

Non-academic online activities among Bangladeshi University students: Case Study

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Abstract:-

Objectives: E-learning has become the mandatory component of all educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities in and around the world due to the pandemic crisis of COVID-19. Students are not busy now. They are spending time in online. This study examines the non-academic online activities of public university students in Bangladesh.

Methods: The study is qualitative-explorative. Data has been collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. That was qualitatively thematic analysed through manual coding to achieve the research objectives. The sample was taken from 20 Students of 10 public universities in Bangladesh for case study by purposive sampling technique from July 5 to July 15, 2020.

Findings and Conclusion: The findings of the study shows, that students are engaged in online activities, both productive and non-productive. Especially focus on non-academic online activities. We found that leisure time activities, Soft skills development, spending time in online and exceptional thinking from academic area of students. However, they are facing different problems. Finally, some solutions are provided in this paper.

Keywords: COVID-19, E-learning, Online Course, Online learning, online activities.

1. Introduction

Online activities refer to by using internet system a thing that a person or group does or has done. COVID 19, is a virus which is now engulfing the planet that has started its journey from China. People are concerned about the protection of their lives with the best health facilities in the world. This pandemic has been shaking the world simultaneously and disrupting life around the globe. Now the principal concern of us is to survive in the world safely.

COVID-19 was declared a global public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020, and a pandemic on March 11 2020 [1]. According to new research (Khan, 2020), the coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) has developed not only a global health concern but also tremendous problems in the economic and educational sectors. Institutions have been closed due to fear of Corona primarily due to the fact that students cannot maintain social distancing and cannot abide by prevention measures.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has advanced rapidly, affecting the entire process and system, including education. The use of the most sophisticated tools is not limited to a classroom; instead it is possible to access mobile learning anytime and anywhere. E-learning is well described as 'instruction provided on a digital platform (such as a desktop computer, laptop computer, tablet or smartphone) to facilitate learning' through the use of both material and instructional methods [3].

E-learning was conceived as an electronically controlled process or mode education through the internet and its technologies [4]. E-learning is becoming increasingly relevant, with technological advancements and learners' rising perceptions of online courses. It has become a mandatory component of all educational institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities around the world as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The dangerous circumstance has flipped the teaching cycle offline [5]. Nichols (2003) considers e-learning synonymous with online learning which is exclusively simplified by the internet, accessible by using technological tools that are either web-based, web-distributed or web-capable. Students of graduate and undergraduate levels are the future human resources for a country, so it need to be identified their non-academic online activities in the lockdown period. Hence, this study explores, the non-academic online based leisure activities of Public University students in Covid19 situation and find out the obstacle behind their e-learning.

2. Back ground

Research indicates that online learning has been shown to increase retention of information, and take less time, meaning the changes coronavirus have caused might be here to stay [6]. In 2001, MIT faculty members offered Open Courseware, which providing access to the educational materials of nearly 2,300 MIT courses to over 200 million people around the world [1].

The first two cases of COVID-19 in Bangladesh were confirmed by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) on March 8 2020 [7]. According to UNESCO data, globally, 1.2 billion learners (68.0 per cent of the world's total enrolled learners) were affected due to the education institute closure in 144 countries. Bangladesh is no exception from this. Due to the effect of deadly virus, all educational institutions in Bangladesh have remained closed since March 17, 2020 [8]. The academic institutions in Bangladesh are experiencing long term closure due to the fear of COVID-19 pandemic.

University is a higher educational institution in Bangladesh; students usually prefer public universities and medical colleges to pursue their higher education. According to the University Grant Commission Bangladesh (UGC), there are 46 public universities in Bangladesh and about 50,000 students admitted each year [9].

As now students cannot go to their institutions, what are they doing in this lockdown period? Whether students spend their leisure activities with mobile phones, chatting and unnecessary tasks or doing online courses, workshops and internships. There are plenty of researchers about E-learning and COVID-19. Nevertheless, no researchers focus on the non-academic online activities of students and the constraints beyond during the lockdown period of coronavirus in Bangladesh. In a developing country like Bangladesh where the education sector has roared recently, there is an urgent need to explore and evaluate the student's activities of online during COVID 19.

Countries of the world fighting with the pandemic, doing things online have become new normal. Universities also switch to online learning. However, in our country, all students do not have internet access. Moreover, the cost of the internet in our country is overpriced. The main point against online course in developing countries is insufficient internet access with reliable speed. But if they do attend lectures, the experience is highly inefficient since they have difficulty following the lesson, since the network sometimes breaks down and cannot interact effectively with the instructors. This problem gets worse for students who visited or resided in the village during a pandemic due to weak internet connectivity. Online courses often hinder class participation since most students do not own computers or laptops. A smartphone cannot do assignments and tasks. [10]. Researchers suggest that, Online learning can be useful in digitally advanced countries [11].

So, it can be assumed that students of public universities in Bangladesh convert their valuable time to valueless because they do not have excellent internet facilities. As youth people are vital for our societal development, so it is necessary to find out their activities in a lockdown situation.

3. Methods and Materials

This research was conducted as part of a larger study examining the opportunities of the lockdown situation of Covid-19 in Bangladesh for non-academic online activities in nationwide under 10 public university students as telephone-based qualitative case study.

In the current lockdown situation, when no one is leaving the house for safety purposes and considering the overall situation, a phone call interview is the best way to get raw data. We have collected data from 20 students of different ages, different genders, and from different public universities of Bangladesh, those who are living in rural and urban area. Data has been collected from 5 July to 15 July 2020. Among 20 students there was 50% male and rest of the people were female. Appropriate methodology has been applied by the researcher to collect valid and reliable data and to analyse the information accurately to arrive at correct decisions and conclusions. The research is exploratory in

nature where phone call interviews as case study are used as the research design. The Design of phone call interview as case study investigates the goal of research by collecting real data. Informal discussion and personal observation have been incorporated into our analysis. Semi-structured questions were used for interviews. As our native language is Bengali, we asked questions in this language.

The case study questionnaire was as followed: Personal details, how students spend their online leisure time, skill development and impediments behind their learning.

The research team consisted of two members (one graduate student and Undergraduate student) for conducting and collecting data through in-depth interviews via mobile phone calls. In this process, researchers were trained in establishing rapport, minimizing interviewer bias, using probing questions, managing transitions, and determining when they had sufficient information to move to the next question. The data of this qualitative research have been processed manually to write the findings based on thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

This study exposed the non-academic online activities of university students in Bangladesh during COVID19. Throughout the process of taking in-depth interviews and data analysis phase, various types of information were identified due to diverse cultural, geographical as well as demographic variations. In the present study, 20 in-depth interviews were conducted. 50% of the study participants were male and rest of the participants were female. (Table 1)

Table 1: Socio-demographic details of the study participants

| Variable | Level | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|---------|-----------|------------|
| Age (in years) | 18-25 | 20 | 100 |
| Gender | Male | 10 | 50.0 |
| | Female | 10 | 50.0 |
| Occupation | Student | 20 | 100 |
| Residence | Rural | 10 | 50.0 |
| | Urban | 10 | 50.0 |

Leisure time activities: Leisure time refers to free from compulsory activities like class, office duty etc. As here we find the activities of the students of public universities during the COVID 19 lockdown period. In this period, students are engaged in productive activities. Such as reading books, doing online courses in multiple learning platforms. They are learning Excel, SPSS, Data Science and project management etc. from Coursera, Udemy and cybersecurity.

A student says, "He is passing his precious time by doing online courses known as e-learning as well as developing a web site. He has already completed different distance learning courses through Internet service." (Case: 01, Age: 22 years old)

A girl who is a graduate student of the Department of Archeology at the University of Comilla. She spends time doing household chores, reading novels, and learning English in Online. (Case: 04, Age: 23 years old)

A 2nd year student at the Al Fiqh Department of Legal Studies, Islamic University, Kustia. He is doing much stuff in the lockdown era. He says, "I am reading different books that are not related to my academic curriculum." He is developing himself through a variety of productive activities. (Case: 02, Age: 22 years old)

Online time: Though they are spending time online has increased in this lockdown period. Approximately students consume their 9 hours a day on the internet by doing various online activities. Notwithstanding they spent time online 4 to 5 hours a day is normal.

A final year female student at Mawlana Bhashani University of Science and Technology (MBSTU), Tangail, Bangladesh. She is increasing her skills by taking online courses and passing the time by playing games with my siblings, and spending almost 6 hours a day doing online activities. (Case: 5, Age: 24 years old)

A student who is studying Sociology at Rajshahi University, Rajshahi. He spends almost 12 hour's online every day (Case: 09, Age: 20 years old)

A Student of Soil, Water and Environment Discipline in Khulna University. He spends leisure time at present in the lockdown situation of Covid-19 with books and online activities. His hobby is reading books. Spends almost 4 hours in online activities. (Case: 10, 23 years old)

Soft skills development: Soft skills, generally described as skills that enable someone to communicate efficiently and in harmony with others, are essential to organizations and can have an influence on culture, thought, leadership, attitudes and behaviours. Students nowadays in lockdown time, doing online courses to enhance soft skills development. They are learning newly emerged things. Six Sigma, Project management, leadership and English spoken courses are good examples of soft skills development.

A student of University doing the course, namely English Spoken, hosted by a leading online educational platform in Bangladesh 10-minute school. She thinks this

course will help her in her future life. This course improves her speaking English. Another student did a course in Basic Arabic, and he can write as well as speak Arabic better than before. (Case: 04, Age: 23 years old)

A student has already completed different distance learning courses through the Internet service, such as Computer communication skill, Excel for Business, HTML, PHP etc. He is currently doing a course called Six Sigma on the famous online learning platform Coursera. Which will increase his soft skills. (Case: 01, Age: 22 years old)

A female student has already completed a myriad of online learning courses. For example, Chinese for beginners, COVID-19: What You Need to Know, Meditation: A way to achieve your goals in your life, Planning, Auditing and Maintaining Enterprise Systems, Introduction to Project Management, Create a Resume and Cover Letter with Google Doc. (Case: 05, Age: 24 years old)

Outside thinking from the academic field: Students have been gaining diversity knowledge and thinking out of academic areas. These kinds of thinking raise the level of knowledge.

A study respondent from textile engineering has completed Excel for Business, HTML, PHP courses from Coursera which is not relevant to his academic field, he did these for enhancing his skill in web design and development. (Case: 01, Age: 22 years old)

Another student enrolled in a course in Basic Arabic language although he is a student of fiqh and legal studies. So, in lockdown students do a variety of activities, and that moves away in diverging directions to involve a variety of aspects. (Case: 02, Age: 22 years old)

Sumaia Akter, Studying Theatre and Performance Studies in Jatiya Kabi Kaji Nazrul Islam University, Mymensingh, Bangladesh. She said, "I am enrolled in numerous courses from Coursera and muktopaath, and doing these to enhance my capability in different fields out of the academic area." She did courses like COVID 19, Quantitative research methodology and Yoga mental health, Positive Psychiatry and Mental Health. These courses help her to keep busy and boost up motivation. (Case: 07, Age: 23 years old)

Online based activities:

As students are in lockdown, they spend time in online activities. We mentioned above approximately students consume their 9 hours a day on the internet by doing various online activities.

- **Engagement in Social media:** Students are involved in social media more than usual time. It is

also an online activity, and not all students pass their time on Facebook by doing unnecessary scrolling, chatting, meme sharing or consuming time in YouTube by watching troll videos. Among 9 hours of online activity, in social media, they consume almost 4 hours per day whereas 2 hours non-productive time, for communication and entertainment.

- **Make productive time online:** Productive time which is useful and effective, not wasted time. Students use social media daily 4 hours where 2 hours are productive. Furthermore, they are doing different e-learning courses from online platforms, and they consume 5 hours for distance learning. However, they are using online time in a productive manner. Busy with productivity means free from any psychological stress and tension.

Desire goal: As we know, students are making their quarantine and lockdown time productive, so, they have some goals behind their e-learning. They can learn a lot of new things which will help these in practical and professional life. Such as, English and Arabic language courses make them fluent in speaking as well as writing. So, this language skill will help them in future. On the other hand, those who learnt Excel, that will help him in any kind of calculation, like a family budget.

A student told us that, "I am doing these courses for the advancement of my personal skill and it should be noted that most of the courses are not connected to my academic subjects". He thinks these courses are going to help him in his professional and practical life because he can learn a lot of new things. (Case: 01, Age: 22 years old)

Student of Soil, Water and Environment Discipline in Khulna University. He said, "I have enrolled in some online courses linked with my academic field, such as Sustainable Agricultural Land Management, Global Environment management. These will help me a lot for bolstering my knowledge in the academic discipline. Apart from this, I am doing courses from Muktopaath which are related to technology." Technology courses are basic computer and projector management. Those will help him in practical life and job. (Case: 10, Age: 21 years old)

Much involvement in virtual life: There is a paradox. Students are involved in 9 hours a day online. That means they are much dependent on virtual life. This can create distance between that student and family members. It leads to isolation socially. Social isolation can cause several effects such as physical, emotional, mental and psychological issues. This can, in turn, lead to depression, anxiety and many other problems as well as virtual behaviour has a high impact on real life.

As they are unable to go outside and typically spend most of their time on these online social platforms, it can reduce the number of face-to-face interaction amongst the youths—the possibility of students getting addicted to their virtual world. Too much sitting in front of a PC and mobile can cause damage to eye power [19].

Barriers behind e-learning: It is clear from the above statement that students are involved in online activities, most of them using productively. Furthermore, some impediments exist behind their e-learning.

The first problem is the internet speed. Most of the students in our country are mobile internet users. But they do not get 2G speed in village homes let alone 3G or 4G. According to Speed test Global Index, June 2020 in mobile internet Bangladesh ranked 134th in the world [20].

Another problem is the higher cost of the internet. Such as, in popular brand Grameenphone people have to buy 12GB, TK 498, Validity: 30 Days and 1 GB, 189 TK (21). Which is a clear burden for a student. There is no Wi-Fi or Broadband line in rural areas of Bangladesh; for this reason, students are bound to use mobile internet. Furthermore, in area Rural areas students do not have access to good devices, i.e. high configuration smartphones, computers as well as many students are not able to run the apps or website which is needed for online learning. Unfamiliar and complicated to them.

A 23 years public administration student of Barisal University has enrolled in a course on Udemy (a leading online learning platform) related to cyber security, but unable to complete it because of trouble. His mobile device does not have a good configuration, it is too slow, he cannot get a 3G network to do any online courses, and due to high mobile internet costs cannot do skill development courses in online. (Case: 03, Age: 23 years old)

Another student of 1st year of Water Resources Engineering (WRE) in Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) says that she enrolled in different courses to enrich her knowledge in the academic field. But to connect to the network, she needs to go rooftop, because in her room only 2G is available. (Case: 08, Age: 21 years old)

A study respondent faces obstacles in doing online courses due to the higher mobile internet rates, as there is no broadband access in his village. (Case: 09, Age: 20 years old)

Discussion of findings:

Analyzing themes of case study and problems of students is just not to identify but crucial for policy-making of the government and ensuring the equal human opportunity for everyone. Most importantly, in order to develop a

country, the government needs to focus on e-education and Internet access for all. This case study paper has cleared from the above analysis, students of public universities in Bangladesh are doing productive work by enrolling in different online courses in the lockdown period.

A study suggests that a majority of the students are found to be highly enthusiastic about the online courses. They are eager to participate and interact in the online platforms [12]. 37.5 % of time a day students are engaged in online activities. During that time, 2 hours for Social media and the internet. Additionally, the rest of the day, they are doing online courses. By doing online courses, they are growing their skills and capabilities beyond the academic field. These skills will help them in their future practical and professional life. But some problems are much involvement in virtual life. Excessive involvement in virtual life and the artificial environment is deleterious for physical and mental health. It leads to mental stress, uneasiness, social isolation. Besides, it can create problems with the eye as well as back pain. In Bangladesh there are lack of technical resources, lack of confidence to practice computer applications coupled with absence of infrastructure such as electricity and good device and stable network in many parts of the country are the most difficult issues to address [15].

However, for engaging e-learning, students are facing many barriers like higher cost, speed of internet, unavailability of network and access to devices. In public universities of Bangladesh, most of the students come from marginal areas like hill districts, river islands and other remote areas. Where mobile and internet networks are unavailable, or only GPRS and EDGE are available. Mobile internet speed is slowing down in Bangladesh amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to an international study, which has found download speed in the country is the lowest among 42 markets it has covered. Download speed came down to 7.8 Mbps in the last week of March 2020 [17].

No broadband internet connection is there. We know that as there is no broadband internet line in rural areas, students need to rely on mobile internet. However, it is a matter of concern that the higher cost of the mobile internet. Which is unbearable for the students. Because most of the students are poor or from the middle class family. In Bangladesh, the economy is growing but so too is inequality. According to an analysis of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh's national poverty rate rose to 35 per cent in 2020 from 24.3 per cent in 2016 due to the adverse impacts of the coronavirus pandemic [16]. There is no sim for students or student's friendly telecom companies.

Apart from that, students do not have access to devices. To do online courses, they need an excellent configuration smartphone, desktop or laptop. There are different online MOOC organizations, like Coursera, Udemy, edx, Alison etc. Online courses mainly conducted by websites or apps. These websites and apps are awkward to use and unaccustomed for that students are showing their

unwillingness to enroll in courses. Students have a lack of digital literacy.

Hopefully, these findings will catch the eye of policymakers and they will think about the marginal areas of Bangladesh, where students cannot access e-learning.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

The core outcome of the study are Online learning is a new phenomenon in education, and most of the students are still not efficient in this system. In this COVID 19 lockdown period e-learning process became more popular. Students are enrolled in different courses to bolster their skills in the out of the academic field. Identifying the problems behind e-learning is essential to make skilled human resources for our country. Because in the lockdown period students are facing mental health problem. A finding from the web-based cross-sectional study indicates that more than two-thirds of the students reported moderate to serious depression (82.4%) and anxiety (87.7%) [22]. If students utilize their time in productive way, then they can get release from depression and anxiety. Earlier studies in Bangladesh observed the presence of both depression and anxiety among students in higher academia. As we mentioned above the online-based non-academic activities of students during lockdown and problems which are facing behind their learning, now we are going to provide some corrective measures to overcome those impediments.

For conducting online classes, some basic requirements must be available to the students. The prime criteria are digital devices, lower cost and availability of network. Devices mean a personal desktop computer, laptop or at least a smartphone. Uninterrupted high-speed internet is also a primary necessity for the online class as the users have to stream online videos on learning platforms. Without high-speed internet, students might browse on the internet and use Facebook, WhatsApp or other social media but cannot stream videos. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 shows that only 37.6 per cent of households in the country have access to the internet. It also found that only 5.6 per cent of households have a computer [18]. Only internet connection is not adequate for remote learning, it requires uninterrupted high-speed internet. Lack of technological proficiency is still a significant issue; students need to be trained on digital literacy, like how to browse websites, how to conduct the internet and computer.

Minimize the cost of the internet. As in our country, the price of mobile internet is very high. Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) should take necessary steps to reduce the price of mobile internet and the availability of mobile networks as well as the broadband connection in marginal areas of Bangladesh. The BTRC is responsible for regulating all matters related to

telecommunications of Bangladesh. Government may introduce special sim for students where they can purchase the internet at a cheap cost. Students do not have access to devices to enroll in online courses, and responsible authority can provide access to devices at free or lower cost to the needy students. A national online education policy is needed now immediately.

These issues must be addressed by policy makers to accommodate all students and ensure equal opportunity for all regarding e-learning. The government must remember that students are the future of the nation. So, the government has to work in such a way that all students can get facilities easily in order to build up their skill and to make the leisure time effective.

6. Limitations of the Study and future scope:

People are not beyond drawbacks. During the collecting data and writing paper some limitations arise in front of us:

- We have collected data by phone call interview. But here some people have shown their unwillingness to provide data.
- In offline we were unable to go to the houses of some people and in this lockdown situation it was risky to take interview in live.
- This kind of research need a quantitative study with large number of population on the issue.

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