

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD EDUCATION: THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

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Summary

Children are the future of tomorrow because the country and nation of the future will be led by children, so if child education is damaged, it is a loss of the country and the nation. In 2020, as the entire world was afraid of death due to the COVID-19 pandemic, child-centered educational institutions have also been closed in Bangladesh as part of the global closure of educational institutions for the sake of safe living. This study investigates whether children's education in Bangladesh has suffered during the shutdown and if so, which types of children's education have suffered more. The study was carried out with ten educational institutions based on primary data. It was mixed research, using a structured questionnaire where 175 parents and 55 teachers participated. 70 teachers and parents were interviewed. This exploration that the prolonged closure of educational institutions during the COVID-19 situation carries negative effects and indicates has hurt the education of children in local, poor families and marginalized children.

Keywords: Covid-19, Impact, Child Education, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO reports that schools have been closed in 160 countries in response to the pandemic, which has affected more than 1.5 billion students (Deopok, 2020). Starting from March 2020 to September 2021, Bangladesh's educational institutions were closed for eighteen months and so, it affected the education of 37 million children in the country (UNESCO, 2021). Today's children are the future of tomorrow, education is one of the tools to reveal their latent talents. By which they become subsistent for life and livelihood (Talukdar, 2020). Bangladesh is a developing country in South Asia with more than 60 million children (UNICEF, ND). According to the Child Budget Report 2019-20, the number of children in the country was about 66 million (Aktar, 2022). In 2020, there were eighty two lac sixty thousand two hundred four children in primary school (Benbeis, 2021). There were nine lac sixty one thousand ninty one children in Ebtedayi 10349323 (Banbeis, 2021). There was one chore three lac forty nine thousand three hundred twenty-three child in secondary school (Benbeis, 2021). According to the United Nations Charter 1989, "All human children aged 0-18 are children" (UNICEF, ND). According to the Bangladesh Child Act, everyone is a child between the ages of 0-18 years (Ali, 2013). Education is the bringing out or development of potentialities hidden within (Wikipedia).

In late December 2019, a deadly disease caused by the coronavirus, discovered in a human body in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China, caused global concern in late January, leading to the World Health Organization declaring it a pandemic on 11 March. Due to the spread of the epidemic in Bangladesh as well, all schools and educational institutions in Bangladesh were declared closed on account of the government's lockdown regulations from March 18, 2020.

As a result, 42 million students stopped going to school (UNICEF, 2020). Basically all schools and educational institutions in Bangladesh were closed due to the government's lockdown regulations (Gov., 2020). Educational institutions were completely closed for about 18 months as part of the government's various initiatives and measures to cure the infectious coronavirus (Akter, 2022; Kabir, et al, 2021.; Gob, 2020.; Alam, ND.). Millions of children around the world have been affected by covid-19 which has resulted in positive effects such as childhood development, greater awareness, development of relationships and empathy, and learning the value of nature, but negative effects such as aggressive behavioral changes, anxiety about the future, shortage of competitive environment. Social media and internet addiction, increased risk of child exploitation, adverse impact on children with disabilities, short and long-term reduction in academic achievement due to unexpected school closures, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds being more affected than others at school (Eyles, 2020). However, negative effects can be more devastating than positive effects (Gupta, 2020). As long as schools remain closed, the achievement gap between rich and poor children will widen (Deopok, 2020). Institutions that can play an important role in the social and economic well-being of children, including child education, have become burdened with debt due to long closures (Evan, 2020). COVID-19 is affecting children's health, nutrition, education, security, well-being, family finances, and poverty. The impacts is likely to be subversive for the most marginalized and disadvantaged children (Silva, 2020). Children are deprived of their greatest opportunity to learn and develop when schools are closed. This epidemic grows a deadly threat to girls and boys from poor, marginalized families (UNICEF, 2021). Closure of entire educational institutions in the context of COVID-19 poses the ultimate challenge to the education system in developing countries like Bangladesh, especially in providing uninterrupted education to all children in local areas. The closure affects children physically, mentally, socially, and in many ways (Kabir, et al, 2021).

Online learning is an educational process that takes place over the Internet as a form of distance education. In 2020, distance education became important due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In early childhood education emphasis is placed on providing student-teachers with opportunities and skills for online teaching and on using and developing online communication tools (Kim, 2020). ICT tools have been instrumental in adapting teachers in developed countries to online learning during COVID-19 (König, 2020). UNICEF supported the Government and teachers of Bangladesh to run effective distance learning programs using TV, radio, mobile phone, and internet platforms. As children in Bangladesh do not have the opportunity to use the Internet, television is used for classes related to children's education (Unicef, 2020). Loss of learning due to long closures increased risk of learning outcomes and assessment, disparities in learning, impact on children with disabilities, safety, and psychosocial issues, increased dropout rates, increased risk of hygiene problems, gendered impact of school closures, impact on children in rural areas and the poorest with so many negative effects on the family, including the effects on the children (Gob, 2020).

In terms of closer reduction in child education, child marriage and increased time spent on housework girls are more affected than boys (Makino, et al, 2021). To help students cope with the adverse effects of school closures, the Bangladesh government introduced distance learning

through television, mobile phones, radio and the Internet, but not all students had access to these. A study by the World Bank proved that access and uptake of these alternative learning methods by students was low (Rahman, 2021). According to the Digital Report 2019, Bangladesh was lagging far behind in terms of average internet speed for mobile and broadband connections, with transmission links being the main challenge in providing good internet speeds, and even found that mobile devices are the most time spent online on social media. (Molla, 2019). According to UNESCO (2020), COVID-19 is not only a global health pandemic, but also a global crisis for education. Concerns are expressed in other challenges and unexpected successes associated with distance education and learning (Timmons, 2021). Initiatives to conduct distance learning have proved ineffective as poor access to technological devices has hindered the process of online learning, affecting early childhood education and creating rural-urban differences in facilities (Abusaleh, 2022).

Online education conducted by various ministries and departments of the government during the corona period was not accessible to all. In most schools and colleges in rural areas, technology-based education facilities and lack of laptops for students, financial burden of poor families have deprived the students from the benefits of online education. (Khatun, 2020). Because of not being able to go to school, the children suffer from loneliness at home and the development of intelligence is hindered, the deficit among them may not be overcome in the next year. Despite telecasting of educational programs on government television, many children do not know it (Parvin, 2020). Teachers continued to try to teach through online platforms but due to technical problems, financial problems and lack of awareness about these issues, the online education system could not handle all the students (Akther, 2022). In spite of the earnest efforts of the government, the most immediate impact of COVID-19 on students in Bangladesh is the disruption of learning opportunities among many other aspects due to the lack of TV sets, slow internet speeds and uneven internet access in many rural households. Most of the students felt emotional distress during this period due to social distancing. With no school, classes and exams, many elementary students felt that they were missing out on not growing up. Basically the COVID-19 outbreak has had a devastating impact on countless students (Emon, 2020). A UNICEF-supported study found that two out of three students from pre-primary to upper secondary in Bangladesh were not reached through distance learning. Even the consequences of school closures include staggering learning loss, psychological distress, and higher risk of drop out, child labour, increase in child marriage and many more. Closures put entire future generations at risk so we need efforts to reopen schools safely as soon as possible. Otherwise, learning loss will be difficult to overcome (Daily Star, 2021).

Rural areas, urban informal settlements, remote areas, women, students from low-income families and students with disabilities were disproportionately affected by school closures. Even their participation in online classes was less (Hossain, 2022). The closure of schools and education centers has increased security risks such as child labour, child marriage, domestic violence and the risk of trafficking. Children even felt isolated, distressed and had limited access to support services (Child Protect, 2021). Reopening of schools is supported on the basis of evidence of children's academic, physical, mental, social and emotional well-being (Kabir, et al, 2021). According to UNICEF, after 18 months of schools reopening in Bangladesh, there

should be no shortage of urgent measures to help children recover from educational losses with special attention to disadvantaged children (Mostafa, 2021). The epidemics increased risk of dropping out for children—especially girls and children from poor and marginalized families—could reverse the gains made in school enrollment in recent decades. Therefore, educational losses must be compensated to achieve the goals of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Prothomalo, 2021). Also a progressive model is recommended for young children's online education by comparing the differences between American and Chinese progressives while exploring the compatibility of online education and early childhood progressive education (Li, 2021).

Although primary education is a basic need of every child, it is disrupted in Bangladesh because of child labor (Hossain, 2010). And the current COVID-19 situation has increased that (child education) risk manifold. Therefore, the researcher has completed the research with primary data and secondary data to know the effect of COVID-19 on the education of children in Bangladesh. No previous research has been done on this subject in the researcher's research area.

Research Objectives

1. Investigating the impact of COVID-19 on children's education.
2. Exploring how the impact of COVID-19 has affected children's education.
3. To find out which classes of students are most affected.

Research Question

1. Has the child's education been affected?
2. How (literacy, learning lag) has been affected?
3. Which class of students have been affected more?

RESEARCH METHOD

Population: 5 primary schools, 1 madrasa, 1 high school in Begumganj upazila, and 2 primary schools in Sadar Ipzella are the parents and teachers of students from third to seventh standard.

Sample: Information has been collected from 175 students' parents and 55 teachers as a sample from all these institutions. That means the total sample is 230 people.

Data Collection: Two sets of questions were formulated for two target groups. 200 questionnaires were distributed among the parents out of which 175 valid responses were received. 60 question papers were distributed among the teachers out of which 55 valid answer sheets were received. 30 teachers and 50 parents were interviewed.

Type of data: Primary data and secondary data were used.

Question Type: Structured questionnaires are set for the research.

Data Analysis: SPSS software was used for data analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Teachers' Response

Age of Teacher					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30-39	12	21.8	21.8	21.8
	40-49	21	38.2	38.2	60
	50-59	21	38.2	38.2	98.2
	60-69	1	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Sex					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	41	74.5	74.5	74.5
	Male	14	25.5	25.5	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Religion					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Muslim	43	78.2	78.2	78.2
	Hindu	12	21.8	21.8	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Question	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Do you think children were fully engaged with lessons during the long lockdown (Covid-19)?	55	1.6182	.06611	.49031
Do you think their studies and learning have improved in the long closure?	55	1.6364	.06546	.48548
Were all children able and benefited from online classes?	55	1.8000	.05443	.40369
Was their basic education disrupted because of the long shutdown?	55	1.1091	.04242	.31463
So is there any negative impact of covid-19 on children's education?	55	1.1636	.05034	.37335
Children of the city, rich and middle-class families have suffered more reading and writing?	55	2.0000	.00000	.00000
Education of localities, poor families and marginalized children has been affected more?	55	1.0364	0.02547	0.18892
Valid N (list wise)	55			

Data Analysis: In this study, the teachers were regular teaching staff in grades III-VII. 58 questionnaires were distributed to the teachers and 55 returned questionnaires were answered as correct. Among the 55 teachers, 74.5% were female and 25.5% were male participants. Those aged between 30-60. Out of which 78.2% were Muslim and 21.8% were Hindu teachers. Mean & Std. As mentioned above from the table, it is understood that the average response to the first 05 questions is negative and the average response to the last questions 06 and 7 shows the degree of loss of villages, poor families and marginalized children's study.

2. Parents' Response

Class		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Three	29	16.6	16.6	16.6
	Four	33	18.9	18.9	35.4
	Five	58	33.1	33.1	68.6
	Six	26	14.9	14.9	83.4
	Seven	29	16.6	16.6	100.0
	Total	175	100.0	100.0	

Age of Parents		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	25--40	135	77.1	77.1	77.1
	41-55	39	22.3	22.3	99.4
	56-71	1	0.6	0.6	100
	Total	175	100	100	

Sex		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	157	89.7	89.7	89.7
	Male	18	10.3	10.3	100.0
	Total	175	100.0	100.0	

Religion		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Muslim	165	94.3	94.3	94.3
	Hindu	10	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	175	100.0	100.0	

Question	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Question	175	4.96	0.09771	1.2926
Did your child regularly read and write to you after a long break?	175	1.3314	0.03569	0.47208
Did he study regularly by himself?	175	1.4171	0.03738	0.4945
Has his reading and knowledge decreased due to prolonged confinement?	175	1.2629	0.03337	0.44145
Because of the long closure, has he developed a habit of wandering and not reading?	175	1.5314	0.12339	1.63225

Due to long closure, your child's reading and writing has suffered greatly?	175	1.16	0.02779	0.36766
Are the children of the city, rich and middle class, poor families more affected?	175	1.9429	0.0176	0.23278
Children of localities, poor and marginalized homes are more affected by reading and writing?	175	1.0286	0.01263	0.16708
Valid N (list wise)	175			

Data Analysis: In this study, the guardians were the parents of third-seventh-grade regular students. 200 questionnaires were distributed to the guardian and 175 returned were taken as correct answers. Of the 175 participants, 79.7% were female and 10.3% were male. Of those with an average age of 25-71, 94.3% were Muslim and 5.7% Hindu. Mean & Standard Deviation From the table mentioned above, it is understood that the mean response of the first 1,2 no is positive. Average response No. 3, 4 and 5 is negative. The extent of loss of villages, poor families and marginalized children is evidenced by the average responses to questions no.6 and 7.

According to the data obtained from the interview, 90 percent of the teachers and 85 percent of the parents agreed that due to the prolonged closure of the primary schools due to the COVID-19 situation, there has been a negative impact on the children's education.

CONCLUSION

Most of the teachers felt that the students were not well engaged in reading during the prolonged closure in Covid-19 situation. Therefore, their class-wise progress in education and learning has been very low. Studies have shown that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on children's education as not all children have been able to attend online classes and their basic education has been disrupted for not getting advantages from online classes. Even teachers feel that the education of rural, poor and marginalized children is more affected than the urban children. On the other hand, many children study with their parents and by themselves, but due to the long closure, their reading and writing skills have decreased. They have even developed the habit of vagrancy and not studying, which has been proven by research as negative effect of the closure of educational institutions due to Covid-19. Apart from this, the parents also think that the education of rural, poor and marginal children is more affected than the city children. According to UNICEF and UNESCO report, 2021.; Silvia, 2020.; Mathis, 2020.; Abusaleh, 2020.; Gob, 2020.; Khatun, 2020.; Arlin, et al, 2020.; Alom, ND. Where the damage of child education has been highlighted are consistent with the findings of this study. The study was limited to two specific areas with 10 educational institutions. Children studying in pre-primary, kindergarten, secondary, Noorani, Qaumi, private schools and English medium are not covered. Others limit economic problems and timing. To verify the results, the research can be done on larger area with children studying in other children's educational institutions, spending more time and money.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Emphasis on parents sending their children to school regularly.
2. Giving full attention to children to complete their school studies regularly at home.
3. Keeping in touch with the teachers to know the progress and deterioration of the child's ability to study regularly and all other matters.
4. As, teachers are aware of the loss of child education, they will encourage the student to come to school happily, pay attention to lesson and give full support for not to give up.
5. Teachers, parents and the state should take special care of backward students.
6. To educate rural, poor and marginal children by taking special care of them with special allocation by the state to educate them in timely education.

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