

**SCHOOLING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC:
CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND WAY FORWARD
FOR THE GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF DHAKA**

By

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a huge challenge to the education system of Bangladesh. Five Government Primary Schools (GPS) of Dhaka were selected as the research site of this study to inquire about current schooling approaches taken by the teachers and students of those schools along with associated challenges and their perception on the way forward of schooling. Government announced a nationwide lockdown from March 16th onwards, forcing teachers and students to adapt to a new way of learning. Teachers started delivering contents through various application like IMO, WhatsApp or Zoom from their homes but student engagement was minimal due to lack of access to resources, financial constraints, digital illiteracy, migration and lack of motivation. Despite the challenges, teachers and students expressed that modernized training on digital literacy, targeted regular communication and differentiated feedback from teachers can enable a school to continue its function even amidst this deadly pandemic. Finally, this viewpoint suggests recommendation to repair the damage of students' learning trajectories for future.

Keywords: Learning, COVID-19, educational challenges, pandemic, digital literacy, teaching.

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List of Acronyms

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
A2I	Access to Information
GPS	Government Primary School
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
TEO	Thana Education Office/Officer
PECE	Primary Education Completion Examination
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development (India)
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MoE	Ministry of Education

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Around 1.5 billion students from over 165 countries, are out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020). This pandemic has disrupted the contemporary education system across the globe. The Government of Bangladesh has imposed COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, which resulted in closing down of all schools and educational institutions in the country from 18 March, 2020 (UNICEF, 2020). There are about 39,936,843 learners who have been affected among which 3,578,384 are pre-primary learners, 17,338,100 are primary learners (Begum et al., 2020). Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), with support from a2i programme initiated telecasting digital content for primary level students on Sangsad TV as well as different social media platforms (UNDP Bangladesh, 2020). JAAGO's 'Ghore Boshe Shikkha' and ROBI 10 Minute School's Facebook Lives are some of the digital initiatives to help students continue their education from home remotely, while many government and private education institutes have adopted online classes (Sania, 2020). However, adopting has been a challenge as a recent survey of 2038 students in 45 educational institutes discovered that 55% of the students did not have access to proper internet connections and 44.7% did not own a large screen smart device (i.e., laptop, PC, tablet, etc.) to learn and engage in online teaching (Islam et al., 2020). Educational institutions of all levels have to address this crisis by reassuring students and parents as a vital institutional response (Daniel, 2020). Now that physical classes in Government Primary Schools across the nation are in halt, alternative measures to replace the discontinuation in the regular curriculum have to be implemented to continue schooling, especially in a country which has a higher proximity of COVID-19 infections due to its overpopulation density.

1.2 Research Topic

'Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka.'

The topic of this study is alternative education. This topic was selected to inquire about the current practices of schooling during COVID-19 pandemic along with the challenges, opportunities and way forward for the students and teachers of urban Government Primary Schools.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

COVID-19 has forced the Government of Bangladesh to close down educational institutions across the country, forcing teachers and students to halt their educational activities. Teachers and students of Government Primary schools have taken alternative measures to continue schooling but has faced various challenges.

Education systems around the world has faced major disruption by the pandemic, pushing most of the children temporarily out of school (BRAC Institute of Governance and Development [BIGD], 2020). Schools and educational institutions all over Bangladesh are facing hardship to address this unprecedented crisis. On top of loss in schooling hours, school closures have far-reaching impacts on several issues such as school dropouts, digital divide, food insecurity and malnutrition, mental health, childcare, as well as disability services (ACAPS, 2020). UNESCO recommended the use of distance learning programs and launching educational applications and platforms which can be used to reach learners remotely and minimize the disruption of education. However, the effectiveness of distance learning is a big question mark in Bangladesh, where a majority of the learners lack the access to educational technology (Rahman et al., 2015). Students' access to resources and information varies based on their socio-economic privileges (Orr, 2003).

In spite of the minimal access and resources, students from reputed educational institutions, have started to use online learning materials such as, Zoom Classes, online assessment, Skype sessions with teachers, YouTube etc. (The World Bank, 2020). However, the disparity in the quality of education for students who are less privileged can create a digital divide (Steele, 2018). Unequal access to educational resources to different levels of students are creating barriers to their learning process (Barua, 2020). In the context of an urban Government Primary School of Dhaka, both students and teachers are facing challenges to adapt to an alternative approach to learning.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on my problem statement, the key questions of my research are:

1. What are the measures taken to continue schooling during COVID-19 pandemic in the urban Government Primary Schools of Dhaka?
2. What are the challenges faced by the students and the teachers of those schools to continue schooling?
3. What are the perception of those students and teachers on the way forward of schooling during the pandemic?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

This study intends to learn about the current schooling measures in urban Government Primary Schools of Dhaka. This study also intends to learn about the challenges both students and teachers of any urban GPS are facing to continue schooling during COVID-19 pandemic and what opportunities do both students and teachers have to prepare themselves for future unprecedented crisis. Moreover, the study also aims to understand the perception of those students and teachers on the way forward of schooling during the pandemic.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Researchers have already informed about the initiatives taken to continue learning during the Ebola outbreak (Santos & Novelli, 2017). Those studies are good references of how to continue schooling during a pandemic, COVID-19 outbreak in my study context. Similarly, this paper might showcase the current scenario of Primary Education system of Bangladesh where underprivileged students and the GPS teachers are facing disruption in their normal way of teaching. The learnings from this study might also influence GPS to prioritize on alternative education opportunities for both students and the teachers.

The results of this study can be used to understand the viewpoints of typical GPS teachers and students during COVID-19 pandemic. If unprecedented digital shift is imposed then the risk of digital divide among GPS and private schools is a major concern. The current measures taken by those schools found via this study can give us a clearer picture of what is working and what is lacking for GPS students and teachers.

This study might be useful to mitigate the knowledge gap among educators and policymakers to ensure access and resources for virtual learning for students and teachers of Government Primary Schools of Bangladesh. Teachers can get insights of GPS teachers and prepare or share modern teaching strategies for the new normal. Policymakers can get a better understanding on the root level adversities. Additionally, findings of this research can help policy actors to formulate adaptable guidelines for post pandemic situation or another crisis of such caliber.

Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) will also get an understanding on how to provide support to underprivileged GPS, teachers and students so that they can continue schooling during the pandemic.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

To understand my research topic of alternative education, I reviewed different articles, books, journals and documents. I have organized my literature review under following categories:

1) Concept of Schooling: Global and Local Context, 2) Impact of COVID-19 on Global Education, 3) Shift from Traditional Way of Schooling and 4) Current Schooling Challenges and Opportunities.

2.1 Concept of Schooling: Global and Local Context

Doskocil (2008) defined schooling as a foundation of consistent education practices that needs students' engagement in learning process within a group environment and setting. Doskocil also stated in his research that the key characteristics of schooling include physical interaction ensuring effective communication and constructive feedback, convivial environment, and dedicated time period of the learning process. In schools, the process of learning occurs simply by transferring knowledge from the teacher to the student. There are several methods of self-regulated and active learning: “guided learning, experiential learning and action learning” (Thijssen et al., 2008).

In Bangladesh, schooling practices are rarely transformative, reflective, and creative thinking oriented. In most cases, the idea of schooling is a teacher giving lectures in a classroom. In some expensive schools, teachers do practice novel and modernized teaching methods but effective teaching-learning is not active at all in the country (Hossain & Khan, 2014). Students seek out to memorizing their learning which they often forget in the near future. As a result, the study contents become irrelevant and apathetic to the learning. There are quite a few factors behind the situation such as; education policy, education administration, backdated curriculum, present teaching-learning methods in practice, limited infrastructure,

minimal access to technology, human quality and motivation-both in the teachers and students side (Jakir et al., 2019).

In order to define schooling into the current context of pandemic, it is important to understand the fundamental differences between traditional schooling and the new socially or physically distanced schooling. Mahboob (2020) stated that the former is community divorced and the latter is community embedded. The normal practice of schooling was to take children away from their community but Mahboob indicated that the new practice of schooling takes places within the homes and residences of the students. Consequently, as Mahboob further argues, based on the differences of socio-economic and educational backgrounds of parents, students will have differing access to information and support to continue their schooling activities.

2.2 Impact of COVID-19 on Global Education

COVID – 19 outbreak has forced over 165 countries to carry out nationwide closure, impacting nearly 90% of the world's student population. (UNESCO, COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response, 2020). UNESCO has also communicated the worry of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and Sustainable Development Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, which the signatory nations are required to attain by 2030.

It is apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic has created a global educational disorder. Many countries are taking adaptive measures which includes banning public gatherings, issuing area based lockdown, shutting down businesses and schools to slow down the infection rates of the coronavirus. Past records of substantial pandemic have prompted closing down schools around the world with varying levels of effectiveness. (Simon, 2020). Similarly to the other parts of the world, since March 17, all the educational institutes in Bangladesh have remained

closed (Uddin, 2020). Closing down schools can be one of the way to minimize the spread of virus but it comes with its own challenges, particularly in a developing country like Bangladesh. School closures are directly impacting students' knowledge and skills development as Burgess and Sievertsen (2013) argue, attending school is the most efficient public policy practice available to develop knowledge and skills.

Disruption in learning or developing skills are not the only impacts, school closure bears social and economic costs as well (Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). The effect of closure can have a direct or indirect impact on anyone from a given community but the disadvantaged children from that community are the most vulnerable group. As, Tiruneh (2020) states that children from low-income family experience two unwanted incidents: disturbance in their daily school hours and family economic constraints. These children have a very high risk of becoming a drop out to make a living for their family and thus, slowly becoming excluded from the main education stream (Shohel & Howes, 2008).

Studies from around the world are showcasing evident of COVID-19 having shed light on various issues, including digital learning (Karp & McGowan, 2020), food insecurity (Cecco, 2020), as well as access to childcare (Belinda, 2020) and internet (Jordan, 2020). However, it is too early to fully comprehend how school and university closure due to COVID – 19 has impacted the education system in Bangladesh, a low-income country in South Asia. Nonetheless, this crisis can be looked upon as an opportunity to reconstruct our backdated educational systems and formulate updated policies and modernized practices in academia, suitable for the current generation of learners (Strielkowski, 2020).

2.3 Shift from Traditional Way of Schooling

One of the first few sectors that encountered hasty shut down of all its activities was Academia (Nicola et al., 2020). Thousands of educational institutions and millions of

students are affected by COVID-19 pandemic as the first response to minimize the pandemic impact was to close down the schools all across the world. This triggered a significant change, enforcing many challenges in the education community globally (Saavedra, 2020). Having the best education system in the world, Finland is a forerunner in using learning technology as an alternative (Vial, 2019). School closures forced the students of Finland to switch to distant learning but the fact that these students had been using technology comprehensively in all the subjects made the transition rather smooth. (Iivari et al., 2020).

However, transitioning to alternative schooling approaches has been very difficult for low-income countries. A study from one of our neighboring countries, India shows that the generalized solution which was adapted nationally was online learning (Kumar, 2020). Digital India Vision of the government was an emergent tool to transit into technology based education. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has made several arrangements, including online portals like Diksha, E-pathshala and educational channels through Direct to Home TV, Radios for students to continue learning (Gupta & Goplani, 2020). Similarly to India, Nepal also considered online learning is a viable option to normalize the process of education avoiding academic calendar backlog. The biggest hurdle for developing countries to continue schooling online has been the lack of access to internet nationwide. Students are unable to continue schooling due to not having an internet connection to communicate with the teacher. Studies showed the significant association between online learning readiness and internet accessibility. (Neupane et al., 2020).

Government of Bangladesh is pursuing a variety of approaches to mitigate school closures. While many other countries around the world are adapting to digital or e-learning solutions to fill the void, Bangladesh seems to lack proper strategies to face the challenges created by the pandemic and almost all schools and universities are closed for more than a year and it is still not clear how long this situation would continue (Emon et al., 2020). Different initiatives

have been taken for four main educational streams: Primary Education, Secondary and Higher Education, Madrasah and Technical Education (UNDP Bangladesh, 2020).

2.4 Current Schooling Challenges and Opportunities

The first focus is on the access to distant learning resources and digital literacy for learning. To technology-reliant policymakers in the west, adapting to education technology or digital resources to battle out educational adversaries during this pandemic, is an obvious choice (Dawadi et al., 2020). But even developed western countries have experienced difficulties to provide equal and easy digital access for its whole population after the COVID – 19 outbreak (Chowdhury & Jomo, 2020). In the context of Bangladesh, not every household has a usable device dedicated to distant learning. Despite the fact that Bangladesh like other developing countries, is experiencing technological transformation, very little progress has been made in the implementation of ICT related policies in general, and ICT education in particular (Khan et al., 2012). Schools and universities are providing flexible learning approaches so that students are not deterred from returning to school when they re-open (Giannini & Albrechtsen, 2020). However, making an immediate shift to online classes is extremely difficult in a country like Bangladesh where digital illiteracy is still widespread but access to internet is not.

To reiterate, giving equitable access to distant learning for all students in Bangladesh is a huge challenge. The sudden move to e-learning will further widen the inequality gaps, leaving a huge number of students behind. Gyamerah (2020) rightly points out that in spite of technology-based education offering many gains, it can broaden the existing educational inequalities where the poor often lack resources and support to pursue their education.

The popularity of digital content to substitute classroom teaching learning is still questionable in terms of their effectiveness. Biesta (2019) argues that the role of schools is often viewed in

a singular lens and students are expected to develop certain skills and mindset which make them eligible in the work market. But the task of schools is actually more complex and sophisticated, and involves developing a wider set of knowledge, so young people learn and self-realize about the society they are part of, any of these cannot be achieved solely through the delivery of digital content, Biesta further suggests.

On the contrary, students and teachers may benefit in some areas while practicing alternative measures of schooling during this pandemic. One of the major causes for significant dropout rates in Government Primary Schools of Dhaka is family migration. But schooling can still continue if the content delivery is digitalized and the learners get all the knowledge and training anywhere they reside in the country (Nagrle, 2013). Currently, education is being transformed as a community embedded practice where the teacher is providing learning materials while being physically distant from the students. (Mahboob, 2020)

Schooling from home can teach students skills and competencies of developing professional skills such as the skill of self-study, the ability to plan and organize, time management, problem solving skills, ownership, to work under pressure, and to be creative and initiative (Markova et al., 2016). Additionally, flexible approach (Stephens et al., 2017) of schooling can benefit for those students who share responsibility to provide for their family members. To use educational resources online or digitally, students will have to learn how to use and maintain devices which are the key components of their home schooling practices during COVID – 19 pandemic. If digital literacy is improved, then the content outreach will be maximum, impacting the most number of learners. (Corlett & Martindale, 2017).

2.5 Conceptual framework

Based on the key literature, the framework of this study guided through four major concepts. The first concept that we needed to understand is the concept of schooling. How is schooling defined in global and our local context? Secondly, we needed to uncover the impact of COVID-19 on education sector. This phase gave us insights about the current situation of schooling, limitations to continue schooling during the pandemic and guided us to our next concept, shift from traditional schooling. In our third concept, we wanted to explore the alternative measures taken to continue schooling during the pandemic. How COVID-19 is leading towards a transformation or a shift in global education, what are the measures taken locally to ensure continuity of learning. Finally, the last concept highlighted the current schooling challenges and opportunities both for the teachers and students. All of these four concepts were discussed keeping both global and local context in mind.



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

This study is a qualitative research based on telephone interviews and relies on data interpretation. Qualitative approach was chosen as this can draw multiple methods on inquiry about the topic very deeply to learn about the current context of students' learning. Moreover, qualitative research has the scope to uncover participants view respecting diversity (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

3.2 Research Site

Five Government Primary Schools (GPS) situated in Rayer Bazar, West Dhanmondi have been selected as research sites for this study. The schools are Rayer Bazar GPS, Moneshwar GPS, Rajmushuri GPS, Jafrabad GPS and Gojomohol Tannery GPS. This study has focused on the current scenario of urban Government Primary Schools and these schools are good representations of a typical urban GPS. Government Primary Schools of Dhaka have been selected as the research site based on the convenience sampling technique. This particular sampling technique was chosen because of the availability and accessibility of the participants, and their willingness to participate (Bernard, 2002).

3.3 Research Participants and Sampling Procedure

Keeping the feasibility of time, access to these schools and tools in mind, purposeful sampling method has been used to determine the sample for this study to focus on a particular population which are of interest to this research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). One teacher who is currently teaching in Grade 5 from each of the schools, was interviewed to inquire about the teacher's perspective on the research topic. Similarly, a student from Grade 5 was

also selected through convenient sampling. The curriculum of Grade 5 develops spirally from Grade 1 and the students of Grade 5 sit for a public examination which marks the completion of their primary level education. As this is the final grade and the accumulation of the primary level, data from Grade 5 students and teachers who are teaching this grade, reflected the scenario of all the grades. Following is a table which showcases the research participants, their numbers, data collection process and timeline for the proposed research.

Table 1: Research Participants and Data Collection Process

Research Site	Research Participants	No. of Participants	Data Collection Process	Date of Data Collection (D.M.Y)
GPS 1 & 2	Teacher	02	Phone Call Interview	05.8.2020
GPS 3, 4 & 5	Teacher	03	Phone Call Interview	07.8.2020 – 08.8.2020
GPS 1 & 2	Student	02	Phone Call Interview	11.8.2020
GPS 3, 4 & 5	Student	03	Phone Call Interview	13.8.2020 – 15.8.2020

3.4 Data Collection Method

The data collection method used in this research is semi-structured phone call interviews for the teachers and the students. Telephone interview is one of the data collection strategies which allows interpersonal communication without face to face meeting with participants (Carr & Worth, 2021). The reasoning of the interview on this particular topic was to inquire about the current schooling approaches, challenges faced by teachers and students while adapting to these new approaches and what are the opportunities and way forward for the students and teachers of urban Government Primary Schools of Dhaka to continue schooling

during COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, some respondents may be more willing to discuss certain subjects over the telephone and may feel physically safer doing so than in face-to-face interviews (Chapple, 1999).

There was two semi-structured phone call interviews for every school. One interview for the teacher who is currently teaching Grade 5 and one for a Grade 5 student. The number of interview was ten in total. These phone call interviews was conducted at the primary stage of the study. Face to face interview would have taken place instead of phone call interviews if the school reopened.

3.5 Research Tool

The interview guide was used as a roadmap to collect data from the research participants and to keep the discussion on track. This tool was designed to collect information from the teachers and the students. The interview guide was developed with five primary questions with follow-up probes to help the participants expand on their answers (Bolderston, 2012). It also included a preamble discussing confidentiality issues and consent with the participant, and process to be followed for the interview (Creswell, 2009).

3.6 Role of the Researcher

During this study, my role as a researcher was to safeguard my research participants' information and data and to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of my study participants without influencing them to get desired data. I tried to be mindful that I am a researcher in this particular context and that I should not be playing the role of a supervisor. There were times when, as a novice researcher, I struggled to maintain the focus as a researcher and not to regress back to the supervisory role. Although much emphasis is placed in writing appropriate questions, the main role of a researcher is to be a good listener (Seidman, 2006).

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis had been an ongoing process that was conducted concurrently with gathering the data (Creswell, 2011). Collected data was transcribed along with the interview. Transcription is a long and time-consuming process and it can take on average 4 hours to type up 1 hour of a taped interview (Bell, 2009). After transcribing the data, content analysis allowed to categorize participants' answers under common themes (Punch, 2004). Coding was used as the main operation to then thematically analyze the data. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

3.8 Ethical Issues and Concerns

Informed consent and issues of privacy and confidentiality are basic principles of ethical research conduct (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). Informed consent from teachers and parents was taken prior to the data collection activity. They had been aware of the research topic and the sorts of questions they would be asked as well as how their answers would be stored and used (Bolderston, 2012).

Confidentiality of the participants' identity and data was maintained. Personal information of the participant was made anonymous using code numbers and pseudonyms for each respondent (Byrne, 2001). Research participants also had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point of the research. Authentic data was showcased throughout the research to maintain credibility. Thick description of the research did allow the study to be transferable in similar context study. Data from the teachers and students was triangulated to ensure confirmability of the data.

3.9 Limitations of the study

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, schools remain closed. Thus, face to face interview or focus group discussion was not viable to collect data for this study. Students and teachers would have gotten an opportunity to interact among themselves and provide detailed opinions on their perception, challenges and opportunities if focus group discussion was conducted to collect data.

Chapter 4

Results

In this chapter, key findings from data collection is organized and presented based on identified themes. Within the duration of a month, phone call interview was the data collection method used to collect data from 10 research participants from 5 different schools. The key identified themes of this study are that a) measures taken to continue schooling during COVID-19 pandemic, b) challenges faced by teachers and students of these schools and c) perception on the way forward of schooling. An outline of the results is provided by themes and subthemes.

Measures Taken to Continue Schooling during COVID-19 Pandemic

Just as schools are taking steps to inform, reassure and maintain contact with students and parents, they have also adapted some alternative approaches for teaching-learning practices. However, some teachers are still depending on the traditional way. Hence, they are encouraging students to follow health protocol and attend their private coaching classes.

Private Tutoring or Coaching Classes

Private tutoring or coaching classes have been the only option as an alternative for students who had minimal access to internet or smartphones. Rony, a student mentioned that,

The teachers do not call or help me with studies. The only support I am getting is from my private teacher. He used to come to my house once or twice every week before COVID but it is hard for him now. He just calls and teaches me over the phone. (Personal Communication: Interview#9, S4, 13-08-2020)

Emphasizing on providing support to students through coaching classes, Ms. Ayesha, a teacher stated:

I am tutoring some of the students in my home who need more support but of course, I am following the health guidelines to make sure there are only a few students at a single time and everyone is maintaining a specific distance. I am focusing more on Math and English because most of the students in their primary level of studies, face difficulties with these two subjects. And, it is quite tough to explain math problems just by phone calls (Personal Communication: Interview#1, T1, 05-08-2020)

However, there was a mixed response regarding the safety of coaching centers from students. Samia, who is a student of the same school where Ms. Ayesha teaches, mentioned:

I stopped going to the coaching classes because all the students were not maintaining social distancing as the space was very small. Nobody was even wearing any masks or gloves. Health protocols were not maintained so my parents also encouraged me to stay at home and study. (Personal Communication: Interview#6, S1, 11-08-2020)

Another student from a different school, Jahid had a different say on coaching classes. He informed that the coaching center he was going to, followed a strict health protocol. The teacher of that coaching center asked the students to wear masks and gloves when they came.

Online Classes using IMO, WhatsApp, Zoom & Telephone Communication

Teachers have adapted different methods to teach. The initial instruction from the school was that the teachers had to be in regular communication with the students, either via phone calls or using different apps like IMO or WhatsApp. The teachers had contact information of the students which helped them to bridge the communication gap and reach more students to provide support. Ms. Fatima, a teacher informed:

All our class teachers had phone numbers of students. They formed groups of certain numbers and assigned these numbers to each subject teachers. The teachers are trying as much as they can to be in regular contact and supporting the students to finish their syllabus. (Personal Communication: Interview#5, T5, 08-08-2020)

Another teacher Mr. Fahad shared his experience on adapting with new approaches of teaching. He stated:

I am taking online classes via Zoom. I have managed to reach 65% of my total students using Zoom for the morning classes. And, I have also managed to reach 10% of the students using IMO app. I usually write down Math problems in a paper and send them an image of the problems. I am also requesting students who are neighbors to constantly being in touch of each other and letting each other know about our online classes and IMO groups. (Personal Communication: Interview#2, T2, 05-08-2020)

Encouraging Students to Follow Televised Digital Content

A2i Program of the ICT Division and the Cabinet Division, supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), have broadcasted over 100 digital content for primary level students. Teachers have encouraged students to follow this program in Sangsad TV. All the

teachers interviewed in this study were familiar with the a2i programs. Ms. Ayesha, one of the teachers mentioned:

We have also informed the students about ‘Ghore boshe Shikkha’ program which is being telecasted in the radio. We have also informed them about the daily classes telecasted in Sangsad TV which covers contents of primary level. Many students have told me that they found the digital classes of Sangsad TV interesting and helpful.

(Personal Communication: Interview#1, T1, 05-08-2020)

Adding to this statement, Mr. Rana, a teacher also mentioned that they have also put up a signboard in the school gate which has the details and schedule of TV programs. The students could take notes and see these programs to attend classes being telecasted in TV or radio.

Assessment Postponement

Assessments of any kind had been cancelled or suspended by many schools and examining bodies. This uncertainty has left students all over the country feeling anxious and worried about their future or just a single grade promotion in general. This study shed focus on Primary Level of Education. Thus, Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) was a concern for teachers and students who were interviewed for this study. A teacher, Mr. Rana shared her knowledge regarding PECE. He stated:

There is no possibility of PECE occurring this year. We send information and lists of eligible PECE candidate to the Thana Education Office (TEO). The TEO records all this information and provide a PECE roll number to the students. They are doing all that but they have told us that the possibility of PECE occurring this year is very unlikely. (Personal Communication: Interview#4, T4, 07-08-2020)

On the contrary, Mr. Sakib, a teacher indicated that

Assessment is not the main thing here. PECE completion should not be the main focus given the time and situation. Main objective is to cover all the topics and to make sure that the students are learning. Regardless of PECE occurring or not, we should keep on providing support to our students through regular communication.

(Personal Communication: Interview#3, T3, 07-08-2020)

Challenges for the Teachers and the Students

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of students and teachers in different ways. Most of the nation worldwide were trying to catch up to the drastic spread of COVID-19, so educational institutions had a very limited time to prepare for a remote teaching. Many governments have ordered institutions to discontinue face-to-face instruction for most of their teachers and students, instructing them to switch to online teaching and virtual education, which came with its own challenges.

Financial Constraints to Purchase Device and Access to Resources

Basic internet connection, smartphone, laptop and TV sets are some of the resources needed to carry out teaching learning practices online according to the teachers and students interviewed. But economic constraints of students' parents and in some cases, teachers of Government Primary Schools of Dhaka, do not allow them to have access to such fundamental resources for online schooling. According to Mr. Sakib, a Government Primary School Teacher:

Most of the students we teach are from very poor families. It is very difficult for their parents to pay for separate internet as majority of them are daily labors. So, a huge number of students were unreachable through Zoom or WhatsApp. (Personal Communication: Interview#3, T3, 07-08-2020)

Ms. Fatima, another GPS teacher was expressing her financial constraints by stating:

Some of the teachers do not own a proper device to conduct classes online. Our salary is minimum and this financial constraints do not allow us to purchase an android device like that. Some teachers have internet connection problems. Government should provide basic internet packages to Government teachers to support and encourage teachers to take classes online. (Personal Communication: Interview#5, T5, 08-08-2020)

Struggles of Students and Teachers to Use Ed-tech Apps: ZOOM, IMO, WhatsApp

Digital illiteracy was a major concern to ensure remote or online teaching both for the case of students and teachers. Most of the parents were not familiar with Zoom. Even the teachers were struggling to learn a new pedagogy or technology to adapt.

Mr. Fahad, one of the teachers interviewed mentioned:

We instructed parents to download and install Zoom in their mobile phones. We made it clear that their children will be able to attend online classes if they had Zoom in their phones. Some of the parents or the older siblings of the students were very supportive and some did not understand how to install the app. The ones who were not able to get the app, missed out on various online sessions. (Personal Communication: Interview#2, T2, 05-08-2020)

Digital illiteracy was not only a challenge for student and their parents. It was prominent in some of the teachers as well. Mr. Rana, a teacher gave his opinion on teachers' digital illiteracy stating:

From every school, two teachers were sent to attend basic ICT training which was arranged by the Government. It was a residential training and guidance to use device for online classes were provided in this training. Yet some teachers complain that they did not receive the training. They may lack the motivation or willingness to learn about this new devices or way of teaching. (Personal Communication: Interview#4, T4, 07-08-2020)

Students Getting Disconnected from Teachers and Schools

A notable amount of students' families migrated back to their hometown right after the COVID-19 lockdown were put in action. Thousands of people lost their jobs and these people were being forced out of Dhaka due to their financial constraints. Siam, a student gave his thought on this matter by stating:

My family also had to migrate back to our hometown due to financial constraints. My father lost his job at one point and we were forced to leave Dhaka and my studies got hampered because of that. When things got a bit better, we came back to Dhaka. But problems regarding my studies were still the same. The new house we moved in to, was a bit far from the coaching centers where most of my classmates were going. So, I could not attend the coaching centers as well. (Personal Communication: Interview#8, S3, 13-08-2020)

Government announced that schools all over Bangladesh would be closed down from March 17th to October 3rd until further notice. So, any kinds of schooling activities in the school premises is currently on the hold until the Government allows the authority to reopen the

schools. There was a possibility of reopening the schools and resuming classes from the last week of October.

Anxiety and Mental Stress for Students

In every sample school of this study, regular classes were on hold because of COVID-19.

One student, Samia shared her experience stating:

When we first started news about COVID-19 pandemic, nobody took it seriously. Most of the students were not wearing any masks and not following the health protocols. I also found it very bothering to wash my hands after every few hours. But when we knew about how severe the pandemic was, the schools were closed down. We were all very scared and soon we got to know that many people were dying every day because of COVID. I was really worried about my family and my friends. I did not know what to do to help my parents besides staying home all the time. (Personal Communication, Interview #6, S1, 11-08-2020)

Another student, Siam mentioned that they were told not to come to school because there was a high risk of getting the virus from other students as they sit very closely with each other in classes. (Personal Communication, Interview #8, S3, 13-08-2020)

Students also expressed their concerns and opinions on the assessments and promotion. They had their doubts on auto-promotion, possibility of term and board examinations. Maria, a student, shared her concerns stating that, she did not know if the school was reopening this year, if she would have any assessments or how she would be promoted to the next class. This uncertainty was worrying her too much and her parents were also forcing her to discontinue school amidst the pandemic. (Personal Communication: Interview#7, S2, 11-08-2020)

In some of the schools, there was a practice of taking extra classes for students who needed more support. That too, had to be discontinued as Government was preparing to undergo a nationwide lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Televised Programs – Difficult to Follow

Students stated a different opinion on televised programs. They found the schedule of these program inconsistent and some did not have a television set in their home. One student expressed her opinion on a2i programs stating:

I am also aware of the education programs which is telecasted in Sangsad TV. I try to follow the Math and English classes. Sometimes it gets difficult for me to follow through as I do not get to ask questions if I miss something or I do not understand a topic. (Personal Communication: Interview#6, S1, 11-08-2020)

Another student, Jahid mentioned:

I have heard about the TV education programs but I think they do not have any fixed timings for the classes. I see different content on different days. As the schedule is a bit confusing, students are not really following these TV classes. (Personal Communication: Interview#10, S5, 15-08-2020)

Perception on the Way Forward of Schooling

Regular Communication and Differentiated Feedback

COVID-19 has brought a new challenge for the teachers and it could be an opportunity for them to adapt new technique of teaching and enhancing their skills. Now, teachers are communicating with their students in a different way and some are thinking that incorporating this new way of communicating with the traditional approach can prove to be more effective. Ms. Ayesha, a teacher, shared her thoughts regarding this matter:

This different approach of taking lessons or providing feedback to students can be beneficial and we can draw learnings from these approaches. It is quite difficult for me as a teacher to provide one on one or constructive feedback to my students in just one period. But regular communication with them via WhatsApp or mobile phones is actually enabling me to provide differentiated feedback and I personally feel that my students are also getting benefited. (Personal Communication: Interview#1, T1, 05-08-2020)

Teachers Adapting to New Teaching Techniques

Mr. Rana, another teacher shared his experience on learning new techniques to maintain communication with students. He shared:

I never thought that I would be able to take online classes this way. I am facing problems every day and learning something new by solving the problems. This could indeed be helpful in the long run and some of the strategies of online classes can still be used after school reopens and maintain regular communication with the students is surely one of them. (Personal Communication: Interview#4, T4, 07-08-2020)

Mr. Fahad also shared regarding adaptation to new teaching methods:

At first, it was difficult even for me. I could imagine the students and their parents facing similar problems adapting. I have been asking my colleagues, friends, and surprisingly my children's help to learn about how to use this application to take classes. I am also learning to support students via phone calls and it has been a new experience for me. (Personal Communication: Interview#2, T2, 05-08-2020)

Students' Eagerness to Learn during COVID-19

Four of the five students showed their enthusiasm and acknowledged the necessity of learning how to use any device to study online. Technological advancement has allowed many educational institutions worldwide to quickly adapt to a new approach of teaching learning. Students' and Teachers' eagerness to learn about new technology has been identified as one of the opportunities for school authorities to reflect upon.

Maria, one of the students interviewed stated:

I needed a device like a smartphone or a laptop to study online. I am still quite unfamiliar with how the internet really works and how you can study online but if trainings were given from our teachers or from the school, it would have helped a lot. (Personal Communication: Interview#7, S2, 11-08-2020)

Another student, Rony shared his thoughts on this matter by indicating:

I try to study on my own but it gets lonely and a bit boring to be honest. I do not have any previous experience or knowledge about internet or how to attend online classes. I want to learn those things as well. I do not know where to learn those things from. (Personal Communication: Interview#9, S4, 13-08-2020)

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

In this study, the data was collected from both teachers and students to understand their viewpoints on the current schooling approach. A semi structured interview roadmap guided the research participants to understand the current context of the education system and voice their opinions and experiences in accordance with the research question of this study (Creswell, 2009). Participants elaborated on the adaptive approaches they have been using after COVID-19 to ensure the continuity of learning. All the participants informed that their schools have been closed since March 16th. The country was preparing to undergo a complete shutdown to tackle this global threat to humanity. Educational institutions of all levels across the nation was required to make necessary changes and adjustments to teach in alternative ways (World Economic Forum, 2020). Daily classes and assessments were on hold until any further notice. Parents and students had to be reassured with targeted communication. The teachers had to provide this message to students without clear information from examining bodies and institutions about the postponement of canceled term exams in their respective schools. They faced uncertainties about PECE as well. The teachers send information and lists of eligible PECE candidate to the Thana Education Office (TEO) every year. The TEO records all this information and provides a PECE roll number to the students. All these formalities were still on progress while the possibility of PECE occurring this year is very unlikely. Government instructed the school authorities to continue their mid-day meal program. This decision contradicted with the idea of promoting social distancing and parents were furious with sending their children to school amidst of this crisis. Educational institutions should update students and parents with frequent communication on schooling

matters as teachers may be better than parents at relieving the anxieties of students in challenging situations like these (McKibben, 2017). In the selected area of study, the number of students tended to be higher compare to other schools of the city. It was difficult for a teacher to reach all targeted students due to several factors. Either the students did not own a device or they lacked access to internet due to their financial constraints. The closing down of schools not only impacted students, teachers and families but also had far-reaching social implications (Lindzon, 2020). Some of the students' families were already migrating back to their hometown.

Measures Taken to Continue Schooling during COVID-19 Pandemic

The government was struggling to tackle the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19, giving educational institutions a very little time to prepare for a remote-teaching regime. Regardless of all the adversity during the pandemic countries all over the world were taking measures so that students could continue learning from home (Miks & McIlwaine, 2020).

In partnership with the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and with financial support from UNICEF, Access to Information (a2i) has been broadcasting over 100 digital content for primary school students (grades 1-5) through 'Ghore Boshe Ghore Shikhi' initiative (UNDP, 2020). From April 7, 2020 the digital classes were televised through state-run 'Sangsad Bangladesh Television' (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education & Ministry of Education, 2020).

Schooling activities had to be continued in the middle of pandemic. Teachers and students in most cases, took adaptive measures to continue schooling from their homes. School authorities requested teachers to use digital applications or software like IMO, ZOOM and WhatsApp to maintain regular contact with their students, and teach remotely. As discussed

before, most of the students studying in free of cost Government Primary Schools of this area, were from low-income families. Modern technological adaptation was unfamiliar and a rare commodity for them and their parents. Thus, teachers were unable to reach all their targeted students via educational technologies. The students who could not attend the online lessons, had to be called separately. Some of the teachers were still continuing private tutoring in their homes for students who needed more support. However, the health regulations maintained by the teachers to ensure safety of their students, was still a big concern and there was a mixed response on this matter. Private tutoring or coaching classes, even with limited capacity, do not promote social distancing. Adaptive strategies like coaching classes to replace daily school classes was not logical to and appreciated by most of the students and their parents.

Students undertook various measures to continue their learning from home. Some had their private tutors calling them on mobile phones, some had parents or siblings supervising their studies and some were able to be in constant communication with their school teachers. In spite of their adverse effects on students' long term learning capacity, guidebooks were also an essential support tool for students to cover topics and contents.

Teachers shared that they had put up signboards in school gates detailing out schedules of TV programs. The students could take note and see these programs to attend classes being telecasted in TV or radio. However, the students had a different response regarding the a2i programs. They were unfamiliar with the schedule and some of them did not own a television set. This tells us that even with the best implementation, alternative schooling measures are likely to benefit students differently (OECD, 2020).

In terms of assessment, PECE was a major concern as this examination reflects the overall learning competency of a primary level student transitioning into high schools. Given the

COVID-19 situation, PECE or any type of school assessments had to be postponed. Yet, one of the schools studied conducted half yearly exams by providing questions through Zoom and IMO to 65% of their students. The students sent their exam papers back to school within 15 days period. Teachers distributed the copies among themselves, checked and handed out marks and checked copies by visiting their students' homes or sending them images through IMO. This was surely a remarkable effort but complete digitization of the assessment system was still a far-fetched idea for Government Primary Schools of Dhaka (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018).

Challenges Faced by Teachers and Students

Technological innovations have created many new opportunities to better serve traditionally disadvantaged students (Jacob, 2016). Smartphones and internet have made it easier to transition into the concept of remote learning. The advancement of touch-screen technology has made it easier for students, even the ones who are young (Holland & Kellogg, 2020). Prior to tablets or smartphones, it was difficult for pre-school, kindergarten and even early primary grade students to work with educational software because it required use of a mouse, keyboard and other sets of equipment (Couse & Chen, 2010).

However, the students or in some cases the teachers of the Government Primary Schools of Bangladesh, have very little experience with this innovation. They are accustomed to the traditional way of teaching. Aid of technology for education was never an option let alone a consideration for these teachers or students. Now, COVID-19 has forced them to adapt to these innovations. The adaptation process faced hindrance due to the lack of availability of internet access and an appropriate device. The teachers have been instructed to take online classes but some of the teachers are unable to do so. The students are either too young to own

a smartphone or their parents are battling financial struggles to provide these basic resources for their children to continue learning. While technological advancement can offer great promise, unless the associated challenges are fully understood and addressed, their success for the most disadvantaged becomes a question mark (Jacob, 2016).

Digitalization of schools and technological advancement can surely offer enormous benefits and advantages during COVID-19 pandemic (Li & Lalani, 2020). However, without proper use and understanding, the technological benefits cannot be drawn. Digitally literate parents can help their children to find, use and create information online in a useful way – which makes the transition to adapt to a different approach of remote learning very easy (Gonzalez, 2020). However, in the case of most Government Primary Schools of Dhaka, students and their parents were struggling to transition as they hardly know about wide range of functions of a smartphone. Parents did not know how to download, install and use an application from the app market. They barely knew what application market or play store was. It was a very ambitious attempt by the teachers to reach all their students online but they failed as parents and students could not fully understand that how can technology replace schools.

Students are taking ownership to formulate their own schedule for some learning time, however it has not been the case for easily distracted or less motivated students. Some students do lack a support system in their household to enable them continue learning from home. They have expressed their concerns on the lack of support they receive, in comparison to earlier. Previously, they had their teacher or their classmates for assistance. Institutions and educational systems must make special efforts to help those students whose parents are unsupportive and whose home environments are not suitable to study.

Moreover, results from previous studies have showed that the effect of lockdown periods during a pandemic can cause individuals to develop several negative symptoms like

depression, anxiety and mental stress (Gómez-Salgado et al., 2020). Mental health of students are one of the major concerns when teaching them online (Martin, 2020). Isolation during the pandemic period may be particularly challenging for children and adolescents with disadvantages such as, disabilities, trauma, migrant background, financial constraints (Thomas & Rogers, 2020).

COVID-19 has significantly impacted the income, food security and lifestyle of the poor and underprivileged families; some of the poorest families are unable to afford three meals a day (UNICEF, 2020). Being forced to be confined in the house due to COVID-19, parents and guardians may be deeply worried about their financial situation. Additionally, education is the least of their priority and their homes often lack the resources and connectivity to ensure continuity of their children's education (OECD, 2020)

Perception on the Way Forward of Schooling

Apart from challenges faced, educators and learners can seek for alternative measures during difficult times (Pontis & Waarde, 2020). Learning a new way of pedagogy is helping teachers to acquire new set of soft skills. Competent online educators are one of the critical factors to transition into the future of education. The situation of COVID-19 has finally forced the teachers to adapt a modern approach. They are constantly learning something new based on their experiences with the new approach. They are learning to draw on the abundance of high-quality learning material from the web, design their lesson plans differently, engaging their students from an unfamiliar point of view (Hammond et al., 2020).

Targeted communication with students after school is not a common practice in Bangladesh. Teachers feel that now they are communicating with their students off class even more, and it is helping them to create a support system for students who struggle more in their studies or

whose parents are not in a favorable financial or intellectual situation to provide them the support they need academically. Students rarely get differentiated support in a classroom which has over 40 students. Thus, maintaining a communication tab outside of class is essential for teachers to provide learners differentiated support and keep them engaged (Barron et al., 2021).

Developed nations have already proven the fact that education technology does not simply replaces schools, it enhances the learning (Heick, 2019). The students interviewed showed their interest and need to enhance their digital literacy skills. Additionally, teacher trainings on application and software usage or online teaching should be infused with their usual content based trainings. Government should also do their part on providing basic internet accessibility to students and teachers.

There were various ideas discussed in the interviews about school reopening within a limited capacity. For e.g., ten students per class can attend schools on a rotation basis and weekly for an hour. They can learn about applications and software which will help them to continue their studies in home. They will also get to meet the teacher face to face, discuss their problems and mark down the homework. If online classes are being incorporated with this way of limited school opening then students will get their value of learning. Otherwise, it is very hard to ensure this new way of teaching and learning where regular teaching-learning practice is so community embedded. (Lederman, 2020).

5.2 Conclusion

Until nations can judge when the trade-off between economic activity and public health will enable them to get back to the normality, concerns about the impact of COVID-19 in the education sector still persists. Government has initiated the a2i program to initiate telecasting digital content nationwide. Educational institutions have been looking for alternative and flexible approaches to minimize the damage and continue schooling. As discussed in this study, Bangladesh is still far from embracing full-fledged online learning solutions. New learning and evaluation methods are still being experimented but those methods need to be contextualized with the back-up of necessary resource provision. Teachers are being suggested to teach online but access to internet is still a problem. Alternative assessments are hardly practiced in Government Primary Schools.

Just as schools are taking steps to inform, reassure and maintain contact with students and parents, they must also boost up their ability to teach remotely. Private tutoring or coaching centers cannot be the only alternative for educators to continue teaching. Similarly for students, guidebook will not help them to enrich their understanding on the content. Teachers are slowly adapting to using IMO or WhatsApp for content delivery, but the number of students attending, reflects either the scarcity of resources or lack of motivation. There are other factors like migration, financial constraints, anxiety and lack of communication which are hindering the learning process of the students.

Despite the complex impediment, teachers and students have showed enthusiasm and eagerness to learn. Teachers do believe that they are acquiring a new set of skills which will

benefit them to deliver content effectively in the future. Students are willing to learn about online education to create a sustained support system for themselves and their education.

5.3 Recommendations

- Alternative learning and evaluation methods – While adoption of online learning methods can only partially address the problem, focus should be given towards promoting inclusive alternative learning and assessment methods.
- Modernizing teachers’ training programs – The current teachers’ training scheme has to be updated, modernized and incorporated with the future needs of the school, putting special emphasis on online communication and content delivery.
- Access to resources – Government has to ensure provision of free internet services to low-income communities with a digital library.
- Dropout prevention – Policies need to be formulated, stipend programs and mid-day meal programs have to be modified to cater the current needs of the most vulnerable students.
- Reopening schools – Reopening schools with limited capacity and rotational based shifts can assist students and teachers to gradually ease into the new approach of teaching-learning. Maintaining health guidelines of WHO and strict health protocols have to be put in place and this still depends on the severity of COVID-19.
- Further research – More research should be funded. Government and private sectors should collaborate to generate important data and evidence. It will guide policymakers to formulate long term and informed solutions.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Consent Letter

TEACHER CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and have decided to participate in the study titled as '*Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka*' to be conducted at the school I work at between the dates of _____ and _____. I understand that the signature of the Head Teacher indicates approval for the research project. This study intends to learn about the current schooling measures in urban Government Primary Schools of Dhaka. This study also intends to learn about the challenges both students and teachers of any urban GPS are facing to continue schooling during COVID-19 pandemic and what opportunities do both students and teachers have to prepare themselves for future unprecedented crisis.

I will participate in a **telephone interview session**.

I agree to the following conditions with the understanding that I can withdraw myself from the study at any time should I choose to discontinue participation.

- The identity of participants will be protected. The data collected on the surveys will be completely anonymous.
- Information gathered during the course of the project will become part of the data analysis and may contribute to published research reports and presentations.
- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved to me participating in the study.
- Participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect either teachers' employment or reputation. If I decide to withdraw permission after the study begins, I will notify the school of my decision.
- If further information is needed regarding the research study, I can contact Md Mahboob Hossain at +8801776620954 or through email at mahboob.hossain@teachforbangladesh.org.

Signature (Teacher): _____ Date: _____

Signature (Head Teacher): _____ Date: _____

PARENT/STUDENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and have decided to allow my child to participate in the study titled as '*Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka*' to be conducted at my child's school between the dates of _____ and _____. I understand that the signature of the Head Teacher indicates approval for the research project. This study intends to learn about the current schooling measures in urban Government Primary Schools of Dhaka. This study also intends to learn about the challenges both students and teachers of any urban GPS are facing to continue schooling during COVID-19 pandemic and what opportunities do both students and teachers have to prepare themselves for future unprecedented crisis.

My child will participate in a **telephone interview session**.

I agree to the following conditions with the understanding that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time should I choose to discontinue participation.

- The identity of participants will be protected. The data collected on the surveys will be completely anonymous.
- Information gathered during the course of the project will become part of the data analysis and may contribute to published research reports and presentations.
- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved to my child participating in the study.
- Participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect either student grades or placement decisions. If I decide to withdraw permission after the study begins, I will notify the school of my decision.
- If further information is needed regarding the research study, I can contact Md Mahboob Hossain at +8801776620954 or through email at mahboob.hossain@teachforbangladesh.org.

Signature (Parent): _____ Date: _____

Signature (Student): _____ Date: _____

Signature (Head Teacher): _____ Date: _____

Appendix B. Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

This interview is being conducted as a part of data collection of the study titled as '*Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka*'. The purpose of the research project is to learn about the challenges faced by teachers and students to transition into a different method of education other than the traditional classroom teaching and learning. Moreover, the study will also explore the opportunities for teachers and students.

The interview will take about 15 – 20 minutes of your time. Are you ready for the interview?

Question 1: How did COVID – 19 impact your schooling activities?

Question 2: How are you continuing your daily schooling activities? (Conducting classes, designing lesson plans, creating assessments etc.)

Question 3: As a teacher, what kind of challenges are you facing to continue schooling for your students?

Question 4: What are some of methods or tools do you use to take online or virtual classes?

Question 5: What are the opportunities you and your students have during this time?

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

This interview is being conducted as a part of data collection of the study titled as '*Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka*'. The purpose of the research project is to learn about the challenges faced by teachers and students to transition into a different method of education other than the traditional classroom teaching and learning. Moreover, the study will also explore the opportunities associated with virtual learning for teachers and students.

The interview will take about 15 – 20 minutes of your time. Are you ready for the interview?

Question 1: How did COVID – 19 impact your schooling activities?

Question 2: How are you continuing your studies since the school are closed now?

Question 3: Is your school teacher providing any resource or support for you to continue learning during this school closure?

Question 4: What kind of challenges are you facing when you try to study?

Question 5: What are the opportunities do you have with your time now?

Appendix C. Sample Interviews

INTERVIEW OF TEACHER 1

This interview is being conducted as a part of data collection of the study titled as '*Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka*'. The purpose of the research project is to learn about the challenges faced by teachers and students to transition into a different method of education other than the traditional classroom teaching and learning. Moreover, the study will also explore the opportunities and way forward for teachers and students.

The interview will take about 15 – 20 minutes of your time. Are you ready for the interview?

Question 1: How did COVID – 19 impact your schooling activities?

On the afternoon of March 16th, we received a message that from tomorrow schools would be closed due to COVID 19 pandemic. Government announced that schools all over Bangladesh would be closed down from March 17th to October 3rd until further notice. So, any kinds of schooling activities in the school premises is currently on the hold until the Government allows us to continue regular schooling activities. There is a possibility of reopening the schools and resuming classes from the last week of October. There has also been a news among teachers that an alternative term exam will be conducted in respective schools in place of Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) for Grade 5 students.

We have also stopped taking extra classes after school for students who need more support. We have made a separate routine and sent it to the students through our mobile phones. Their subject teachers have been assigning them homework by forming groups of 10-15 students either in Zoom or WhatsApp. Students who are not reachable by these apps are being directly called by their subject teachers to be in regular communication. We are giving them assignments or homework and trying our best to give them feedback on their work as well, everything via mobile phones.

Question 2: How are you continuing your daily schooling activities? (Conducting classes, designing lesson plans, creating assessments etc.)

In our area, the number of students are higher compare to other schools of Dhaka. Personally, I am trying my best to be in regular communication with the parents of the students. But it is

difficult to reach all the students in our area just by mobile phones. So, I am tutoring some of the students who need more support in my home but of course, I am following the health guidelines to make sure there are only a few students at a single time and everyone is maintaining a specific distance. I am focusing more on Math and English because most of the students in their primary level of studies, face difficulties with these two subjects. And, it is quite tough to explain math problems just by phone calls.

Most of the students in our school is from a needy or poor background. It is difficult for them to install or pay for internet. Some students do not have a support system in their homes. Their parents or sibling are either unaware or not available to give them the support they need. Again, I am trying my best to provide these students support in Math and English through mobile phones or by meeting them in person.

We have also informed them about ‘Ghore boshe Shikkha’ program which is being telecasted in the radio. We have also informed them about the daily classes telecasted in Sangsad TV which covers contents of primary level. Many students have told me that they found the virtual classes of Sangsad TV interesting and helpful.

Question 3: As a teacher, what kind of challenges are you facing to continue schooling for your students?

Due to the COVID situation, we are currently being forced to take classes online or via mobile phones. But most of the students in our schools are from poor families. It is very hard for their parents to pay for separate internet as majority of them are daily labors. So, a huge number of students were unreachable through Zoom or WhatsApp. Maintaining a regular communication with those students via phone call was the only way.

In our school there are 70 students in every class on average. It was a difficult task to reach all 70 through online classes or phone calls. But I called most of them and gave them a separate schedule to come online for their lessons. The students who could not attend the online lessons, had to be called separately. I delivered the lessons online and the students also had the opportunity to ask their questions. They have been participating interactively but a concerning number of students were and are still unreachable. Many students have also migrated back to their hometowns with their parents because their family members were not being able to continue their work and earn in Dhaka.

Question 4: What are some of methods or tools do you use to take online or virtual classes?

I am using Zoom to take online classes and WhatsApp to communicate with my students separately. We talked with some of the parents and identified which students had internet connection in their home. We instructed those parents to download and install Zoom in their mobile phones. We made it clear that their children will be able to attend online classes if they had Zoom in their phones. Some of the parents or the older siblings of the students were very supportive and some did not understand how to install the app. The ones who were not able to get the app, we called them directly to provide support. But there are some students who live really close to my home. I invited them in small groups of 2-3 or 5 to provide necessary help in their lessons, maintaining health regulations.

Question 5: What are the opportunities you and your students have during this time?

If the schools remain closed all over the country due to COVID-19 pandemic, we have to come up with a different or alternative approach. In my experience, online classes or phone calls can be helpful to allow students to be in regular touch with their studies. But the students as well as the Government school teachers should have a prior training on how to search, download and install the app in their mobile phones so that they can continue schooling activities online. Government should also do their part on providing basic internet accessibility to students and teachers but I understand that it is a very difficult thing for the Government.

Secondly, this different approach of taking lessons or providing feedback to students can be beneficial and we can draw learnings from these approaches. It is quite difficult for me as a teacher to provide one on one or constructive feedback to my students in just one period. But regular communication with them via WhatsApp or mobile phones is actually enabling me to provide differentiated feedback and I personally feel that my students are also getting benefited. We should continue this way of communicating with students even after the COVID-19 situation.

Lastly, I want to talk about students who struggle more in their studies and whose parents are not on a favorable financial or academic situation to provide them the support they need in their studies. If we can continue this new way of teaching for weaker students, after their regular classes or in anytime of the day, it will surely help them a great deal.

INTERVIEW OF STUDENT 1

This interview is being conducted as a part of data collection of the study titled as '*Schooling during COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges, opportunities and way forward for the Government Primary Schools of Dhaka*'. The purpose of the research project is to learn about the challenges faced by teachers and students to transition into a different method of education other than the traditional classroom teaching and learning. Moreover, the study will also explore the opportunities and way forward for teachers and students.

The interview will take about 15 – 20 minutes of your time. Are you ready for the interview?

Question 1: How did COVID – 19 impact your schooling activities?

When we first started news about COVID-19 pandemic, nobody took it seriously. Most of the students were not wearing any masks and not following the health protocols. I also found it very bothering to wash my hands after every few hours. But when we knew about how severe the pandemic was, the schools were closed down. I think it was a good decision to stop the spreading of COVID-19 in our area. But still most of us were still worried about our studies and exams.

But even before the schools were closed, some of the families in our area were affected. Some of our parents work as a maid and they were the ones who got affected first.

We have not received any updates from the school regarding when the school will reopen and what will happen with our assessments. Teachers are encouraging us to attend their private tuition classes in their homes but they barely follow any health protocols.

Question 2: How are you continuing your studies since the school are closed now?

I have my own schedule to study. I usually study four days a week now. I got some story books from my elder sibling. I am trying to read those books to improve my English. I am also taking the help of guidebooks to solve exercises for other subjects.

I have two younger siblings. Being older, I try to help them with studies as well because my parents are always busy. I am also aware of the education programs which is telecasted in Sangsad TV. I try to follow the Math and English classes. Sometimes it gets difficult for me to follow through as I do not get to ask questions if I miss something or I do not understand a topic.

Some of my friends use their parents' smartphone to study online. I do not know how to do it but I have seen most of my teachers are suggesting to visit their homes for private classes. Personally, I feel that attending classes online is a better option than going outside for private classes.

Question 3: Is your school teacher providing any resource or support for you to continue learning during this school closure?

I have not received any resource or support from the school or school teacher. When some of my family members were sick, we suspected it to be COVID and I had to stay indoors. Then, I called one of my teacher and asked him/her to pass down some of their notes to my friends who attend their coaching classes. But, the teacher strongly disapproved that and told me to rejoin their coaching classes when I get better.

I stopped going to the coaching classes because all the students were not maintaining social distancing as the space was very small. Nobody was even wearing any masks or gloves. Health protocols were not maintained so my parents also encouraged me to stay at home and study.

Teachers did not decrease the amount of students per batch even after COVID. I think the amount of students in coaching is now higher as schools are closed now and coaching classes are the only option for some of the students to continue their studies.

Question 4: What kind of challenges are you facing when you try to study?

Firstly, I did not have a fixed teacher who would help me with my studies unlike before. My mother told me that our landlord had a private coaching class upstairs but that too was closed down. I had to study on my own completely which was very difficult. I was not able to find solutions to all my problems. Nobody was there to help me with my studies. My father was at work most of the time, and my mother was busy with my younger siblings. I struggled a lot doing Math exercises.

My family also had to migrate back to our hometown due to financial constraints. My father lost his job at one point and we were forced to leave Dhaka and my studies got hampered because of that. When things got a bit better, we came back to Dhaka. But problems

regarding my studies were still the same. The new house we moved in to, was a bit far from the coaching centers where most of my classmates were going. So, I could not attend the coaching centers as well. And, teachers did not want to help those who were irregular in the coaching centers.

Question 5: What are the opportunities do you have with your time now?

I needed a device like a smartphone or a laptop to study online. I am still quite unfamiliar with how the internet really works and how you can study online but if trainings were given from our teachers or from the school, it would have helped a lot. I think good internet connection and smartphones are necessary as I have seen some of my classmates studying this way.

Besides studying on my own, I have been doing some of the house chores to help my mother which I had never done before. These chores have made me more active and allowed me to have more patience. I am glad that I am spending more time with my family and learning new things from them. I used to talk less with my family members but I feel that I am closer to them now than before.