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Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Study: Assessing Reading Habits of University Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The world has been shaken and normalcy has been stifled due to Covid-19 pandemic leading the affected people to adapt to, adopt new ways of life and reconstitute habit inviting activities other than those previously practiced. Reading habits of university students have been affected adversely by the unprecedented pandemic. While the students, during this period being distanced from the regular academic environment, have opted for alternative engagements, the time for reading and number of books covered have dwindled remarkably. This article examined the changed dynamics of both academic and nonacademic reading habits of the students at public and private universities in Bangladesh. Data were collected from 700 students through a questionnaire using Google form. The results show that reading habits have been adversely affected during this pandemic as 44.6% students read books only 1-2 hours whereas 57.4% of them spend 5-6 hours using electronic devices for multiple purposes

mostly other than reading. This study recommends developing a strategy by the concerned authority starting from the state level to institutions to attract the learners and facilitate learning online with a rich and reliable reservoir of study materials with easy accessibility.

Keywords: Reading Habit, Lockdown, Covid-19, Online Reading.

Introduction

The world has been experiencing unprecedented circumstances due to Covid-19 first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and has then turned into an ongoing pandemic worldwide affecting the socio-cultural practices adversely. The impacts of this calamity have penetrated into every aspect of life almost everywhere in the world. Doherty et al (2020, p.1) have stated, “The SARS-CoV-2 is a novel strain of coronavirus which is ravaging many countries, and this has become a global public health concern”. Bangladesh also finds it a toughest challenge, and all somehow affected are attempting to reshuffle and restructure life and activities. This pandemic situation with unheard of complications has made people focus on aspects of life and the world anew. The educational system initially faced an unprecedented disruption and adopted new directions for mostly relocating residence, rearranging social interactions, forming companionship, restructuring mode of instructions etc. The following graph by UNESCO shows the severe impacts of COVID-19 on education around the world.

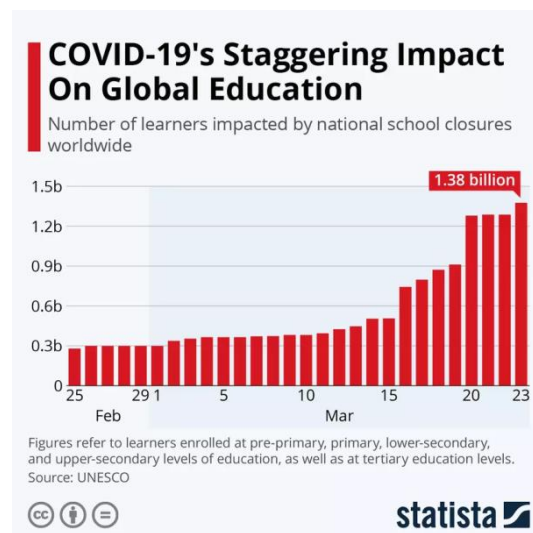


Figure 1: Impact of COVID-19 on global education (Source: World Economic Forum, 2020)

The study conducted by UNESCO (2020) shows that the COVID 19 pandemic has brought life to a virtual standstill with enormous impacts on the economy and a devastating impact on global education. According to Hoang et al. (2020, p.1) “The COVID-19 pandemic exerted an adverse influence on the global education system, especially since starting school

lockdown”. Mondol and Mohiuddin (2020) find a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in Bangladesh resulting from this pandemic. Consequently, the reading habit of the students at university level has also undergone a massive change.

It is evident that the neo-normal situation has showcased new spaces in day-to-day life and so the common habits have consequently had a jolt and juncture in regular reading habits. The university students who are supposed to engage substantial amount of time in reading as a part of their reading habit have swayed to and invited other forms of activities to be interrupted in this productively receptive work. Thus, they have rerouted their time and got dispersed in engagements. Under these circumstances, it is important to map out the reading habit which directly impacts other dynamics of the society and future prospects. This study is an attempt to assess the impacts of Covid-19 on the reading habit of the university students in this neo-reality to find out the transitions and transformations. The study will come out with recommendations regarding boosting up reading habits through some means and measures to bring the students back to book again.

Literature Review

Reading has been considered to be one of the most powerful weapons which can sharpen readers' faculty to explore the unexplored, to develop the underdeveloped, and to soothe the un-soothed. Reading habit invites other intellectual and academic areas to be cultivated and enriched. Reading is a means for personal growth, it shapes the imagination, and plays a critical role that allows the individual to control language and play a role in society (Knoester, 2010). Hence, it is predominantly important for students for their academic, intellectual and cognitive growth and success. According to Adeyemi (2020), readers are often successful people in their endeavors as they are exposed to the world of possibilities and motivations. Therefore, developing a reading habit is the opening of the door of success and possibilities. But depending on contexts and cultures, any habit can be affected. “The worldwide spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has unpredictably changed the way people live, by influencing their behaviors and beliefs” (Ceccato et. al 2021, p.1). The Covid-19 crisis across the world has brought various changes in the practices of education, business, religion, communication and other areas. As Kukkonen *et al* (2020) have stated, “The Covid-19 pandemic entailed a sudden change of all aspects of our everyday life” (para.1). Like other practices of everyday life,

reading habit has also been affected as students remained at home and had lots of time to read. According to Mental Floss (2020)

When most of the world went into lockdown at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people found themselves with a lot of extra free time. Some people used that time to bake bread, make crafts, or play video games. For the bibliophiles of the world, quarantine was the perfect chance to burn through their pile of books to read. (para.1)

The impact of reading habits on an Indian university's faculty members has been analyzed recently (Vyas & Tandel, 2020). The study findings show that the university faculty members read every day in both print and electronics. The results also show that most of the respondents read only one to three hours a day. Nonetheless, the study's findings also show that some of the respondents' reading hours dropped to less than an hour per day. Most academics have also been found to read from phones. Another study conducted by (Parikh, Vyas, & Parikh, 2020) shows the reading habits of different library users' during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research results suggest that more than fifty per cent of individuals read more e-resources, particularly e-books. In comparison, reading is a significant activity for most respondents during the pandemic. The findings also indicate a noticeable increase in the reading period of the user. This study suggests encouraging decision-makers to ensure adequate e-library facilities.

A cross-sectional study carried out in an Indian city by Tyagi, Gaur, & Sharma (2020) reveals that whatever was available on the Website, most of the respondents spent time reading books at home, supplemented by the decision to read online news regarding Covid-19. The study also finds that the probability of satisfaction is five times higher for people reading books than no reading at all. There is another study (Benkhider & Kherbachi, 2020) recently published on the influence of remote learning during the coronavirus pandemic. The study has analyzed many evaluating indicators and found digital technologies as the most influential factors on learning habits during the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

From the Nigerian perspective, a study (Adeyemi, 2020) has been conducted on the influence of Covid-19 on reading habit. The study finds a significant improvement in reading hours from 1-2 to 3-4 hours per day. The study shows that reading is not a means of pleasure to the respondents but a way of passing a boring time during the lockdown. The influence of Covid-19 on the students' performance of Indonesian university is studied using the qualitative method. The study finds many factors such as income lost, unemployment, reduction of various

allowances making students psychologically ill and pushing them to anxiety disorder. Due to financial crises, students are facing difficulties to afford the expense of online learning. Students' learning process is severely affected, and sometimes they prefer onsite schooling instead of focusing on technology-based learning (Purwanto, et al., 2020).

An investigation carried out on reading habits by ERI-Lectura (2020) on Spanish adults showcases around an hour increase in reading time during the first month of Covid-19 lockdown. Issa *et al.* (2012) while investigating the reading interests and habits among the students of Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Nigeria, find them read only notebooks to pass examinations proving that reading has already lost its potential to them as a good way of utilizing time.

The papers reviewed above have their own urge, insight and interest whereas the present paper is unique in its probe. Vyas and Tandel (2020) examined the reading habit of Indian university faculty members who reduced their reading habit less than an hour per day while Parikh et. al (2020) focused on library users' reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tyagi et. al (2020) in their cross-sectional survey found that the satisfactory level of the readers is five times higher than individuals with no reading. Benkhider & Kherbachi (2020) explored digital technologies to be the most significant factors for developing learning habit during corona crisis whereas Adeyemi (2020) found the development of reading habit from 1-2 to 3-4 hours per day among Nigerian readers and Purwanto *et al.* (2020) discovered the difficulties students face in online learning due to financial crisis. The existing papers focused on almost the same arena of reading and learning, on the same category of respondents, and on the same sorts of educational institutions. On the contrary, this paper encompasses diverse areas of investigation including urban and rural areas, a large number of students that is seven hundred students having diverse socio-economic and socio-cultural background in the context of Bangladesh. This study also makes a comparative analysis of the reading habit of students before and during the lockdown. Thus the paper is outstanding in its impulse, input and uniqueness from those of the reviewed paper.

Materials and Methods

The study has been conducted mainly based on quantitative methods. Only university-going students were the informants for this research. There are two types of university in Bangladesh; public and private. When the coronavirus infection started in Bangladesh in March 2020, all educational institutions were declared closed. Private universities started online education

within a month of announcing the university's closure, but online education activities in government or public universities began much later. In this case, the study was conducted to understand the variability of students' reading habits.

A structured questionnaire was prepared for data collection. Data has been collected from students using Google Forms. Teachers from different universities have been used to reach the students with the question paper and Google form link. University teachers who are familiar with us and willing to collaborate in research have collected information from their students. In this case, they have provided the online questionnaire link directly to the students during the online class. Others have encouraged students to provide research information using Google Classroom or any other online platform to communicate with students. Due to our lack of direct communication with the informants, many students have left the forms incomplete. We did not consider 300 such incomplete answers as primary data for our research.

Information has been collected from 1000 students of both public and private universities. This research article has been prepared by analyzing the information received from 700 people by canceling 300 answers due to incomplete and defective form filling. Informants have been selected from twenty private and ten public universities of Bangladesh through convenient sampling from 10 February to 30 March 2021. The data provided by the informants were manually verified, and the opinions of the 700 completed respondents were analyzed.

Firstly, the collected data has processed by taking the output from Google Forms to Microsoft Excel Sheet. Then, the data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. Using the measures of frequency of descriptive statistics, the summary of the result has been presented employing frequency distribution and percentage, and this has been used to determine the proportion of respondents choosing various responses. Tables and charts have also been used to ensure an easy understanding of the analysis.

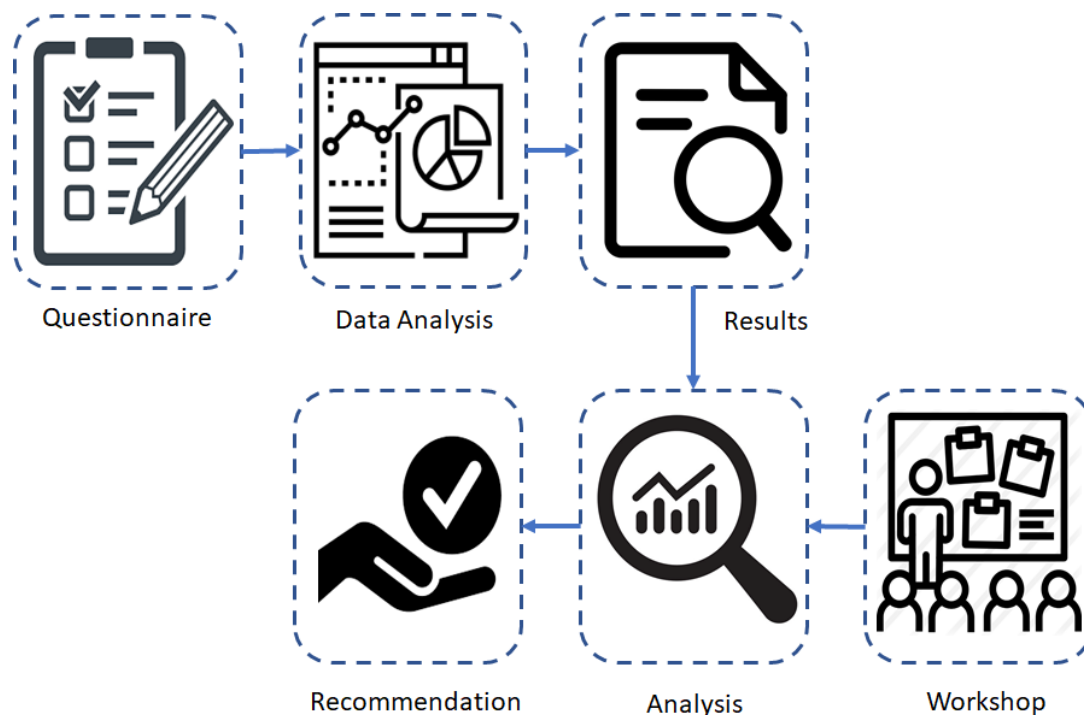


Figure 2: Schematic Diagram of the Proposed Work Methodology

Figure 2 shows the schematic diagram of the methodology of this work. At first a set of relevant questionnaire is set to investigate the reading habits of the students during Covid-19. After collecting the data, it is analyzed using statistical platform SPSS software.

Results and Analysis

The following results and analysis have been made based on the primary and authentic data from 700 respondents.

Table-1: Demographic information of the respondents

Sl. No	Characteristics	Component	Frequency	Percentage
(1)	Gender	Male	507	72.4
		Female	193	27.6
(2)	Age	Under 18	01	0.1
		18-24	514	73.4
		25-34	176	25.1
		35-44	8	1.1
		44-Above	1	0.1

(3)	Year of Study	Honors 1 st Year	91	13.0
		Honors 2 nd Year	129	18.4
		Honors 3 rd Year	255	36.4
		Honors 4 th Year	207	29.6
		Masters	18	2.6
(4)	Current Employment Status	Full-time Student	403	57.6
		Study with Part-time Job	213	30.4
		Study with Full-time Job	71	10.1
		Study with Mothering	13	1.9

Table-1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. 72.4% of the participants were male while 27.6% were female. Most of them are studying in honors 3rd year (36.4%), and the rest 13.0% are in 1st year, 18.4% in 2nd year, 29.6% in 4th year and 2.6% in Masters level. Regarding the age group, the majority 73.4% are from the age group of 18 to 24 years. Under 18 years, the number of respondents is 0.1%, from 25 to 34, it is 25.1%, from age of 35 to 44, it is 1.1% and in the age group of 44 years more, it is 0.1% only. Regarding the professional status of the respondents, full-time students were 57.6%, and the rest 30.4% were students with part-time jobs, 10.1% students were with full-time jobs while 1.9% students were in study with mothering.

Table-2: Staying location during COVID-19 pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dhaka	318	45.4	45.4	45.4
	Outside Dhaka	382	54.6	54.6	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

Table-2 presents the residing location of the respondents during Covid-19 pandemic. It shows that 54.6% of the respondents stayed outside of Dhaka and 45.4% of them stayed in Dhaka. To note, outside Dhaka refers to all around Bangladesh where the university students relocated for the pandemic. It, however, does not cover the remote locations with no access to a strong internet network.

Table-3: Time spent in reading before COVID-19 pandemic

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 hours	20	2.9	2.9	2.9
	3-4 hours	211	30.1	30.1	33.0
	5-6 hours	170	24.3	24.3	57.3
	7-8 hours	68	9.7	9.7	67.0
	More than 8 hours	231	33.0	33.0	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

Table-3 showcases time spent in reading before Covid-19 pandemic. 231 respondents representing 33.0% would spend more than 8 hours in reading before COVID-19 pandemic, 211 respondents representing 30.1% would spend 3-4 hours, 24.3% would read for 5-6 hours, 9.7%, 7-8 hours and only 20 representing 2.9% would read 1-2 hours.

Table-4: Time spent in reading during Covid-19 lockdown

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 hours	312	44.6	44.6	44.6
	3-4 hours	152	21.7	21.7	66.3
	5-6 hours	153	21.9	21.9	88.1
	7-8 hours	24	3.4	3.4	91.6
	More than 8 hours	59	8.4	8.4	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

In Table-4, time spent during pandemic is sought for and it shows that 44.6% of the respondents spent 1-2 hours in reading while 153 respondents representing 21.9% spent 5-6 hours, 152 respondents representing 21.7% spent 3-4 hours, 59 respondents representing 8.4% spent more than 8 hours and 24 comprising 3.4% spent 7-8 hours in reading during Covid-19 lockdown.

Table-5: Time spent in reading both in online and offline

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 hours	74	10.6	10.6	10.6
	3-4 hours	240	34.3	34.3	44.9
	5-6 hours	205	29.3	29.3	74.1
	7-8 hours	121	17.3	17.3	91.4
	More than 8 hours	60	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

When respondents were asked about the time spent in reading both online and offline, 240 of the respondents comprising 34.3% said that they spend 3-4 hours in reading both online and offline while 29.3% spend 5 to 6 hours and 17.3%, 7-8 hours, 10.6%, 1-2 hours and more than 8 hours is consumed by 8.6% respondents.

Table-6: Time spent with electronic devices for different purpose in a day

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 hours	15	2.1	2.1	2.1
	3-4 hours	101	14.4	14.4	16.6
	5-6 hours	402	57.4	57.4	74.0
	7-8 hours	133	19.0	19.0	93.0
	More than 8 hours	49	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	700	100.0	100.0	

Table-6 shows the time spent with electronic devices for different purposes in a day. 57.4% of the respondents spend 5-6 hour while 19.0% spend 7-8 hours, 14.4% spend 3-4 hours and 7.0% spend more than 8 hours. Only 15 respondents representing 2.1% spend 1-2 hours with electronic devices.

Discussions, Recommendations and Limitations

The study conducted on the impacts of pandemic situations on reading habit focused entirely on the students hailing from around the country from **different age groups** studying at university level. Of them, Dhaka covers 45.4% and the rest are from around the country. The study thus reflects well on the overall pictures of the country. 73.4% of all the respondents are from the age group 25-35 years and more than 65% among 700 participants are in 3rd and 4th

year. This also showcases the focus of the study and it covers those who are expected to be more and more habituated to studies of multiple forms. Time spent in reading books during pandemic shows a radical decline as highest 231 respondents comprising 33% would read books more than 8 hours before the pandemic while highest 312 respondents covering 44.6% spent only 1-2 hours reading during the Covid days. One alarming aspect is that the respondents spend much time online with electronic devices and it is for about 80% who spend around 6-7 hours. In that long time, they spent 1-2 hours only in reading books while around 4 hours is consumed by other activities like gaming, facebooking, youtubing, and others. One positive sign is, however, that the students have started reading more online than ever, but that is not of a higher level at all. It is then crystallized from the study that reading habit has got a jolt during this pandemic time and students are getting more and more involved in activities and devices other than reading. If this trend continues, it will be alarming for the future generation as their brighter future depends much on the habit of reading books.

It was a core objective of the study to make some recommendations as ways and means to mitigate adverse impacts of pandemic and lockdown on reading habits with implications for policy making. As pandemic situations exert extensive adverse impacts on the students, the concerned teachers, guardians, policy makers should pay their concentration to boost students' reading habit and normal involvement through strategies fitting for the time. Still in Bangladesh, there is a dearth of digitized reading materials, and this has been felt strongly during COVID-19 period. Therefore, the study recommends that the required reading materials like books, handouts etc. should be developed and made accessible in an extensive manner. We also recommend that online amenities like strong internet connections particularly in remote areas, and incentives to poorer students should be ensured. The research finds that the students have got diverted to activities like gaming, social media, and recreational activities while using electronic devices. We recommend that online learning in different forms should be inculcated as reading culture. We also recommend that the concerned authorities prioritize the interest of the students and ensure the continuity of academic activities and involvements.

The study, however, has its limitations regarding sampling frame, gender differences. Data has been collected through convenient sampling whereas it could have been better if purposive sampling was there. Besides, the ratio between male and female students could have been optimized. The lockdown resulting from COVID-19 has had various impacts on the people and a study conducted by Rodas et. al. (2021) finds it producing “a number of negative

psychological effects, such as increased anxiety and depression”. Further studies can be carried out to investigate factors like psycho-socio-economic issues affecting reading habit.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic has adverse impacts on the life and activities around the world and reading habit of the students has been seriously affected with a marked downgrading trend. The students, however, have got a shift in their time management and activities leaning towards electronic devices. This study finds a decrease in the habit of the students in reading books and spending time in reading during this pandemic. The study also explores students’ The findings resulted from a systematic analysis of the primary data collected through convenient sampling over a period of time from students of university level. The study argues that the guardians and the government should create enough amenities and strong network connectivity for the students to ensure access to reading and resources. Along with awareness and access, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for reading could be there from teachers, parents and guardians. With these findings, the paper comes up with the recommendations that all concerned should take the silent paradigm shift in reading habits of the students into consideration and address the issue with priority pragmatically.

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