

COVID Pandemic Impact on Higher Education and Adaptation Approach: Perspectives of Two Public Universities in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education at two distinct universities in Bangladesh: Gopalganj Science and Technology University (GSTU) and Barisal University (BU). Using a survey methodology, the study collected extensive data from students at both institutions to assess the multifaceted challenges and institutional responses during the pandemic. Following the implementation of nationwide lockdowns and strict containment measures, teaching and learning activities abruptly shifted from traditional in-person instruction to online platforms. The findings revealed that COVID-19 had a predominantly negative impact on higher education, resulting in reduced access to research and educational facilities and a significant decline in student enrollment. Furthermore, the transition to online education was fraught with significant barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, network instability, device shortages, accessibility constraints, and digital illiteracy. The study highlights the detrimental consequences of the pandemic on higher education, emphasizing persistent disparities in educational outcomes. The central hypothesis highlights that, despite the availability of online educational programs, a significant portion of students at both universities experience academic disruption due to financial constraints and technological barriers; however, there is a clear comparative difference in the degree of academic disruption between the two students.

Key Words: COVID-19, tertiary education, online classes, impact of COVID-19, higher education

Introduction

Education serves as the foundation for individual and societal progress, shaping not only individual development but also the larger socio-economic landscape. Like many countries around the world, Bangladesh, too, has faced unprecedented disruptions to its education system due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus in early 2020 led to the government taking drastic measures to contain the spread of the virus, including the closure of all educational institutions for almost a year and a half. This abrupt suspension of face-to-face teaching deprived millions of students – from primary to higher education levels – of traditional classroom opportunities, forcing them to rapidly transition to online and digital platforms to continue their education. While these measures were necessary to mitigate public health risks, they have also exposed and exacerbated

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existing vulnerabilities in the education sector, particularly in higher education (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

The shift to online learning was intended to maintain academic continuity, but it soon became clear that both students and parents were dissatisfied with this teaching method (Brown et al., 2023). Challenges such as limited access to digital devices, unreliable internet connections, and digital illiteracy disproportionately affected students from low-income backgrounds, widening educational inequalities. In addition, the quality of online learning often failed to meet expectations, as many teachers were unprepared for the sudden change and lacked adequate training in digital teaching. As a result, the academic experience of university students was significantly affected, leading to frustration and anxiety among students and their families.

After nearly eighteen months of closure, universities in Bangladesh began to reopen, prioritizing the vaccination of higher education students as part of a national vaccination campaign. However, the resumption of in-person classes did not immediately restore normality to academic life. The long period of online learning has left deep scars, both academically and psychologically. While essential for public health, the closure of universities disrupts students' routines, disrupts their academic progress, and isolates them from their peers and mentors. Social distancing and stay-at-home guidelines, while necessary, have created an environment of uncertainty and stress, which has impacted students' mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being (Bowen, 2023; Grasser et al., 2023).

The impact of the pandemic on mental health among university students is particularly evident. The sudden loss of social connections, combined with the pressure of adapting to new learning methods, has led to increased levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Many students have turned to self-care practices such as meditation, yoga, and creative pursuits to cope with these challenges, but the underlying issues remain unresolved (Grasser, et al., 2023). The link between mental health and academic performance is well-established; Therefore, the deterioration of students' mental well-being has inevitably affected their academic records and future prospects.

Furthermore, the prolonged period of online learning has contributed to the rise of digital addiction, where students spend excessive time on mobile devices and the internet, often at the expense of their studies (Perez-Albeniz et al., 2022). This loss of focus and motivation has made it difficult for many students to re-engage in traditional classroom environments, even after universities have reopened. The lingering impact of the pandemic is clearly evident in the feelings of depression and academic lag among students, who continue to struggle with the consequences of disrupted learning.

The impact of COVID-19 has not been uniform across institutions. Students at different universities have faced varying levels of hardship, depending on factors such as institutional support, access to resources, and socioeconomic background (Pannir et al., 2023). This study focuses on two specific universities in Bangladesh: Gopalganj Science and Technology University (GSTU) and Barisal University (BU). By examining the experiences of students at these institutions, the study attempts to answer three key

questions: How have GSTU and BU students been affected in their higher education due to COVID-19? How are students at these universities facing session delays after the campus reopened? And what is the broader impact of the pandemic on the academic and personal lives of students at both universities? Through this investigation, the study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the lasting impact of the pandemic on higher education in Bangladesh and inform recovery and resilience strategies in the post-COVID era.

The principal objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students of GSTU and BU in the field of higher education. In particular, this study attempts to assess the extent to which students of these two institutions have experienced educational disruptions as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, the study aims to assess the effectiveness and accessibility of online learning methods for students of both universities during the period of campus closure. The study also examined the prevalence and magnitude of session lag among students one and a half years after resuming in-person academic activities. Finally, the study investigates whether students have been able to regain pre-pandemic levels of engagement and focus in their higher education pursuits after their respective universities reopened.

Literature Review

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic triggered unprecedented closure of all educational institutions at all levels across Bangladesh, reflecting a global trend that significantly affected globally over 80% of students. Universities in Bangladesh were not exceptional, compelled to suspend in-person academic activities disrupting the educational trajectories of the students. Through a critical review of the existing body of literature, it becomes evident that both positive and negative consequences have emerged within this sector over continuing the closure for long time, including unprecedented worldwide disruption of education; case study; Bangladesh's responses, readiness and challenges; perceptions of students and faculty members; recovering from years of gap.

Sumitra & Chhetri (2021) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to education worldwide, affecting more than 1.6 billion students in 200 countries in various ways. As a result, there is a need to rapidly shift from face-to-face learning to online learning. This shift has exposed significant challenges, including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited teacher preparation, uneven access and assessment, and difficulties in student participation, particularly in developing countries. Despite these obstacles, the crisis is accelerating the adoption of digital learning, fostering innovation, and strengthening collaboration between teachers and parents. The literature highlights the urgent need for policy interventions, professional development, and research into effective, equitable online teaching and assessment strategies for future educational resilience.

A study conducted by Adnan & Anwar (2020) on higher education students in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic found significant challenges in compulsory online learning, mainly due to limited internet access, high costs, and inadequate digital infrastructure. While 73% of students reported proper internet usage, issues such as poor signal and cost remain. Most students (78.6%) believe that face-to-face interaction with

instructors is essential, and 71.4% feel that traditional classes are more motivating than online ones. Disadvantages include lack of socialization in the classroom, slow instructor response, and challenges with teamwork. Findings indicate that, in an underdeveloped context like Pakistan, online learning is less effective than traditional methods and needs considerable improvement.

Roy, et. al. (2023) investigates the response, readiness, and challenges of online teaching in Bangladeshi higher education during COVID-19. Findings reveal that universities, especially public ones, were largely unprepared, lacking prior experience, policies, and adequate training for online education. Teachers faced significant challenges, including limited IT skills, poor internet access, insufficient devices, and unsuitable home environments for both teaching and learning. Pedagogical adaptation was minimal, with most instructors replicating face-to-face methods online. Students, particularly from rural areas, struggled with connectivity and costs. The study highlights the urgent need for teacher training, technological investment, and policy reforms to support effective online education.

The study conducted by Rouf et al. (2024) highlights key barriers such as technological limitations, digital divide, poor internet connectivity, limited access to devices, and lack of digital skills among both students and teachers. These challenges are consistent with the findings of global research on online learning in developing countries. The study provides context-specific insights into the higher education system in Bangladesh and highlights the need for policy reforms to ensure an inclusive and sustainable online learning infrastructure post-pandemic.

Datta (2022) reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted Bangladesh's education system, resulting in the closure of educational institutions nationwide from March 2020 to September 2021. In response, the government quickly shifted to online learning, using television broadcasts and digital platforms such as Zoom and Google Classroom. However, this shift exposed significant challenges, including limited access to digital devices, slow internet connections, and a lack of preparedness among teachers and students. Despite these obstacles, online education initiatives have facilitated the continuity of learning and fostered digital innovation. The literature emphasizes the need for integrated policies, infrastructure investments, and sustainable strategies to enhance the resilience and inclusion of Bangladesh's education system.

Kamrujjaman, et.al. (2024) explores the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted Bangladesh's education sector, resulting in prolonged school closures, increased dropout rates, and increased child marriage, especially among girls. Distance learning initiatives, such as TV and internet-based education, have exposed and deepened socio-economic inequalities, as many students lacked devices and reliable connectivity. The transition to online education faces further challenges due to inadequate teacher training, limited ICT infrastructure, and persistent power outages. Psychological distress, including anxiety and depression, among students and teachers has increased significantly. Economic hardship has exacerbated educational inequalities, with forecasts indicating long-term losses in GDP and employment. Mitigation requires a holistic strategy: targeted financial support,

mental health interventions, investment in digital infrastructure, and policies to re-engage dropout students and prevent child marriage. Collaborative efforts between governments, NGOs, and international partners are considered essential to build a resilient and inclusive education system in the post-pandemic era.

A quantitative study of public university students in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic by Sarkar, Das & Zobaer (2021) outlined that most students faced significant challenges when it came to online classes, including difficulty accessing courses, communicating with teachers and peers, and understanding the content. Most students preferred traditional face-to-face learning and reported that online assignments and note-taking were less effective. Urban students, female students, laptop or broadband connection users, and students from urban areas exhibited more positive perceptions of online learning than their counterparts. The findings highlighted clear disparities, especially for rural and economically disadvantaged students, due to poor internet connectivity, lack of devices, and high costs. Despite acknowledging the need for online learning during the pandemic, students reported that online classes created new forms of educational inequality. The study emphasized the urgent need for targeted policies and infrastructure improvements to ensure equitable and effective online learning in Bangladesh.

The study of Ahmed (2021) describes the faculty perspectives that policy responses influenced by neoliberal agendas such as cost-sharing, global market integration, and digitization have exacerbated existing inequalities. Students from low-income and rural backgrounds face severe barriers, including limited access to devices, unstable internet, and additional financial burdens, often requiring loans to participate. Both faculty and students lacked adequate training and preparation for digital learning, resulting in inconsistent educational standards and engagement. The decentralized approach to online learning, infrastructural deficiencies, and the absence of supportive learning environments, have widened the digital divide and undermined educational equity. Ultimately, the emergency response prioritized economic goals over social justice, reinforced structural inequalities, and hindered social mobility, rather than effectively addressing the educational gaps created by the pandemic.

Meghla and Sarkar (2020) highlight the fragile progress of the country's higher education system before the pandemic. At that time, the problem of session jams – commonly known as “session jams” – had significantly reduced. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020 led to the closure of all educational institutions, including universities, for almost a year and a half. While some online academic activities continued, only private universities were able to effectively reduce session jams through virtual classes and assessments. In contrast, students in public and national universities once again faced serious disruptions in their academic progress. The authors argue that the prolonged closure of higher education institutions due to the pandemic has exacerbated existing structural challenges. These challenges include prolonged political interference and frequent institutional closures, which have historically contributed to academic delays and hindered the timely completion of undergraduate degrees.

While there is research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education in Bangladesh, there is a significant gap in the in-depth and institution-specific analysis of universities located in district towns like GSTU and BU. While most existing research has emphasized the challenges faced by general students, such as technological challenges and health related issues, comparative case studies that capture the nuanced socio-economic and psychological impacts of students and their families have been largely ignored. Furthermore, there is limited empirical data on how universities have addressed the digital divide in rural cities and contributed to improving the quality of education due to the prolonged disruption of in-person learning activities, which further reinforces the need for this research.

Given the complexities of budget and resource constraints faced by universities in underdeveloped countries, further research is needed to develop a context-specific framework for emergency response in higher education. The insights or findings of this study on GSTU and BBU can further inform policy formulation, development, and institutional planning for higher education in the context of other universities in the same category in Bangladesh.

Conceptual Analysis and Research Area

COVID-19

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the term given to it. 'D' stands for disease, 'VI' for the virus, and CO for corona. COVID-19 has been described as a pandemic by the World Health Organization in 2020 (WHO, 2020). The disease is usually spread by airborne particles produced by the sneezes and coughs of an infected person. Diagnosis is usually made by taking nasal or throat mucus in the laboratory and using rRT-PCR (CDCP, 2020). The disorder can also be diagnosed by the presence and symptoms of lung inflammation (pneumonia) through a CT scan of the chest (Onder, G. et al., 2020). The disease has an average mortality of 1.1% after infection, with a mortality rate of 0.2% in patients under 20 years of age and about 15% in patients over 80 years of age. COVID-19 has pushed the global economy into the worst recession (The World Bank, 2020). Many migrant workers are likely to lose jobs and thus remittance flow declined sharply by 20 percent. Travel bans disrupted the tourism economy of many countries. The world saw the number of hungry people double in the aftermath of the crisis. About 135 million people have become in acute food insecurity. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, numerous schools, colleges, and institutions were forced to cease operations. This has had an enormous effect on the worldwide educational system. COVID-19 is a potential threat to the entire planet. The World Health Organization (WHO) and other global public health agencies are fighting this curse unitedly. However, the WHO declared COVID 19 remains deemed a curable pandemic and presents guidance on preventative actions and plans to halt the disease's spread. Scientists across the world have recently invented effective cure for or vaccine against this evil (The UNESCO, 2020).

GSTU

Formerly Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Science and Technology University,

currently Gopalganj Science and Technology University, Gopalganj 8100 popularly known as GSTU is a public university of Bangladesh which is located in Gobra, Gopalganj. It was established in 2001 but for some political difficulties the university started its educational activities in 2011. This university has 33 departments and there are almost 10 thousand student studies here for their higher education. Every year around 1800 students admits here which was more than 3000 in few years ago. The university is about 55 acres. This university was academically fast before the COVID-19 as there was no session lag. But after this pandemic like every other university of Bangladesh, this university faced some session lags. But they are trying hard to get rid of this.

BU

BU is a public university which located in Barisal, a divisional city in southern Bangladesh. It was established in 2011. About 1500 students admitted here for their higher education each year. At present the university has six faculties and 24 departments of undergraduate and 18 departments of postgraduate education are running in these faculties. Among these six faculties, only Law Faculty has one department and all other faculties have multiple departments. The university is about 53 acres. It's not so broad area as a university and not enough areas for Its huge number of students. The main difficulty of this university is residency problem. It has only 4 halls for students. For this reason, maximum students have to rent mess or flats for living here. This university is academically so fast. There was not much session lag in this university before the COVID-19 epidemic. After the pandemic like every other university of Bangladesh this university faced some session lags. But the authority of the university has taken some initiatives to get rid of session lag.

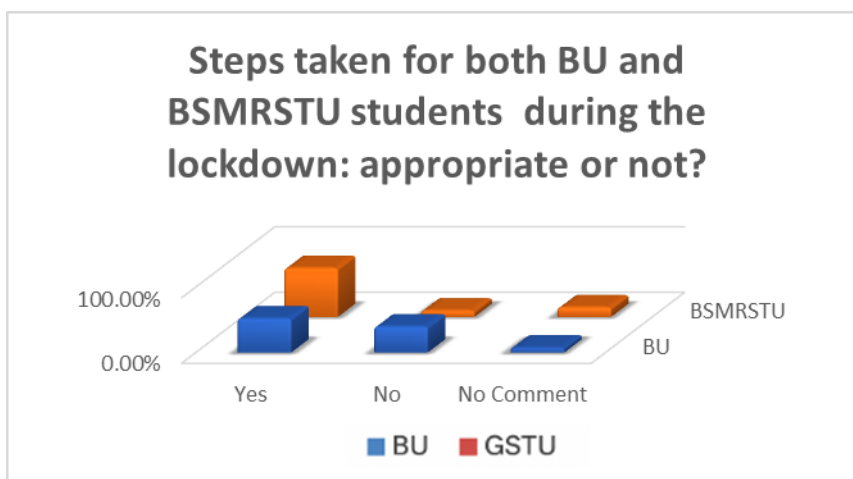
Research Methodology

The study has been conducted both qualitative and quantitative approaches in analyzing the impact of COVID_19 on the study of both university students. The study adopted primary data collected through interviews of relevant stakeholders (university students, officers and faculty members) and first-hand observations at GSTU and BU. Field investigations conducted by the author for two months. The author facilitated 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students from the two institutions during the field visits (both new and outgoing students, encompassing male and female 18–22-year-olds). 30 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) of both universities' students, teachers, officials and higher authority were conducted. In order to fully understand the perspectives of the survey respondents, discussions with locals and direct observations of the educational institutions were conducted during the selection process. Qualitative data were collected through a survey method by a structured questionnaire from 200 respondents of both universities. Then the qualitative data were examined for accuracy of information by comparing it to pertinent published sources. Publicly accessible materials include books, articles, newspapers, reports, government and nonprofit organization records, and websites.

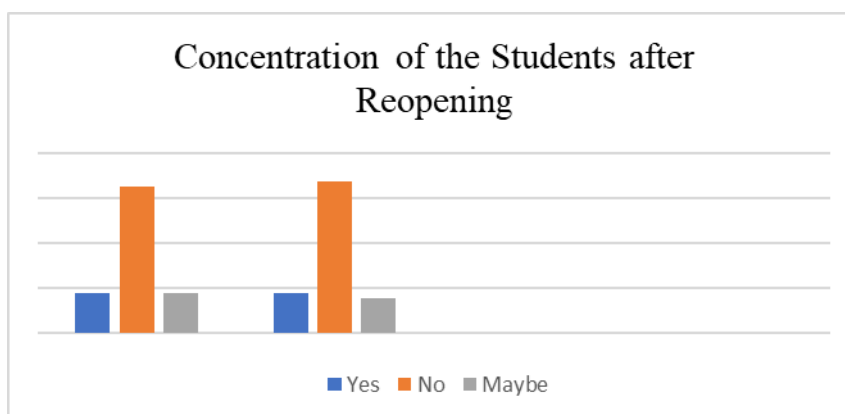
Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter attempts to address the data analysis on the basis of questionnaire. This study covers total 200 respondents from both universities (100 students from each university).

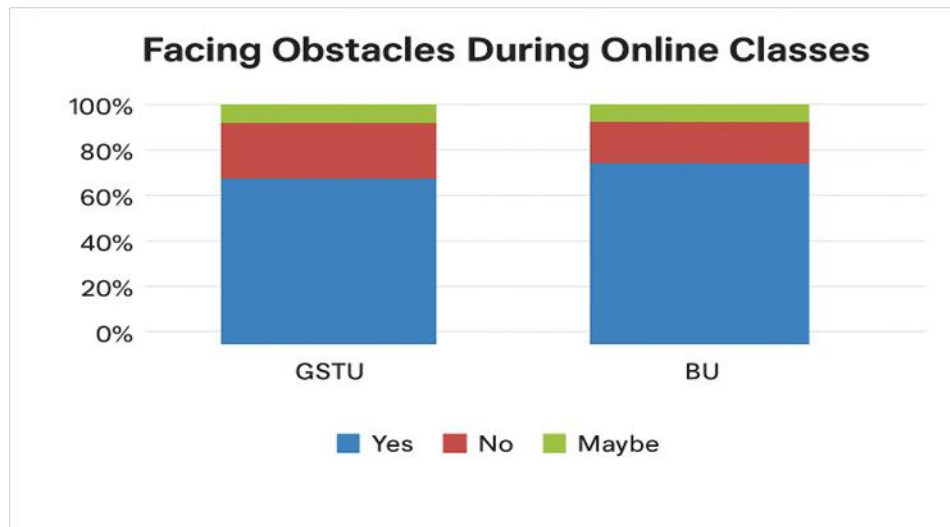
The findings are taken from those questionnaires. A total of 200 students from both universities are covered in the questionnaire who are from different departments and sessions of the two universities.



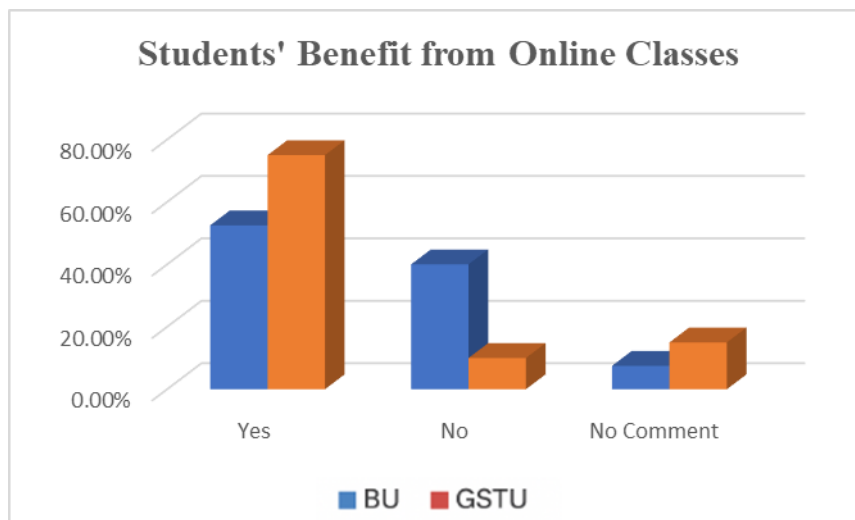
The perspectives of BU and GSTU students about the appropriateness of the actions taken during the lockdown are displayed in a bar graph. The replies are divided into three categories: "Yes," "No," and "No Comment." The majority of GSTU students (about 70%) said "Yes," indicating that they thought the actions were appropriate. 15% or so said "No," while 15% or so had "No Comment." A somewhat higher proportion of BU students—roughly 75%—answered "Yes." 10% of respondents said "No," and 15% said "No Comment." Overall, the graph shows that a sizable majority of students from both universities—BU students slightly more so than GSTU students—agreed that the actions conducted during the lockdown were appropriate.



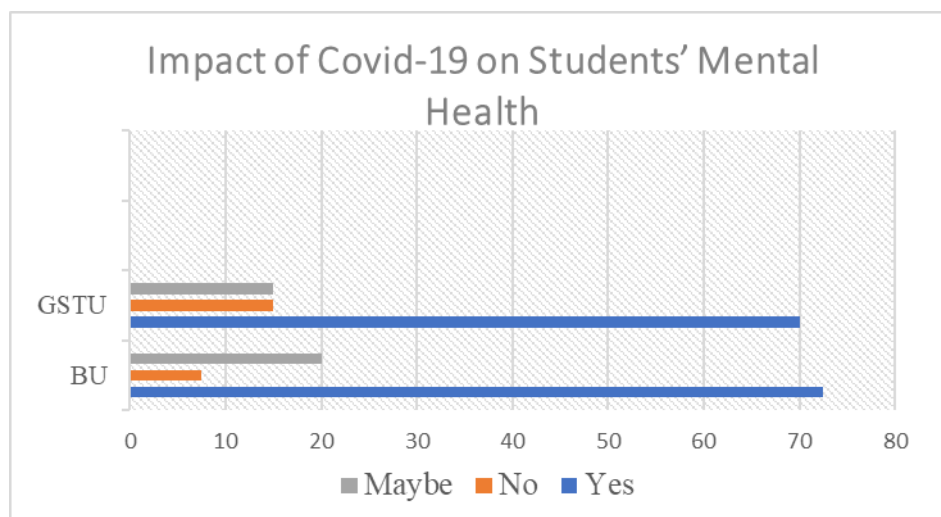
Just 17.5% of the 100 students at GSTU and BU were able to focus entirely on their studies after classes resumed following the lockdown. A sizable portion of students—65% at BU and 67.5% at GSTU—had trouble focusing. likewise, 15% of GSTU students and 17.5% of BU students expressed uncertainty regarding their capacity for concentration. After the COVID-19 closure, the majority of students at both universities, with a slightly greater percentage at GSTU, found it difficult to concentrate on their studies.



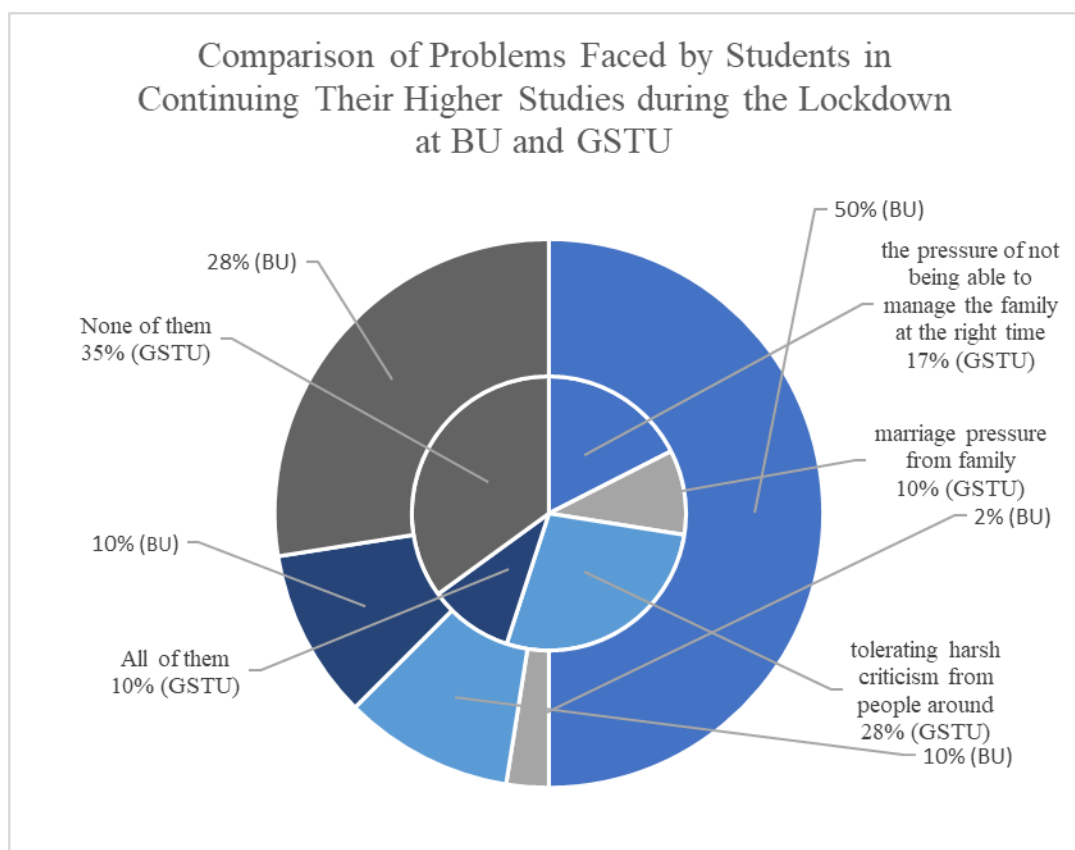
60% of GSTU students reported difficulties accessing online courses during the lockdown, 27% reported no difficulties, and 12% expressed uncertainty. Comparably, out of 40 students at BU, 72.5% reported encountering difficulties, 20% said they did not, and 7.5% said they were unclear. According to the study, a sizable portion of students from both universities reported difficulty with online learning during the lockdown, which had an impact on their desire to finish their degree. Notably, compared to GSTU students, BU students encountered more challenges.



The bar chart presents a comparison of the views of BU and GSTU students on the advantages of taking classes online. Approximately 70% of GSTU students, as opposed to about 55% of BU students, think that taking lessons online has been advantageous. approximately 40% of BU students and only approximately 20% of GSTU students think that taking lessons online has not been beneficial to them. Just a small portion of students at both universities—roughly 5% at BU and 10% at GSTU—think that taking lessons online has been somewhat helpful. Overall, the graph shows that a greater proportion of GSTU students than BU students have a favorable opinion of online learning.

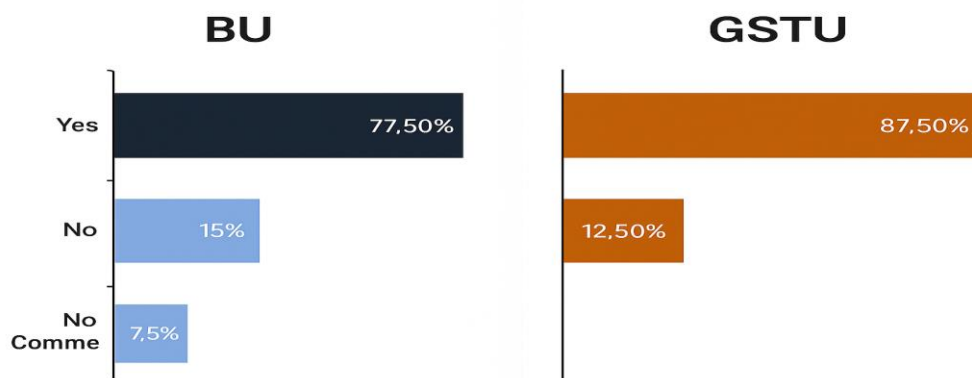


The graph shows how COVID-19 has affected students' mental health at GSTU and BU, two universities. The answers are divided into three categories: "Maybe," "No," and "Yes." This distribution is well equal at GSTU, with slightly more students answering "Yes" (about 11), "Maybe" (about 10), and "No" (about 8). On the other hand, fewer students chose "Maybe" (about 10) and "No" (about 5), with the vast majority of BU students (approximately 70) choosing "Yes," indicating a clear consensus that COVID-19 harmed their mental health. In contrast to the more variable replies from GSTU students, this indicates a more pronounced influence on mental health among BU students.

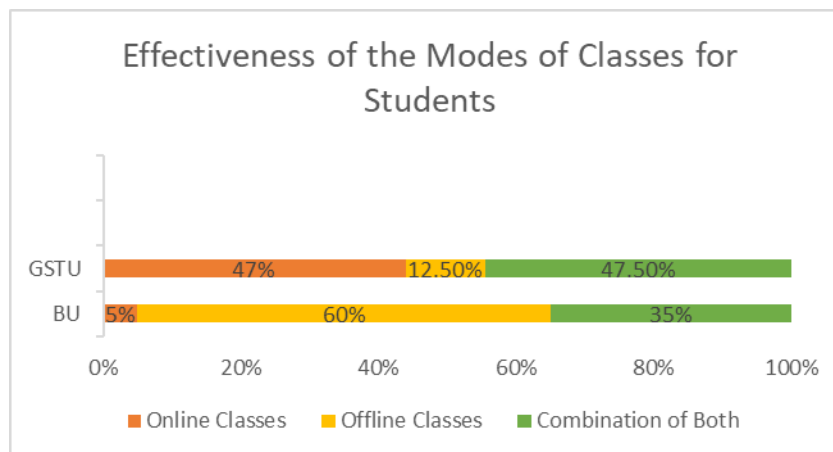


Due to the closure of Universities for COVID-19, students were mostly out of studies for one and a half year. That is why they had to face various problems to continue their higher

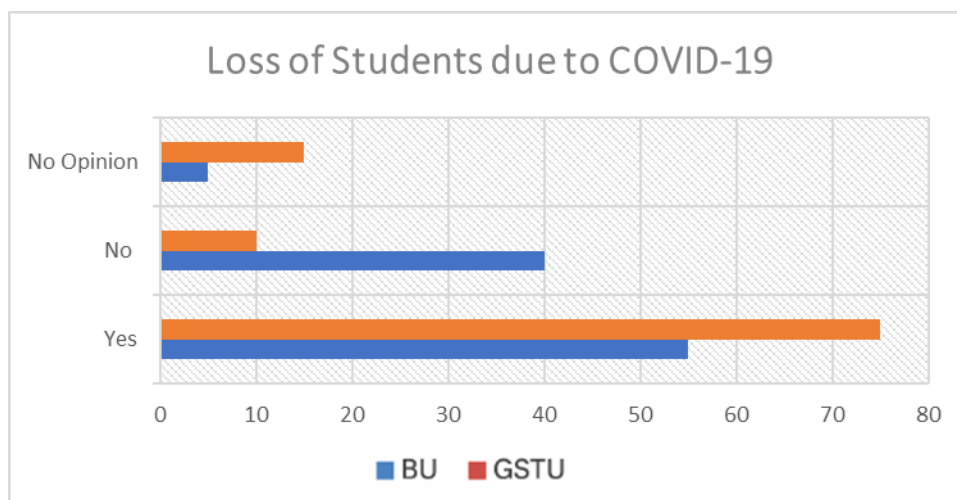
studies. But 50% students of BU did not face any problem to continue their higher studies as a student during lockdown which is really good for their student life, on the other hand 35% students of GSTU did not undergo any problem to continue their higher education as a student during lockdown which is less than BU. As a student of BU, the biggest problem faced by him in continuing his higher education during the lockdown was pressure of not being able to manage the family at the right time which is 27.5%; On the other hand, as a student of GSTU, the biggest problem he faced to continue his higher studies during the lockdown was tolerating harsh criticism from people around which is 27.5%.



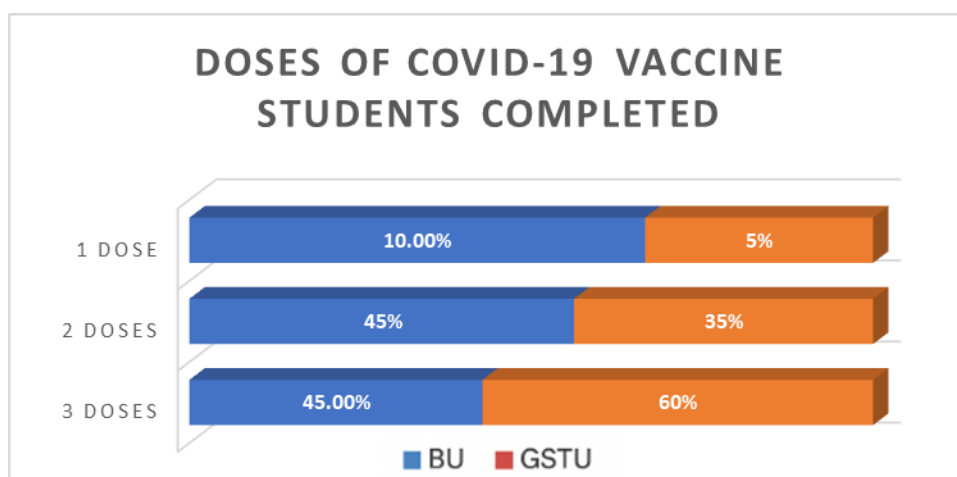
The effect of COVID-19 on the career goals of students at BU and GSTU is shown in the bar chart. At BU, 77.5% of students said that COVID-19 had an impact on their career goals, 15% said it had no effect, and 7.5% said they had no opinion. At GSTU, however, a greater proportion of students (87.5%) said that the change had an impact on their career intentions, whilst 12.5% said there was no change. For GSTU, no non-comment responses were noted. In comparison to BU students, GSTU students had a little higher influence on their career goals; at GSTU, 10% more students were impacted. The majority of students from both institutions' career objectives have been significantly impacted by the pandemic, as the visual representation of the data vividly highlights. However, 12.5% of GSTU students have not affected their career planning due to the impact of COVID-19, on the other hand 15% of BU students have also had no impact on their career planning due to the impact of COVID-19.



Universities switched to online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown, enabling students to complete their coursework from home. However, there were drawbacks to online learning, including low teacher awareness of student activity and issues with student participation. As a result, a lot of students think that in-person instruction is more beneficial. Particularly, 40% of students at GSTU and 60% of students at BU favor offline learning. However, a sizable portion of students support a hybrid method that combines in-person and virtual instruction. 35% of students at BU and 47.5% of students at GSTU show this desire.



The replies from instructors at two institutions, BU and GSTU, about the steps taken to make up for the loss of students as a result of COVID-19 are depicted in the graph. The replies are divided into three categories: "Yes," "No," and "No Opinion." Regarding BU, about 40% of teachers said no action was taken, roughly 5% expressed no opinion, and around 55% confirmed that actions were taken. On the other hand, at GSTU, a greater proportion of teachers (about 75%) attested to the fact that measures had been taken, a lower proportion (roughly 10%) indicated no steps were done, and roughly 15% had no opinion. This shows that, in comparison to their peers at BU, teachers at GSTU were more proactive or thought greater efforts were made to solve the issue.



The percentage of students from two universities—BU and GSTU—who have gotten varying vaccination dosages is shown in the graph. It contrasts the vaccine's dosages for students receiving one, two, and three doses. 10% of students at BU have taken one dose, 45% have

taken two doses, and 45% have taken three. 60% of students at GSTU, in comparison, have taken three dosages, 35% have taken two, and 5% have taken one. The graph shows that whereas BU has a slightly higher percentage of students who have only taken one dosage, GSTU has a higher percentage of students who have completed the entire three-dose immunization.

Student activities during lockdown to spend their free time:

BU students said that they spend their free time during lockdown on study, tuition, using mobile phone, watching tv, seeing movie on online platform, social work, doing arts and crafts, spending time with family, skill development, social work, reading Islamic pdf books, visiting with friends, drawing, painting, gaming, cooking, doing freelancing, hangout lonely, practicing religious orders, reading journals, books, using social media and kite flying in the afternoon, travelling here and there, attending online classes, dress painting etc.

GSTU students said that they spend their free time during lockdown on study, reading books, spending time with family, doing house works, experimented new recipes and doing online courses from Coursera, cooking, drawing, productive work, participate in various curriculum activities online, doing online business, tuition, social service, planting trees, learning graphics design, freelancing etc.

Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education:

GSTU students opined that the impact of COVID-19 on their higher studies that they suffered from mental pressure, could not concentrate properly in higher studies, session lag, missing graduate admission at several universities, waste of time, money and mental pressure, thought about future circumstances, network related problem which hampered online Class's concentration, didn't connect with their teacher, depressed about study and job works, faced a lot of financial problem etc.

BU students said that the impact of COVID-19 on their higher studies that losing concentration, family pressure, people's criticism, can't concentrate or focusing study, mentally Sick, educational backwardness, session lag etc.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on higher education at Gopalganj Science and Technology University (GSTU) and Barisal University (BU), revealing both common and unique challenges faced by students at these institutions. The abrupt shift from traditional classroom learning to online platforms due to pandemic-related closures resulted in significant educational disruption for most students. Students at both GSTU and BU reported difficulties accessing online classes, with issues such as inadequate digital infrastructure, unreliable internet connectivity, device shortages, and digital illiteracy being particularly prominent. Findings indicate that very few students at both universities were able to fully concentrate on their studies after classes resumed, with most struggling with motivation and focus. Mental health concerns, particularly among BU students, reported more pronounced negative impacts than their GSTU counterparts.

Despite the challenges, a significant portion of GSTU students experienced some benefits of online learning, although the overall sentiment was in favor of traditional in-person instruction or hybrid approaches. The pandemic has also had a substantial impact on students' career aspirations, with most respondents indicating that COVID-19 has changed their future plans. Institutional responses varied, with GSTU reportedly taking more proactive steps to mitigate educational losses than BU. The study also highlighted persistent disparities in educational outcomes, shaped by socioeconomic and infrastructural factors unique to each university.

Finally, the study emphasizes the need for targeted policy interventions to address the digital divide, improve online learning infrastructure, and support students' mental health. The experiences of GSTU and BU students during the pandemic illustrate the broader challenges facing higher education in Bangladesh and provide valuable insights for building a more resilient and inclusive education system in the post-pandemic era.

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