteeism. According to one respondent (ID no. 470), *"...we reach the University to attend class in the early morning and every so often are informed about the cancelation of the class. We drop interest in class even if that class is rescheduled in the afternoon on that same day."*
4. **The source of stress, anxiety, and frustration:** Frequent change in class schedule has been reported as the source of frustration among students. They lose interest in lessons which adversely affects their academic performances. Students reported a lack of sufficient understanding about the subject matter and thus increased subject-centric anxiety caused by inadequate classes, and classes for an inadequate time. One of the respondents (ID no. 152) stated, *"Arbitrary cancellations and rescheduling of classes produce mental stress and anxiety regarding our transportation and also the completion of the syllabus in time. This thought makes me feel unwell both mentally and physically"*
5. **Lack of Priority:** Sudden cancellation of class and other unexpected practices often occur because the teacher concerned is engaged with any other personal or administrative task (e.g., meeting, examinations). According to one of the respondents (ID no. 161), *"I think, if our teachers had treated us like their own child, they would have been acted more responsibly towards us. Sometimes our teachers cancel classes just because they have to take their child to/from school. And also teachers show engagement with activities linked to the 7 affiliated Colleges and cancel our classes."*

6. **Teachers' disinterest in teaching and learning:** Respondents identified teachers' disinterest in the subject matter as a reason behind these unexpected practices of frequent class cancellation, inadequate classes, and classes for inadequate time. One of them stated (ID no. 261), *"...it may be the case that most of the teachers are not interested in teaching and learning..."*
7. **A sense of punctuality and responsibility:** A sense of punctuality and responsibility is thought to be crucial for both teachers and students. One respondent (ID no. 29) shared: *"Each of us must be punctual. No one should only be concerned with oneself and his/her own needs, rather be sympathetic to others' needs. Unfortunately, this sense of responsibility is missing in some of our teachers..."*
8. **Mutual understanding:** It is believed that mutual understanding among teachers and students can improve the current situation. One respondent (ID no. 203) opined, *"The changes in routine is unavoidable. However, these changes should reflect the mutual understanding between the teacher and students..."*
9. **The timetable of the rescheduled classes:** Respondents believed that teachers should not burden students with a load of rescheduled classes, especially immediately before their examinations or during the preparatory leave (PL). Moreover, the timetable for rescheduled classes must be fixed keeping in mind that students have their own work plan too and sudden announcements for make-up class might mess up the plan. According to one of the students (ID no. 226), *"rescheduled classes clashes with our daily routine, often we cannot go to offer tuition and return home/hall in time."*
10. **Teacher's accountability and students' feedback:** Teachers' accountability can play a major role in the improvement of the current situation. Respondents thought these unexpected practices as negligence of duty by the teachers and therefore the teachers might be brought under punishment. According to one of the respondents (ID no. 290), *"There is high accountability of the teachers in the private Universities, that is why our teachers, especially the senior teachers, perform their duties in the private Universities, even in exchange of canceling our scheduled classes."* Students' feedback is thought to be taken seriously in order to understand the current situation. According to one respondent (ID no. 135), *"...no complaint about class, routine or exams are ever taken seriously. When any of us raise voice, he/she is threatened of being rusticated."*
11. **Introducing Training for teachers:** Respondents think that training for teachers must be introduced to ensure quality in the University. *"Teachers should be trained about how to assess the learning need of the students and design career-oriented education framework"* one of the respondents (ID no. 353) mentioned.
12. **Role of Authority:** Participants expected the development of an appropriate policy to eliminate the practice of frequent class cancellation and rescheduling. They expressed their opinion with an expectation that the University administration will



take proper steps and develop a framework to ensure students' better learning and academic performances. According to one of the respondents (ID no. 39), "*the authority should be more vigilant*". Another (ID no. 177) said, "*We have passed three of our academic years facing these and these might continue in the future too. It is because the administration does not care about the troubles the students face.*"

The 12 extracted themes have been further shortened to four higher-order themes:

- a. The nature (theme 1)
- b. The cause (theme 5, 6, 7)
- c. The consequences (theme 2, 3, 4)
- d. The remedies (theme 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

The findings of this study reveal that frequent class cancellation, class rescheduling, inadequate classes, and classes for an inadequate time reduce students' interest in classes and demoralize students from concentrating on learning. Also, attendance decreases which may result in poor academic grades of the students. It also leads to the development of adverse attitudes among students towards their teachers and departments/faculties. These might create hindrances for the University to meet all future challenges and to prepare the students for leading the nation in the global context. So, it is necessary to ensure that all its courses/classes are well organized and running smoothly and that any changes in these are communicated effectively. It should be recognized that for a variety of reasons it may sometimes be necessary to make changes to the scheduled timetable for academic activities. The disruption that changes to the schedule cause and the significance of a stable schedule should also be considered. It is, therefore, the persons concerned must be committed to keeping such changes to a minimum.

To pave the way perfectly for the students towards their intellectual life, the academic environment of the university has to play a role of great significance. The academic environment is an important determinant of students' attitudes, knowledge, skills, progression, and behaviors. Students' perception of the environment within which they study has been shown to have a significant impact on their behavior, academic progress, and sense of well-being<sup>(4,5)</sup>. According to Ramsden (1979), "Students' perceptions of their departments and the faculties are found to have significant impacts on their approaches to learning<sup>(6)</sup>. So, it is essential to assess the psychological needs of the students and to make a joint effort to provide excellent learning and teaching experience for all its students.

The present study is not beyond its limitation. The sample for this study was from different departments/faculties/institutes of University of Dhaka using nonprobability sampling technique. Some of the departments/faculties/institutes might have remained under-represented which is a problem for the generalization of the findings.

Furthermore, exploring only the perception of students is not sufficient to arrive at well-founded reasoning regarding the factors under our study. Rather, future research should focus on the investigation of the insight and sensitivity of the faculties as well as the administration of the University of Dhaka to better understand these phenomena.

### **Recommendations**

For the overall intellectual development and psychological well-being of the students, well-disciplined quality culture in the university is essential. In this regard, the following things are highly recommended:

1. Cancellation of classes can be executed only when there is a crisis or natural disaster (i. e., a weather warning, or a storm warning) and the suspension of public transport services has been issued.
2. Class cancellation decisions must be made at least several hours before the start of class and communications with the students about canceled classes must be done using email, through telephone, in person, and through notifications that are placed on the notice board when applicable.
3. Learning materials of canceled classes should be provided to the students so that they are not disadvantaged and can have an outlook of the topic.
4. Teachers should provide a clear reason and must notify the students about the rescheduling of classes.
5. Teachers should consult with the students and take their availability into account to schedule a makeup class.
6. Teachers should not impose academic penalties for students who do not attend a makeup class.
7. The Department Chair should attempt to monitor the progression of classes and encourage faculties to complete the syllabus following the academic calendar.
8. Feedback from the students about the ongoing academic activities must be obtained in regular intervals to assess the actual picture.

### **Acknowledgment**

This research was supported by a grant from the Center for Advanced Studies and Research in Biological Sciences, University of Dhaka.

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*(Manuscript received on 23 March, 2022; accepted on 20 June, 2022)*