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Student Performance in Online Education: Evidence from Bangladesh

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the educational institutions in Bangladesh to adopt online technology for higher education in just a couple of months that, otherwise, would have taken years. This change creates a unique opportunity to examine student performance in online education in the country. In this study, in addition to examining the effect of online education on student performance, we investigate if students are more likely to cheat in online tests compared to face-to-face format. We use transcript-level student records of BBA and Economics departments from one of the leading private universities in Bangladesh for pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. Existing literature provides mixed results for both student performance and cheating in online education compared to face-to-face format. We find that the online format has a positive impact on student performance. Our results show that student-level grade points in online format are higher by about 0.22 (on a scale of 0 to 4). However, better grade points do not necessarily mean better learning outcomes in online format. Since online tests are not proctored, better performance could be driven by the adoption of unfair means such as collaboration among students or getting help from some else during the test. Data show that better grade comes from a narrower distribution which is indicative of cheating in online exams. Our estimates show that the course level coefficient of variation (CV) of grade points in online courses is lower by about 0.022 compared to face-to-face classes, equivalent to a reduction in standard deviation by 0.06. These results suggest that the adoption of unfair means is, at least partly, responsible for the inflated grades in online format.

JEL Classification: A20, I21