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Covid19 - Consumption Nexus: A Bangladesh Scenario

Nayeema Reza^{*}, and Shahriar Kabir[†]

Abstract

The article explores the nature of the impact of Covid19 on house-hold consumption of Dhaka city. By doing a survey of 200 residents, and graphically analyzing the survey data, the study identifies that Covid19 caused income loss, drop in consumption, shifts of consumption preference towards healthcare and online usage, and inclination to cashless transaction and online purchase. Thus, the study suggests that Covid19 impacts on consumption ability as well as consumer preference for consumption category, mode of payment, and method of purchase.

Keywords: Covid19, Consumption, Pandemic, Economy, Income drop.

1. Introduction

Despite the latest inventions and cutting-edge modern technology, when it comes to pandemics and infectious diseases, their impact has been seen to be difficult to contain throughout history. Infectious diseases are generally referred to as diseases that are contagious, meaning they can spread from one person to the other easily. For such diseases, the risk and stakes are higher in comparison to non-infectious diseases as it can spread among people easily.

History has been marked by such diseases throughout and plenty of studies have been conducted to understand how it affects economies, mental health and beyond. When it comes to economic impact, in the 1900s, the flu was seen to cause a 6% loss in GDP and an 8% decrease in consumption (Barro et al., 2020). This loss was seen to take place globally across 42 countries. Furthermore, the Spanish flu that also took place in the 1900s, caused Sweden's GDP to drop coupled with a 5% increase in unemployment (Barro et al., 2020). For SARS, GDP declines by 3% in China and 4.75% in Hong Kong, while for MERS, GDP declines by 0.7% in South Korea (Tanaka, 2022).

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According to literature, the effects of an infectious disease on consumption can be drastic. A previous study conducted on China observed that pandemics or diseases such as MERS did have severe impact on consumption (Jung et al., 2016). Severe impact is also indicated for the Covid19-consumption nexus; however, the nature of the impact is relatively unclear (Wang et al., 2020). This study aims to bridge the gap by exploring the impact of Covid19 on household consumption.

To understand how Covid19 impacts household consumption, a survey was conducted to collect data from individuals across Dhaka city of Bangladesh. A total of 200 people were surveyed, and data related to their pre- and Covid19 consumption, employment status, income change and consumption priority was captured. Overall, the effects of Covid19 on consumption is little studied in the context of Bangladesh. Hence, this paper aims to contribute to the literature by identifying some possible nature of the impact of Covid19 on consumption.

The study observes that 25% of the total respondents report of suffering from declined income due to Covid19, while 36% of the total respondents report of suffering from consumption decline. The amount of consumption drop was commonly from Tk10,000 to Tk50,000 per month (since the survey was done online, mostly high/middle income group was reached in the survey). Besides, apart from grocery shopping and rent payment, the priority of consumption categories during Covid19 changed more towards lifesaving, health protection and online usage compared to previous priority of transport, restaurant food and clothes. In addition, more people preferred cashless transactions and online shopping compared to the pre-Covid19 period. Covid19 changed consumption ability as well as consumer preference for consumption category, mode of payment and method of purchase. The change in consumption category may not sustain in the long run (transportation and restaurant may return as priority category); however, mode of payment (cashless transaction) and method of purchase (online shopping) may partially sustain.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on past pandemics and identifies the literature gap. Section 3 explains the methodology of the study, followed by results and discussion in Section 4. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review

Since the beginning of mankind, the world has been hit by several pandemics. The first among the most significant pandemics would be the Antoine Plague (165 AD), followed by the Bubonic Plague (541-542), The

Black Death (1346-1353), Third Cholera (1852-1860), Flu (originally the Asiatic or Russian Flu, 1889-1890), Sixth Cholera (1910 – 1911), Flu (also known as Spanish flu, 1918 – 1920), SARS (2002 – 2004), Swine Flu (2009 – 2010), HIV/AIDS (2005 – 2012) and the most recent Covid19 (2019 – present). Besides pandemics, the world has also been affected by several epidemics as well. The recent ones among many would be the West African meningitis outbreak (2009 – 2010), Avian influenza epidemic (2013 – 2019) and Ebola (2018 – 2020).

Among these diseases, the flu resulted in a 6% GDP loss and 8% decrease in consumption across 42 countries between the years 1901 and 1929 (Barro et al., 2020). The Spanish Flu pandemic specifically (1918) was a devastating one, as it affected 500 million people and led to 50 to 100 million deaths. Due to the pandemic, in Sweden, the economy was severely impacted. The GDP of the country was seen decreasing by 5% along with surges in unemployment. However, a study conducted in Sweden was not able to conclude the effect of the pandemic on individual income (Karlsson et al., 2014). Similarly, SERS and MERS were seen to negatively affect many countries as well. The tourism, accommodation, food and transportation sectors were seen to greatly decline, and this led to a reduction in supplies and eventually a reduction in GDP by 3% in China, 4.5% in Hong Kong, and 0.7% in South Korea (Tanaka, 2022). Thus, literature indicates income decline during any pandemic. The current study examines the income decline at the micro level.

Besides GDP decline, disasters in general have been observed to have impacts on consumption as well (UNISDR, 2009). Looking at different diseases that have impacted countries in different ways, such as consumption, the Swine Flu can be considered. A study conducted in Malaysia shows significant changes in behavior and consumption preference as a response to this virus (Goodwin, et al., 2009). It was found that 26% of people reported using public transportation less in order to be safe, and 49% purchased or intended to purchase items essential for protection against the virus, such as face masks and food (Goodwin, et al., 2009).

Against that backdrop, the latest pandemic and its impact on the world can be expected. The Covid19 pandemic and its impact is prevalent across the Americas, South-East Asia, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, Western Pacific and several other regions (WHO, 2020). According to WHO, as of October 2020, a total of 34,804,348 cases of the virus have been confirmed. The number of infections is known to increase every day

and vaccines for this virus have just recently become available across the first world countries (Tanne, 2020).

The virus itself has till date affected countries worldwide; it has challenged the medical systems of countries, impacted economies, financial markets and households (Stanciu, et al., 2020). The way it has impacted countries has varied from one to the other. To mitigate these impacts, countries have tried to implement several measures – ranging from raising awareness of the need for social distancing to physical lockdowns of regions. It also led to governments dispatching stimulus packages to help sustain businesses as a result.

In the case of China, three months after the pandemic started, the overall consumption was seen to decrease by 27% (Chen et al., 2020). Among this, consumption of durable goods decreased by 35% and discretionary goods by 29%. A significant change was observed in the consumption of dining and entertainment with a 64% decrease and travel related consumption, with a decrease of 59%. This shows that due to the restrictions and with people being confined to staying in their homes, dining outside had become less of a priority or necessity. The same applies to travel expenditure, as due to the situation, it was not possible to travel, especially for entertainment purposes (Chen et al., 2020).

For the UK, it has been observed that consumption was affected due to the significantly increasing difference between income and expenditure (Piyapromdee, et al., 2020). Households that had an increase in this difference were not able to meet the cost of their expenses, and as such, their consumption decreased. Interestingly, households that possess liquid assets were seen to be able to sustain on their assets in the short run. Furthermore, households with higher earnings were predictably able to manage expenses better and in comparison, households with low income found it difficult to sustain themselves during the pandemic (Piyapromdee et al., 2020).

The pattern of behavior change during Covid19 is close to the behavior change seen with Swine Flu (Laato et al., 2020). People were seen to demonstrate behavior of making unusual purchases, i.e., buying items they normally would not have bought. It was also observed that there was a connection between the tendency to make such purchases and self-isolation. A possible reason behind this behavioral pattern could be information overload (Laato et al., 2020). As people got exposed to more news on the pandemic, they would make such purchases to feel more in control, as they were in a panic-stricken mental condition. As a result, people tend to do panic buying, and once again, one of the reasons behind this happens is

that people feel like they are in control amid all the changes and chaos happening in the environment (Slovic, 1987). Thus, people's tendency to consume and preference of consumption is seen to alter (Chuang et al., 2015). This has also been observed during Covid19 as well.

A study conducted by Wang, et al. (2020) on respondents from China showed that prior to the pandemic, people would tend to stock up on food supplies that would last for 3.37 days. After the pandemic, this was seen to increase to people stocking up for 7.37 days of food supplies. This resulted in an increase in demand of food and consumption or purchases. Interestingly, people were seen to stock up on food supplies, not because they were afraid that food prices would increase, but because of the reasons mentioned earlier. This indicates that price is not a key factor for consumers during pandemic situations.

In USA, people responded to the uncertainty resulting from the Covid19 situation as well through their consumption pattern (Baker et al., 2020). As the news regarding pandemic spread and lockdown measures were put in place, people started reacting. People were observed to start stocking up on goods, and overall household expenditure was seen to increase by 50% as a result. Furthermore, spending on food items was seen to increase specifically significantly, standing at 7.5% in March 2020 in comparison to the previous year. It is also interesting to note that most of the spending took place through card transactions and not cash. This is also critical to note, post pandemic, many businesses started accepting digital payments only as a precautionary measure. In contrast, spending on entertainment, travel, outside dining etc. decreased, which is consistent with the impact seen in China as well (Baker et al., 2020).

Countries are affected by Covid19 in a diversified way. In response to the situation, the nature of consumption has varied too (Pantanoa et al., 2020). For example, people in Italy were seen to buy a lot of hand sanitizers and surgical masks, resulting in a stock out of those items. On the other hand, in UK, the same was applicable in cases of purchase of toilet tissue. Similar effect was also soon seen across other products that were non-medical. This is a clear deviation from regular purchasing behavior as during normal situations, people would not consume in this manner or volume. It has also been found that during such situations, a lot of people became less sensitive to pricing and were willing to make purchases at a 300% price increase for products. People were also willing to wait in long queues to stock up on products, whereas generally this would cause them to be dissatisfied. In addition, it has also been observed that the mode through which people procure their desired goods has changed too. For example, it has been seen

that due to restrictions in mobility, consumers prefer to make purchases for essential goods at locations closer to where they live or through phone calls or online. This shows that the entire consumption pattern and nature of people change during disasters and similar emergency situations (Pantanoa et al., 2020).

Overall, literature on the impact of Covid19 is not sufficient, and consequently not much detailed in research. However, a few things have been highlighted through various research related to past pandemics and epidemics, showing that besides a nation's GDP and other economic indices, consumption is impacted too. The same has subsequently been indicated for the Covid19 pandemic. Clearly the pandemic has led people to alter their consumption patterns in different ways across various countries. This has led to certain sectors prospering, when essential products were given priority whereas certain sectors, like tourism, retail, entertainment are seen to suffer. Literature is available on how consumption of people has changed for countries like UK, USA and China. However, little research is done on how the pandemic has made changes and caused disruption for consumers in Bangladesh.

As such, it is crucial to better understand the effects of the pandemic in Bangladesh for its future policy precaution. For this, a further dedicated study is required that focuses on empirical evidence. It would be helpful to understand the nature of consumption of the people, the mode in which they prefer to consume during a normal situation and whether the volume of consumption has altered or not during the pandemic. Consumer's preference of products during Covid19 would also help to understand which industries are able to withstand the effects of the virus and which sectors are struggling. With the help of such research, the government, policy makers and business owners would be able to better align their strategies to help sustain economic growth of the country and wellbeing of the people. Developing insights on these aspects of the effect of the pandemic have not yet been explored and there is an existing gap. As such, this paper intends to find more data and evidence in this regard to help in developing strategies and policies for the future and mitigate the shocks caused by the pandemic as much as possible.

3. Methodology

The research uses primary data that has been collected through questionnaire survey of the residents of Dhaka - the capital city of Bangladesh. A total of 200 respondents participated in the survey by

responding online through Google Forms (In-person survey was not possible due to the Pandemic).

The main geographic focus of this survey has been Dhaka city, since the city is the capital city of Bangladesh and has a population of about 2.1 crore people (World Population Review, 2021). The entire population of Bangladesh is 16.6 crore, meaning Dhaka accounts for almost 13% of the total population of the country. Hence, the impact of Covid19 in this region could be used to understand how it has affected such a large urban population.

The monthly consumption of households is captured through a series of questions. The timeline covers both pre- and the pandemic periods. Thus, the dataset offers the understanding of how Covid19 affects the consumption pattern of people living in the capital city compared to the pre-pandemic consumption pattern. It provides new information on the nature of spending of people, for example comparing their online and offline shopping pattern during the Covid19 period. Thus, data regarding people's employment changes, category of consumption, total average spending, and method of purchasing goods has been investigated.

In a research conducted on China; Chen et al. (2020) captures the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on Consumption. Daily consumption pattern dataset was taken from one of the largest bankcards of the country (China UnionPay Merchant Services Corporation). Since it has not been too long since Covid19 pandemic started, there is currently no secondary data available in the context of Bangladesh to be used for this research. Hence, primary data was collected with a prime focus on capturing data related to consumption, where average monthly consumption pre and post covid has been taken.

3.1 Data Modeling and Sampling

Due to social distancing and lockdowns, it is extremely challenging to collect field level data. As such, for the purpose of this research, the survey was circulated online using various platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, e-mail etc. Following the data collection, the entire dataset was organized in Spreadsheet format according to each respondent's ID. The survey included both quantitative data, such as consumption expenditure in Bangladeshi taka as well as qualitative data, such as age of respondents, occupation, change in employment status due to Covid19, change in consumption priority etc.

Below is a diagram representing the conceptual framework of this research—
Figure 1: Conceptual framework

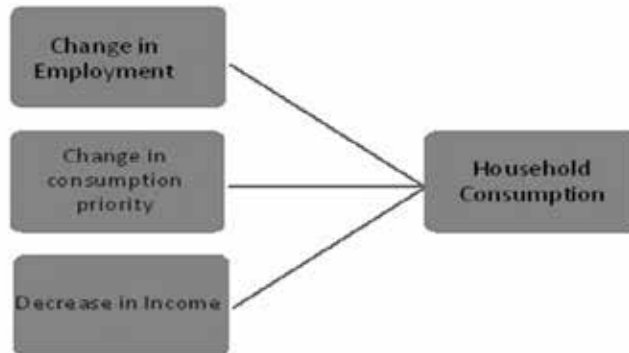


Figure 1 shows the conventional prediction that household consumption will be influenced by employment status, income status and consumption priority during a pandemic. The questionnaire has been developed based on this conventional conceptual framework.

This paper uses descriptive analysis technique to gather a deeper understanding of the nature of impacts that the pandemic Covid19 had on household consumption. Since the data was gathered using Online survey tools, the sampling falls under the convenience sampling (only people with internet access could be reached). Using descriptive tools and charts for the survey data, this paper aims to provide insights on possible variables that may affect household consumption during Covid19. Since convenience sampling was done, there is a constraint that the data does not represent the entire population. However, the research gives insights on how the consumption of randomly picked 200 people in Dhaka city has been affected due to Covid19. It sets the stage for further research on this topic and provided the foundation.

3.2 Variables and Data Organization

A detailed description of the independent variables is given below –

- Consumption difference: Respondents were asked to enter the numerical value of the average monthly consumption expenditure in BDT for both pre- and Covid19 periods. From that response, the numerical value of consumption difference was obtained for the two periods by subtracting values of consumption expenditure of Covid19 period from the consumption expenditure of pre-Covid19 period.

- **Unemployment Due to Covid19:** The variable captures if any individual's employment status has been affected due to the pandemic. For example, if an individual has lost their job during the pandemic, they have mentioned 'yes' to the specific question.
- **Income decreases due to Covid19:** This variable focuses on people whose income has not only changed but decreased during Covid19. Hence, any individual whose income has decreased has written 'Yes' to the specific question.
- **Change in consumption priority:** This variable captures changes in consumption pattern among individuals during pre- and Covid19 period. The survey asks individuals to list the major consumption categories with ranking separately for pre- and Covid19 period.
- **Age groups:** Three age groups were defined to capture the age ranges of correspondents. The age groups are 14 to 30 years old, 31 to 45 years old and 46+ years old respectively.
- **Occupation groups:** Three categories were used to capture the occupation of the respondents. The options given were Student, Service Holders, Business Owners and Unemployed.

Data cleaning and organization of the entire dataset was done in the MS Excel platform.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study is to explore the nature of the impact of Covid19 pandemic on household consumption. The data source for this paper is a primary data survey and the results and analysis are descriptive in nature. The datapoints are thus represented through pie charts, bar charts, graphs etc. for visualization.

4.1 Description of Respondents

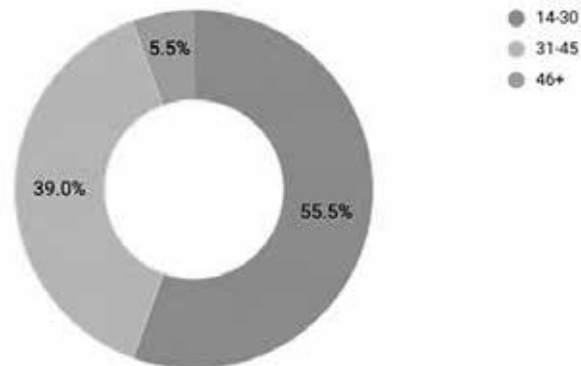
Age and occupational distribution are shown in this sub-section.

4.1.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

The pie chart below represents the age distribution of the respondents. Respondents are distributed into three age groups - 14 to 30 years, 31 to 45 years, and 46+ years old.

A majority of the respondents belong to the 14 to 30 years age group, which is 55.5% of all respondents. 39% of the respondents belong to the 31 to 45 years old age group, making it the second highest group of respondents.

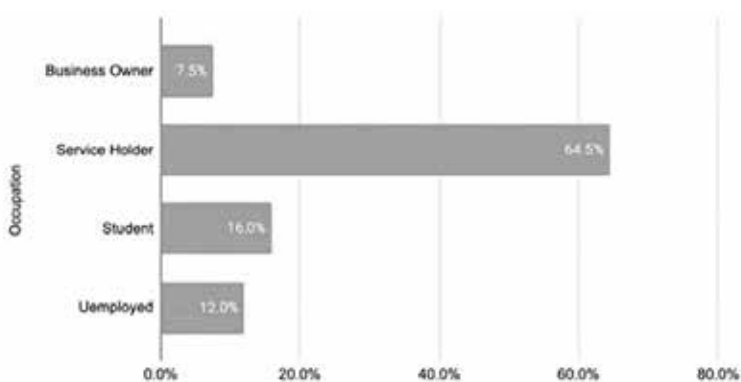
Figure 2: Age distribution of respondents



Lastly, 5.5% of respondents belong to the 46+ years age group. Thus, the study is skewed towards the younger population. Since young people tend to have limited savings, covid19-consumption nexus could be more prominent for them.

4.1.2 Occupational Distribution of Respondents

Figure 3: Occupational distribution of respondents



The highest occupational category of the respondents is service holder, which is 64.5% of all respondents. Among others, 16% of respondents are students, while 12% of respondents are unemployed. Finally, 7.5% of respondents are business owners. Thus, the study mostly captures the covid19-consumption nexus for the service holders.

A limitation of the study, however, is that the exact industry involvement of the respondents has not been captured. Industry-specific similar survey could overcome this limitation.

4.1.3 Employment Status of Respondents

During a pandemic, it is crucial to identify whether people lose jobs because of the pandemic. A person experiencing job loss suffers from a decline in monthly income as well as impact on cashflow. Under such circumstances it is possible for consumption to be affected since families would have less money to spend compared to before.

Figure 4: Unemployment during Covid 19

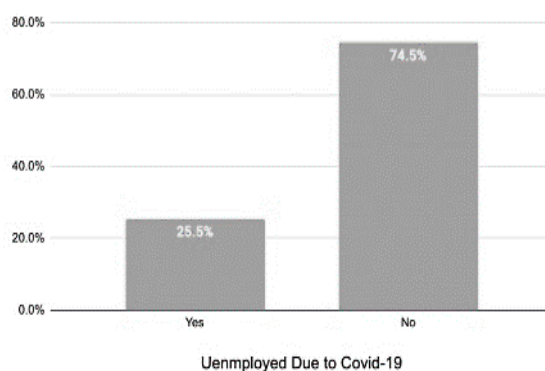


Figure 4 shows that 74.5% of respondents have claimed not to lose their job during the Covid19 pandemic, while 25.5% of respondents lost their jobs during the pandemic. This ratio is quite large and expected to have substantial impact on consumption to accommodate the decline in income. This would lead to cost cutting and not spending as much as before the pandemic. This behavioral change is explored in this study.

Besides jobholders, business owners may be affected too. In Bangladesh alone, several businesses are observed to close because of Covid19 (Ovi, 2020). Micro, small and medium enterprises are seen to suffer, where 33% of firms are not able to pay their loan installments and 37% of Micro and small enterprise workers lose their jobs (Ovi, 2020).

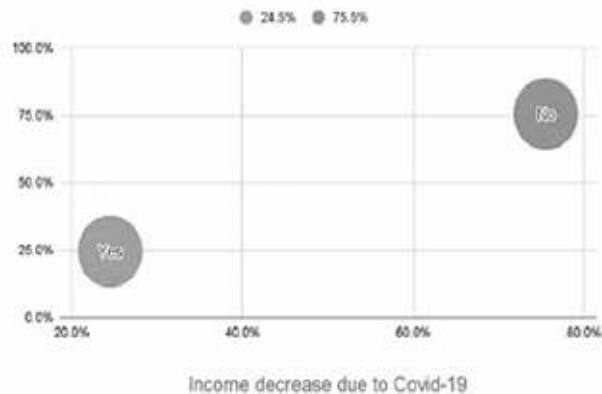
4.2 Decrease in Income due to Covid19

While the data indicates that people have experienced loss of jobs due to Covid19, another related phenomenon has been observed, i.e., decreased income. Many companies, during the pandemic, cut down employee salary to cushion business losses and to help their businesses survive without

laying off the employees. This means individuals did not lose their entire income; however, they experienced a decrease in their income.

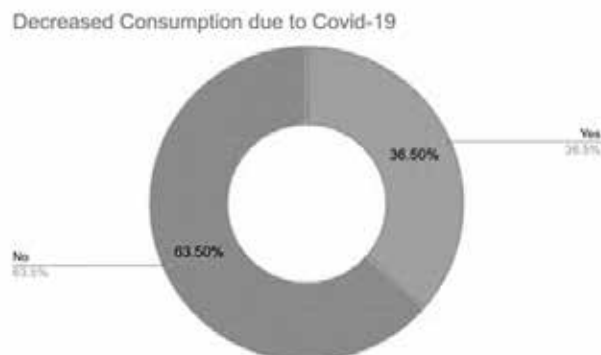
Figure 5 shows that 24.5% of respondents experience a decrease in income due to the pandemic, while 75.5% of respondents did not experience such a decrease in income. For individuals with reduced income face challenges to maintain the similar level of consumption to pre-pandemic period. Thus, exploring the pre- and Covid19 consumption priority is crucial, as it would shed some light on commodities which would be highly prioritized during a pandemic.

Figure 5: Decreased income caused due to Covid 19



4.3 Decrease in Consumption due to Covid19

Figure 6: Decreased consumption caused due to Covid 19

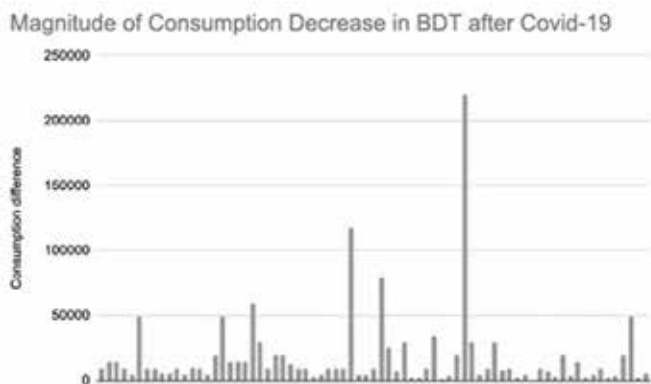


According to Figure 6, 36.5% of respondents admitted that they have reduced their consumption during the pandemic compared to the pre-Covid19 period. However, 63.5% of respondents informed that there was no change in their consumption due to the pandemic.

4.4 Magnitude of Consumption Drop due to Covid 19

For the 36.5% respondents who reported suffering from consumption drop due to Covid19, the magnitude of their consumption drop is further analyzed.

Figure 7: Magnitude of consumption decrease due to Covid 19



It is critical to understand the deviation or quantifiable change that occurred in consumption between the pre- and Covid19 period. Figure 7 shows that the magnitude has immensely varied. The lowest value of consumption drop is BDT 500, whereas the highest drop is a staggering BDT 2,20,000. However, most of the consumption drops are from BDT10,000 to BDT 50,000. To Be more specific, when income decreased, most people from the survey had decreased consumption from BDT10,000 to BDT 50,000. This is a clear indication that the middle-income group substantially suffered from consumption drop during the pandemic.

4.5 Comparison between Top Consumption Categories Pre and Post Covid19

To better understand the nature of consumption and consumption priorities during pre- and Covid19, respondents were asked to list their top consumption categories for both periods. Figure 8 shows that 19.54% of respondents have marked groceries as their top consumption priority during pre- Covid19 period. Rent payment and transportation costs are observed to be the second most important categories, both being marked by 15.76% of respondents. Among others, restaurant food is prioritized by 11.97% of respondents and clothes related expenditure is prioritized by 9.45% of respondents.

In comparison, when looking at the top five consumption categories during Covid19 period in Figure 9, groceries are still on the top of the list. However, in comparison to 19.54% during the pre-Covid19 period, 24.53% of respondents picked groceries as their priority during Covid19 period. Rent remained second highest during the Covid19 period with a support of 14.47% of respondents, which is slightly lower than 15.76% during pre-Covid19 period.

Figure 8: Top five consumption category prior to Covid 19

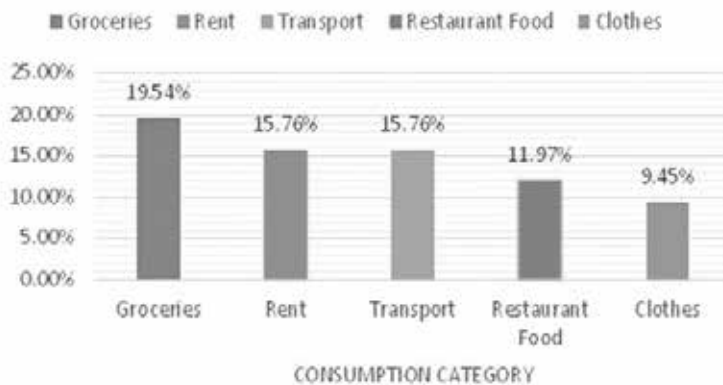
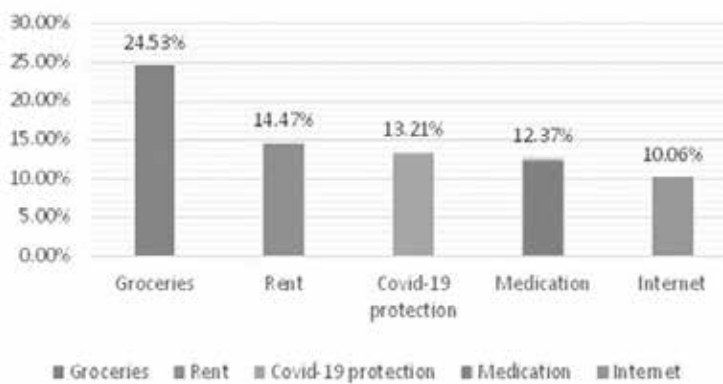


Figure 9: Top five consumption category during Covid 19



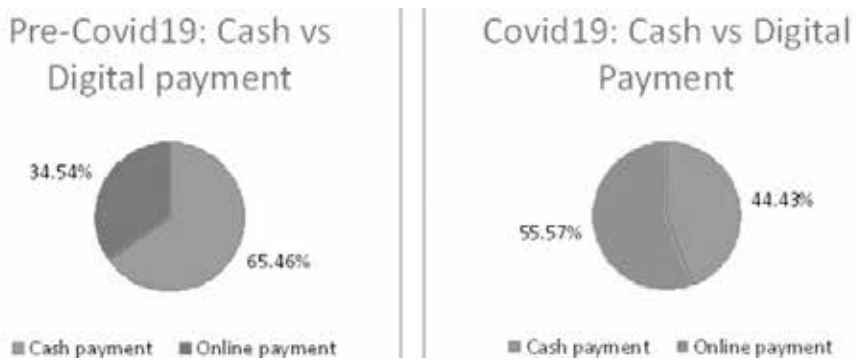
Thus, people spend even more on groceries during Covid19. Among others, Covid19 protection materials appeared as one of the major consumption categories during Covid19 with 13.21% response, followed by purchase of medication with 12.37% response and internet use with 10.06% response. Furthermore, categories such as Transport and Restaurant Food, which were among the top five categories during pre-Covid19 period are not prioritized during Covid19 period.

4.6 Purchasing through Cash vs Digital Payment

The survey data captures the preference of respondents with respect to cash versus online payment for pre- and Covid19 period. The figure below depicts the responses in the form of a pie chart in Figure 10. During pre-Covid19 period, on average, respondents preferred to make 65.46% of their purchases by using cash, and 34.54% through digital payment such as credit cards, debit cards, any mobile wallet (bkash, rocket etc).

In contrast, during the Covid19 period, on average, digital payment was preferred more than cash payments, standing at 55.57%. This indicates that due to Covid19, the preference for mode of payment has changed.

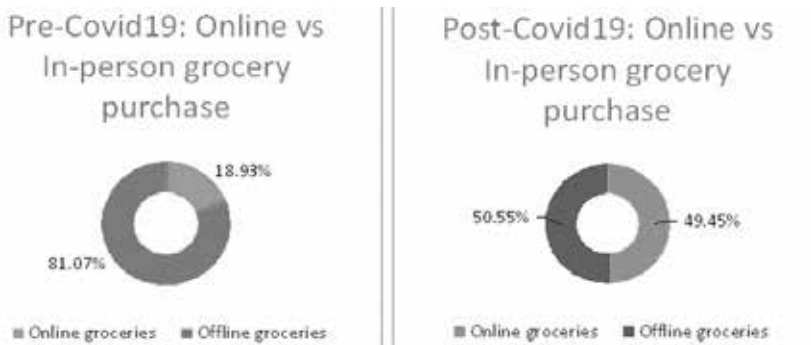
Figure 10: Preference of cash vs digital payment pre and Covid 19 period



It is also worth noting that a change of this nature may or may not be permanent, that is, people may go back to using more cash once the situation is more stable.

4.7 Purchasing Groceries Online vs In-person

Figure 11: Preference of online vs in-person grocery for pre and Covid 19 period



As Covid19 caused lockdowns nationwide as well as worldwide, it raised caution among people about going outside for purchasing necessary items such as groceries. In Bangladesh, it was seen that stores from local neighborhoods or communities started offering home delivery service for groceries. In addition, online grocery companies such as Chaldal continued to provide grocery deliveries. On the other hand, other companies such as Pathao, a rideshare service and Foodpanda, a restaurant food delivery company, introduced grocery delivery services, which was initially not a part of their core business idea.

On that note, when looking at responses from the conducted survey, people on average made 81.07% of their grocery purchases in-person through visiting stores before Covid19. During Covid19 period, this distribution seems to have become more even, on average, online purchases were 50.55% and in-person purchase was 49.45%. While preference of in-person purchases declined by around 30%, it was still almost equal to the preference of online groceries. This means that even if online groceries are preferred more in comparison to pre-Covid19 period, in-person groceries were preferred equally.

5. Conclusion

The research explores the Covid19 - Consumption nexus that occurred in Bangladesh economy. The study discovers that the impacts that took place through income and consumption decrease, change in consumption preference and a stronger intention for online shopping and cashless payments. More respondents reported on consumption decline (36%) than income decline (25%), which may be due to the conservative purchase

behavior because of fear of infectious disease, the limited access to the marketplace and the fear of future income drop. This finding is consistent with the claim of Watanabe (2020) that Covid19 generated demand shock is stronger than the supply shock; and the claim of Chetty et al. (2020) and Miyakawa et al. (2021) that pandemic transmitted consumption decline leads to job losses, especially in small and medium-sized business. Tanaka (2021) and Aum et al. (2020) correlate the job losses to the supply shock and ensures that Covid19 is a combination of demand and supply shock. Reduced international trade (Hayakawa & Mukunoki, 2021) and pessimism among remittance-dependent households (Murakami et al., 2020) also causes consumption decline during pandemic.

The study also identifies that the sectors such as transport, restaurant and clothing suffer from the pandemic, while health care sector and internet services gain during this time. This finding is consistent with Keogh-Brown and Smith (2008), Fernandes and Tang (2020) and Joo et al. (2019) who observed similar consequences during SARS and MERS. The possible reasons for such a sectoral shift include long lockdown and the risk of infection in public places. In fact, Inoue and Todo (2020) and Zhang (2021) identify lockdown as a cause of strong consumption drop during Covid19.

The study entirely relies on graphical and descriptive analysis of survey data. The number of respondents could not be increased due to limited access because of the ongoing lockdown. However, a further modification and reorganization of the dataset would allow further statistical analysis. The authors recommend such analysis as a future research scope.

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Effects of Covid-19 on Bangladesh's School Dropouts and Child Marriage Rates: A Threat to Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and Promotion of Intergenerational Poverty

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Abstract

The 2030 deadline for eradicating child marriage set forth in SDG is made challenging by COVID-19. According to UNICEF, Covid-19 increased the likelihood of child marriage for 10 million more girls. The negative effects of the epidemic have increased the probability of child marriage and school dropouts worldwide. After 543 days of closed educational facilities in Bangladesh, particularly schools and colleges, the number of unfilled seats in classrooms revealed a heightened worry about dropouts. Following a qualitative study and review of the literature from Bangladesh, this study explored the trends and impact of covid-19 on the growing number of child marriages and school dropouts, as well as the repercussions of how it jeopardizes the accomplishment of relevant sustainable development objectives. According to this study, child marriage and school dropout rates will in the near future increase the intergenerational poverty rate nationwide.

Keywords: Covid-19, Child Marriage, School dropout, Sustainable development, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction and Background

Wuhan, China, experienced a viral pneumonia pandemic in December 2019, and on December 1 the coronavirus "Patient Zero" was discovered. On January 9, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) publicly declared the COVID-19 corona virus, often known as SARS-Cov2, to be a novel finding. (Coronavirus Illness). Due to its widespread use, the WHO declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020. To prevent the virus's transmission, countries across the world started employing social distancing

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and started to lock down the country which brought an enormous impact on the education system including other sectors as well. According to UNESCO (2020), out of the total enrolled students in 188 countries at all learning levels, 1,576, 021, 818 students in schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) were impacted. Almost after 3 months of covid-19, the first Covid patient in Bangladesh was identified on March 8, 2020. On March 26, 2020, the countrywide general holiday began. From the 17th of March 2020, A total of 543 days of school closure took place till September 12, 2021. The school reopens with both glad (reunion of instructors, students, and parents) and sad news (students missing in almost every class). During the pandemic city people's income fell by 30 percent, while rural dwellers' income fell by 12 percent. Whereas food expenses per person in the city were 65BDT, which was reduced to 54 BDT, and in rural regions, they were 60BDT, which dropped to 53BDT during the early stage of the covid-19 (Prothom Alo, 2021). And all these show a significant part in the occurrences of child marriage and school dropout rates across the country.

The apparent has been proven to be true: a key contributor to child marriage and teenage workforce school dropouts is a crisis-exacerbated surge in home poverty coupled with uncertain job prospects. Indeed, according to UNFPA estimates, economic shocks and the worsening of family poverty are to blame for a substantial part of the global increase in child marriage (UNFPA, 2020). Despite the fact that the legal age of marriage is 18 for women and 21 for men, Bangladesh has South Asia's highest number of child marriages. 38 million of the country's residents married before age eighteen, with another 13 million marrying before age fifteen. According to Save the Children data, Bangladesh is one of 28 countries with a moderate to high school dropout rate because of Covid-19 and long-term school closures (Prothom Alo, 2021). According to government statistics, 231 child weddings took place over the first three months of the shutdown last year, across the nation (March to June), with 61 of them taking place in Kurigram's northern district. The district of Natore had the second-highest number of child weddings, with 23, followed by Jessore and Kushtia, each with 15 apiece. Jhalokati has ten child weddings, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon, and Narsingdi have eight, Cox's Bazar and Gaibandha have seven, Ladhipur and Nilphamari have six, and Rajshahi and Chittagong have five (Haque, 2021). There were 231 reported child weddings in the nation during the first six months of the year (March 2020-June 2020). Between April and October 2020, 138 girls in 21 regions were victims of child marriage, according to a Manusher Jonno Foundation and UNICEF report, with 48 percent of them aged 13 to 15. According to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), school attendance plummeted to 60% immediately after the school year began. According to the BRAC

and BSS research, Child marriage flowed by 13%, the highest proportion in 25 years (Haque, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this study is very significant to explore the effect of covid-19 on the increasing rate of child marriage and school dropout rate in Bangladesh which is also connected with and impacting sustainable development growths of the country linked to literacy, women and girls empowerment, child labor and so on.

1.1. Pandemic Challenges, Implications for Institutions and Social Systems

The World Bank (2020) report came up with the prospective immediate challenges and long-term challenges that educational institutes at all levels (Primary to tertiary) are going to confront due to Covid-19.

1.1.1 Immediate Challenges to Confront

Broad-scale institutional disruption is taking place. Illnesses among staff and students necessitate adequate care. Massive student relocating is happening, as is the loss of essential campus services and support. Technical "debt" is escalating. The use of outdated technological platforms impedes even developed and wealthy nations. Modifications are being made to the ways in which coursework, exams, and degrees are awarded. International mobility restrictions, such as the effects on logistics for repatriation or local housing for foreign students and staff, are significantly impacted. Staff and academics are being subjected to furloughs. Repayment of student loans, including deferrals and freezes on payments, has been adversely impacted. The academic, social, economic, and physical equity ramifications for low-income/at-risk students—possibly those with COVID-19 health risks—are on the stack (World Bank, 2020).

1.1.2 Long-term Challenges to Confront

Equality in access and retention has gotten worse as fewer at-risk students return due to rising financial and situational demands such as family duties, changes in personal circumstances, support systems being diminished or destroyed by school closures, etc. Government assistance, private support, household support, company money, and third-party financing in higher education will all be considerably decreased. It is quite likely that irrevocable program and institution closures will occur, resulting in lasting harm to skills and people capital in administrative and academic jobs. Permanently shifting to more applications to digital platforms will want greater help in order to be done successfully. Reduced internal mobility increases the domestic need for education while also raising quality issues. Since global mobility has declined, so have income-generating activities.

The wellbeing of students and academic staff as well as the improvement of interpersonal skills need to be given top priority in environments where there are no direct interpersonal relationships. The decline in higher education's contributions to regional and national civic cultures and communities, including its ability to hold public events, provide ongoing education, and host locations for performing visual arts, etc (World Bank, 2020). Long-term cross-institutional, cross-border, and cross-disciplinary research collaborations will suffer severely.

2. Research questions, objectives, variables, and method of study

This study aims to discover the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the growing rate of child marriages and dropouts from school. And the effects of child marriage and school abandonment, particularly how they endanger the accomplishment of goals connected to sustainable development. In order to address this central research question, the study seeks to focus on the following specific objectives –

1. This paper aims to explore how the education sector is affected during covid-19 outbreak while exploring the status of child marriages and school dropouts in Bangladesh society.
2. This paper also aimed to find out how sustainable development goals are being hampered due to the increased child marriage and school dropouts due to Covid-19.
3. Finally, the research will explore the initiatives taken by the government to halt child marriage and school dropout to establish a sustainable youth force in the country.

In this research child marriage and school dropout are dependent variables whereas Covid-19 is an independent variable. The household level of poverty, parental education status, social status, stigma, taboos, and health crisis are the moderator, mediator, and control variables. Following the qualitative method of study this research aimed to answer the raised research questions and objectives. As secondary sources of data collection, a number of newspaper articles about school dropout and child marriage that were published in 2021 in several national daily newspapers, including but not limited to The Daily Star, Dhaka Tribune, and Prothom Alo, have been gathered. A few local newspapers have also been cited to cross-check the statistics with national dailies. The most trustworthy source was chosen for our reference only after thoroughly comparing the findings of many national sources. The newspaper articles have all documented the process

of school abandonment and the victimization of child marriages during the Covid-19 period.

A systematic review of the content based on secondary data and policy papers detailing Bangladeshi government measures to reduce child marriage and school dropout rates was conducted using a thematic analysis method. No cases of psychological or physical harm have occurred as a result of the careful adherence to ethical standards for human research and secondary data sources, and sources have been properly acknowledged through citation and reference. The victims' names were utilized exactly as they were used by those news publishers because the data for this research mostly came from published news sources.

3. Global Scenario of School Dropouts and Child Marriages

Between 2011 and 2020, 110 million child weddings were expected to have taken place worldwide, with 25 million of those marriages reportedly being averted. However, there is a chance that this tendency will reverse. A maximum of 10 million more girls could be at danger of underage marriage between 2021 and 2030, per UNICEF (UNICEF, 2021). According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Covid-19 epidemic would result in 13 million more child marriages globally between 2020 and 2030. The remaining 5.6 million cases of family poverty can be attributed to the global economic slump, and 7.4 million cases can be attributed to a halt in program implementation (UNFPA, 2020).

UNICEF (2021) estimated that around 2.8 million girls and women in South and West Asia may be unable to return to school. According to the estimation of Save the Children (2020) in 2020, 2 million South Asian girls were at risk of child marriage, with 2.5 million girls be victims by 2025. Following Covid-19, it was estimated that 11 million girls would not return to school (UNESCO, 2020). In Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, 29 percent of female students dropped out, half of whom were pregnant; 34 percent lost parents or guardians; 70 percentage engaged in earnings activities, and an 86 percent of students couldn't afford to go back to school; and 30 percent pregnant female students wanted to return to school. Ghana stopped schools for significant periods of time in 2020, resulting in a dropout rate of 2% of total enrolled pupils, the majority of whom are males from disadvantaged neighborhoods. Repetition rates have risen significantly, between 3.5 percent on average in 2018 and 10.5 percent in 2019. Four times as many children in the poorest wealth quintile drop out of school as those in the richest quintile (4.5%). (0.5 percent). Girls (2%) are somewhat more likely than boys (3%) to leave school early. In the case

of Nairobi and Kenya transactional sex dependency has risen by 49 percent (Abreh et al., 2021).

No difference was statistically significant in the school dropouts for girls and boys in Senegal, despite a grade recurrence that nearly doubled from pre-COVID levels, the dropout rate was only 1.6 percent (rising from 6.3 percent to 11.4 percent). Ten percent of grade 10 females and eight percent of grade 10 boys did not return to Ugandan schools following a six-month break. Even worse, 18% of grade 12 girls did not return, compared to 2% of grade 12 boys. According to UNICEF (2022) study of over 4,000 teens living in urban and rural areas, 16% of vulnerable teenage females and 8% of vulnerable teenage boys did not return to school when Kenyan schools resumed in January 2021.

In Indonesia, the number of child marriages increased from 22,000 in 2019 to over 33,000 in just the first half of 2020 (Inoue, 2022). Child marriage and sexual assault rates have increased by up to 52% in some Indian states. Between April 2020 and March 2021, Telangana, a state in southern India, intervened to prevent 1,355 child marriages, a 27 percent rise from the previous year (Jeleebhoy, 2021; Reliefweb, 2021).

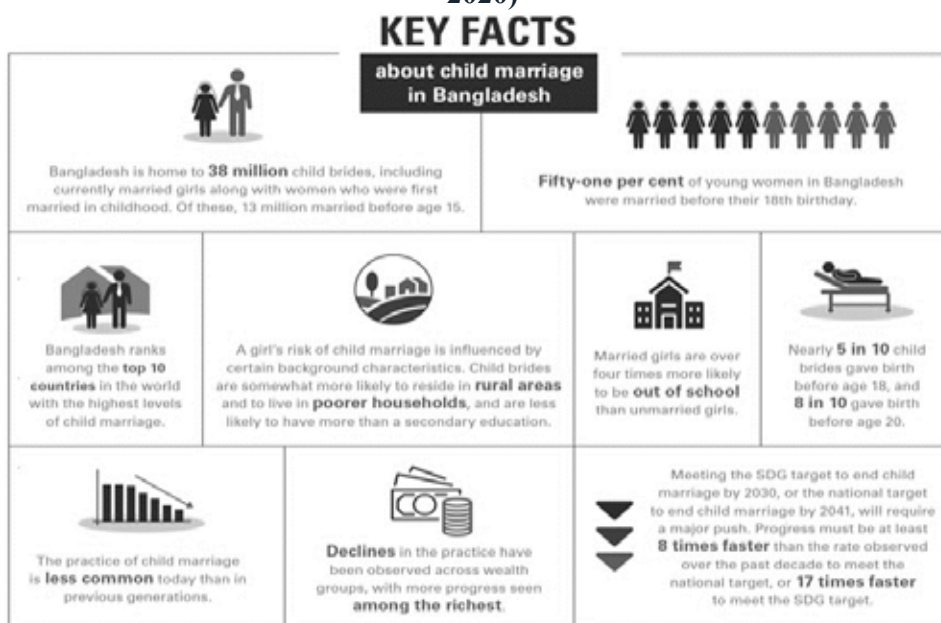
The global level data from various geographical locations made it abundantly evident that while Covid-19 affected practically all countries, the social, cultural, and economic effects varied from one nation to the next. Thus, the school-age children of Africa and Asia suffer the most when it comes to dropping out of school, either because they participate in income-generating activities or because they are victims of child marriage. Thus, Long-term costs must be borne by the nations and victims.

4. Child Marriage and School Dropout Rates in Bangladesh during Covid-19: The Case of Bangladesh

The findings of the study by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) and the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) show that, during the fiscal year 2019-2020, 3 crores 24 lac persons were added to the new poor list, of whom 79 lac people were added in the past six months of Covid-19 (Prothom Alo, 2021). The study also stated that the general holiday, lockdown, and social distance measures make people very worried about their livelihood and a lot of people lose their job. Thus, due to poverty and joblessness 28 percent of urban dwellers migrated to the rural areas of whom 18 percent came back afterwards.

Following the discovery of the first covid patient in the country on 8th March and the first reported death on 18th March, the Government of Bangladesh closed all the school colleges on 17th of March 2020. Save the Children data depicts that, the Covid-19 and long-term closure of schools makes Bangladesh, one of 28 nations, having a moderate to high school dropout rate (Prothom Alo, 2021). The students of Bangladesh returned to their classrooms on September 12 after 543 days of school closure caused by the Covid-19 epidemic, one of the world's longest schooling gaps. When classes started, social media was flooded with heart-warming images and videos of kids reuniting, chattering happily as they came into their classrooms, and being greeted by their professors (Tasneem, 2021).

Figure 1: Child marriage- a profile progress in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2020)



Before the pandemic, it was estimated by UNICEF that, over 100 million girls were at risk of getting married as children., although some countries were very successful in reducing the rate Covid-19 brought that success under threat. Tomoo Hozumi, a UNICEF representative in Bangladesh stated, despite substantial advancements in recent years, child marriage is still a problem in Bangladesh, where the rate is the fourth highest in the world. The challenges that millions of girls' face is made worse by COVID-19. Girls are more likely to be married as children as a result of school closings, being cut off from their peers and social networks.

UNICEF estimated that around 38 million Bangladeshi students have been affected by Covid-19. Despite the government's introduction of TV-based learning programs, the pandemic-related school closures in the country affected roughly 38 million kids (UNB, 2021). Most of the girls were married and some boys started joining the income-generating activities during the Covid-19 lockdown situation. There were 231 child marriages nationally in the first three months of the shutdown of 2021 (March to June), with the majority (61) occurring in Kurigram's northern district. With 23, the Natore district had the second-highest number of child marriages, followed by 15 in each of the Kushtia and Jessore districts. There have also been 10 child marriages in Jhalokati, eight in Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, and Narsingdi, seven in Gaibandha and Cox's Bazar, 6 in Nilphamari and Ladhipur, and 5 in Chittagong and Rajshahi (Haque, 2021).

According to the Manusher Jonno Foundation and Unicef (2021) study, Between April 2020 and October 2020, child marriage affected 138 girls in 21 districts, with 48 percent of them aged 13 to 15. In Bagatipara Upazila of Natore district, in the Perabaria Dakhil Madrasha center out of 98 examinees, 15 Dakhil examinee didn't attempt the test and all of them belongs to Bagatipara Mohila Madrasha thus the Madrasha supers stated that all the girls of his institute got married during covid-19 (Nasim, 2021). In Kurigram, over 50,000 students, or nearly 13% of all students, dropped out, 91 females married, and 20-25% were absent from all schools. In Faridgonj, Chandpur, 81 secondary school certificate examiners-2021 (Male-24, Female-57) with a scientific background (24 males and 57 girls) were absent (Hussain, 2021).

Anindit Roy, Staff members of Save the Children stated,

"Our staff members who work in rural and urban slum areas inform us that child marriage has sharply increased during the epidemic." (Reliefweb,2021).

Villages must now intervene to prevent parents from marrying their daughters, even though they have not seen a single-child marriage in years. As a result of keeping their children at home all day due to job losses, many families feel forced to marry their daughters in order to feed fewer mouths (Reliefweb, 2021).

A few families were able to reduce their living expenditures by marrying off their daughters early as they stated. Furthermore, because everyone is at home and people come and go, sometimes parents marry off their girls early out of fear of scandal and disgrace if they become pregnant. Irene, a 10th-grade student, at Jatrapur Girls High School, Kurigram Sadar upazila stated-

"Our parents viewed us like a burden that needed to be released as soon as possible. We were confined to our homes because we were not allowed to go. Private instruction was not a possibility. We were victims of child marriage despite so many of my friends wanting to study and so many of my friends wanted to study and had high aspirations." (UNB, 2021).

School attendance dropped to 60 percent shortly after school began, according to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE). According to the BRAC and BSS study, child marriage increased by 13%, the highest percentage in 25 years (Haque, 2021). Nargis Nahar, from Kurigram Sadar Upazila, graduated with eight other female students of Sardob High School from Class 8 in 2020. When she arrived at school, she found that she was the only one there—all the other girls had dropped due to child marriage. According to the principal of her school, three students in the tenth grade, four eighth graders, one-sixth grader, two seventh graders, and one-sixth grader were all married off during the pandemic. Out of the 63 female students that had been registered before the school reopened, just 15 females showed up (Tasneem, 2021). 50 incidents of child marriage also took place in an institute named 'Alipur Union School' in Satkhira district during the school closure period (Prothom Alo, 2021).

Chowdhury Mohiman, manager, of Child Helpline 1098 of UNICEF and BD Government stated that,

"The Child Helpline received 450 calls on child marriage in April of the prior year. We detect a pattern of more attempted child marriages in recent years compared to pre-pandemic days based on the number of requests we currently receive from adolescent females to prevent child marriages." (UNICEF, 2020a).

According to the BANBEIS report, the dropout rate for boys in secondary school has climbed to 36%, while it has grown to 40.19% for girls. Girls aren't the only ones who are at risk. The Daily Star published a photo essay in December 2020 about nine-year-old Nayeem selling cigarette and betel leaves to support his family while the school was closed. (His mother's position as a housekeeper had been lost). The eye-catching image of the cheerful, round-faced youngster working on the streets while he should have been in a class led to Nayeem receiving help from a social organization and enabling him to return to school. Other kids who had to work during the shutdown, especially when the pandemic made their family's situation even worse, experienced something similar? Only 50 of the 162 registered

male students at the Sardob High School in the Kurigram District continued their studies, while the remaining pupils entered the child labor force. Anna Minj, Director, BRAC-CEP opined,

"The rise in child marriage brought on by the pandemic has several factors, including long-term school closures, employment loss in families, and the nation's general economic situation. Furthermore, organizing wedding celebrations during the pandemic is a relatively low-cost option for families. Additionally, the poor mobility of all individuals involved, including officials, keeps those incidents hidden in the pandemic," (Tasneem, 2021).

Guardians and grooms hastened to set up child marriages as a result of the significant number of Bangladeshi migrants who returned home during the pandemic. In order to prevent child marriage and school dropout, school authorities also failed to stay in touch with venerable girl pupils on a regular basis.

All of the aforementioned information and arguments made it abundantly clear that Bangladeshi school-going children, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds who live in urban or rural areas, are the most at risk because their education and well-being could be affected at any time by natural disasters like pandemics, economic upheaval, social unrest, and political unrest, among other things. And they are the ones that suffer and struggle in the never-ending cycle of intergenerational poverty, paying the price generation after generation. They are further forced to live in a socially divided and marginalized state for the duration of their lives by the flawed social system (lack of institutional assistance, bureaucracy, corruption, etc.), as well as by cultural and religious hurdles that prevent them from moving up the social ladder at every stage of their lives.

5. School Dropout and Child Marriage: A Barrier to Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

Dropout from school and child marriage is closely connected with a series of crises including literacy, poverty, malnutrition, sexual and reproductive health, child mortality, and other associated goals of sustainable development. Young women's lives are significantly impacted by COVID-19. Due to travel limitations and the physical isolation brought on by the epidemic, girls find it difficult to get the healthcare, social assistance, and support from society they require to prevent child marriage, unintended pregnancy, and sexual assault based on gender. Even when schools are open, married females are more likely to leave their studies and never return. In order to relieve their financial burdens, families may be compelled

by job losses and growing economic instability to marry their daughters and employ their sons. Teenage girls who get married run the danger of both short- and long-term consequences. They are more prone to quit school and become domestic violence victims. The likelihood of an early or unplanned pregnancy increases with child marriage, increasing the risk of maternal illnesses and mortality, because it separates them from their families and friends and prevents them from participating in their communities. The practices has a detrimental impact on the mental health and general wellbeing of girls.

Figure 2: Covid-19 a stumbling block of sustainable development and possible way out

	Impact (Children & Parents)	Consequence	Students stands to lose	Threats to SDGS	SDG hampered	Remedies		
Covid-19	a) School closure	Child marriage	Education	a) Increase illiteracy	4	a) Reopen schools		
	b) Economic stress			b) Universal primary education disruption		3 5 16	b) Ensure access to health (Physical, mental, sexual and reproductive) and social protection services	
	c) Service disruption	School Dropouts	Health	c) Dropouts	2,5 8,9 10,12		c) Economic security	
	d) Unplanned pregnancy			a) Early and unplanned Pregnancy		3,16	d) Creation of job sector	
	e) Parental death due to pregnancy			b) Maternal complications and mortality			Access to health care, social service, community support	e) Address the education, economic, social and health needs.
	f) Unemployment and joblessness			c) Isolate Girls and boys from Family and Friends				h) Ensure equitable access
	g) Isolation from peers and support networks	d) Exclude from participating in communities	3,16					
	h) Fear of violence	e) Toll on mental health and well being		3,16				
f) Domestic violence and depression		3,16						
	Engagement in Earning by boys (Child labour)				Prospects	a) Social stigma and Trauma	3,16	f) Uphold human rights
					b) Raising poverty and Economic insecurity	3,16		g) Consult girls and guardians during the full cycle of preparedness, risk mitigation and response
				c) Job crisis, Unemployment and Food insecurity	3,16			
			d) Exacerbated gender inequalities	3,16				
		Services	Access to health care, social service, community support				3,16	
						3,16		
					3,16			
				3,16				

Source: Developed by Authors

The reaction to Covid-19 has significant ramifications for girls and women. Lockdowns have rendered many men unemployed and, as a result, at home throughout the day, making various demands. Women are under increasing pressure to make more meals, clean up after themselves, and manage their homes. Financial stress increases domestic stress and increases the chance of violence, particularly when husbands ask wives' families for more money, which is a major contributor to domestic violence. To achieve such a cultural transition, girls and women must be economically empowered as well as socially empowered (UN Women, 2021; World Bank, 2021; WHO, 2021). There is a requirement of practical abilities including goal-setting, cooperation, and decision-making, among others. In order for girls and women to have access to the job market and be able to support themselves,

for occupational skill training is necessary. There is also a need for mentorship in order for women to see a future in which they need microfinance in the form of loans. Girls and women, according to Covid-19, need to be able to imagine a bright future for themselves. The world must become aware of this knowledge in order to defeat Covid-19. For the rest of the world, Covid-19 should act as motivation to support women and girls in achieving a future free from gender-based violence (Bani, 2021). But due to child marriage and school dropouts, all of the boys' and girls', prospects and possibilities are just being buried and they become the victim of the vicious cycle of poverty, malnutrition, hunger, illiteracy, health crisis, domestic violence, and so on. All these young people forces who already dropped out and got married in the meantime are the future fathers and mothers and thus their future childrens life will also be at stake. The vicious cycle of poverty will haunt them throughout their life. And all of these have a long-term negative impact on the road to sustainable development of the country.

6. Initiatives Taken by the Bangladesh Government to Hold Back School Dropouts and Child Marriages

To encourage children to return to school, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) recommends improving monitoring methods, re-enrolment campaigns that include participatory community activities, and an awareness program. Covid-19 responses and recovery plans have been prepared with a budget of 768 crores, 11 percent of which will go towards student evaluation and teacher training. By 2023, the government plans to have boosted stipends and arrange daily school lunches for 1.4 million government primary schools. Government authorities pushed schools to utilize ministries to persuade married girls to return to school. To avoid the use of fake age documents, a digital birth registration system has been developed, ensuring that no one marries before the age of 18. Under the Vulnerable Persons Act, the government increased food and cash aid by 10%. In the meantime, the government increased food and cash support by 10% under Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), one of Bangladesh's primary safety net programs designed to reduce people's vulnerability so that they don't marry off their underage children and halt their schooling (Prothom Alo, 2021, Tasneem, 2021; Sakib, 2021).

7. Fighting Child Marriages and School Dropouts with the Revision of Curriculum and Textbook

Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia, despite the fact that the marriage age is 18 for women and 21 for men. Of the 167 million people who call the country home, 38 million got married

before the age of 18, with 13 million getting married as early as fifteen. Bangladesh would update its educational program and include a new course on reproductive health, citing the data as a significant cause for concern as the nation struggles with the highest rate of child marriage in more than two decades.

The state minister for primary and mass education, Md. Zakir Hossain, announced in December that the government will develop a new curriculum to address the problem of child marriage. According to Nazma Sheikh, deputy secretary for basic and mass education, the new curriculum is being updated. In January 2023, it will go into effect (Dhar, 021).

By 2041, the Bangladeshi government intends to have outlawed child marriage, according to board members for basic education Prof. Dr. A. K. M. Riajul Hasan and Prof. Syed Mahfuj Ali. It released its National Prevention Action Plan in 2018. In order to increase awareness of issues including child marriage, adolescent health, mental health, and other issues. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board decided to make the new subject, "Health Safety," compulsory. Despite being presented to younger children, the subject will first be taught to secondary school students in grades six through 10. They also wish to incorporate child marriage awareness issues into the fifth-grade curriculum in view of the present scenario (Sumon, 2021).

Generation Breakthrough (GB) was a three-year experimental program run by the board in the districts of Barguna, Barishal, and Patuakhali. Prof. Syed Mahfuj Ali stated,

“In the Southern regions child marriage rates are among the highest in the country, and the results of the GB experimental program are positive. The first priority is to end child marriage in the nation, and nothing can stop accomplishing this goal.” (Arab News, 2021).

In certain areas, the GB initiative had a good impact on the number of underage marriages." We'll start incorporating this curriculum into textbooks nationwide starting in 2023. We'll also talk to youngsters about issues with reproductive health that have been mostly disregarded for years due to social stigma. He claims that the updated curriculum seeks to make sure "education has greater practical value.

The government has printed two emergency toll-free numbers — 333 and 109 — on the back covers of all textbooks for the new academic year, which starts in January 2022, so that students can ask for help regarding the abuse

of women and children and other pertinent crises they face in their daily lives (Sumon, 2021). In order to enable students, to seek assistance in preventing child marriage, the government is also thinking of establishing a national emergency hotline starting in the subsequent academic year 2023. A significant amount of school dropouts can also be remedied by stopping child marriages.

8. Recommendations and Call for Policy Formulation

Some recommendations and policy suggestions are made in this vein considering the aforementioned facts and keeping track of sustainable development. If these recommendations are put into practice, the country's efforts to prevent school dropouts and child marriages will be greatly aided. First of all, because most girls and boys are dropping out of educational institutes owing to financial difficulties, economic incentives from the government and non-governmental organizations are required to encourage girls and boys not to marry and to continue their studies.

Secondly, as part of safety net services, more and more poverty reduction measures must be implemented. It is critical to protect females' right to schooling, which must be enacted. Remote learning access must be controlled, and students who drop out must be made mentally prepared to return to school. Teachers and caregivers must be provided with digital packs and training in order to properly use education technology offline and online and ensure that students gain the most. A hotline-based educational campaign may be pushed throughout the country.

Thirdly, investing in girls' education, psychological support, and sexual and reproductive health care, should be increased regardless of marital status. During the whole cycle of readiness, risk mitigation, and response, consultation with girls, boys, and women must be improved. Donors and government agencies should expand and make more flexible support for civil society organizations. Girl students who marry and become pregnant must have entry to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services so that they do not suffer from malnutrition and other health problems in the long term.

Fourthly, the usage of social media and internet access for educational reasons must be encouraged. Data collection must be maintained to follow dropout and child marriage victims so that maximum assistance can be delivered over a long period of time, and community participation will play a vital role in making this happen. Finally, creating a supportive

environment from a social, psychological, and economic standpoint will assist them and the country in ensuring the youth's long-term growth.

Fifthly, the call for policy might be regarding those in the school who already drop out. Bangladesh has a large informal sector (85 percent), thus developing skills through informal vocational education arrangements can be worth making school dropouts to be productive and integrated into the labour market. And those who want to get back to school sometimes also become the victim of stigma and other taboos that also exist in the social system. Thus, getting back school dropouts (Boys or girls) needed to be handled with great care so they do not experience stigma and easily overcome the taboos.

Finally, the most important task to overcome the crisis is to develop partnerships with the government involving civil society, NGOs, INGO, and other relevant agencies to combat the crisis efficiently and effectively. Being a religion-dominated country, the involvement of religious leaders is very essential. Since they belong to the heart of the community they can make the people aware of the negative impacts of child marriages and enlighten the masses about the positive impacts of being educated and its long-term impact on the individual, family, society, and the country as well.

9. Concluding Remarks

COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the world's economic, political, social, cultural, and educational systems. The global rates of child marriage and schooling have both been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic. The rates of child marriage and school dropout have increased in many nations, including Bangladesh, as a result of schools being forced to close and economic challenges affecting families globally. Bangladesh, which has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, has been rendered even worse by the pandemic. After COVID-19, many females quit going to school as a result of financial issues. Due to the effects of COVID-19, Bangladeshi schoolgirls experience enormous pressure to get married young both during and after the event. Girls are more likely to drop out of school than boys, and the country's rate of school attendance has fallen since the outbreak of the epidemic. Bangladesh's child marriage and school dropout epidemics demand immediate, comprehensive community remedies. The nation needs to make more major efforts to raise awareness. Government and non-governmental groups must work more to raise awareness among families, encourage girls' access to school and employment possibilities, and reinforce policies that forbid child marriage.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on Bangladesh's experience with child marriage and school abandonment have significant implications for sustainable development. Prioritizing investments in gender equality and women's empowerment as well as addressing the root causes of child marriage and gender-based injustices are essential if we are to create a society that is more just and equitable. Since we are living in a high-risk era with multidimensional uncertainties, now is the time to develop a sustainable and affordable management system across the educational system, as well as other arenas, to mitigate the crisis in the future, so that all the school going little flowers bloom well and contribute to the world's sustainable development.

Future research might focus on COVID-19's long-term implications on child marriage and dropout rates. Additionally, the post-Covid-19 status of those victims of child marriage and school dropouts' lives can be monitored in order to determine their level of livelihood, which can then be linked to and assessed in relation to sustainable development goals.

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Perceptions of University Students in Bangladesh towards the Challenges and Benefits of Online Classes: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of students regarding the challenges and benefits of online classes based on their online classes' experiences particularly during pandemic COVID-19. Following the interpretive research paradigm and cross-sectional design, this research is qualitative in nature. Using a semi-structured questionnaire the researchers conducted 30 in-depth interviews of the 23 public and private university students who are attending their classes virtually during the pandemic. The collected data was analyzed following a content analysis approach to evaluate the relationship among the ideas, the interview data, and the theoretical context. This study finds that in developing countries like Bangladesh, the online class system is a relatively new concept, so the participants face some difficulties such as low internet connection, electricity support, teachers' capacities, and lack of institutional support as well as their technological engagement. As such participants face challenges that they do not learn as well as they would in regular classes. Moreover, the participants must comprehend the contrasts between traditional and online classrooms in order to improve their competence. However, participants are taking e-learning for extra advantages due to COVID-19 pandemic in order to reduce detachment from education and session gap. This study will be helpful to the policy-makers to develop proper rules to cope with such difficult situations, particularly when it

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comes to delivering communicative education to students particularly in a crisis situation.

Keywords: COVID-19, E-learning, Perceptions, Challenges, Benefits.

1. Introduction

In December 2019, Wuhan, in Hubei province, China, was the origin of a disease known as COVID-19, or the corona virus disease (Wang et al., 2020). It was rapidly spreading all through the globe (Agung et al., 2020). Considering the intensity and seriousness of the epidemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on 12 March 2020 within seven days after its first identification (WHO, 2020). As on 10 July 2021, globally over 241 millions cases of the corona virus have been reported in more than 160 countries, which have resulted in more than 4.91 million deaths and left several States dealing with severe outbreaks. At the same time in Bangladesh there were over 1.57 million cases and 27,778 deaths due to COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the progress some governments were making around increasing the education budget. Therefore, this crisis required urgent attention and collective action by all governments, stakeholders and communities. COVID-19 wreaked havoc across the world and like any critical sector, education was hit hard. Students, schools, colleges and universities were deeply impacted (Rahman, Uddin and Dey, 2021). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), over 800 million learners from around the world were affected, 1 in 5 learners could not attend school, 1 in 4 could not attend higher education classes, and over 102 countries ordered nationwide school closures while 11 implemented localized school closure (Shammi et al., 2021).

According to the guidelines of WHO, from March 15, 2020, the government of Bangladesh (GOB) emphasized social distancing and advised people of the country to work, study, and conduct religious practices from home (Shammi et al., 2021). In such a situation, the GOB declared to close all educational institutes from 18 March 2020 to prevent the spread of this virus (Haque et al., 2020). Therefore, due to closure of schools, colleges and universities in the lockdown situation face-to-face learning was interrupted and educational institutes across the country were moving towards online learning to manage the adverse consequences in the education sector and students (Abbasi, Ayoob et al., 2020). In managing such adverse situations, GOB emphasized its attention towards online education like other countries (Hoq, 2020). Both the public and private universities in the country also attempted to adopt such online education (Haque, Hossain, Bhuiyan et al., 2020). Before 18 March in 2020, when the traditional classes were opened,

about 90% of students in Bangladesh took part in face-to-face classes. Since the COVID-19 situation creates the reality of having online classes and to implement such classes, now there is the need to know the perceptions of the university students towards the challenges and benefits of online classes. To the best of the knowledge of the researchers, there is limited documentation in the context of Bangladesh that relates to investigation of the challenges and benefits of online classes from the view of the university students in Bangladesh. Therefore, in this study, the researchers intend to fill the knowledge gap by investigating the challenges and benefits of online classes experienced by the public and private university students in Bangladesh particularly during COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve the purpose of this study, the researchers employed an interpretive research paradigm using a qualitative approach.

2. Literature Review

The means of online class is the technological devices, which support to conduct a distance mode of education and learning (Hartnett, 2016). By using the settings and systems of information communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, the participants get facilities of distance learning where learners were separated by space (Dempsey & Van Eck, 2002, p. 283). In online learning, the communication between the teachers and students becomes a vital component to be effective. Before the introduction of the ICT, distance learning had been common for a long time (Mahieu & Wolming, 2013). Now, Smart devices become essential in our life, a number of applications for Google Android, Windows Phone operating and Apple iOS can be used for interfacing sensors measuring various parameters, which implies smooth progress of the use of the notion of IoT in our daily life (Gubbi et al., 2013). This new means helps the students-teachers to manage educational area using smart devices via ICT particularly at any adverse time (Benahmed & Douli, 2014). Bao et al.(2020) argued that there are some important factors that educational institutions must address which are highly integrated to the effectiveness of IoT based learning or online learning. Study by Muthuprasad, Aiswarya, Aditya and Jha (2021) showed that operating virtual classes and learning, there are some basic requirements that must be arranged for the participants. They also mentioned three primary requirements in online learning i.e. digital devices (desktop computer, laptop or at least a smartphone), internet (uninterrupted high-speed internet) and a platform (Google Classroom, Zoom, Moodle, et cetera). Moreover, Auma and Achieng (2020) and Rahman et al. (2021) have pointed out in their studies that to make effective online classes in the educational institutions particularly public and private universities the students and the teachers must have proper ICT Infrastructure, they need to

have Competencies in ICT and also to have instructor-learner interaction. Chen et al., 2020) found in their studies that the availability of ICT Infrastructure and competencies in it are the most important factors that influence online classes of students. Since the accomplishment of online education depends on students' ability, readiness and acceptance to use this system (Almaiah&Alismaiel 2019), a sort of online education system usage hinders the apprehension of well-being (Almaiah et al., 2019; Almaiah & Al-Khasawneh 2020). In addition, Rahman et al. (2021) showed that merit of communication between teachers and students; ICT based infrastructure and competencies in the use of the ICT have an effect on online learning. They further stated that students' motivation for accepting online learning is a simple access to online classes, convenience. Mishra et al., 2020) argued that to keep hold of participants in online classes, there is the need to retain their online class platforms usage.

Several studies have been conducted to determine the challenges and benefits of online classes. It is being promoted as a teaching approach by many colleges throughout the world, and it is well received by students (Blas & Fernandez, 2009). Without a doubt, an online class is an excellent idea for continuing to learn and teach during this pandemic (Kim, 2020). However, students and professors must contend with various difficulties in transitioning to online classes (Kim, 2020). Due to the fact that an online class is relatively new in our educational system and we are unfamiliar with the process, both students and teachers experience challenges during online sessions (Gopal et al., 2021). For the first time, students and teachers in developing nations like Bangladesh are adopting virtual technology to organize educational activities instead of traditional face-to-face classrooms (Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Al-Amin et al., 2021). The new online class and test systems provide several issues for both teachers and students (Al-Amin et al., 2021). Students from rural regions make up the bulk of those who attend universities. Students returned to their homes after the public holidays were declared, and they now had to engage in online lectures and tests from other places (Ramij & Sultana, 2020). To engage in online classes and other educational activities, the majority of students utilize smartphones and laptop computers (Ramij & Sultana, 2020; Al-Amin et al., 2021). In Bangladesh, internet costs are extremely high, and most rural regions lack high-speed internet connections such as broadband internet (Al-Amin et al., 2021).

During the COVID-19 epidemic in Bangladesh, the study aims to look at how students felt about online classes at public and private universities. A convenience sample of Bangladeshi University students participated in an online survey. The study begins by analyzing the challenges and barriers

that students in urban and rural areas experience while pursuing online classes during the coronavirus epidemic. The researchers also compared and contrasted our findings with those of other similar global researches.

3. Objectives of the Study

- A. To investigate the student's perception of online classes of both public and private universities in Bangladesh.
- B. To analyze the challenges and barriers that students in urban and rural areas experience while pursuing online classes during the coronavirus pandemic.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

In this paper, the researchers present a qualitative investigation of the challenges and benefits into online classes experienced by the public and private university students in Bangladesh particularly during COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative method is used to address questions about comprehension, meaning, and interpretation from the participants' point of view (Goedeke et al., 2015; Wyverkens et al., 2014,). Under this method, an online survey with open-end questions was conducted for having better understanding and exploring research subjects' opinions, behavior, experiences. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed and developed by considering literature review. Convenience sampling was employed in this research. In both qualitative and quantitative research, the process of convenience sampling is valid (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, personal contacts-based convenience sampling was applied (White, Lansky, Goel, Wilson et al., 2012)

4.2 Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Data are collected from the Tertiary level (Undergraduate and Masters) students. The sample of this study is the students of public and private universities in Bangladesh. Since data were not possible to collect in following face-to-face interview due to COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, researchers used Google Forms. Moreover, data were collected following snowball sampling. A self-reported questionnaire was developed, generating a Google Forms link and sent to the teachers of different universities who shared the link with their students using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Messenger. To have a representative sample size to conduct this study, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted from students of 23 both public and private universities throughout the country during 15 July 2021 to 15 September 2021. According to Robinson

(2014), the sample size of 10 to 50 is sufficient to discern its necessary constituents in qualitative research.

4.3 Sample Distribution

Table 1: Sample distribution

University name (Public University)	UoR	BAU	UoD	UoC	KU	NU	HSTU	MBSTU	RUET	JU	CU	JSTU
No. of Sample	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
University name (Private University)	IUBAT	EWU	AUB	DIU	BU	BaU	SIU	SEU	DIU	SU	RUD	
No. of Sample	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	

UoR= University of Rajshahi, BAU=Bangladesh Agricultural University, UoD=University of Dhaka, CoU=University of Chittagong, KU=Khulna University, NU=National University, HSTU=Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology University, MBSTU= Mawlana Bhashani Science & Technology University, RUET= Rajshahi University of Engineering & Technology, JU= Jagannath University, Comilla University=CU, JSTU= Jessore University of Science & Technology, IUBAT= International University of Business Agriculture & Technology, EWU= East West University, AUB= Asian University of Bangladesh, DIU= Dhaka International University, BU= BRAC University, BaU= Bangladesh University, SIU= Sylhet International University, SEU= Southeast University, DIU= Daffodil International University, SU= Stamford University Bangladesh, RUD= Royal University of Dhaka

4.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the in-depth interviews gathered from the field study using NVivo software, this software is computer-aided which helps in transcribing the collected data, coding, and developing the central theme of the research (Zamawe, 2015). To analyze the data gathered from the field study, first the interviews were transcribed by using the verbatim data of mobile records and the notes written down during the interviews. Then, to examine and evaluate the collected data, the content analysis approach was used to investigate the challenges and benefits of online classes experienced by the public and private university students in Bangladesh (Lune & Berg, 2017). The data gathered from interviews was consolidated and subjected to open coding and inductive analysis, as recommended by Merriam (Merriam, 2002). Moreover, secondary data were collected from the published documents and websites for this research.

5. Data Analysis and Interview Result

The motive of this study has a look at students’ perceptions of the online classes based on online learning reviews they had. Students’ perceptions in the direction of online classes, primarily based totally on their very own reviews, were examined. The elements, which formed the students’ online classes’ reviews, have additionally been investigated.

Q-1: As a student, how does your experience of online classes compare with traditional class instruction? How do you like or dislike it?

Participant (P)1,2,6,9,10,13,14,15,19,21,22,28 and 30 states that “we dislike the online classes because this learning system is less effective than

traditional classes. Because there is a lot of communication gap between teachers and students. In addition, we miss personal communication with teachers. In a traditional class, the eye contact of all students is great. Nevertheless, in online classes yet our teachers and we the students are not skilled in its process and technologies”.

P3,5,7,9,11,17 and 26 states that “we want to cope up with the situation. We think, online class is not comparable with traditional class instruction, but in corona situation, every educational institution should continue their class regularly. Traditional classes are the best of all. But in this pandemic, there are no options without online classes. Because they are sitting idle, this harms our both knowledge & mental health”.

Moreover, P5,12,16,20,23,24,25,27 and 29 opines that “we have a good experience with online class because in traditional classes we study in 100 s of students so in 100 s of students they can not give our feedback nicely plus in traditional classes we cannot ask question freely to our course teachers if we do not understand a lesson but in online classes we can give our feedback freely and ask questions freely that’s why love online classes very much. For getting class materials online classes are best. But for understanding the topic more clearly traditional classes are the best. I feel the same experience while having online classes but a little less effective. Especially in this pandemic online class are better for giving guidelines to us about what should we read or not. Even teachers can monitor our study by giving homework and assignments. Because I can understand my learning topic more easily than online method.

Q-2: In what ways could online class serve your educational needs?

P4,5,6,7,9,11,13,14,15,16,17,18,22,23,24,25,26,28 tells that “in many ways could online classes serve my educational needs. Giving the opportunity to learn and also providing strong teaching material and regularly giving some assignments were great. Time, Place, and Independence are the best reasons students are going for Online Medium. Secondly, I personally prefer online examinations; thirdly, all of our class documents need to be provided prior to classes. And finally, we can say the foreign lecturer's best part of online discussion. They think, they need assignments based on online class. They can get proper instructions about our semester. Besides if we can't understand any topic regarding the course, we may ask our teacher in online class. Professor can give us PDF file by email or other media. Thus, we may continue our study. Engaging Students at a Deeper Level Improve Digital Literacy Offer Flexibility No Need for Actual Classrooms to Get to Know

Students Better. Online classes make my course to finish in time. This online system is making a bridge between teachers and students”.

P1,2,3,8,10,12,19,20,21,27,29,30 thinks that “online class didn’t fulfill their educational needs. Many teachers did not send class lectures before the class, internet was not functioning well, and class time was too short. We suggest taking class test, viva after completing a chapter”.

Q-3: As a student, how do you feel about the communication between yourself and the instructor? Between you and other students?

P1,6,7,8,14,18,21,27,28,29,30 states that “communication between me and my instructor is not so good. In online platform, we think it is quite easier than before. We assume that we should be in communication with both our teachers and classmates. This makes our minds even a little well, we will be able to get news about what others are doing. What we should do about our studies talking with teachers. Moreover, if we talk to each other regularly, our mental stress maybe a little better”.

P2,5,9,10,13,15,16,19,20,26 provide their opinions that “the communication between ourselves and the instructor is some time possible when the instructor gives us an opportunities to say something. Feeling good but not best as like physical presence. But most of the times all together are not so easy to face to face discussion so communications are not good. If it is possible to rate we will rate 7 out of 10 in the matter of communication. Use appropriate style and language for school”.

P3, 11,17,22,24,25 tell that their teachers are so much helpful and their friends are very impressive and friendly. Therefore, they fell great. They all are supportive and their classmates are very friendly. It has become very helpful for most of the students. They can see each other, they can communicate easily. Teacher and student relations become more focused.

Q-4: As a student, do you think your learning outcomes could be achieved through online education? Why? How?

P1,4,5,7,9,10,12,18,21,23,24,26,27,28,29 states that “we think our learning outcomes couldn't be achieved through online education. We also add online class outcomes are not as much effective as traditional one. Online education may have some benefits but we don't think our learning outcomes could be achieved 100%. But the online platform is also a great way to achieve a good outcome if the instructor and the students helps each other. Though living far from institution these online classes saved our time and hassle. Knowledge can be achieved from this system but evaluation should

take conventional way. We think our learning outcomes could be few achieved through online education, because of distance learning”.

P2,3,6,8,11,13,14,15,16,17,19,20,22,25,30 views that “in this way we will learn to use the best & good sides of modern technologies as well as attaining class regularly, giving presentation, submitting assignments from far away. Because the COVID-19 disease is the most dangerous all over the world, class is off all over the word that’s why we try in online to create our knowledge. We think our learning outcomes could be achieved through online education with the help of technology. Our learning outcomes could be achieved through online classes. In foreign countries we already can see why the online education platform is expanding because it's easy to learn at any time and from anywhere. At present time we are learning many things online and also it is possible to achieve outcomes but it is not like our traditional classes”.

Q-5: As a student, how do you view the feedback from instructor? Is it in a timely manner? Constructive? Please give some examples.

P2,5,10,12,13,15,16,20,22, 26,27 tell that “*some teachers’ teaching material is strong and some teachers’ teaching material weak. We believe that weak teaching material from the instructor is not in a timely manner and not constructive like traditional classes. Feedback should be very specific to the students and written in a way we know they will understand. Online class is both difficult for students and teachers. The response is very difficult to understand*”.

P1,3,4,6,7,8,9,11,14,17,18,19,21,23,24,25,28,29,30 states that “*instructor feedback must be constructive and in a timely manner. We must need to be in online classes like we attend our random classes in our university. Manner is so softly for all the students. It's impressive and constructive. Instructor should take attendance so that students can be more serious*”.

Q-6: As a student, how do you think about the technical support provided from the university? Do you receive any other types of support, such as enrolling in online class, electronic database, and written information about the program?

P1,2,6,7,8,12,13,14,15,17,18,21,24,28,29 views that “*the technical support is not good at all. The database and written information are important to our course. But we didn't receive any support from the University. But it should be necessary for both students and teachers to get every type of support to attend*

online classes from University. We are confused about how many students get technical support provided from the university.

P3,4,5,9,10,11,16,19,20,22,23,25,26,27,30 also viewed that *our respected teachers give us class notice and all type of notice on facebook. They conduct our class on zoom. University upgrades some technology for online classes. We get our entire needs through our class CR which is provided by our teachers. Online support was quite helpful for us. Our university takes a smooth action to make us familiar with this zoom app system”.*

Q-7: How do you view your online class environment? E.g., Quality of graphics, layout, user-friendly, navigation, etc.?

P4,5,11,25,29 mentions that *“it can be a little tedious at times, and it isn't always excellent. We don't think of zoom as an internet educational tool. They have also included some network issues that hamper attention. We already recommended Microsoft Teams because we have a system for taking exams, uploading files, and many other things”.*

P1,2,3,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,26,27,28,30 tell that *“online class environment, views layout were user friendly and efficient. We are satisfied about the lecture and classroom environment. We think that Google meet is more user friendly, it has high quality of graphics and navigation”.*

Q-8: As a student, what could you do to improve the quality of your online class?

P15,19 views that the interaction between the teacher and the student assisted the instructor in properly instructing us.

P2, 3,9,12,14,21,22 opines that *“quality is a matter for online class but most important is how many students can participate at a time. Some of us live in village, some live in city. Students may not be able to participate at a time while taking online class. So it could be better to create a facebook group with the particular batch and course teacher. Many poor students are in our class as well as internet problems. If our department provides Internet and improve speed, it will be more helpful”.*

P1, 4,5,6,7,8,10,11,13,16, 20, 25,26,27,28,29,30 think that *“we need some creative task which help us with academic as well as future job sector. The main part is discussion to understand the whole part of the studies, for example, Online class quizzes, pop quizzes, class assignments, open book exam system for all”.*

P17, 18, 23, 24 view that *“our classes are on laptops and then listen afterwards, but it's very difficult to improve the quality, because we need digital devices. So everyone should have laptop system, better devices, high rang internet service, to teach like a live class.*

Q-9: What do you think are the important factors determining the quality of the online instruction you receive?

P1,4,7,8,10,13,18,19,21,24 tell hat providing lecture sheets and books and asking questions after completing the lecture are necessary. PDF file of class lecture, Live course PPT, related videos and pictures in real-time are also required. After class teachers should also be available in phone and social media to solve our problems.

P3, 5, 6, 18, 20 also tell that the most essential catalyst is network bandwidth, fast internet connection and a good network.

P11, 12,15,20,23,26,29,30 mention the dedication, technological knowledge, and a positive attitude toward students. *“We have the ability to operate electronic equipment, and remote learning technologies.*

Q-10: What factors would lead you to choose online educational programs rather than traditional in-class instruction?

Table 2: Factors distribution

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Participants</i>
<i>Distance learning that saves time and join class form anywhere of the country.</i>	<i>P2,5,10,17,18,19,24,25</i>
<i>Reduce session jam and continue study regularly that eliminate depression</i>	<i>P4,6,8,9,11,12,13,14,20,21,22, 23,</i>
<i>Continuing students and teacher friendly environment</i>	<i>P15,</i>
<i>Technological advancement</i>	<i>P26,30</i>
<i>Didn't like online education</i>	<i>P7,16,27,28</i>
<i>No responses</i>	<i>P1,3,29</i>

Q-11: As a student, how would you rate the overall quality of the online education you receive? Very good, good, moderate, not good? Why?

All the participants mentioned that the respondents rate the overall quality of the online classes as follows 10% very good quality, 30% good quality, 38% moderately good quality and 22% not good quality of education. The online class is good, actually not very good. Because online learning is not

better than physical presence learning. They are very much grateful to the University authority to take proactive decision for them. Some of them think it is moderate but can be good if teachers and students cooperate together. Because, the internet quality is not good, lack of previous experience, lack of quality PowerPoint slides and educational resources, lack of good devices, affect the online education.

6. Finding of the Research

This research examined university students' impressions of online classes and the differences between them in terms of where they live, the device they use, institutional support, and the sorts of networks they utilize to access online education. In this study, researchers investigated the students' perceptions about online classes and the challenges faced for quality education. The major findings on the basis of respondents' interview are as follows-

a) Many students are disliked online classes due to communication gaps and lack of personal interaction between teachers and students. Traditional classes provide better eye contact and interaction, but online classes may not be as effective due to the pandemic. Despite this, online classes offer a more flexible learning environment, allowing students to give feedback and ask questions freely. While online classes provide class materials and guidance, traditional classes are preferred for clearer understanding of topics. Despite these drawbacks, online classes are essential for maintaining knowledge and mental health during the pandemic.

b) Online education may not achieve the same learning outcomes as traditional methods, but it can be beneficial if instructors and students collaborate. Distance learning can save time and hassle, but evaluation should follow a conventional method. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, online education can help students learn to use modern technologies, attend classes regularly, and submit assignments from far away. The expansion of online education platforms in foreign countries demonstrates the potential for learning at any time and from anywhere.

c) Participants come from wide range of areas and are confronted with several environments at the same time.

d) Due to their inability and apathy, some instructors are unwilling to teach online classes. As a result, there is a significant communication gap between the students and teachers. Effective instruction in online classes relies on teacher-student interaction, internet speed, and effective digital devices.

Facebook groups, creative tasks, and high-speed internet can improve online classes.

e) The study suggests that providing lecture materials, real-time videos, and online resources is crucial for effective online education. The most important factors are network bandwidth, fast internet connection, and a good network. Teachers should be dedicated, technologically knowledgeable, and have a positive attitude towards students.

However, such online class platform brings some benefits to both the students and teachers as well as blocking the education sector of Bangladesh during the pandemic. From the in-depth interviews, the researchers chalk out some benefits of online classes, such as:

The advantages of taking an online class are including recorded classes, digitally stored class materials, effective student participation and monitoring, and quick submission of course presentations, term papers, and class assignments are among them.

- Online classes allow students to complete their courses on time and allow them to learn from the comfort of their own homes.
- Online learning improves each students knowledge of new technologies and helps them to enter the modern world.
- Online learning is easy and convenient, and it is the most effective method for participating in classes and enhances skills.
- Every student may ask a question without hesitation, which helps to improve teacher- student interaction.

7. Implications

The focus of this research was to understand more about how students feel about online classes. This study's qualitative research methodologies were well suited to achieving this purpose. The depth of knowledge gleaned via interviews, observations, and archive data has brought a degree of comprehension that quantitative approach could not provide (Yang & Cornelius, 2018). Our study group assessed that e-learning enabled them to increase their knowledge to the extent as traditional learning. Students are taking it for extra advantages due to COVID-19 pandemic in order to reduce session gap. However, they do not want to continue it for a long time because they have faced some difficulties such as low internet connection, electricity support, teachers' capacities, and lack of institutional support as well as their technological engagement.

Teachers should receive sufficient training in order to teach online. They must comprehend the contrasts between traditional and online classrooms in order to improve their competence. Prerecording video lectures, testing the content, and always having a Plan B on hand can all help to ensure that the teaching–learning process is not impeded. Dynamic, engaging, and interactive online classes should be the norm. To keep kids aware and focused, teachers should create time limitations and reminders for them. To the greatest extent possible, attempts should be made to humanize the learning process. Students should be given attention in order to help them adjust to this new learning environment. Students can be communicated through social media and numerous group forums. The government should take the initiative to develop a powerful network. While online lessons are beneficial, there should be more initiative as well.

In developing countries like Bangladesh, the online class system is a relatively new concept (Gopal et al., 2021). According to the outcomes of this study, most students believe that they are not as challenged in online classes and that they do not learn as well as they would in regular classes. There is no formal guideline or strategy in place to assist educational institutions in taking long-term efforts to maintain education services running during a pandemic (Sanker, et.al, 2021). As a result, researchers recommend that decision-makers develop proper rules to cope with such difficult situations, particularly when it comes to delivering education to students.

8. Limitation and Future Study Direction

The study's main limitation was that only a small percentage of participants in Bangladesh taken part in the survey. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey focused mainly on major university students' perceptions toward online classes using online survey. Other considerations that could influence online classes, such as students' emotional and economic circumstances during the epidemic, and other relevant provisions, were also overlooked. The researchers also fail to explain how to cope with the problems and how students can do so. Further study needs to be conducted on larger respondents and consider the face-to-face interview for obtaining information will be helpful to enrich the generalization of the study findings. Here the researchers have used a qualitative method for collecting data, analyzing data, and exploring findings so the future study either may be considered a quantitative approach using the developed conceptual model of this study or may apply the mixed-method approach to assemble the credibility of the overall result.

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Response Strategies Used during COVID-19: Restaurants in Dhaka City

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Abstract

COVID-19 jeopardized the survival of the worldwide restaurant business. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the effectiveness of restaurant response strategies to the COVID-19 crisis during more than two months of lockdown in 2020 in Bangladesh. A two-stage approach was used to collect the data. The restaurants were chosen from eight Dhaka City clusters that were selected judgmentally. A standardized questionnaire was utilized to collect data from 221 restaurant owners selected through simple random sampling. The findings show that during COVID-19, all three strategies online reliance, cost reduction, and resilience- influenced restaurant profitability. Restaurants may replicate some of these successful response strategies developed during COVID-19 in the future. To increase profitability, restaurants should develop good relationships with online food delivery companies.

Keywords: Online Ordering, Resilience, Cost Reduction, Temporary Laying Off Employee, Delivery Service, Restaurants, Response Strategy.

1. Introduction and Past Research

Bangladesh, like the rest of the world, was struck by the COVID-19 epidemic. In March 2020, the Government of Bangladesh implemented a complete lockdown and a risk zone-based COVID-19 containment strategy to limit the spread of COVID-19 (e.g., Mohiuddin, A. K., 2021). Except in emergencies, law enforcement officers rigorously restricted public movement. It effectively reduced the infection rate. However, after more than two months, the lockdown was partially lifted in June 2020, and businesses were allowed to continue under stringent circumstances.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on the global hospitality sector, particularly in the restaurant industry (Kim et. al, 2021). Even though the restaurants had to remain closed owing to the COVID-19 shutdown, the owners were still obliged to bear the high overhead such as rent, labor, and so on. These constraints led to permanent closures and job losses in this

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sector (Neise et al, 2021). However, the restaurants have demonstrated their resilience by digitalizing their daily transactions to sustain the business (Yost et al, 2021).

In such circumstances, a question needs to be answered. What strategies have the restaurants used to respond to the COVID-19 crisis?

Several studies on the implications of COVID-19 on the restaurant business have already been undertaken (e.g., Sardar et.al, 2022; Brizek et. al, 2021; Messabia et al, 2022). Researchers have also investigated the recovery strategies adopted by restaurants to manage the COVID-19 crisis. However, most of these investigations have been exploratory in character (e.g., Yost et. al, 2021; Kim et. al, 2021). Some researchers have concentrated on more specific strategies. Several researchers attempted to comprehend the impact of restaurants' employment of digital technology to sustain their business during COVID-19 (e.g., Wali & Idenedo, 2021; Hung Kee et al, 2021; Lau & ng, 2019; Esposito et al, 2022). A few research have also probed into the restaurant's resiliency during COVID-19 (Neise et al, 2021).

We may conclude that some research focused on the digitization method of responding to the COVID-19 problem, whereas others focused on restaurant owners' resilience to deal with the crisis. However, no study has combined these strategies. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to assess the effectiveness of three COVID-19 crisis response alternatives utilized by restaurants- online dependency, cost reduction, and resilience to regain profitability.

As the Covid-19 lockdown eased, the restaurants could only provide limited outdoor seating or take-out options. To make their business sustainable, many restaurant owners had to rely on online and other digital platforms to compensate for the decline in sales. Furthermore, most of them were compelled to offer extra services such as online payment systems and home delivery (Brizek et al, 2021). Food delivery apps ensured that clients' favorite meals, chosen from digital menus, are delivered fresh, on time, and to their desired location (Wali and Idenedo, 2021). Far more "options" for contactless delivery and online payments are now available (Chowdhury & Haider, 2020). All these techniques have contributed to an improvement in service experience and increased sales (Wali and Idenedo, 2021).

To deal with the COVID-19 issue, restaurants had to conserve cash by reducing needless expenses, which increased the business's resilience (Yost et al, 2021). Closing unprofitable stores reduced the risk of business going bankrupt (Neise et al, 2021). Employees were also considerably downsized

to reduce the restaurants' expenses (Kim et al, 2021). However, most of these employees were not fired outright; instead, many were granted unpaid leave, while others were compensated (Chowdhury & Haider, 2020). The reduced operating costs helped the restaurants avoid financial loss (Samonte Jr, et al, 2022).

Property ownership and a sound financial foundation are essential variables in establishing a company's resiliency (Neise et al, 2021). Restaurant revenue was severely affected when large gatherings were suspended and dine-in services were discontinued. Meanwhile, rent, utilities, taxes, wages, and other expenses piled up. Still, the restaurants have been able to survive on personal investment, accumulated profit and liabilities shared among the partners. Thus, restaurants have proven to be resilient (Chowdhury & Haider, 2020).

In line with the above discussion, the paper offers the following hypothesis:

H1: Online dependency influences profitability of restaurants during COVID-19

H2: Cost reduction influences profitability of restaurants during COVID-19

H3: Resilience influences profitability of the restaurants during COVID-19

To examine the above hypothesis, a survey was undertaken. A two-stage sampling strategy was used. First, 390 restaurants from eight clusters of Dhaka City were selected through judgmental sampling based on their popularity. Thereafter, a questionnaire was used to collect data from 221 restaurant owners who were chosen through lottery using simple random sampling.

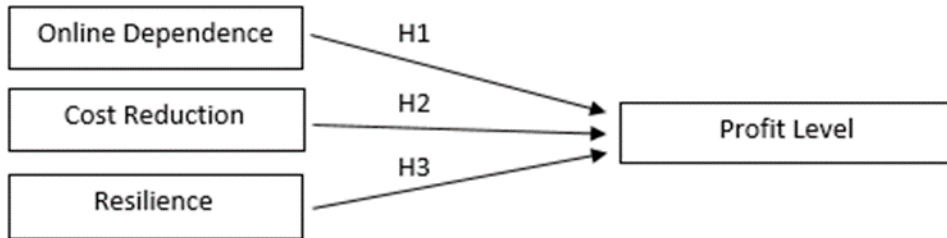
The collected data was subjected to regression analysis. The findings indicated that restaurants might recover their profitability by implementing digital platforms, reducing costs, and displaying the owners' resilience through actions such as absorbing losses, using personal savings, and so on.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: an examination of the literature on the response strategies used by restaurants in Dhaka City to develop the hypothesis. The development of the conceptual framework is followed by methodology, which discusses the questionnaire design and sampling methods used. The empirical findings were then discussed, followed by the limitations of the study. The study ends with managerial implications and a conclusion.

2. Conceptual Framework

Fig 1 shows a graphical representation of this study. It comprises the three predictors- Online Dependence, Cost Reduction, and Resilience. The dependent variable is Profit Level of the restaurants.

Figure 1: Adoption strategies used by restaurants during Covid-19



3. Research Design

The objective of this mixed method study was to determine the effectiveness of restaurant adaptability techniques during COVID-19 lockdowns. Initially, a focus group discussion with some restaurant owners was held to get insight into the types of techniques they used to sustain their businesses. Several journals were examined to determine the types of studies that have already been undertaken in this field. They were employed in the creation of a conceptual model. Finally, a questionnaire was created to collect the data, which was then analyzed.

3.1 Exploratory Research

3.1.1 Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions were conducted with two sets of eight restaurant owners to learn about the adaptation strategies they used during COVID-19 lockdown to secure the long-term sustainability of their businesses. Each session lasted for about an hour, and the data was examined. They revealed that these restaurants began conducting their operations through social media platforms. They provided home delivery and used payment platforms such as Bkash, Nogod, and others. To cut costs, some restaurants temporarily laid off their personnel.

3.1.2 Measurement

The conceptual model consists of four broad constructs. The literature used to develop the constructs is mentioned in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Source of measurement items

Constructs	Items	Relevant Literature
Online Dependence	Online Food Ordering	(Neise et al., 2021)
	Online Payments	(Wali, 2021)
	Take-Out Service	(Brizek et al., 2021)
Cost Reductions	Stop Operation of Unprofitable Store	(Brizek et al., 2021)
	Reducing Capital Expenditure	(Kim et al., 2021)
	Temporary Laying off Employees	(Yost et al., 2021)
Resilience	Use Accumulated Profit	(Neise et al., 2021)
	Use Personal Savings	(S. Vig, R. N. Agarwal, 2021)
	Share Losses	(Samonte et al., 2022)

3.2 Descriptive Research

3.2.1 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire's objective was to quantify the effectiveness of the restaurants' adaptation tactics during Covid-19. The first section of the questionnaire focused on the respondents' demographic information. The following portion concentrated on the items designed to assess restaurants' adaptive techniques. A 4-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the items, with the two extremes being 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree'.

3.3 Sampling Method

The population for this study comprised the owners or managers of all restaurants in Dhaka City to evaluate the techniques used by restaurants during the COVID 19 shutdown. In this investigation, a two-stage sampling strategy was used.

First, eight thanas were chosen on a judgmental basis from among the 43 thanas in Dhaka City based on the most popular restaurant areas. The most popular 390 restaurants were identified from these clusters (thanas) based on online reviews. 95 of these were fast food restaurants, 50 were fine dining restaurants, 160 were casual restaurants, 40 were coffee shops, and 45 were buffet restaurants.

Second, 240 restaurants were chosen through a lottery using simple random sampling. The contact information for these restaurants' owners or managers was collected online. A pre-arranged meeting was held to collect data from restaurant owners or managers via a structured questionnaire. With a 92% response rate, data could, finally, be collected from 221 restaurants. Data was collected between December 2021 and January 2022.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

There were 85.1% males and 14.9% females among the 221 respondents. Most respondents (64.2%) ranged from 31 to 45 years old. Although 65.2% of those surveyed were operating in rented space, the remainder operated in their own space. In terms of education, most respondents (57.9%) earned their undergraduate degree. 61.5% of them earned more than BDT 40,000 per month on average, and 42.5% had more than 15 years of experience in the restaurant industry.

Due to the forced shutdown to stop the coronavirus from spreading, revenues of restaurants severely decreased (Rahman & Kuddus, 2021). According to the descriptive analysis, 84.6% (n = 221) of respondents believed their adopted strategies had decreased the decline in the restaurants' profit levels during COVID-19 lockdown.

One of the strategies adopted by the restaurants during COVID 19 included an increase in online dependency. By employing an online meal ordering system, 92.8% of the restaurant owners interviewed reported they could withstand the COVID 19 lockdown, while 84.6% said an online payment option had made transactions simpler. In addition, to survive during the lockdown, 84.2% of the restaurant owners claimed that the take-out service had encouraged people to visit their restaurants. Therefore, the online food ordering initiative might be seen as the most critical measure for sustaining the restaurants during the shutdown.

Due to a drop in sales, many restaurants had to resort to different cost cutting measures to survive during the shutdown. Almost all the restaurant owners (96.4%) admitted that they had to close the operation of the unprofitable branches to avoid going bankrupt. 84.6% of them had to temporarily lay off staff as a cost-cutting strategy during the lockdown, while 88.2% of them had to limit capital spending to retain their solvency. Therefore, the restaurant owner believed that all three cost-cutting measures—closing loss-making outlets, laying off employees, and reducing capital spending—were very effective. Closing the underperforming branches, however, was relatively more effective in maintaining profit levels.

By enduring numerous difficulties during COVID-19, the restaurant owners displayed resilience (Messabia, N., 2022). While 88.2% of restaurant owners utilized their personal funds, more than half of the restaurants (52%) used accumulated profits to finance their expenditures during the shutdown. In addition, 91.9% of the restaurant owners had to bear the losses themselves to keep their operations sustainable. It can be inferred that the

restaurant owners believed that their ability to endure losses best exemplified resilience.

Extent to which the independent variables can account for the dependent variable

Regression analysis was conducted to see how much the independent variables employed in the graphical model could explain the dependent variable, Profit levels.

Regression equation, $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 \chi_1 + \beta_2 \chi_2 + \beta_3 \chi_3 + \dots + \beta_n \chi_n$

Y= Dependent variable (Profit levels of the restaurant)

α = Intercept

β = Coefficient of independent variable

χ = Independent variable (Online dependence, Cost reduction, Resilience).

Table 2: Regression model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.890 ^a	.792	.789	.327

a. Predictors: (Constant), Resilience, Cost reduction, Online dependence

Table 2 above displays the regression findings. The R value (R = 0.890) indicates a strong link between the independent variables (Online Dependence, Cost Reduction, Resilience) and dependent variable, Profit level. The Adjusted R-square = 0.789 indicates that variation in the independent variables- Online Dependence, Resilience, and Cost Reduction- can explain 78.9% of the changes in the dependent variable, Profit level of the restaurants. Other variables that were not investigated in this study may have had an impact on the remaining 21.1% of changes in restaurant Profit levels. Other factors such as using strategies like sales promotion, negotiating rent reductions with landlords (Neise et al, 2021), may be explored as part of subsequent research.

4.1 Hypotheses Testing and Results

H1 contends that the restaurants' reliance on the internet during Covid-19 influenced their profit levels. This hypothesis is supported by the regression results in Table 3 ($\beta = 0.530$). This means that online dependence accounts for 53% of variations in profit levels. As a result, increasing online dependence through initiatives like online food ordering and online payments was the most critical element for ensuring restaurant profit during the COVID-19 lockdown. This outcome is consistent with the findings of Wali and Idenedo (2021) and Chowdhury and Haider (2020) that online dependence promotes restaurant revenue.

Table 3: Regression coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.499	.137	.000	-3.647	.000
	Online Dependence	.617	.060	.530	10.308	.000
	Cost Reduction	.352	.044	.328	7.994	.000
	Resilience	.167	.063	.138	2.624	.009

a. Dependent Variable: Profit Levels

H2 implies that cost reduction during COVID-19 influenced restaurants' profit levels. The regression result ($\beta = 0.328$) also supports this idea (Table 3). This suggests that cost reduction accounts for 32.8% of restaurants' profit levels. The cost reduction has been achieved by measures such as closing unprofitable branches, laying off employees temporarily and limiting capital expenditure. This viewpoint is supported by Yost et al (2021), who found that reducing needless expenses had a favorable effect on the business. As a result, the restaurants' profit margins improved.

H3 contends that the owners' resilience boosted restaurant profit levels during COVID-19. This relationship has been established. The findings (Table 3) indicate a positive relationship between restaurant owners' resilience and their profit levels ($\beta = 0.138$). It demonstrates that the owner's resilience can account for 13.8% of the restaurants' profit level. The restaurant owners had to utilize their personal savings, accumulated profit and also absorb losses to sustain during COVID 19 crisis. This idea is confirmed by the findings of Neise et al (2021), who demonstrated that enterprises may survive Covid-19 pandemic-related shutdowns by utilizing earnings saved for contingencies.

5. Limitation and Future Research

The first limitation of this study is the survey's target respondents were restaurant owners. However, in most situations, restaurant owners do not run the business entirely on their own. Restaurants are often run by managers and staff. As a result, in some cases, interviews were conducted with managers instead. The second limitation is while the specific restaurants were chosen based on probabilistic sampling by lottery (simple random sampling), the way the areas (Thanas), from which the restaurants has been selected, was chosen is subjective. As a result, the results may differ if other areas (Thana) were considered.

To ensure a more thorough finding, future researchers should investigate some other adaption tactics such as sales promotion, negotiating rent reductions with landlords, and so on during a crisis (Neise et al, 2021). Data was collected from only eight Dhaka City regions (thanas). Future researchers may collect data from restaurants in other parts (thanas) of Dhaka City to make the findings more generalizable. In addition, future studies may analyze digitalization as part of the restaurant industry's changing process rather than as a response plan by the restaurant owners in the aftermath of COVID-19. In fact, the shift towards online food delivery began much before the Covid-19 outbreak. Online food delivery services such as HungryNaki and Foodpanda began operations in Dhaka as early as 2013. Since then, the demand for online food delivery has been rising and it increased significantly during the pandemic. As a result, future studies could investigate the structural changes that restaurants will need to make in the future.

6. Managerial Implication

First, the most successful strategies identified through this study on the restaurant industry's current efforts to address the financial issues during the COVID-19 outbreak might be applied with other firms (Kim et. al, 2021). The introduction of online ordering and delivery as well as online payment systems were critical for restaurants to increase sales. As a result, some of these methods may be used by businesses such as restaurants in the future even at normal times as consumers are already habituated with online food. Second, this research may also be significant for online food delivery businesses. Consumers' desire to use online food delivery services has grown due to factors such as convenience, privacy, and security (Lau & ng, 2019). Restaurants that form strong alliances with online food delivery companies have proved to be more profitable. To succeed, online food delivery enterprises should, therefore, try to provide efficient services to restaurant consumers.

7. Conclusion

Since restaurant industry provides non-emergency services, it was seriously affected by the government's COVID 19 stringent lockdowns in Bangladesh. Our results demonstrate how restaurant owners dealt with the COVID-19 situation. Many restaurant owners have learnt to be innovative, run their businesses strategically, and respond quickly to change (Messabia et al, 2022).

First, while investigating restaurant owners' innovations, our research stressed the relevance of digital technology adoption. Using online delivery,

online payment, and takeaway to serve customers have confirmed its usefulness in achieving higher sales amid COVID 19 crisis (Wali & Idenedo, 2021). In fact, the results showed that the adoption of online sales was the most critical factor for ensuring the restaurant's profit (Table 3).

Second, our findings suggest that the restaurant owners must be prompt in closing unprofitable outlets to reduce their costs during a crisis. In addition, they also need to postpone capital expenditure as well as reduce staff. Strategies like closing unprofitable outlets have been found to be the most important cost reduction measure. Cost reduction itself had the second most impact on the restaurant's profit (Table 3).

Third, while examining organizational resilience, our research emphasizes the importance of the owner's financial stability. Our findings reveal that businesses with accumulated earnings and considerable personal savings of the owners are more robust during crises like COVID-19 as they helped the owners to bear the losses during the shutdown. Resilience had comparatively the lowest yet significant impact on the restaurants' profit (Table 3). As a result, organizations are incentivized to keep enough assets as reserves to lessen the risk of failure during a crisis (Neise et al, 2021).

Because of the drastic shift in consumer behavior triggered by COVID-19, restaurants ought to adopt a more flexible approach. The COVID-19 crisis may be viewed as part of the ever-changing environment that enterprises must contend with. Therefore, business strategies must be adopted based on continuous market research (Vig & Agarwal, 2021).

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