Challenges and Opportunities of Completing Undergraduate Education Online: Narrative Study of Public and Private University Students in Bangladesh

By

Naushin Reza

ID: 16203012

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Humanities

Brac University

May, 2022

© 2022. Brac University

All rights reserved.

Declaration

I hereby declare that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name and Signature:

_____

Naushin Reza

16203012

Approval

The thesis titled "Challenges and Opportunities of Completing Undergraduate Education Online: Narrative Study of Public and Private University Students in Bangladesh" submitted by Naushin Reza (ID:16203012) of Spring, 2022 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor: _____

(Member) Dr. Asifa Sultana

Professor, Department of English and Humanities

Brac University

Departmental Head: _____

(Chair) Professor Firdous Azim

Chairperson, Department of English and Humanities

Brac University

Abstract

The arrival of COVID-19 pandemic brought significant changes in all aspects of human life since everything came to a standstill. For maintaining social distance and safeguarding individual's lives, soon the educational institutions shifted from in person classes to online platforms. However, the effectiveness of e-learning and pedagogic practices became a question specifically for a nation like Bangladesh where only the conventional teaching and learning approach were practised since the beginning. Thus, in this qualitative study, focus has been given on understanding the perception of undergraduate students of Bangladesh on online education. The participants of this study had to complete their Bachelors online enduring different challenges and exploring different learning opportunities amidst pandemic. Circulating open – ended questions through Google form among participants, the findings indicated that even though all the participants went through different challenges and struggles, they did not deny the fact that the practice of online education needed to be brought into the system. Their responses also shed light on the factors like poor internet issues and accessibility to digital tools which must be addressed immediately to make online education effective. Lastly, they also opined that our system still has a long way to go to completely shifting the classroom online since the practical classes done online were not at all helpful. Thus, their preference was given more towards a hybrid mode where both online and offline classes should be added in the curriculum design.

Keywords: Online education, Distance Learning, Viewpoint, Perspective, Learner's Choice, Pandemic

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to convey my gratitude towards Almighty Allah for giving me enough patience and ability to come so far in my educational journey. Next, I am immensely thankful to my parents for their unconditional support and believe in me in every aspect of my life. Without their appreciation and encouragement, I would not have come so far. I would like to convey thanks to my teachers and professors for their support and guidance and the knowledge they have imparted throughout my life. Special thanks to my respected supervisor, Dr. Asifa Sultana, whole guidance and encouragement has made it possible for me to complete my dissertation. Last but not the least, I am extremely thankful to all the participants of the study and my fellow classmates, seniors and juniors for their every bit of help in completing this research work.

Contents

Abstract……..4

Acknowledgement…….5

Chapter 1: Introduction……9

1.1 Problem Statement……...11

1.2 Research Purpose……12

1.3 Central Research Question……...12

1.4 Context of the Study……13

Chapter 2: Literature Review……14

2.1 Beginning of Online Education at Tertiary Level and COVID – 19……..14

2.2 Online Education and the Completion……15

2.3 Challenges of Online Education at Tertiary Level……..16

2.4 Opportunities of Completing Undergraduate Education Online…….18

2.5 Post – pandemic Condition and Opportunities for Undergraduate Online Education…….20

2.6 Research Gap……...21

Chapter 3: Research Methodology……22

3.1 Nature of the Research……22

3.2 Research Design……..23

3.3 Participants of the Study…….23

3.4 Data collection Procedure…….24

3.5 Data Analysis……26

3.6 Ethical Consideration……27

Chapter 4: Findings…….28

4.1 Fatima……28

4.2 Morshed…….29

4.3 Tabassum……31

4.4 Puja……..32

4.5 Afra……..33

4.6 Salam……34

Chapter 5: Discussion……37

5.1 Academic Impingement……..37

5.2 Struggles in Effective Time Management…….41

5.3 Barriers Faced……44

5.4 Differences in Choosing the Future Medium of Education……48

Chapter 6: Conclusion……...51

6.1 Summary of the Findings……51

6.2 Recommendations……52

References…….54

Appendix……59

Chapter 1: Introduction

The sudden outburst of coronavirus gave rise to a sudden shift in the mode of teaching – learning at Tertiary level and left a great influence on the reciprocity of teachers and learners. Considering the safety protocols, the universities had to modify their regular academic practices and get acquainted with the online mode of education in order to ensure interrupted learning (Sobaih et.al., 2020). Consequently, leaders all over the world took initiatives for minimizing the infection rate and securing the constancy of all the academic practices which encouraged all the universities to adopt online mode of education worldwide (Ali, et. al., 2020). While online education is usually seen as a substitute for conventional learning (Abou et. al., 2014), amidst pandemic it eventually turned into a necessity for sustainable continuation of institutional operations. Thus, based on personal experience, viewpoint and positive, negative encounters this sudden change in the medium of instruction resulted in shaping diverse learners' perspectives towards online learning. Not to mention, their stance on the effectivity and utility of online learning might differ significantly from those found in research conducted before COVID. The findings of earlier research demonstrated positive remarks of learners as they viewed e-learning as a learner-centered and resilient medium of education (Dhawan, 2020). Additionally, some research findings highlighted upon its flexibility in connecting learners and teachers all across the globe through asynchronous and synchronous technologies like email, forums, chats, video calls etc (Marinoni et al., 2020; Anwar, 2020).

Besides, e – learning makes it easier for teachers to circulate the required materials and contents simultaneously among all the learners. The platforms used in e – learning offers many rewards to learns including the liberty to make their own schedule for covering course contents through which they can customize the whole process to meet their learning objectives and needs

(Suresh, 2018). Despite some implicit complexities and challenges surrounding this medium of education especially during the pandemic period, e -learning surely holds the potential in developing a clear communication between learners and instructor which eventually can make the whole experience motivating and effective for learners. As Yusuf (2013) asserted, there exists some factors that creates obstacles for learners in e – learning which results in lowering learners' enthusiasm as often time there might arise a clash between learners' and teachers' schedule resulting in postponement of appointment and feedback. Additionally, he also stressed upon the tendency of undergoing feeling of loneliness which is hardly seen or faced in conventional learning. Yet, these issues can be resolved through teacher's cooperation who can adapt their pedagogical approaches prioritizing learner's needs and goals. Moreover, to ensure the successful execution of an e – learning programme, technical expertise and experience are also needed for a teacher and these difficulties and drawbacks become more prominent once all the academic process are exclusively done digitally. As a result, during covid – 19 when the institutions shifted their whole medium of instruction to online platforms, numerous challenges occurred which indicated teacher's inadequate skills and familiarity with technological platforms and tools along with the little time they were given to modify their teaching techniques in accordance to the circumstances. The findings of the research carried by School Education Gateway during the arrival if the pandemic revealed that 66.9% of the participants had no prior experience of using digital platforms while conducting classes (Survey on Online and Distance Learning—Results, 2020). Thus, it can be asserted that online teaching and learning experience was a completely a new phenomenon for both teachers and learners worldwide.

This lack of experience and required skills made online education a challenging journey for university learners as well. According to the Organization for Economic Co – operation and

Development some hurdles encountered by universities included the failure of maintaining academic pressure and well – balanced course requirements in online setting which affected learner's physical and mental health. Such failure in establishing an equilibrium among all the offered courses in online semesters made the learners spent a significant amount of time glued to their digital devices along with concentrating on activities that required attention offline. Such academic pressure made them went through emotional turmoil which universities could hardly acknowledge along with taking into account whether all the learners are being able to access the materials and lectures given online (Education Responses to COVID-19: Embracing Digital Learning and Online Collaboration. Available online, 2020). Moreover, many universities failed to maintain clear communication with the institutional authority which resulted in inconsistent and irrelevant course content that further disrupted effective learning (Marinoni, 2020). In addition, learners had to cope up with countless obstacles and hardships which has been highlighted by Aboagye (2020) in his research where the biggest challenges highlighted by the learners were availability of internet connectivity, absence of suitable tools and devices along with communication gap with teachers and peers.

1.1 Problem Statement

In light of the aforementioned factors, the researcher argued that the sudden shift in the medium of instruction from physical classes to online has been a revolutionary movement and left both positive and negative impact on all the academic activity. Amidst this, the learners have been both sufferers and gainers as all of them have both positive and negative remarks to share regarding their e- learning experience. Therefore, the researcher grounded this study focusing on the issues and challenges faced by university students of Bangladesh who had to complete their undergraduation online. Since the country's educational system was always sticked to the

traditional way of learning, the researcher felt it was crucial and needed to examine how well learners could acclimate to web-based learning and to what extent they were pleased as well as disgruntled with this new learning experience.

1.2 Research Purpose

With the purpose of enhancing and creating a new prospect of E – learning in Bangladesh, this research aimed at pointing out university learner's viewpoint on their experience with online classes during the pandemic period in Bangladesh. Therefore, this research looked at how the pandemic affected the regular learning of the undergraduate students of Bangladesh while exploring learners' experience of using digital platforms for academic purpose and to what extent the inclusion of digital tools and internet influenced their ability to comprehend and assimilate knowledge. The researcher also identified the key challenges and prospects found by the students in online learning and recorded their preference on the utilization and effectiveness of including digital platforms of educational purpose in the coming future at tertiary level.

Thus, the researcher hoped to assist the innovation and expansion of online learning in Bangladesh through this research as the data offered by the study contains learners' grievances, suggestions and interests related to online teaching in Bangladesh.

1.3 Central Research Question

This is the central research question which the current study tried to answer –

What issues and challenges did undergraduate students of Bangladesh face while completing their degree online amidst the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.4 Context of the Study

Though online education is not a new occurrence around the world, it is more prevalent in the West than in the East. Furthermore, in terms of infrastructure needed for ensuring an uninterrupted and well-managed online education system, Bangladesh still has a long way to go. Similarly, the COVID-19's arrival has had an impact on more than just academic and professional life. It has had a significant impact on people's personal lives, since many have lost loved ones while also enduring financial, personal, and societal difficulties. As a result, this abrupt change in the educational system has been difficult not only for teachers, but also for students, who have had to adjust to a completely different learning and assessment environment. Despite the fact that using a Smartboard or PowerPoint in physical classroom is no longer an unknown phenomenon, the complete incorporation of technology-assisted teaching methods is yet to create a new realm in the educational system of Bangladesh (Kapasia et al., 2020). It occurred because, despite having considerable necessity of developing technology-based teaching techniques and making the learners used to the digital learning environment, no comprehensive training was provided for instructors to improve their literacy in this area. As a result, the inefficiency of teachers made it more difficult for the learners to cope with the situation more since there existed additional issues like pure internet connectivity, lack of updated devices, financial instability etc. Thus, in light of the above-mentioned issues, this research aimed to study the challenges and issues faced by the learners during attending online classes in their undergraduate life.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter contains discussion of some relevant literature related to online education mostly from other contexts. Despite being a major area of research all over the world, the researcher could hardly find any studies that focused on recording the online learning experiences of university students in Bangladesh. Therefore, by reviewing the findings of the research in other contexts, the researcher pointed out gaps in the literature in Bangladeshi context in this chapter in order to ensure the relevance of her research.

2.1 Beginning of online education at tertiary level and COVID-19

The trend of online education started worldwide in 1990 when academic tutoring emerged with the help of the Internet. To add more to it, digitalization of education has found a new way with the proliferation of Internet- based distance education while accelerating e-learning. Online education struggles with different constraints in Bangladesh, for instance, building a strong network for an undisturbed online education, suitable learning materials for online education, and so on and COVID-19 in the year of 2020 challenges the conventional education system. In fact, the pandemic has pressed the existing education system to be upgraded in accordance with the demand of crucial periods like COVID-19. In other words, “emergency eLearning” was the only option left that time as the alternative of pedagogical practice in the conventional universities (Cranfield et. al., 2021). Besides, the education of the tertiary-level students has been affected at unprecedented scale during COVID-19.

Furthermore, students of tertiary level education had to suffer the most in terms of academic, social and economic affairs due to the pandemic situation (Al-Tammemi et. at., 2020). When tertiary level students’ social life was affected as they could not have face to face

interactions with their family, friends, colleagues, it increased boredom, frustration, and anxiety which made it more difficult for them to focus on their future career plans. Additionally, the delay of re-opening the educational institutions affected the academic growth of the tertiary level students along with other students and many students developed dysfunctional learning behavior that became a big obstacle for them in terms of pursuing higher education in future (Meo et. al., 2020). Approximately four million students from more than 5000 tertiary educational institutes were dealing with the crisis of learning which started with the pandemic (Ahmed, 2020). Hence, with a view to reducing the academic disruptions in the tertiary level, many universities switch to online semesters. However, different research and surveys revealed that online education strategy made the students distressed and worried since online lectures, online assessment process and issues like unavailability of suitable electronic devices, internet connectivity created an inconvenient situation for the students (Al-Tammemi et. at., 2020, Subedi et. al., 2020).

2.2 Online education and the completion

Students of tertiary level were not only face a big shock in terms of shifting traditional way of learning to eLearning but also with the sudden change in learning they found themselves as the competitors of the distant universities since tertiary education system throughout the globe was being operated through online (Cranfield, 2021). The author also finds that due to online semesters many universities had to face difficulty as they did not have necessary pre-existing infrastructure and backing in order to manage the altered teaching process. In other words, although a developing country like Bangladesh tried its level best to cope with the online education; however, the "... lack of technological resources, readiness, and inclusiveness from the perspective of the students" kept the country lag behind in comparison to the other world class universities (Islam & Mahmud, 2022). Moreover, academic staff had immense hassles in

providing students essential study materials because they were not prepared with proper training and necessary support (Cranfield, 2021). In fact, for the developing countries shifting to online education or eLearning itself was the biggest challenge (Saeed, 2020).

2.3 Challenges of online education at tertiary level

Lecturers along with the students found the changes challenging berated by the COVID-19 pandemic from many aspects. For instance, due to the socio-economic condition for many students, it was quite hard and, in some cases, impossible to study at home. Again, the environment of homes was the other reason to make it difficult to study as those were not like university libraries, seminars and study rooms. To add more to it, some students mentioned that their homes were too noisy to concentrate on studying. Furthermore, an article titled, “Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on University Students’ Learning Life: An Integrated Conceptual Motivational Model for Sustainable and Healthy Online Learning" come up with an interesting fact about the percentage of tertiary level students’ learning flexibility at their homes. It shows that only 27.8% of students' families were helpful towards them and let them study in an interruption free environment. On the other hand, 72.2% students expressed that studying online by staying at homes was extremely difficult and challenging for them (Al-Kumaim et. al., 2021).

Additionally, another article titled, “The Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Tertiary Education in Bangladesh: Students’ Perspectives” shows that many students could not keep their study progress because of the sudden closure of the universities as they left their study materials either in halls or their respective living places (Dutta & Smita, 2020).

Again, the loss of social interaction was another challenge for the university students as they are more involved in societal activities in comparison to students of schools and colleges.

The study by Dutta and Smita reveals that university students preferred studying in groups rather than alone at homes. The Study also shows that the lack of face-to-face interaction with their teachers and friends made them uninterested in studying. In fact, these aspects have negative impacts on the psyche of the students and while referring to that one of the participants in Dutta and Smita's study mentioned staying at home for a long time without spending time with the friends made her so upset that it hampered her study habit. Furthermore, the continuous conversion mode with the people was lost. Again, the student was also worried that the communication gap which had been created during the COVID-19 period might make them suffer in the long run and cause failure in their professional life.

Apart from this, according to the article titled, "Strategies to Mitigate the COVID-19 Challenges of Universities of Bangladesh" the pandemic also drew a new line of disparity between the public and private universities. As public universities are patronized by the government, they did not have to face any financial crisis. On the other hand, private universities' edupreneurs had to go through a serious financial crisis because of a pandemic (Huque, 2021). Again, although private universities cut their high tuition fees due to the emergency of pandemic, many students still could not afford it and had to leave their studies. Since everything started on online platforms because of health concerns, many students who used to do part-time jobs to bear their expenses became jobless and their parents were also unable to pay their tuition fees as a pandemic hit hard (Dutta & Smita, 2020). Moreover, the students who somehow managed to join online semesters during the crucial time were finding it tough to continue studying by paying internet bills on a regular basis. Hence, by considering these problems the private university authorities lessened the wages of the teachers and employees so that they could overcome the financial problem that they were dealing with along

with the students. Furthermore, the enrolment rate of the students had also dropped remarkably in the private universities (Kamol, 2020). Not only the private university students suffered due to lack of money but also public university students who were mostly from poor economic backgrounds had to lose academic year.

2.4 Opportunities of Completing Undergraduate Education Online

In spite of challenges and obstacles during pandemic, Bangladeshi online education especially at the tertiary level created many new opportunities for the students. An article titled "From Crisis to Opportunities in Higher Education in Bangladesh" while discussing the opportunities noted that "technological and pedagogical challenges" actually integrated technology in teaching and learning which improved "learners' autonomy and self-regulation" (Jahan et. al. 2022). After observing all the advantages and disadvantages, University Grants Commission (UGC) along with Ministry of Education (MOE) allowed the private universities to resume their activities on 7 May, 2020 (Ahmed, 2020). Despite the financial crisis, private universities tried their level best to ensure flexible learning for their students (Jashim, 2020). To add more to it, keeping aside all the problems private university made better learning opportunities for their students as most of their students were from wealthier and urban background. On the other hand, public universities started online teaching from 25 June, 2020 after being permitted by UGC. However, since the majority of the public university students were from rural and poor economic backgrounds, they struggled to compete with the private university students.

Apart from this discrepancy between private and public universities, undergraduate students of Bangladesh also got opportunities for improvement. For example, since teachers and

students could not have face to face interaction, both of the groups became more functional online with a view to coping up with the situation (Ferri et. al., 2020). Additionally, students received more benefits from online sessions than normal time because "...teachers' newly developed knowledge of technology" made them (teachers) understand students' needs properly. In fact, teachers' role was not just limited to teaching the students; rather they had to play the role of "therapist, psychologist, teacher all in all online" (Jahan et. al. 2022, p.154). In other words, students started to see teachers differently during this time, shared their struggles and asked help from them. In fact, in comparison to their families, they received more support from their respective university authorities and teachers.

Again, students had more study materials than the traditional classrooms as they were provided with "live class recordings, PowerPoint slides, soft copies of textbooks, and YouTube videos" (Jahan et. al., 2022, p. 156). Moreover, many eLearning platforms made their courses free around the globe in response to the pandemic situation. For instance, BRAC University students had the opportunity to do Coursera courses for free until the end of 2020's September (Hossain, 2020). Through these types of opportunities, undergraduate students during COVID-19 explored the world class teacher's lectures. Besides, different private universities tried to give a dynamic breakthrough in online education. And, as a part of this turn, they initiated to collaborate with different outside universities and offered their courses which were suitable for Bangladeshi undergraduate landscape. Such as, BRAC University's joining in OSUN (Open Society University Network) in February, 2020 opened a door of huge opportunities for its students throughout the pandemic. Under this collaborative program, students of BRAC university were not only provided special world class study materials but also, they could

interact with the high profiled professors, ask them questions and have experienced the environment of the global undergraduate education.

Furthermore, developing learners' autonomy was one of the biggest opportunities created by COVID-19. As everything i.e., teaching, learning, assessment went online students had to grapple with the situation like their teachers. University students who were introduced with online education firstly had outlined that "... they became digitally literate and confident in using online tools by utilizing the frequent opportunities to interact with peers and teachers via different online platforms" (Jahan et al., 2022, p. 146). Additionally, after being adjusted with the online education, students showed their interest in this new way of learning. Students who had problems in speaking in English started responding to the teachers' questions "... through the chat box, had raise options, emojis, verbal communication, and WhatsApp (Jahan et. al., 2022, p. 156). To add more to it, the negligent students had to be serious online because learning through online was completely dependent on the student himself/ herself.

2.5 Post-pandemic condition and opportunities for undergraduate online education

After the pandemic when educational institutions resumed taking classes in person, educationists observe that both the group teachers and students are now effectively integrating technology in their everyday teaching and learning. In fact, "Face-to-face instruction is combined with online components to provide a hybrid learning experience" and this combination is bringing revolution in the education sector in Bangladesh just like the other countries in the world (Mete et. al., 2022: 149). Again, learners of Bangladesh have expressed that online classes have made them tech-savvy and confident enough to take more benefits of digitalization of education (Khan et. al., 2021).

2.6 Research Gap

Taking into account all the major findings of the existing literature related to online teaching and learning, it is certain that this concept of education is no longer a new phenomenon among learners, educators and policymakers especially after the pandemic. Numerous studies have been conducted focusing on the challenges and barriers faced by teachers in experimenting with new teaching techniques and material adaptation to provide better education. However, there is a gap in identifying the varieties of challenges and issues faced by various groups of learners due to it especially in Bangladeshi context. Most of the studies done so far focused on the effect of Covid and how it has completely transformed the traditional approach to education, how it is still a very new thing and challenge to face for many people engaged in the field of education. Only a few researches have looked at how the issues, challenges related to online learning vary from learners to learners and how they are perceiving this new mode of learning. More importantly, in Bangladeshi context where traditional pen and paper-based learning has always been the medium of education, it is very significant to document how different groups of students are receiving this new change. Thus, the current study aimed at fulfilling the gap highlighting tertiary level learner's perspectives regarding online education based on the challenges and opportunities they faced in order to determine the prospect of online education in the post covid period.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter entailed the purpose and nature of this study chosen by the researcher, the research method and the instruments the researcher has utilised to conduct the study. The researcher also talked about the participants of the study and ethical concerns they had prior to, during, and after their involvement. Finally, the data collection and analysis process, as well as the probable challenges the researcher faced during the study have been explained in a detailed manner. Thus, this chapter will give an overview of the rationale behind the methods chosen by the researcher to address the research question:

What issues and challenges did undergraduate students face studying indifferent disciplines while completing their degree online amidst COVID-19 pandemic?

3.1 Nature of the Research

The researcher conducted this study following a qualitative research approach which according to Creswell (1994), is a holistic method that entails exploration. In order to get the information in an in-depth, realistic and authentic way, the whole research was done in a natural setting. The researcher's goal was to examine, describe, and analyse the rising challenges and opportunities of completing undergraduate education online via the experiences of the participants they have faced and perspectives while receiving online education during the pandemic. Thus, the researcher attempted to design the whole research in a way which would give her access towards gathering insights of more real-life experiences of the participants. Therefore, qualitative researcher method seemed the most suitable approach to her for conducting this research.

3.2 Research Design

Since the researcher aimed at collecting and describing the real experiences of the participants, she used the narrative research design for the current study where researchers describe, analyse and interpret the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the data analysis included a comprehensive and thorough information regarding participants' educational background, their personal experience regarding their share of struggles, perspectives and their stories of overcoming the barriers. Such description helped the researcher to complement the catalysed hypothesis. Additionally, the data analysis focused more on the information gathered from participants' active input regarding their first-hand experiences and very little attention was given to bookish knowledge and information from other already existing resources. Later on, all the gathered data consisting of participants viewpoint, narration of experiences were sorted out in a systematic manner to build up individual stories which the researcher found would be the most appropriate approach to address the participants' voice narrating their struggles, stories, experiences and perspectives through an in-depth analysis. The purpose behind choosing this approach was the differences and diversity the searcher found in participants' narration. The overall purpose of this study was to examine an individual's personal belief or expectation regarding online teaching and their struggles related to it by considering the surroundings and different perspectives. Therefore, narrative research design seemed more appropriate to the researcher to complete this study.

3.3 Participants of the Study

The participants of the study included students who are currently pursuing their undergraduate degree from public and private universities of Bangladesh. There were 6 participants in total and there were a mix of both the public and private universities. Students

from both institutions went through the online form that contained open-ended questions to record their responses on their perspectives and opinion on online education were examined equally. They all were familiar with the concept of distance learning and due to the circumstances caused by the pandemic, were bound to continue their education through online education to meet the requirements of their degree completion. Not all of them had experienced online classes since the beginning of the pandemic, however the online education was not an unknown phenomenon to them. Hence, the researcher hoped to gather effective data from them which contributed significantly in making the study an effective one.

Table 1

List of Participants

Name	Age	Gender	University (Public/Private)	Academic Year (Hons)
Fatima	22	Female	Private	4th year
Morshed	21	Male	Public	3rd year
Tabassum	23	Female	Private	3rd year
Puja	22	Female	Private	4th year
Afra	21	Female	Private	4th year
Salam	23	Female	Private	4th year

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect data for this study, the researcher had to gather information from the participants through open-ended questions. The researcher planned to pilot the open-ended

interview questions (Appendix-A) with one of her friends, who was also a university student, at first. Based on her recommendations, quality of response, the researcher had to rewrite and reorganise the questions so that other participants could easily understand them and enough data can be retrieved for the study. Since all the participants were students who, alongside attending their online lectures, were engaged in part time jobs as well, finding a suitable time for conducting a physical interview became a difficult job. Additionally, considering the new wave of COVID-19, ensuring everyone's safety also became a prominent issue. Thus, Google Forms seemed to be the best possible source used for gathering the data to the researcher. All the open-ended questions for data collecting were circulated among participants via mails where the researcher provided a brief overview of her research, its goals and objectives. Therefore, the participants got the liberty to share their viewpoints in the Google Form as per their convenient time with full enthusiasm which helped the researcher to a great extent in completing this research. The only difference that existed was if there were face-to-face interviews conducted, the researcher had to record it or take notes of each participants' view. However, the responses received through Google Forms made it easier for the researcher to sort out and document the viewpoints in a more convenient way. Since the researcher chose qualitative approach for this study, doing surveys would not have served the purpose since survey questionnaires mostly deal with numerical data. Additionally, the purpose of case study is to observe the particularity and complexity occurring in cases in order to hold a holistic view of different context (Stake, 1995, p. xi). This includes a detailed discussion of the data collected from interview and observing participant's viewpoint critically so that a detailed discussion can be done regarding a certain phenomenon. Since the researcher aimed to look at the struggles and challenges faced by learners from both public and private universities, who had different experience and exposure to

online learning during COVID-19, it seemed suitable to present the narration under different cases so that the variation of problems and struggles under different context could be understood holistically.

However, before circulating the Google Forms to the participants, the researcher wrote each of them an email and asked for their consent before sending them the forms (Appendix-B). Given the participants' and researcher's hectic schedules, finding an appropriate time for conducting interviews through Skype or Google Meet appeared to be impossible. As a result, the researcher chose to use Google Form. Furthermore, the open-ended questions aided in eliciting participants' "views and opinions" (Creswell, 2014), which is an important data collection method for the narrative research design used in this study.

3.5 Data Analysis

The researcher used Creswell's (2012) "six steps in analysing and interpreting qualitative data" (p. 502), which incorporated both iterative and simultaneous processes, to analyse the data collected from the participants. Initially, the researcher observed the piloted interview as part of the iterative process. The audio recording was transcribed later on to categorise the material. The researcher then examined all of the transcribed data thoroughly in order to construct an overview of the material. While interpreting qualitative data, Kvale (1996) referred to this process of building an overall idea regarding all the data, the similarities and differences between them as self-knowledge and critical common-sense understanding where researcher will develop an in-depth understanding of what the participants tried to imply by each of their statement. The researcher sought to develop an in-depth understanding of what the participants intended to convey through their statements for self-understanding. In addition, the researcher evaluated participants' understanding using his or her own knowledge of the "context of statements to place

them in a wider arena" for important common-sense understanding (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The information derived from Google Forms were analysed in a similar manner, but in this case, it was stored and organised in MS Excel Workbooks. Based on the text segments, all of the data were classified and labelled into numerous codes. Later, the researcher looked for commonalities among them, and after building a link between them, they were classified into bigger topics and thematically analysed (Creswell, 2012). Also, some of the data regarding participant's educational background and overall experience were presented in a case study manner which helped the researcher to build up common occurrences in their experiences which significantly contributed to the thematic analysis of the data.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

First and foremost, the participants were given a brief overview of the study. The researcher made it certain that the participants have a thorough understanding of the challenges surrounding online learning and how everyone is coping with this new educational style. They were also advised that they must fill out a form detailing their experiences with this particular case. They had given their verbal consent. The Google form link was emailed to the participants, along with a description of the research's aim. The participants were further informed about their choice to back out from participating in the data collecting process at any point if they felt the questions are hurting their sentiments or their own perspectives. Additionally, the researcher attempted to develop the interview questions from a neutral viewpoint in order to avoid upsetting or outraging participants so that participants openly express their viewpoint without holding back anything. Furthermore, to maintain the anonymity of participants' identity and privacy concerns, the actual names of the participants were replaced by pseudonyms in the whole research.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter carries detailed information gathered from the nine participants of the study regarding their educational journey during pandemic, experience, challenges as well as their ways to overcoming those barriers. It provides a narrative insight of all the qualitative data that the researcher got from the participants through an online questionnaire. Based on the responses of the participants, the researcher has developed 6 cases in total that carries information of their educational background, how they have tackled the academic pressure during pandemic, how they adjusted to the new changes and their opinions and perceptions towards this new journey.

Narration of Participants Responses to the Open-Ended Questions

4.1 Fatima

Fatima is currently studying at a well reputed private university of Bangladesh, pursuing her BSc (Hons) in Computer Science and Engineering. When the pandemic started in the year 2020, she was in the third year of her undergrad journey. When asked about her early exposure to digital classroom setting, she responded that she has always been used to traditional classroom setting and the sudden transition in the medium of education was quite a shocking experience for her. “Even though I completed my school and college from very well-established institutions of Dhaka, the teachers always followed the conventional pen-paper based mode,” she said. She also said that taking help from digital platforms like watching YouTube tutorials for better comprehension of concepts or certain topics for completing her coursework was something new that she started doing after joining university. “…other than that, I have always been fully dependent upon the lectures and notes provided by teachers in the classroom and reading the books only for completing my syllabus at school and college,” she added. Furthermore, she

added that in university too, before the pandemic, the classes were always lecture based and teachers provided lectures using PowerPoint slides and multimedia. “That was the only digital tool we were exposed to before the pandemic,” she stated.

Being a youth of the 21st century, Fatima was certainly well aware of all the technological advancement happening worldwide and also agreed that such development surely brought positive changes in bringing the world closer to us. However, she also expressed how she struggled at the initial period of online classes, since there was absolutely no way for face-to-face communication with teachers during lectures which created trouble for her since she could not immediately ask the teacher where and what she could not really understand which was possible during physical classes. Furthermore, she also mentioned that even though the new way of learning has surely enlightened them about new resources to complete academic tasks, she could not really make the best use of those since she had no access to up-to-date devices. Also, the courses that required practical implications of the theories learned, were not taught quite effectively through virtual classes since there was no way for them to practice those hand in hand. Despite all the struggles, she also could not deny that for a nation like Bangladesh, where online education never took place earlier, this sudden transition caused by the pandemic surely added a new dimension in the education sector. However, it still has a long way to go and proper planning and decisions need to be taken into this regard.

4.2 Morshed

At present Morshed is in the final year of his undergrad journey, pursuing his BSc degree in Computer Science and Engineering from one of the top public universities in Bangladesh. In the year 2020, his 3rd year of Hons had just started and since the lockdown happened, like other public university students, his study progress also came to a standstill. While talking about his

initial reaction towards experiencing online learning for the first time, Morshed mentioned that public universities began taking online classes much later compared to private universities since there was a lack of required resources and facilities. He added that students from different economic status are present in public universities and many of them are not financially solvent enough to buy laptop or smartphones on an immediate basis which was required for attending online classes. Moreover, a stable internet connection was not available to many of them since after the declaration of the lockdown all of learners living the university hall or even in mess or hostels left towards their home which are located in rural areas. “In rural areas, people are still struggling to have an uninterrupted power supply, so thinking about having a very strong internet connection is like a daydream”, Morshed stated. Also, being dependent upon internet packages does not prove to be economically friendly to many of them since the majority of the learners belong to middle or lower middle-class families. Thus, the online classes in the public universities were delayed which made the learners lose a lot of time and fall behind. “We should have been done with our final year by this time, if the situation was normal. However, we did not get to attend online classes in the year 2020 which caused a year loss for us,” Morshed explained. Additionally, he also mentioned that even though the classes had begun there was a constant debate going on whether the exams will be taken online or not. “So many propositions were made and debates took place, yet no final decisions were made regarding our year final and semester finals,” Morshed added. Thus, even though classes started taking place they had no examinations going on, there were only few assignments given to them as course requirements yet, their results were not published since no final examination happened. Therefore, it did not bring much help to them since they had to lose an entire year because of these uncertainties, lack of resources and hesitancy in decision making.

4.3 Tabassum

Currently Tabassum is in the final year of her undergrad and soon after submitting her thesis, she will be a graduate with B.Sc. degree in Biotechnology of a well-established private university of Bangladesh. Like majority of the students in this nation, online learning significantly affected the regular academic life of Tabassum as well since she was used to the conventional method of teaching and learning and had no experience of virtual classes, When the university declared that classes are going to take palace on screen, Tabassum had her share of anxiety and panic attacks since she was not an expert in using technological devices and tools. “It was difficult for both the teachers as well as the learners since we never experienced such a method of teaching and learning ever in our lives,” she asserted. However, she also mentioned that despite having the initial struggles to get adjusted to these devices and the whole method, how it eventually became a part of her daily life. “It has become a new routine of my life where I wake up in the morning and sit in front of the screen to attend the classes and watch the recorded and pre-recorded lectures to complete my course requirements”, she added. While talking about the academic pressure in the online semester, Tabassum added that the pressure has been doubled and she has to spend almost 17/18 hours daily in front of the screen to keep up with the academic loads. She also mentioned that compared to in person semesters, the pressure in online semesters has doubled since every day they either have to take quizzes, submit assignments, presentations, participate in discussion boards etc which was not so intense during physical classes. She also talked about her struggles in maintaining concentration while the classes go on since at home the surroundings are not always suitable enough to stay attentive all the time which created trouble for her to keep pace with the lecture. “I have no free time at all, when the semester is going on since every day, I have to meet a deadline and if I cannot do it on time, the work load only

increases which only adds to my anxiety attacks," she added. However, despite such immense pressure. Tabassum tried her level best to make the best use of what she got to learn from every course done online. She opined that compared to the situation of my friends who are studying in public universities, I feel that we are in a better position despite all the academic pressure since we did not have any gaps and nothing was stopped in private universities due to covid.

4.4 Puja

At present, Puja is working on her dissertation and she will soon be a graduate from the department of English and Humanities as an English Literature major after defending her thesis in the upcoming semester. Puja spent half of her university life by attending classes online. "As soon as my third year started and we gave our midterm in that ongoing semester, covid happened and everything changed", she stated. However, despite all the uncertainties, fear and anxiety she is thankful that she is being able to complete her graduation without any delay and year gap which happened with some of her friends studying in public universities. "The online semester brought both positive and negative effects with it; however, keeping all the odds aside, I believe that this transition in the mode of education was needed in our system since we are already very behind in case of development compared to other nations," she further mentioned. She said that the online education in Bangladesh is a first step towards a new revolution in the field of education since it not only provided the learners an opportunity to know about different ways to learn lessons but also offered an extraordinary chance to the teachers to experiment with their teaching styles and reshape their philosophies and values. "It would be a lie if I say I do not miss in person classes. However, this change was also needed otherwise, I would not get to explore different methods and resources which I could use to make my learning better and effective," she said. She further mentioned that online classes provided an opportunity to her to know about how

the internet can be used to get access to many international journals and e-books which she never thought would be possible while staying in Bangladesh. “I attended seminars, webinars as well as online lectures of many well-known scholars during this pandemic, got to know about different podcasts which added value to my learning”, stated Puja. Thus, more than negativity, Puja tried to figure out all the positives that online education brought and made the best use of it.

4.5 Afra

Afra is a private university student who is currently in the final year of her undergraduate studies. Like Puja, Afra also spent half of her undergraduate studies doing online classes while going through extreme academic pressure and workload. However, keeping all the cons aside, Afra believes that the transition in the medium of education surely added a new dimension to the academic practices of Bangladesh. She mentioned that despite the struggles teachers had to go through initially in order to ensure quality education, they tried their level best to improve their teaching skills so that learners can learn better and grasp the knowledge effectively. Yet, she also mentioned some of her disappointments which she might not have had, if physical classes had taken place. As Afra elaborated, she had to do three courses related to the genre of drama and theatre which could have been more fun if they had taken place in a physical classroom. “I was already doing a course in that running semester which we had to discontinue because of the pandemic and the syllabus was half covered,” she added. She further mentioned that in that course they were supposed to arrange a play and act in it which would have been a wonderful experience for them since drama and theatre becomes more fun when dialogues are heard and characters are seen on the stage. “We also had a schedule to go to Bangla Academy to watch theatre which was cancelled due to pandemic,” said Afra. She further mentioned that later on she took similar courses like this online, where they had to record their performances online and

present it to the teacher. “That was another fun experience, since we got to learn how we can use technology better for our own benefits and it helped in developing our expertise. However, we still missed the presence of stage and the audience which are vital elements of a theatre,” she added. Thus, her experience throughout the online semester has a mixture of both positivity and negativity.

4.6 Salam

After being admitted to the English and Humanities Department of a renowned Private University in 2018, Salam was really excited about her journey as a literature student. However, due to COVID 19, the university started to conduct online teaching and evaluation through BUX, which was one of the most difficult challenges she faced during her whole academic career. Since she was only a second-year student when her university initiated online semesters because of COVID 19, she was perplexed and also, struggled to feel motivated and passionate regarding her undergraduate study initially. As she was not so familiar with technology related things, she was anxious whether she would be able to learn the contents properly.

To begin with, before doing the online semesters, she hardly knew about Zoom, Google meet, Slack and so on. For this reason, her university resumed its teaching activities on an online platform, she could not understand anything properly, like how to open a Zoom account and join classes through it and so on and so forth. Hence, due to this reason, she only took three courses thinking that she may not be able to cope with the online learning. Moreover, at the initial stages of online teaching, teachers also struggled to adapt to the online teaching. For example, the common problem that she used to face at the very initial stage was the sound problem which most of the time hampered the lectures. Teachers had to repeat the lectures which were very

exhausting sometimes and many students including her left the online session because of this kind of interruption.

Again, as she was staying outside Dhaka, the internet connection in her area was terrible and most of the time she had to buy mobile data just to attend the classes. Above all, she could not stay calm during the online timed exam as there was always a fear inside me of what if wifi connection was interrupted or the mobile data did not work. That was why; she could not do well in many of my exams even with good preparations.

Additionally, most of the courses had an excessive number of assignments and those gave her a hard time. Even sometimes she had to spend more than 15 hours in a day before the screen. As a second-year student who did not have enough knowledge about online learning she had hard time while doing the course work. The Bux lecture videos did not cover the contents properly and hence, to understand the lectures she had to watch YouTube videos. To add to more, although the teachers told them to contact them if they faced any difficulty understanding the lectures, they were not reachable sometimes. Again, in the online sessions there was not enough time to discuss the previous lectures. For this reason, there was a lack of learning due to the online semesters. Furthermore, in many cases teachers used to provide YouTube lectures in the Bux instead of their own lectures. In fact, online education became like ‘robotic learning’ which had no pleasure.

However, there were many other things in online learning that benefitted her as a student. Although initially it was challenging for me to adapt to online education, it literally made her advance in technology with time. For instance, she has become very good at typing and she can type 600-700 words in only 15 minutes. Moreover, during the online semester, she had to write a lot of research papers. Since she is doing her thesis now in the final year, it is helping to a great

extent. She can easily conduct research and recognize the scholarly sources which she was not able to do before the online semesters. In fact, as the university has resumed in person teaching after the pandemic, she can use both my online and offline semester knowledge in her studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter deals with the elaborate discussion of the findings that the researcher gathered from the narration of participants' data under four themes:

5.1 Academic Impingement

While being asked about the kind of influence participants felt in their academics due to the changes that took place during the pandemic, the majority of the participants highlighted how their experiences in terms of understanding the academic content varied from person to person. Additionally, they also mentioned about the challenges they faced perceiving educational content. The mode of education being transferred completely to online platforms, surely brought a significant number of pros and cons with it, especially for those to whom online education was completely a new phenomenon (Cranfield et al., 2021). For some students, online education surely brought new opportunities for them to learn and explore new mediums that will help to enrich their knowledge. Whereas, for others it was a total nightmare which led them towards questioning their academic capability and doubting themselves. All the participants agreed that they viewed online education as a new resource that will add value to their educational journey and academic achievement. However, they also said that for specific discipline it was a very suitable medium to continue education fruitfully and for others it could not do proper justice. These findings from the participants parallels the findings with some of the already existing literature that were done outside Bangladesh. For instance, Kapasia et al. (2020) and Subedi et al. (2020) who conducted their studies in India and Nepal respectively and voiced the perspectives of the learners regarding online education. It was highlighted by one of the participants Fatima that distance learning offered a very satisfactory opportunity for those studying theoretical subjects like social science, humanities, law or even basic science. Because

whatever topics or contents they studied, all of them were connected to or grounded based on some already established philosophy, theory or concept. However, they hardly studied those concepts that were related to skill development which needed to be tested via practical implication.

Thus, the viewpoints gathered from students varied from participants to participants depending upon their respective disciplines. For liberal arts or social science students, online learning was a new scope to explore different sources and analyse different perspectives regarding a content which might not have been possible during regular classroom. On this, Puja expressed that even though faced some hurdles initially while adapting to online learning, her overall experience was not at all unsatisfactory. She found the majority of her courses done online were fruitful since they kind of pushed her to come out of her comfort zone and explore more by taking the help of the internet, which she might not have done so extensively in regular circumstances.

Many of the participants also mentioned the utility online classes brought to them by creating opportunities of self-study and self-assessment. In this regard, they stated that due to the absence of physical classroom discussions, they were given various supplementary readings and online lectures which not only helped to increase their knowledge but also provided a guideline to us regarding how they could have access to various additional classroom materials through the internet. In their opinion the knowledge they got while browsing through different journals helped them more in the latter courses where they did their own research and completed dissertation.

Additionally, Shikdar also asserted how he used to struggle a lot while searching for other scholarly articles because of his lack of knowledge regarding various sites or journals. Being a

literature student, he had to take courses where submission like research paper, reflection paper, or analytic paper were a common phenomenon. Due to this reason, he had to do a lot of extensive reading and find resources to support his claims in the paper. Even though initially he had to struggle a lot in finding out relevant articles because he did not know the correct way of searching it. However, the pandemic helped him learn and explore a lot of new things for instance, how he can use information from YouTube videos as reference etc. which helped him in knowledge development.

Besides, the participants also mentioned how the access to have recorded lectures helped them to a great extent in understanding the concepts better (Jahan et. al., 2022). While doing online classes at home, it was always not possible to give proper attention to the lectures the whole time, because at home they were always surrounded by family members due to which ensuring a peaceful environment was not always possible. In such a condition, concentration broke very easily and if at some point of the lecture they missed out something or failed to understand it and could not communicate with the teacher instantly, the recorded lectures helped them to rewatch and go through it again and again to master the ideas. In their opinion it was really helpful for their academic progress throughout pandemic.

Whilst talking about the challenges participants faced in case of content perception, the participants mentioned their needs that surely varied from person to person depending upon their target and learning objectives (Jashim et. al., 2020). Morshed asserted that he faced a great difficulty in understanding the lectures that were given for labs. Being a CSE student, they had both theoretical and lab classes where they were practically taught how to run programming languages, python etc. However, due to the pandemic, the lab classes were totally off. In fact, in the first two semesters, they did not have any lab classes which surely hampered their knowledge

development since many of the theories would not bring any benefit to learners unless they are able to use those practically. Later on, even though the lab classes started, yet the scope of practising those were not available. They opined that they just required to see the pre-recorded lectures and expected to complete assignments which they found quite hard and felt they have a lack of knowledge in grasping many of the contents which was disheartening.

To add more, Fatima added that even though online classrooms surely helped them to learn the use of technology for educational purposes better, many of the facilities of physical classrooms were not available there (Ferri et. al., 2020, Ahmed, 2020). She mentioned that in literature courses while discussing certain topics or a literary piece, there used to be very extensive discussion with the course instructor as well as among classmates which was somehow missing during online classes. However, she further mentioned about the access to recorded lectures which proved to be very beneficial to them in order to keep pace with the online lecture. During physical classes, there used to be 80 mins for each class and within that time frame, teachers used to cover a lot of items and oftentimes learners failed to take notes of each and every topic discussed in the classroom because the delivery of lecture was too fast. In this aspect, online learning provided them the accessibility to pre-recorded and recorded lectures of the classroom due to which they could always go through the lectures, pause it and make important notes whenever they needed which they found to be a positive and beneficial side of virtual classroom.

Furthermore, Tabassum asserted that even though pre-recorded and recorded online lectures surely helped them to keep pace with the new mode of learning and benefitted them to a great extent to their overall academic progress, it could not help them much regarding the practical aspects of the courses. Being a student of biotechnology, many of her courses had lab

classes too where many important topics were covered which were necessary for her experience and try physically. However, the covid situation and social distancing protocols took that opportunity from them. She added that during her first semester, she was offered BIO101 which was a very basic course for her to complete. There they had to submit two lab reports and even though those labs were very basic like identifying blood types and RH factors, they could not really understand the whole procedure, until their lab teacher showed the whole process practically. And now that they were in third year during pandemic and completed the last two years of their undergrad attending online classes, the laboratory experiments and observations became more sophisticated. Even though the lab teachers tried their best to help them online yet, many of them expressed that believe that they could have comprehended those concepts better if they could attend lab classes physically.

5.2 Struggles in Effective Time Management

Even though the participants agreed that online classes were initially considered to be a great relief for them considering the terrible traffic conditions of Dhaka city which used to kill a lot of time and energy of them, some of them also mentioned that online semester caused them extensive academic pressure, due to which they struggled to manage a little bit of free time of their own. Thus, the opinion of the participants included both positive and negative responses regarding time management issues.

As Afra mentioned, “online classroom helped me a lot in managing my whole-time schedule…it provided me with a better insight to make a schedule that gave me an effective outcome in terms of my academic achievement.” In this regard Tabassum added that her house and campus share a very long distance and due to excessive traffic jams, it used to kill a lot of

time while making her completely exhausted. Many times, she had to miss the classes that were scheduled after 12 pm because there used to be a lot of traffic and even if she managed to somehow reach the university, she used to be so drained mentally that it used to take extra effort for her to stay attentive in the classroom. Thus, online classes surely were an escape and relief for her from such mental exhaustion.

However, while mentioning about academic stress that participants had to face during online learning, Fatima added that she had a hard time creating a balance between her studies and personal life. She also added that online semesters had been the most stressful semesters she had ever encountered in her undergrad life. She added that earlier there was a fixed routine, either she had to attend the classes in the morning or in the afternoon. Then the rest of the time, she used to be free for other work. However, during these online semesters all she did was to study when the semester was going on. She had no time to focus on other things. First of all, she had to go through the pre-recorded lectures to see if she understood everything from the lectures or not, then take preparations for attending the online sessions for more in depth understanding while discussing her perspectives with the instructor.

She further asserted that it felt like she was attending two classes back-to-back for a course in one day which was really exhausting for her. Additionally, she also mentioned that there were countless assignments which she had to submit for the course requirements and these assessments were not present during regular semesters. Thus, she found the workload of the online semester too overwhelming.

On a similar note, it was also mentioned by Salam that she did struggle bringing a balance in the overall time management of her daily routine because the study schedule was making it too difficult to focus on other aspects of her personal life. She mentioned that her

parents' house is located in Sirajgonj and in Dhaka she used to stay in the hostel. When the lockdown started, she had to leave the hostel and go back to Sirajganj and the whole environment was not working in her favour to keep her focused-on studies only. Her mother expected some help from her in her regular domestic work however, she could not do so because she already had so much on her plate. The academic workload doubled during pandemic for her but it was not possible by her side to explain it to her family members. There were times when she did not sleep the entire day because she had to meet a deadline and there was too much work to complete for different courses. She had no scope of offering her time to other things than my studies.

Additionally, it was also mentioned by Afra that the academic load during the pandemic got doubled since there were too many weekly assignments and tasks to complete. "I had to do one social study related course as a free elective to fulfil my credits. There I had to go through a good number of reading materials per week to complete one chapter and also had to respond to the online discussion board," she asserted. She also said that reading the materials weekly surely did help her to complete the syllabus on time instead of piling everything up for the last moment reading yet, the pressure was intense since they also had to submit small assignments after two weeks along with completing the activities of other courses. Being a CSE student, with three of her courses there were labs too and each week they had to go through the pre-recorded lab lectures to complete their lab reports and it was not the case that on those days or weeks they could skip the activities of the theory classes. Everything had to be done simultaneously which created too much pressure for them. "We surely did not face so much workload during physical classes", she added. As a result, they had to spend almost all day in front of the screen and doing study and got no free time at all when the semesters were going on.

Thus, the researcher got mixed responses from the participants regarding the time management issue during the online semester where some of them asserted that the online semester significantly contributed in improving their study and sleep schedule and everything was under control for them. Whereas for some, the online semester caused nothing but a very hectic schedule that was only occupied for academic work only.

5.3 Barriers Faced

The narration of the participants' also carried insights of the struggles, challenges and barriers that they went through and had to overcome during online learning. Therefore, the researcher has discussed the overall challengers encountered by the participants under different criteria. Among them, the first criteria deal with the negative aspects that the participants highlighted in their responses while discussing different aspects of online teaching and learning. One of the most prominent ones was regarding the maintenance of the quality of the lectures delivered in the pre – recorded and recorded lectures and how effectively teachers were able to make the educational contents as easy and comprehensible for the learners (Subedi et al., 2020). Additionally, the time management issue along with teachers' and learner's engagement in the virtual setting was also mentioned by some of them which they considered as a barrier during their online classes. Furthermore, the participants also commented about the arrangements of the contents delivered in each learning session and talked about the issues they faced while attending classes online (Subedi et al., 2020).

As Fatima mentioned, her university created a different platform for all the academic interactions between teachers and learners. On that platform, teachers uploaded their pre-recorded lectures following the routine and they had to watch all the videos and figure out

whether they had any questions or not. Following that they also had to attend the online discussions via Google meet or zoom and discuss those contents. Even though the attendance was not mandatory initially but participation was highly encouraged yet many of the students did not attend the online discussion sessions which made the teachers really disappointed. As a result, many a time it happened that teachers did not continue the online meeting because the participation was low and those who joined, the teachers asked them to email them regarding those problems which was quite disheartening.

In this regard, Morshed added that due to this tendency of low attendance in the discussion sessions, many of his course instructors stopped providing detailed lectures in the pre-recorded versions so that learners come to the discussion session. He added that many times, it also happened that they did not upload the lecture and started covering the whole content during the online session. Even though he understood that it was done thinking about their own benefits, some of the lectures used to exceed the regular class time and continue for a long time. Also thinking about the learners who had back-to-back classes, the timing of the sessions used to change which seemed problematic to him because such irregularities and lengthiness made them lose their concentration from the class and mess up their routines which was not convenient to him.

Moreover, the communication gap between the instructor and the learners were also highlighted by the participants as one of the challenges during online classroom. They mentioned that in the case of a physical classroom, there was clear interaction between teacher and students which was somehow missing in terms of distance learning. Earlier, when a problem aroused while understanding a certain part of the lecture, learners used to ask teachers instantly about that and through classroom discussion and active participation of the classmates, the concept used to

be very clear to them and there were no further need for talking to the lecturer during consultation hours or via email unless someone was absent in the classroom. However, in online learning this opportunity to learn from classmates was absent and even miscommunication also took place many times.

Even the miscommunication issue between classmates was discussed by Fatima and Tabassum where they mentioned that during group projects or pair assignments, not everyone used to be available due to back-to-back submissions of other courses and constantly changing class schedules. Tabassum elaborated that during one course, they had to submit a 5,000 words term paper and there were 4 members in total in her group. They did such projects earlier too, however, there used to be clear communication among the members since they got to meet face-to-face and discuss everything accordingly. However, during the online semester everyone had different class schedules and no one used to be free to work on the project together as a result the communication gap was always there. Since they were all working separately, at the last moment while compiling things together they all had to struggle and it did not finish well which was disheartening.

Technological issues have been the most prominent barrier highlighted by all the participants since it was the foundation of online learning. Among the issues the most common was the lack of stable internet connection since the speed was always low. Additionally, accessibility to sufficient and effective technological devices and tools were another aspect connected to the barriers. As Salam asserted that after the lockdown started, she immediately left Dhaka and went back to Sirajganj and since it is in the rural area, here she did not have the accessibility to a stable internet connection service who could provide her the speediest

connection. Therefore, she had to face a lot of troubles while attending classes since the connection used to be lost in the middle of the classes or at the beginning of her class.

In this regard, Puja also stated that even though all the lectures used to be recorded and were made available to them yet, once they joined the meeting and did classes with full attention, such disruption significantly affected their interest in learning the topics discussed in the classroom. It also used to waste a lot of time since she had to see everything again which she could have used to complete other course works.

The participants also mentioned how the lack of suitable digital tools made it difficult for them to complete tasks and made the journey very challenging for them. Fatima asserted that since the camera of her laptop did not work properly therefore, she could not keep her camera on throughout the classroom which caused her trouble specially during presentations where she had to speak to the whole classroom and as the speaker it was disrespectful towards the audience, however, she could not really do anything about it since she did not have the option to change her device immediately at that point.

Moreover, it was also mentioned by Fatima that how due to software update issue some of the digital platforms did not function properly due to lack of update which was disheartening since they faced a lot of difficulty while completing their tasks in an alternative manner which could have been done very easily if they had accessibility to up to date devices. “It was really time consuming and drained us completely,” she added.

Other barriers that were brought up by the participants in their responses was how the whole transition in the medium of education affected their behaviour and to what extent they were able to accept the challenges and changes. Their responses reflected how they had a

negative attitude towards adapting to the new mode of education. As Shikdar responded that she was not at all prepared for the online lectures and classes. It was somewhat a culture shock to since she has always been in touch with the traditional pen-paper based education. It is very necessary for her to interact with the teacher and discuss topics and concepts with them during classroom discussion to hold a better understanding of the topics. However, that satisfaction was missing during the online semester.

Additionally, it was mentioned by Afra and Salam that how they faced inconveniences in ensuring a comfortable and suitable place at home to attend classes since there were always noises and too many people walking around while disturbing their concentration. It was also mentioned by Fatima that her parents were not always ready to believe that she has been attending classes. “Often, they used to scold me that why am I always using the devices, it will be harmful for my eyes. They even thought that I have become addicted to using these devices all the time due to lockdown and pandemic and got really worried. I had a hard time explaining to them that due to online education I have no choice but to stick to these devices 24/7”, she further added.

5.4 Differences in Choosing the Future Medium of Education

The responses from the participants regarding their choices regarding the medium of education in the upcoming academic journey consisted of both positive and negative attitudes towards online learning. While many of them conveyed that they have no objection to continue the virtual classes in the coming days as well, some of them specifically those from CSE and Biotechnology background stated that if a balance between online and offline classes are created understanding the learner’s needs according to different course requirements, it would be

beneficial or them. Tabassum mentioned that since they are already near the end of their undergrad journey, they are completing one of the crucial and toughest courses where different concepts are being discussed in every session. Thus, in order to develop a better understanding of these topics, active participation and in-depth discussion are needed with the course teacher as well as among classmates which will ensure better learning. Thus, she believes there should be a mix of online and offline classes since they still have a long way to go in terms of effectively using virtual teaching and learning platforms.

Additionally, Morshed explained that the courses where practical learning and application are more required should be taken through physical classes since without practical implications those concepts can never be taught and understood properly. She had an awful experience while attending lab classes online since she did not learn anything from those classes. There was miscommunication or no communication at all between the learners and teacher which significantly affected their knowledge development. Therefore, she would never want to join lab classes online since she believed there was no chance for them to apply their knowledge practically which is the backbone of a practical class.

Furthermore, learners in support of continuing education online also mentioned some suggestions which they believed would bring significant changes in teaching and learning by ensuring maximum success. Some of them responded that they would like to continue doing online classes since they are getting the opportunity to learn about the usage of technology in the most possible way which is helping them to minimise their academic load. They also highlighted how in the case of developing their research skills, online learning has helped them to explore different sources and sites which they might not have attempted to learn on their own during

in-person classes. Thus, for the further development of their research skills, they would prefer if the authority give more importance in improvising online education system.

As long as the authorities concerned are willing to work for the further development of online education in Bangladesh, I have no problem in continuing our education online in the upcoming days too. Unless we are not continuing the practice, we would not find out how and where we are lacking in the case of developing virtual teaching and learning platforms. Thus, online education should not be discontinued. Rather focus should be given more on how to make it better and more useful for learners in the coming days.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the Findings

The aim of this research was to provide an insight of the struggles, challenges and opportunities encountered by the students of Bangladesh while completing undergraduate education online. Even though the notion of distance learning and use of technology for educational purposes was not an unknown phenomenon to learners of this nation due to the rapid expansion of e-learning in the west, the pandemic certainly pushed the authority to adapt to this mode of teaching and learning by replacing it with the conventional method. Considering the economic condition as well as literacy rate of the country, this sudden transition brought both merits and demerits with it. Both teachers and learners not only faced various types of challenges but also explored different learning opportunities too which created a new hope for development in the educational field as well as the future of the learners. The responses from the participants too provided the same reflection.

From the thorough analysis of participants' responses, some factors have been ascertained among which learners' journey as beginners of virtual learning to advanced or intermediate learners was indeed praiseworthy. Even though it was evident from their responses that this whole journey of struggle to success was very overwhelming for them, they also mentioned about the brighter sides as well which included exploring new ways of learning, use of different learning platforms and tools etc. It was also understood from their responses how they were able to create a clear distinction between what they need and what they are getting from online classes and what should and should not be done to make the whole learning a success. Furthermore, the narration of all participants experiences somehow or other parallels to each other which helped the researcher to represent the overall situation of the undergrad learners of Bangladesh in this

study. Thus, this study will be a medium for the practitioners to know about what the learners need and how much improvement and development are needed to make online learning a success. The participants' response will help them to rethink their policies and make necessary changes in the system so that maximum learning objectives can be achieved.

6.2 Recommendations

It is indeed a challenging task for the policymakers and educational authorities to bring immediate changes and developments in the case of online teaching since the nation has never faced such a medium of education earlier. Yet, the researcher would like to drop some suggestions which could bring effective changes in the field of online education in Bangladesh while making education more useful for the learners:

- Because of the sheer number of the equipment held by universities, technical problems are still the ones that are the most challenging to resolve. Universities have undoubtedly made attempts to address these issues and enhance the functionality of the E-learning systems. Poor internet connections, transmission failure, and a lack of sufficient digital devices continue to be issues for students, especially those who live in rural regions or come from low-income households. Institutions could develop programs to address these kinds of demands and thereby aid learners who encounter such circumstances in their academic pursuits.

- In order to promote students' involvement and participation in the educational process, it is crucial that teachers are accessible and receptive to their needs. Teachers should seek solutions to conceptual concerns students encounter so that they can access the information provided during classes (for example, by providing supplemental materials).

- If solutions cannot be found, teachers should at the very least be understanding and refrain from punishing students for these types of difficulties. When given responses like "there is absolutely nothing I capable of doing to assist you" or "it is your responsibility," students' motivation is reduced, their level of dissatisfaction rises, and their likelihood of dropping out increases.

References:

Aboagye, E., Yawson, J. A., & Appiah, K. N. (2020). COVID-19 and E-Learning: the Challenges of Students in Tertiary Institutions. *Social Education Research*, 109–115. https://doi.org/10.37256/ser.122020422

Abou El-Seoud, M. S., Taj-Eddin, I. A., Seddiek, N., El-Khouly, M. M., & Nosseir, A. (2014). E-Learning and Students' Motivation: A Research Study on the Effect of E-Learning on Higher Education. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, *9*(4), 20. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v9i4.3465

Ahmed, M. (2020). Tertiary Education during Covid-19 and Beyond. The Daily Star.

Ali, W. (2020). Online and Remote Learning in Higher Education Institutes: A Necessity in light of COVID-19 Pandemic. *Higher Education Studies, 10*(3), 16. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p16

Al-Kumaim. N., Alhazmi, A., Mohammed, F., Gazem, N., Shabbir, M., & Fazea, Y. (2021). Exploring the Impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on University Students' Learning Life: An Integrated Conceptual Motivational Model for Sustainable and Healthy Online Learning. *Sustainability, 13,* 2546.

Al-Tammemi, AB., Akour, A., & Alfalah, L. (2020). Is It Just About Physical Health? An Online Cross-Sectional Study Exploring the Psychological Distress Among University Students in Jordan in the Midst of COVID-19 Pandemic. *Front Psychol*. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.562213. PMID: 33240151; PMCID: PMC7677563. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362568878_From_Crises_to_Opportunities_in_Higher_Education_in_Bangladesh_The_Dhaka_University_Journal_of_Linguistics_1427-28_143-166

Anwar, K., & Adnan, M. (2020). Online learning amid the COVID – 19 pandemic: Students perspectives. *J. Pedagog. Res., 6,* 45 – 51.

"Brac University joins Open Society University Network as an inaugural". (2020). https://www.bracu.ac.bd/news/brac-university-joins-open-society-university-network-inaugural-member

Cranfield, D. J., Tick, A., Venter, I. M., Blignaut, R. J., & Renaud, K. (2021). Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Online Learning during COVID-19—A Comparative Study. Education Sciences, *11*(8), 403. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080403

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2014*). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage publications.

Creswell, J.W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating Quantitative.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Dutta, S., & Smita, M. K. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Tertiary Education Bangladesh: Students' Perspectives. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 8,* 53-68. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344103553_The_Impact_of_COVID19_Pandemic_onTertiary_Education_in_Bangladeshh_Students'_Perspectives

"Education Responses to COVID – 19: Embracing Digital Learning and Online Collaboration". *https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/surveys/survey-on-online-teaching.htm*

Express, BRACU. "Bracu Express." BRACU Express - Free Courses in Coursera for Brac..., 12 June 2021, https://www.facebook.com/bracuexpress/posts/free-courses-in-coursera-for-brac-university-studentsin-response-to-the-current-/2802922969790095/.

Ferri, F., Grifoni, P., & Guzzo, T. (2020). Online Leaning and Emergency Remote Teaching in COVID-19 Pandemic: Opportunities and Challenges in Emergency Situations. *Societies, 10*(4), *86.* doi:10.3390/soc10040086

Huque, S. M. R., Aziza, T., Farzana, T., & Islam, M. N. (2021). Strategies to Mitigate the COVID-19 Challenges of Universities in Bangladesh. *Handbook of Research on Strategies and Interventions to Mitigate COVID-19 Impact on SMEs,* 563–587. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7436-2.ch028

Islam, M. Saiful, & Mahmud, A K M F. (2022). Public and Private University Students' Perceptions towards Online Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic in Rajshahi, Bangladesh. *J. Res. Agric. Anim. Sci., 9*(9), 57-66. http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4235758

Jahan, A., Khan, R., Roshid, M., Haider, M. (2022). From Crises to Opportunities in Higher Education in Bangladesh. *The Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics*, 14(27 – 28), 143 – 166.

Jahim, M.M. (2020, April, 20). Govt. Allows Private Universities to Take Online Classes, Exams. *The Business Standard*. https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/education/govt-allows-private-universities-take-online-classes-exams-75760

Kamol, E. (2020, November 7). Private university enrolment dips. *New Age.* https://www.newagebd.net/article/120938/private-university-enrolment-dips

Kapasia, N., Paul, P., Roy, A., Saha, J., Zaveri, A., Mallick, R., Barman, B., Das, P., & Chouhan, P. (2020). Impact of lockdown on learning status of undergraduate and postgraduate

students during COVID-19 pandemic in West Bengal, India. Children and Youth Services Review, 116, 105194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105194

Kvale, S. (1996, March 14). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing (First)*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Khan, M. M., Rahman, S. M. T., & Islam, S. T. A. (2021). Online Education System in Bangladesh during COVID-19 Pandemic. *Creative Education, 12*(02), 441–452. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2021.122031

Marinoni, G., Van't Land, H., & Jensen, T. (2020, August 14). "*The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education around the World. International Association of Universities"* . https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_covid19_and_he_survey_report_final_may_2020.pdf

Meo, S. A., Abukhalaf, D. A. A., Alomar, A. A., Sattar, K., & Klonoff, D. C. (2020). COVID-19 Pandemic: Impact of Quarantine on Medical Students' Mental Wellbeing and Learning Behaviors. *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences, 36*(COVID19-S4). https://doi.org/10.12669/pjms.36.covid19-s4.2809

Mete, J. K., Das, R., & Chowdhury, A. (2022). Post – Covid Challenges and Opportunities for Higher Education. *Education Sciences, 15*(8), 302.

Saeed, S. (2020, October 24). COVID-19 has exacerbated inequality in higher education. *University World News.* https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201023103200335

Sobaih, A. E. E., Hasanein, A. M., & Abu Elnasr, A. E. (2020). Responses to COVID-19 in Higher Education: Social Media Usage for Sustaining Formal Academic

Communication in Developing Countries. *Sustainability*, *12*(16), 6520. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166520

Subedi, S., Nayaju, S., Subedi, S., Shah, S. K., & Shah, J. M. (2020). Impact of E-Learning Among Children and Adolescents during COVID-19 School Closure: The Importance of Parent-Child Discussion. *J. affective Discord, 279,* 353-360. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2020.10.106

Suresh. M., Priya, V., & Gayathri, R. (2018). Effect of e – learning on academic performance of undergraduate students. *Today, 10,* 1797 – 1800.

"Survey on Online and Distance Learning – Results." *School Education Gateway*, https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/surveys/survey-on-online-teaching.htm.

Yusuf, N., & Al – Banawi, N. (2013). The Impact of Changing Technology: The Case of E – learning. *Contemp. Issues Educ. Res. 6,* 173 – 180.

Appendix

Appendix – A

Questionnaire

1. Kindly write down your full name. (It will not be revealed throughout the study)
2. Kindly mention your educational intuition's name. (It will not be revealed throughout the study)
3. In which academic year you are currently in?
4. Are you aware of the concept of distance learning? Kindly share your brief insight on this.
5. How long have you been familiar with online classes and lectures?
6. Are you comfortable with this new approach to learning? Justify your opinion by sharing your experience.
7. Do you consider yourself as technologically challenged or competent person? Kindly explain the reasons behind your claim.
8. Do you feel that online classes and assessment procedure somehow made you question your capabilities as a learner? If yes, how?
9. Do you think physical classroom had more things to offer in terms of teaching and learning which somehow gets limited in online classroom? Why or why not?
10. Did you feel that online learning somehow affected your interest towards learning? Did you consider such change as something normal?
11. Kindly mention your insight on how online teaching actually helped the learners meet with their expected learning outcomes.
12. Was this whole process of online learning being convenient to you? Please justify your position with some explanation.
13. Did you find any positive aspect while experiencing online learning? If so, what was it and how did it benefit you?
14. Mention two/three major concerns you had regarding online learning.

15. Kindly share how overwhelming this whole online learning journey was for you and what were the steps you took to deal with the whole situation.
16. Do you believe that our teachers were well prepared for conducting classes online? Why or why not?
17. What is your expectation from the concerned authority regarding the improvement of distance education in Bangladesh? Do you think enough manpower exist in the nation who can help to overcome with the existing issues concerning online education in Bangladesh? Kindly share your thoughts on this.

Appendix - B

Participant Consent Form

Research Title: Challenges and Opportunities of Completing Undergraduate Education Online: Case Study of Public and Private University Students in Bangladesh.

Brief Description of the Research: This study focuses on understanding the perception and preference of the undergraduate students of Bangladesh regarding online education since the majority of them had to complete or still completing their studies online while going through different challenges and exploring different learning opportunities too. The responses gathered from participants' responses will highlight different challenges and struggles encountered by them, and to what extent the practice of online education was needed to be brought into the system. Considering the overall experience of the participants, the researcher aims to address various issues and challenges perceived by different groups of learners who pursued or are still pursuing their undergraduate degree under different public and private universities in Bangladesh. Because the mode of teaching as well as assessment varies institution wise, learners too are dealing with a variety of issues while continuing online learning. Based on those issues, this study will seek to present a student voice in the research field so that more student friendly approaches can be adopted by the policymakers to make online education effective in Bangladesh.

For collecting the data, semi-structed interview questions will be designed and circulated among the participants online. Considering the covid-19 restrictions and the schedule of both the researcher as well as the participants, circulating Google Form among participants seemed the most convenient approach for collecting the data. The researcher aims to collect data from at

least 10 participants and all the interview questions will be related to the research aim only. None of the participants' personal details will be revealed throughout the study. Even their names will be replaced with pseudonyms and all their inputs and narrations will be presented under those pseudonyms. Additionally, the participants are allowed to withdraw from participating in the study at any time whenever they might feel their identity, privacy and security is being violated.

Consent Statement:

I am agreeing to be a part of this research and I have been well informed about my rights of withdrawing from my participation at any moment and I will not be required to provide any explanation for my withdrawal. I also understand that some of the personal data might be collected from me for completing this research.

By signing this form, I am confirming that I was well aware and understood all the procedure and the purpose of this study.

Name:

Signature:

Date: