Freelancing as a Career Choice for University Students in Bangladesh

**Abstract**

This study explores the motivations, challenges, and institutional dynamics influencing student engagement in freelancing at the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior, it examines how personal attitudes, perceived social norms, and control beliefs shape students’ intentions to pursue freelancing as a career. A qualitative approach was employed, involving semi-structured interviews and surveys with 15 active student freelancers. Thematic analysis revealed that financial independence, skill development, and flexible work schedules are primary motivators. The study found that financial independence, flexibility, and skill development are key motivators for Rajshahi University students to pursue freelancing, while inadequate institutional support, unreliable digital infrastructure, income instability, and academic pressure act as major barriers. It also revealed significant gender disparities and highlighted the need for targeted university support to foster sustainable student participation in the gig economy. However, significant barriers including unreliable digital infrastructure, income instability, academic workload, and inadequate institutional support limit sustained participation in freelance work. The study offers an original contribution by applying behavioral theory to student freelancing within a developing country context, an area that remains underexplored in existing literature. By linking theoretical insights with practical realities, it provides a nuanced understanding of how students navigate freelance opportunities alongside academic commitments. The findings hold policy relevance, offering guidance for universities, policymakers, and development actors. Targeted institutional support, improved technological infrastructure, and integration of freelancing into career development programs are recommended to enhance student participation in the gig economy and promote equitable access to digital employment opportunities.

**Keywords:** Freelancing, Bangladesh, University Students, Gig Economy, Career Development

**Type of Paper:** Original Research Article

**Introduction**

Freelancing is a contract-based profession in which a person uses their skills and experience to serve multiple clients. A freelancer is an independent person who offers their service where required and is not attached to any single establishment as an employer (Okolo & Oghenetega, 2021). A freelancer uses skills, education, and experience to work with several clients and can take on various assignments without committing to a single employer. The number of tasks or gigs that a freelancer can take boils down to his/her ability to deliver on the tasks (Salem, 2021). Nowadays, students in both developed and underdeveloped nations have been involved with this job (Akhmetshin et al., 2018). While a majority of students view freelancing as an excellent means to gain hands-on skills and financial advantage, significant drawbacks include unpredictable income, business versus student responsibilities, and infrastructure limitations persist (Sattayathamrongthian & Vanpetch, 2023). It also puts into perspective conflicting societal perceptions of freelancing along with institutional needs to ensure student success in this area (Harris & Krueger, 2015). Javokhir et al. (2025) examine how the gig economy, particularly freelancing, is transforming traditional labor structures by promoting flexible employment models, increasing self-employment opportunities, and challenging regulatory and policy frameworks in both developed and developing countries.

Among the dynamically developing models of employment today, one can single out freelancing, which are introduced into practice by business leaders and are used by the economically active population. The demand for freelancing as a form of self-employment is facilitated by the intensive development of information and communication technologies and the digitalization of all spheres of the economy, ensuring the guaranteed transfer of large volumes of information between companies, which becomes relevant during the spread of COVID-19 and the use of new forms of personnel management in companies. These non-standard forms of employment are becoming a kind of marker of the information society (Hüseyin & Lütfihak, 2017). Compared to 11% for products, World Trade Report (2023) reports a 15% increase in digital platform service exports over the past 15 years.  It also shows that Bangladesh is home to 14% of global online freelancers in creative and multimedia services.   Bangladeshi youth are increasingly freelancing (Zaman, 2019).  They freelance as web developers, programmers, graphic designers, etc.   As online markets and the Internet have grown, so have the numbers.  The promotion of freelancing in various media also helped.  This profession, a type of self-employment (Akhmetshin et al., 2018), attracts youth like no other due to its freedom, flexibility, and convenient relationship between businesses and skilled workers.

Rajshahi University has a vibrant student community with immense potential for freelancing. Thousands of students at Rajshahi University, one of the top universities in the nation, are increasingly looking into freelancing as a way to make money and advance their skills. To better understand how to support this trend, this study will examine the opinions, opportunities, and challenges faced by Rajshahi University students regarding freelancing (Rashid et al., 2024). The objective of this study is to explore the attitudes and motivations, obstacles, and recommend strategies of students toward freelancing.

**Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study are;

1. To identify the key motivational factors, such as financial independence, skill development, and flexibility, that influence university students to engage in freelancing as a career or side occupation.
2. To examine the institutional and infrastructural support systems available to student freelancers and assess their effectiveness in enabling sustainable freelance careers.
3. To explore the challenges and barriers, including academic pressure, income instability, and social perceptions, that hinder student participation and success in freelancing.
4. To investigate the gender disparity in student freelancing and analyze the socio-cultural and institutional factors contributing to limited female engagement.
5. To evaluate the long-term career outlook of freelancing from the perspective of students, including its perceived impact on employability, entrepreneurship, and post-graduation opportunities.

**Literature Review**

This section reviews existing literature on freelancing, focusing on its benefits, challenges, and relevance to university students, particularly in the context of Bangladesh and Rajshahi University.

**Global Evolution of Freelancing**

In the 1970s, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology called freelancers "Boundaryless Workers" (Tams & Arthur, 2010). This moniker was given since freelancers may work for clients from anywhere in the world. Most online occupations may be done with just one computer, a webcam, and a fast internet connection. You need a bank account to get paid, though (Kazi et al., 2014). Freelancing has become a popular way to work for yourself throughout the world, thanks to advances in technology and the growth of remote work options (Flood, 2023). It lets you work on your schedule and on projects, which makes it quite appealing to students who want to make some extra money on the side. But it also has hazards, such as not being able to count on your income and having trouble managing your duties (Broadbridge & Swanson, 2006).

**Definition and Nature of Freelancing**

Freelancing refers to temporary, contract-based work that does not follow distinctive employment frameworks. Freelancers exchange terms and conditions directly with clients or via sites such as Upwork, Freelancer.com, and Guru.com. These sites serve as mediators for job postings, applications, and payments (Hüseyin & Lütfihak, 2017). Freelancers are valued because of their independence and diverse skill set. Freelancing is thus a hybrid employment procedure, with appearances of both the primary sector (high skill, compensation, and autonomy) and the secondary sector (poor security, meagre benefits). As a result, there is a great deal of obscurity near the definition and classification of freelance work (Mai, 2021).

**Freelancing in the Bangladeshi Context**

According to Rahman and Rahman (2017), freelancing presents a promising solution to unemployment in Bangladesh, particularly among graduates. The study highlights how internet-based freelance work offers income opportunities, enhances living standards, and contributes to the national economy, despite challenges such as infrastructure gaps and limited awareness among job seekers. In the present era, Bangladesh, a developing country, is a noteworthy contributor in the global freelancing market, with a second-place global position in freelance labor supply and an annual revenue of $100 million (Pandit, 2022). To facilitate the expansion of the freelance industry, the government has implemented initiatives such as the provision of Freelancer ID cards and access to loans. Nevertheless, pervasive success remains impeded by factors such as platform competition, skill gaps, and inadequate customer communication (Ahmed et al., 2022). According to a study conducted by Nemkova et al. (2019), although platform work offers flexibility, many creative freelancers feel their work is becoming less meaningful. Based on 40 interviews, this study showed that freelancers worry about how relying on platforms affects both their income and personal fulfillment, especially the non-monetary value they get from their work. Only a few, with strong entrepreneurial drive, manage to find both purpose and a steady income through these platforms.

**Student Involvement and Challenges**

Bangladeshi students are progressively turning to freelancing since it provides prospects for skill development as well as cash. However, challenges like technical issues, erratic job schedules, and challenges juggling academic obligations continue to exist. While some Rajshahi University students are very good at freelancing, others lack awareness, mentorship, and essential operational expertise (Roy, 2021; CPD, 2021). Newcomer freelancers frequently faced significant hindrances such as a lack of IT infrastructure, inadequate expertise, and difficulties getting paid. Social hurdles and scarce capital are other issues that many of them face. Among the main challenges they encounter daily are power outages, expensive internet, difficulties safeguarding financing, payment problems, and powerful competition. Even if they are viewed as insignificant, Issues, for example, government regulations, client bias, and communication breakdowns, continue to complicate matters (Alam et al., 2021). Peters et al. (2020) suggest that **female freelancers find it hard to simultaneously achieve meaningful work, work-life balance, and financial independence** due to conflicting values.

**Institutional and Infrastructural Support**

University-level support is still insufficient despite national measures. Students' ability to freelance is limited by a lack of direction, training, exposure, and access to excellent equipment and internet (Rahman, 2024). The need for more proactive university involvement is highlighted by the fact that success frequently depends more on students' independent initiative and outside training than on institutional support. Freelancers have reported a lack of money and IT infrastructure assistance, a scarcity of training facilities, payment challenges, and social hurdles (Alam et al., 2021).

This study is novel in exploring freelancing among university students in a developing country context, specifically Rajshahi University in Bangladesh. Unlike most research focused on Western professionals, it investigates how students balance freelancing with academics. It applies the Theory of Planned Behavior to understand psychological and social influences. The paper reveals unique challenges like infrastructure gaps and limited institutional support. It also uncovers gender disparities and a lack of formal training. These insights fill a gap in the literature on youth engagement in the gig economy in South Asia.

**Theoretical Framework: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**

Ajzen (1991, 2012) developed the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which provides a framework for discovering university students' willingness to do freelancing. As of TPB, behavioral intentions are covered by three key factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude denotes students' judgement of freelancing, and it can be positive or negative on perceived outcomes. Students with positive benefits with favorable attitudes think that they may have financial independence, skill development, and flexible work hours (Prakasha et al., 2023).



**Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)**

Conversely, students who consider freelancing as not stable or may be academically distracted may develop negative perceptions (Eman, 2021).  In the case of Subjective norms, it reflects that there is an influencing factor between social pressures and students' decisions. According to the study of Dunumadalawa et al. (2024), students are more likely to pursue freelancing if peers, family, or faculty approve of freelancing (injunctive norms). Additionally, seeing fellow students successfully freelancing (descriptive norms) reinforces their intentions. However, skepticism from parents ("not a real career") or professors ("distracts from studies") can discourage participation, even if students personally favor freelancing. Perceived behavioral control assesses students' confidence in overcoming freelancing challenges. Key factors include having relevant skills (e.g., digital marketing, programming), time management abilities, and access to reliable infrastructure (internet, payment systems). Students with prior training or supportive university programs feel more capable, while those struggling with academic workload or technical barriers may avoid freelancing despite positive attitudes. So, TPB helps find mental and environmental elements that affect students' plans to work for themselves. Damian and Empoli (2021) assert that the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a strong way to understand why freelancers want to start their businesses. Their research showed that freelancers' entrepreneurial intentions were strongly affected by their attitudes about entrepreneurship, how much control they thought they had over their conduct, and subjective standards. This shows how useful TPB is in the gig economy. In addition, Gandhi et al. (2018) used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to look at why people want to work as gig workers on platforms. Their qualitative study showed that attitude, subjective standards, and perceived behavioral control are important factors that affect how ready people are to do gig labor on digital platforms. In summary, TPB suggests that freelancing intentions depend on a balance of personal motivation, social approval, and practical feasibility. Universities and policymakers can encourage student freelancing by addressing these factors promoting its benefits, fostering supportive social norms, and providing skill development and infrastructure support. The barriers reported by students, such as unreliable internet and academic pressure, directly affect their perceived behavioral control, a core component of the Theory of Planned Behavior, thereby reducing their intention to continue freelancing.



**Figure 2: Elements of the Theory of Planned Behavior with the study elements**

**Figure 2.**Shows the conceptual application of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to understand how university students decide to engage in freelancing. Attitudes (e.g., motivations), subjective norms (e.g., peer/family influence), and perceived behavioral control (e.g., access to skills and infrastructure) interact to shape students’ intentions and actual freelancing behavior.

**Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives, opportunities, and challenges of freelancing among students at Rajshahi University. The research design involved descriptive data collection through in-depth interviews and surveys to gain deeper insights into students' freelancing experiences. A structured questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms and offline methods, was used to gather responses, which were then compiled in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Each row represents a respondent, while columns correspond to specific questions, allowing for systematic data organization. Irrelevant or incomplete responses were removed to ensure a clean and reliable dataset for interpretation.

The target population consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students at Rajshahi University who were actively engaged in freelancing. A combination of snowball and purposive sampling techniques was used to select participants, ensuring that only students with freelancing experience were included. The final sample size comprised 15 respondents. The questionnaire was divided into eight sections: (A) Demographic Information, (B) Awareness and Understanding of Freelancing, (C) Motivation and Interest, (D) Skills and Preparation, (E) Opportunities and Market Prospects, (F) Challenges and Barriers, (G) Social and Academic Impact, and (H) Future Outlook and Career Vision. Data collection spanned four weeks, with responses anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, where recurring themes such as time management, financial benefits, skill acquisition, and mentorship needs were identified through sequential coding and classification. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, including ensuring participant anonymity, voluntary participation, and using the data solely for educational purposes. However, the study had several limitations. The small sample size (15 respondents) may not fully represent the diversity of freelancing experiences at Rajshahi University. The purposive sampling method could introduce selection bias, as only students with freelancing backgrounds were included. Additionally, the research was confined to a single university, limiting the generalizability of findings. Certain high-demand freelancing sectors, such as blockchain and artificial intelligence, were not specifically examined, potentially overlooking niche opportunities. The study also provided only a snapshot of student experiences rather than assessing long-term career impacts. Furthermore, no comparative analysis was conducted between freelancing and non-freelancing students regarding academic performance, employability, or psychological well-being.

**Research Instrument**

Once the theoretical framework is in place, all subjects should be looked at from a qualitative point of view. It is necessary to look for phenomena through profound empirical experience by doing a semi-structured interview. Each concept is broken down into some codes as shown in Table 1. This study uses inductive reasoning to code and track the pattern of replies received, as conducted in the study of Gandhi et al. (2018).

**Table 1: Data collection materials**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Code** | **Keyword** | **Full Question** |
| FA | Freelancing Awareness | Where did you first hear about freelancing, and how has your knowledge developed since then? |
| FVE | Freelancing vs Employment | What do you think distinguishes freelancing from traditional employment? |
| MOT | Motivation | What motivates you to consider freelancing as a career or side job? |
| FG | Freelancing Goals | Are there specific goals (financial, skill development, etc.) you hope to achieve through freelancing? |
| FS | Freelancing Skills | What skills do you believe are necessary to become a successful freelancer? |
| PM | Preparation Methods | Have you taken any steps (courses, workshops, self-learning) to prepare for freelancing? Please elaborate. |
| US | University Support | Do you feel Rajshahi University supports the development of freelancing skills? Why or why not? |
| FO | Freelance Opportunities | What kind of freelancing opportunities are you aware of that are suitable for university students? |
| FD | Field Demand | Do you think there is a growing demand for freelancers in your field of study? Please explain. |
| CH | Challenges | What are the major challenges or barriers you face (or expect to face) in freelancing? |
| TLI | Tech & Language Issues | How do issues such as internet access, payment methods, or language skills affect your freelancing journey? |
| AI | Academic Impact | How does freelancing affect your academic performance or daily schedule? |
| SP | Social Perception | What do your peers, teachers, or family think about your interest in freelancing? |
| CO | Career Outlook | Do you see freelancing as a long-term career path or a temporary option? Why? |
| CE | Career Encouragement | What would help you or others take freelancing more seriously as a career choice? |
| UR | University Role | How can Rajshahi University play a more active role in promoting freelancing among students? |

**Data Collection**

This research needs an Upwork or Fiverr membership. Criteria sampling selects 15 university of Rajshahi gig workers as respondents. Table 2 shows that the sample is made up of all males, most of whom are between the ages of 23 and 26 (73.33%). The majority are master's students (40%) and come from the Social Science faculty (46.67%). There are not many different faculties or study levels involved, and there are no female responders, which shows that there is a gender imbalance and a focus on mid- to advanced academic levels. As Marshall et al. (2013) suggest, it has the minimum qualitative case study sample size. This study employs semi-structured and in-depth interviews to detect patterns in participant responses, which are categorized using research techniques.

**Table 2: Demographic Information**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variable** | **Category** | **Frequency (n)** | **Percentage (%)** |
| **Gender** | Male | 15 | 100.00% |
| Female | 0 | 0.00% |
| **Age Group** | 18–22 | 2 | 13.33% |
| 23–26 | 11 | 73.33% |
| 28+ | 2 | 13.33% |
| **Level of Study** | 1st Year | 1 | 6.67% |
| 2nd Year | 0 | 0.00% |
| 3rd Year | 4 | 26.67% |
| 4th Year | 3 | 20.00% |
| Masters | 6 | 40.00% |
| PhD | 1 | 6.67% |
| **Faculty** | Social Science | 7 | 46.67% |
| Business Studies | 2 | 13.33% |
| Arts | 2 | 13.33% |
| Law | 1 | 6.67% |
| Science & Technology | 3 | 20.00% |

**Data Processing**

Survey responses from 15 anonymous participants were compiled in Excel and imported into NVivo. First-cycle descriptive codes (e.g., KN\_SOCMED, MOT\_FIN, CHAL\_TIME) were applied to responses using open coding. These were grouped into five second-cycle thematic nodes: *Motivational Drivers*, *Institutional Support Gaps*, *Skill Development*, *Platform Barriers*, and *Academic-Freelancing Interface*. Matrix coding queries explored frequency by department and co-occurrence (e.g., MOT\_FIN + CHAL\_TIME). Visual outputs included word clouds and comparison charts. Coding reliability was ensured via intercoder checks (α=0.78), with ethical safeguards like anonymization, versioned codebooks, and secure data storage protocols.

**Data Analysis**

**Motivations for Freelancing**

***Financial Independence***

Freelancing offers students a pathway to financial independence by enabling them to earn income while studying. Many pursue it to reduce reliance on family support and cover educational expenses while gaining valuable work experience. One of the respondents mentioned that *"It's giving me financial independence."(R6)*

"*I'm mainly motivated by the chance to earn money while building real-world skills at my own pace."*(R13)

"*Freelancing provides the opportunity to earn additional income.*"(R8).   As stated in the research of Sagala et al. (2025), with technological advancements and increased access to the internet, the phenomenon of students working as freelancers is expanding quickly.  Students can work when they have the flexibility that comes with freelancing.  This freedom allows for greater selectivity in clients, more focus on passion projects, and even the flexibility to take creative risks that might not offer immediate financial gain. It transforms freelancing from a necessity into a purposeful pursuit, where the freelancer can align their work with personal values rather than just income. In this way, financial independence doesn’t just support freelancing—it supercharges it. Additionally, working as a freelancer gives you the chance to develop skills relevant to your subject of study, broaden your professional network, and generate extra cash. In addition, freelancing is reported to have become a huge opportunity for students to earn money while studying. 21 % of British graduates with a first-class degree are reported to freelance. Businesses are looking for student copywriters, bloggers, and essay writers to help with their online content. Online platforms are also advertising freelancing opportunities to students as a means for extra income, helping make a career choice, working independently, and getting a paid opportunity to practice and build experience (Sagala et al., 2025).

**Flexibility and Autonomy**

When so many people compete to obtain status as employees and permanent workers, some choose an independent career path that prioritizes freedom and flexibility. One type of independent career actor is a freelancer. Freedom and flexibility offered by the career choice of freelancers have their unique attractiveness, which is unavailable in conventional careers. Freelancers have the freedom to determine their work’s place, time, and style (Gold & Mustafa, 2013).

As mentioned by R-14, "*Freelancing offers more flexibility and independence, allowing people to choose their projects and set their own schedules, the freedom to work from anywhere and choose projects that align with my interests makes freelancing really appealing*." A new World Bank analysis says that internet gig labor lets people choose their own hours, which helps them take better care of their families, keep studying, or establish their own enterprises while working and making money (Kuek et al., 2015).

The opinion of R-12 reflects a common challenge faced by student freelancers in balancing academic schedules with paid work: "*Freelancing is flexible; as a student, I can't work in a fixed period of the day due to my class schedule*."

This highlights how time flexibility is not just a convenience but a critical enabler of freelance participation for students. The ability to choose working hours allows them to navigate academic demands without abandoning income opportunities. This aligns with Schein’s (1990) assertion that freelancers anchor their careers in autonomy and independence. More importantly, this autonomy fosters entrepreneurial creativity, enabling students to explore client-based work while managing their learning environments. However, the flexibility also presents challenges without structured work hours, students may struggle with discipline, time management, and maintaining academic performance. This tension reflects the broader finding that while freelancing offers adaptability, it requires a high level of self-regulation to be sustainable alongside university commitments.

**Skill Development**

Freelancing can play as a viable option for students who want to earn extra revenue, gain valuable work experience, and cultivate marketable skills. However, many students face challenges such as lack of access to adequate technology, training, and guidance. Online courses, mentorship, project-based learning, and networking are important to gain for a freelancer. They have to gain knowledge, skills, and confidence

to pursue freelancing opportunities in various fields, such as software development, graphic design, writing, and tutoring. By developing skills, they can achieve their personal and professional goals. A study of Margaryan et al. (2020) conducted on the CrowdLearn initiative and looked at ways to help people learn new skills while working online as a freelancer or doing microwork. Surveys of freelancers and microworkers showed that they gain skills in different ways. Freelancing gives workers additional chances to learn in a complicated and independent way. The results guide Cedefop's suggestions for how to help people learn more skills while working online.

While asking about which skills are necessary to become a successful freelancer, most of them mentioned that besides technical skills; communication skills, English frequency skills are also necessary. The responses from participants reveal that freelancing is not merely a means of income, but a strategic avenue for personal and professional development. R13 emphasized the dual goal of "*I want to improve my communication and tech skills while also earning enough to support my education*," highlighting how freelancing functions as a practical learning environment beyond formal academic settings. In response to the question, are there specific goals (financial, skill development, etc.) you hope to achieve through freelancing?, most respondents mentioned financial independence as a core goal. R3 shared, "*Through freelancing, I hope to achieve financial independence, expand my skill set, and build a strong professional network*," suggesting that freelancing is perceived as a stepping stone toward long-term career readiness. This idea is further echoed by R14: "*Yes, I hope to boost my income while gaining real-world experience in areas I'm passionate about. I also want to sharpen my skills and build a strong portfolio that can open up more opportunities in the future.*"

These responses collectively point to a recurring pattern: students are motivated not only by immediate financial needs but also by the opportunity to grow professionally and personally. Freelancing is viewed as a means to bridge the gap between academic learning and marketable experience, offering flexibility, autonomy, and career-relevant exposure. This demonstrates how the student freelancing experience is deeply tied to aspirations for independence, self-improvement, and future employability, making it more than just a temporary income source.

**Perceived Advantages of Freelancing**

***Work-Life Balance***

Work-life balance is when people are equally engaged and happy in their personal and professional lives (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Work-life balance is the alignment of an individual's professional and personal efficiency and satisfaction with their values and goals (Greenhaus and Allen, 2006). The extent to which an individual's performance and enjoyment in professional and familial activities match their life values at a given time is called work-life balance (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). R-14 stated like "*I choose who I work with and how I do it." Having authority makes me happier than a 9-to-5 worker”*. However, the growing trend of freelancing presents new challenges for workers seeking a healthy work-life balance. Striking a balance between personal and professional life is crucial for productivity, happiness, and overall well-being.  Freelancing workers face difficulties due to the blending of personal and professional lives, the need for independence, flexibility, and maintaining a strong professional reputation.  Despite these challenges, freelancers can improve their personal and professional lives using various techniques (Abug et al., 2023). R5’s reflection, “*Getting time with family. It's not just about being in the same place; it's about being present and connected with family,*” highlights a deeper emotional and relational dimension of freelancing that extends beyond financial or skill-oriented motivations. This statement suggests that for some student freelancers, the value of freelancing lies in the flexibility it offers to maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships, especially within the family unit. Unlike rigid part-time jobs or traditional employment, freelancing allows students to manage their schedules in a way that prioritizes not just physical presence but emotional availability and quality time with loved ones.

This insight reflects the importance of work-life integration, where professional commitments are balanced with personal well-being and familial responsibilities. For students who may otherwise be stretched thin between academics and earning, freelancing provides a model of work that supports holistic life satisfaction. It also suggests that emotional fulfillment and social connection are integral, though often underexplored, factors in the freelancing experience, particularly in collectivist societies where family bonding holds cultural significance.

***Career Opportunities***

The study by Stupnikova et al. (2015) talks about new job options in the labor market that have to do with freelancing. Every year, more and more people in Russia work as freelancers. This kind of job can help those who can't work in offices for a number of reasons but can work from home. Freelancing lets people make more money and find work in rural sections of the nation where it is hard to find a job, much like it did in the United States. This paper talks about the theoretical aspects of freelancing and how different types of jobs are related to each other. It also looks at the present condition of free employment in Russia.

Freelancing has now become one of the popular choices, especially among students. Freelancing offers flexibility in time, opportunities to hone skills, and early work experience, which are very valuable for building a career in the future (Sagala et al., 2025).  They enjoy freelancing as a career, and they can offer jobs to many people. *“It’s a profession with huge possibilities and can earn more than traditional jobs."(R15)* As most of my respondents are students, as students they can't work in a fixed period of the day due to their class schedule. So, this flexibility motivates them to choose freelancing as a side job. There are no specific boundaries in terms of work and financial independence, so they choose it as a career. As respondent 11 mentioned, "*Freelancing as a career or side hustle is attractive due to its flexibility, autonomy, and potential for higher income. It allows individuals to work on their terms, choose projects that align with their interests, and potentially earn more than in a traditional job. This freedom and control over one's work life can be a significant motivator for those seeking more personalized and fulfilling work experience*. Likewise, another respondent R-3 mentioned "*I see freelancing as a potential long-term career because of its flexibility, independence, and income opportunities*.".

***Global Exposure***

The nature of freelancing has completely transformed with the emergence of online platforms, working from anywhere across the globe, and sitting at home. Freelancers offer a wide variety of skill sets to choose from and can source (Kathuria et al., 2017).

Freelancing is a new line of work for people around the world. “I like finding tasks that fit with my principles. It gives me a feeling of motive that my position at the business hardly provided.” (R5)

Freelancers can work from home. Many experts, leaving office walls, are happy to give up leadership, control, and constant communication with colleagues. Freelancers have a large part of communications in electronic format, and for introverts this is a real find. Working remotely, one encounters uncertainty and

fluctuations in income. But these revenues are directly dependent on the freelancer himself: he receives as much as orders or projects managed to complete. Remote workers are not as time dependent as office workers (Akhmetshin et al., 2018). *"Working with clients from different industries and countries gives me a sense of international exposure."(R8).* R8’s statement reflects that freelancing offers valuable **international exposure,** enabling students to engage with diverse industries and cultures, thereby broadening their **global perspective**, professional adaptability, and cross-cultural communication skills.

**Challenges and Barriers**

***Finding Clients and Income Stability***

Freelancing has surged globally as professionals seek flexibility, autonomy, and diversified income streams (Sattayathamrongthian & Vanpetch, 2023).  However, freelancing also presents challenges, such as income instability, lack of job security, and limited access to traditional employment benefits. Facing technical issues while working, Fear of job security, managing multiple projects simultaneously, balancing work and personal life, meeting unrealistic demands of the client, and long hours of working are the most common challenges faced by freelancers (Aithal, 2024). As one of the respondents mentioned, *“One major challenge in freelancing is finding consistent clients and building a stable income stream.*"(R14)

There is no day and night; they have to do night shifts to maintain a balance between study and work, so there are health issues and psychological impacts.

Another respondent said, *“Some major challenges I expect to face in freelancing include finding reliable clients, dealing with inconsistent income, and managing multiple projects independently. Building a strong reputation and standing out in a competitive market can also be difficult at the beginning. Additionally, handling contracts, payments, and time management without external support may be challenging at first.*"(R7)

"Major challenges include finding clients, dealing with inconsistent income, and balancing work with studies."(R3) as mentioned in previous. Also *"The income in freelancing is uncertain."*(R12).

***Time Management***

Freelancers should have flexible schedules. Giving workers the freedom to choose their hours whenever feasible improves satisfaction and lowers stress. Freelancers are typically judged based on the quality of the work they produce within the given timeframe. Nawaz et al. (2020) said that some freelancers felt a lot of pressure to meet deadlines, which made them more stressed and made it harder to reconcile work and life. Clear project scopes, deadlines, and performance expectations are essential.

Some respondents find it hard to balance between study and work: *"Hard to balance between academic studies and freelancing activities."*(R10). Another related comment, *"Freelancing can affect my academic performance by making it harder to manage study time"*(R12).

***Infrastructure Issues***

In the evolving gig economy world, freelancers, mostly those who work remotely, depend on remote tools to manage client relationships and project roadmaps across diverse time zones. This transition has resulted in personalized digital infrastructures that rely deeply on video conferencing, project management software, and collaboration tools to coordinate with clients and teams around the world. These solutions not only provide freedom but also help the independent community maintain productivity and create professional credibility in a globally distributed, totally digital work environment (Sutherland, 2017; Braesemann et al., 2022). These types of collaborative platforms with such tools like video conferencing, project management software make it easier to manage geographically disseminated workflows. However, from the perspective of developing countries, especially Bangladesh, they have high bandwidth problems. Inconsistent or slow Internet connectivity makes it difficult, in areas where internet (Figure 3) infrastructure is poor (Hossain et al., 2023), freelancers face serious limitations in freelancing.



            **Figure 3: Different nations' 4G and 5G data speeds compared (Hossain et al., 2023)**

"*Currently, our internet service is in a very bad state. This is a very challenging issue for all freelancers."(*R11).

They face difficulties accessing and transferring large files like high-resolution images, videos, or software packages. Video conferencing tools (Zoom, Google Meet, Teams) may become unusable, causing miscommunication or poor client interactions and Cloud-based project management tools may fail to sync.

"*Unreliable internet access, limited payment methods, and language barriers can hinder communication with clients*."(R14). Freelancers in Bangladesh have a lot of problems, such as not having enough outsourced middle management and bad infrastructure. Martin Conboy said that businesses need to strengthen their English and cross-cultural abilities if they want to be competitive (Dhaka Tribune, 2016). There are still problems with payments since PayPal is absent, which makes transactions harder. Frequent power outages and sluggish internet connections also make it harder for the industry to flourish, which makes it harder for freelancers to work quickly and compete on a global scale.

In this regard, one of the respondents mentioned, "*Payment methods can be a barrier if popular platforms like PayPal or Payoneer are not fully supported in my region."(R8).*

**Required Skills for Success**

***Technical and soft Skills***

Technical talents encompass practical knowledge for IT jobs including programming, data analysis, and graphical design. Ensuring children obtain technical instruction in school is crucial for improving their abilities. Training might include internships, workshops, and hands-on projects to provide students with real experience. This prepares students for the workforce and gives them a competitive edge in the employment market (Al-Zekri et al., 2024).

Freelance graphics designers, network specialists, software and site designers, developers, and IT trainers are in demand due to advances in ICT and the Internet. Freelancers in web development may work from home and design websites, apps, and systems at their own pace.

The World Wide Web is becoming the most common place to find freelancing jobs. There are several websites, for example, Elance.com, FreeLance.com, Go4outSourcing.com, and many more, which allow individuals and organizations to hire freelancers, especially for web designing and development (Ahmed & van den Hoven, 2010).

 As respondent R-7 mentioned, " *To succeed as a freelancer, both technical and soft skills are essential. On the technical side, you need strong expertise in your specific field—whether it’s writing, design, programming, or another area. Equally important are soft skills like communication, time management, and problem-solving. Freelancers must be self-motivated, organized, and able to meet deadlines without direct supervision."* Others say, "*To be a successful freelancer, it is important to be skilled in a specific subject (such as graphic design, digital marketing, web development)."(R11)*

Freelancing is not just about technical skills; it involves many software skills too. In today's fast-paced and rapidly evolving job market, students need to adapt and acquire specialized skills that match industry demands (Khalifa, 2024).

Multiple respondents (R2, R6, R10) specifically mention completing courses in digital marketing platforms, including social media marketing tools (Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest), SEO/SEM tools (Google Analytics, Ahrefs, SEMrush)- SEO is seen as one of the most important tools in digital marketing. SEO, search engine optimization, means setting up your professional website in a way that is more search engine friendly, Email marketing platforms and WordPress and Shopify for web development.  According to the respondent R-10, *"To be a successful freelancer, it is important to be skilled in a specific subject (such as graphic design, digital marketing, web development). Also, knowing English is very important.”* Several students (R3, R11, R15) mentioned Creative Design Software like Graphic design tools (Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator), Video editing software (Premiere Pro, After Effects), UI/UX design platforms (Figma, Adobe XD) as very significant to learn to cope with the changing world of freelancing.

**University Support and Institutional Role**

***Current Support***

Rajshahi University, one of the largest public universities in Bangladesh, has a vibrant student community with immense potential for freelancing. Thousands of students at Rajshahi University, one of the top universities in the nation, are increasingly looking into freelancing as a way to make money and advance their skills.  However, despite the increasing interest in freelancing, many students face barriers such as limited resources, insufficient skills, and infrastructural challenges (Iliasov et al, 2024).

In response to the question, do you feel Rajshahi University supports the development of freelancing skills? Why or why not? Respondents are not satisfied with the current support by their university.

Respondents mentioned, "*University provides several opportunities but they are not enough."(R15).*  "*Though universities and various departments such as Information and Communication Engineering provide workshops for students to learn about basics, it's not enough in this field."(R12)*

According to respondents R-9, *“No, they don't support it, rather pressurize it to focus on academic studies!” In this respect, another freelancer stated that" Rajshahi University offers a solid education, but more freelancing-focused programs would be helpful.” Honestly, Rajshahi University could do more—right now, there’s very little structured support for freelancing.”*

***Social Perceptions***

***Family and Peer Attitudes***

Family and friends' support in regard to freelancing is significant. *"My friends are supportive, but my family and some teachers still don't fully understand the value of freelancing."(R13).* However, it varies peer to peer. In this case, one of the people said that*" It seems like the response to freelancing varies across peers, teachers, and family. Some peers may be intrigued by the flexibility and earning potential, while others might be skeptical or unsure about the stability it offers. Teachers might be more receptive, especially if they are looking to diversify their income or offer unique learning experiences. Family members might have mixed reactions, potentially worried about the security of a freelance career but also appreciating the opportunity for personal growth and flexibility. "(R11).* Incomes are not always the same. Sometimes they don’t get work. At that time family members have different views as stated by a respondent *"None appreciates it. They don't even believe it as an earning sector!"(R10).*

**Future Outlook**

***Long-term vs Temporary***

During the past few years, freelancing has grown exponentially due to the pandemic and subsequent economic changes in the world. In fact, in the last ten years, a drastic increase in freelancing has been observed; people quit their jobs to be their boss. There are various reasons for this: downsizing of employees, not having fun in their jobs, unemployment, part-time work to earn more (Khan et al., 2022).

As one of my respondents mentioned, *" I see freelancing as a potential long-term career path because it offers flexibility, diverse work opportunities, and the ability to be self-directed. It allows me to continuously learn and grow while working with clients from different industries. However, I’m also open to combining it with traditional employment, depending on future goals and stability needs. "(R7)*

While others stated that "*It can be a long-term career plan.* " (R15).

We believe that after being enlightened about the benefits of freelancing, the population of online employees became interested in it. Many people are motivated to work through various online freelancing platforms because of the information created by freelancers in their social networks.

*"Freelancing can be viewed as both a long-term career and a temporary option, depending on individual circumstances and goals."*(R14).

**Implications**

This study proved the notion of planned behavior's behavior-affecting factors. If extensively utilized, the results match another research (Damian & Empoli, 2021; Kobayashi & Hazra, 2024; Ang et al., 2023; Ramesh et al., 2016). By considering such factors, this research plugs gaps in freelancer participation to complete their life cycle. User inspiration, curiosity, acquisition, problem-solving, and freelancing success are also shown.

After discovering how to assist people to become freelancers, the platform may exploit those variables to attract additional freelancers to other universities in the country. The platform owner might choose features to achieve their purpose. Thus, the platform will be more reliable and competitive. This study also found that becoming digital may make people more flexible and better at their professions.

**Conclusion**

This qualitative analysis reveals that students at Rajshahi University perceive freelancing as both an opportunity and a challenge. Financial independence, flexibility, and the desire to build market-relevant skills are key motivators driving their participation. However, the journey is hindered by institutional shortcomings, such as lack of university support, unreliable digital infrastructure, and academic workload pressures. Additionally, gender disparities and limited international exposure further complicate the freelancing experience. Overall, the findings suggest that while freelancing holds strong potential for student empowerment and career development, targeted support systems and policy interventions are essential to make this path more sustainable and inclusive. Van den Born and Van Witteloostuijn (2013) state that the emergence of freelancers corresponds with the prediction of Handy (1989) in that the organization of the future consists of three types of workers: (1) professional employees, (2) professional freelancers, and (3) workers doing routine jobs. Van den Born and Van Witteloostuijn (2013) focus on a subjective measure of freelancers’ career success, i.e., six items reflecting satisfaction with one’s career. It turns out that autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance are significantly and positively related to the subjective career success of freelancers. Indeed, Storey et al. (2005, p. 1050) conclude that “… freelancers tended to aspire to the core qualities of enterprise independence and autonomy in their working lives.” And (p. 1051): “There was the possibility of a more flexible, home-based working life for individuals with caring responsibilities or other personal commitments.”

Freelancing is becoming a more popular choice for people all over the world, especially students and young professionals who want to be financially independent and have flexible career options—especially, during COVID-19, the internet usage among students significantly increased (Rahman et al., 2023), since then, the involvement in online business has also increased. Freelancing presents financial risks that can be daunting for individuals accustomed to stable employment, as noted by Kautonen et al. (2017). However, this inherent uncertainty fosters mental resilience in freelancers, who learn to view setbacks as opportunities for growth and adapt to evolving work environments. Many respondents, including R3, R6, and R8, found freelancing to be a valuable source of income while studying. For example, R6 highlighted the "financial freedom" it offered, while R3 was drawn to its "flexibility, freedom, and earning possibilities." Additionally, Ray and Thomas (2019) suggest that freelancers benefit from skill development driven by market demands. They point out that online labor platforms reflect changing global economic demands, from simple data input to complex software development. R8 and R11 both agreed with this, saying that communication, time management, and the need for web development and digital marketing abilities were all becoming better. R3 and R14 both said that freelancing has its pros and downsides, but it is still hard to make money and get regular clients, especially for novices (Barlage et al., 2019). Another big problem is balancing freelancing with schoolwork. For example, R10 and R12 said that keeping this balance sometimes meant missing out on school events. Also, the absence of strong digital infrastructure and institutional support is a big problem in places like Rajshahi, where students have trouble getting online (R11), have few ways to pay (R8), and people don't trust freelancing as a real job (R10). Rajshahi University does offer basic IT education and occasional workshops through departments like ICE, but respondents like R5 and R8 called for more organized efforts, like adding freelancing skills to the curriculum and improving internet access, to better help students who want to work as freelancers. As Nguyen et al. (2025) point out, starting a freelance career requires both personal flexibility and support from institutions, especially in places where traditional job patterns are still the norm.

Freelancing is working on a contract basis, offering services to consumers or businesses without being hired full-time by them. It provides the capacity, independence, and flexibility to work on several different projects for several clients. This study investigated, therefore, the elements affecting and difficulties experienced by freelancers as well as their dynamic nature. Detailed analysis revealed financial stability, telecommuting, and having the freedom to work on their schedule as salient factors influencing freelancers' effectiveness. Issues like irregular paychecks and managing clients pointed up various dimensions of freelancing. Additionally, shifting technology, as well as remote employment patterns, created opportunities along with complications (Barlage et al., 2019).

Freelancing offers a bright professional future to Rajshahi University students, characterized by versatility, stability, and skill acquisition. There are indeed challenges, but by surmounting these through purposeful learning, infinite possibilities are created. RU students can condition themselves to pursue interesting global jobs in today’s virtual age by keeping an open mind towards freelancing (Vardanyan, 2023). To support student freelancers nationwide, universities should integrate freelancing skills into curricula, establish mentorship networks, and collaborate with policymakers to improve digital infrastructure, payment systems, and access to international markets.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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Author(s) hereby declare that generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models, etc. have been used during the writing or editing of manuscripts. This explanation will include the name, version, model, and source of the generative AI technology and as well as all input prompts provided to the generative AI technology

Details of the AI usage are given below:

1. ChatGPT, Gemini, and Grammarly tools were used during the refurbishing and correcting grammatical concerns in this study.

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