

EXPLORING THE DISTANCE TEACHING-LEARNING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PRACTICE, CHALLENGES AND BEYOND: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY

By

Sanjida Hannan
Student ID: 19357031

A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

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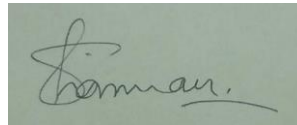
BRAC Institute of Educational Development
BRAC University
August, 2021

Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing a 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 that has been accepted or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to be 'Sanjida Hannan' written in a cursive style.

Sanjida Hannan
Student ID: 19357031

Approval

The thesis/project titled “EXPLORING THE DISTANCE TEACHING-LEARNING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PRACTICE, CHALLENGES AND BEYOND: A QUALITATIVE STUDY” submitted by

1. Sanjida Hannan, 19357031

of Spring, 2021 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement on 15/12/2021.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:
(Member)

Abdullah Al Mas-Ud
Lecturer, BRAC Institute of Educational Development

Program Coordinator:
(Member)

Dr. Manjuma Akhtar Mousumi
Assistant Professor, BRAC Institute of Educational Development

External Expert Examiner:
(Member)

Israt Jahan
Research Associate, BRAC Institute of Educational
Development

Head of the Institute:

Dr. Erum Mariam
Executive Director, BRAC Institute of Educational Development

Ethics Statement

I have consciously tried to keep myself aware of the prejudices, judgments, biases, and perceptions that might hamper the data's objectivity, authenticity, and neutrality throughout this study. I was careful while upholding any particular values or ideas. Also, I have not made any attempt to omit data that might affect the interpretation of the findings. Therefore, the findings presented here in this study are authentic and without any manipulation. At the same time, I was strict about maintaining the highest possible ethical and professional research code of conduct, such as the willingness of non-participation, the right to remain anonymous, the confidentiality of the research participants, etc.

Abstract

Distance education is a frequently used term nowadays around the world. Covid-19 pandemic has changed the traditional way of teaching-learning. Instead of traditional classroom teaching, almost all countries have adopted the distance learning approach to block coronavirus spread. Like other countries, Bangladesh adopted the distance learning approach last year as due to the pandemic, all the educational institutions were closed for a long time. Though distance education is present in some forms, it is very narrow and unable to reach all the population around the country, specially in primary education. Exploring the current practice and challenges of distance education at the application level is essential to overcome this barrier. Therefore, this study aims to explore the practice and challenges of distance learning in the primary sector from the perspective of teachers, students, and parents. I chose the qualitative research method with thematic sampling for this study. I collected data from 4 teachers, 2 students, and 2 parents of 6 different schools, both government primary schools and private schools in Panchlaish education thana at Chattogram city, through individual phone and virtual interviews and class observation. The data showed that the participants agree on the necessity of continuing distance education, its practices are still narrow. The challenges they mentioned are lack of devices, internet availability, lack of technological knowledge, financial crisis, and lack of training. Thus, the study proposes more research and making infrastructural development along with knowledge and skill upgradation so that every student can avail proper distance education in a time of any emergency crisis.

Keywords: Online education, distance learning, virtual teaching, education at school, COVID-19, pandemic

Dedication

This Thesis is dedicated to my beloved mother who always nurtured and cared for my inner strength, my father for always trusting me, and my sisters for their unconditional love and continuous support.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Nazia Tasnim, ma'am, for supporting and guiding me in the initial phase of my research development, and Abdullah Al Mas-Ud sir for his insightful guidance and constructive feedback during the research and thesis writing process.

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List of Acronyms

GPS- Government primary school

PC- Personal Computer

Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, schools have been closed in Bangladesh since March 2020. This unplanned extended closure of schools hampered the learning process of the students. For primary level schools, it created new challenges. Scarcity of resources and lack of knowledge on distance learning contributed to this issue. The teachers had to develop new distance education processes/ techniques/ solutions to adapt to the situation to support the students. Distance education occurs when a teacher and a student are separated by physical distance and technology (i.e., voice, video, data, and print), often in conjunction with face-to-face communication, to bridge the learning gap. There is a broad spectrum of technological options available to distance educators. In recent times online education has been one of the important education methods. Online education has gradually become a significant method of education by its rapid development around the world. Countries of the world are continuously exploring and researching how to use the Internet effectively to educate students, and throughout the time and phenomenal uses of online education, it has emerged drastically.

Still, online education is being used as an additive to regular school education, not an alternative, although it is developing rapidly around the world. More students go to schools to participate in traditional classroom teaching in the normalized education and teaching practice, and large-scale online education lacks practical application scenarios. Specially in Bangladesh, before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, distance education or online education was an exception, and for government primary education, it was totally absent. Due to the prolonged school closer, keeping in mind the health/safety and digital literacy aspect, the teachers started to teach through telecommunication and online platforms such as IMO, Zoom, G-meet,

WhatsApp, and Messenger, which can shortly be said as mobile learning. This distance education or online education started when the COVID-19 pandemic hit most of the world's countries, and educational institutes remained closed for a long time. To improve the practice of online education, knowing the experience of its beneficiary is important. As the students and the teachers are the main beneficiaries here, it is important to know their perspectives. As it is a recent phenomenon, very few studies have been conducted on distance learning practice and the challenges students, teachers, and parents face. As I had been working in a government primary school and had been a part of this experience for the last eight months of the year 2020, it intrigued me to explore more, to understand and measure teachers, students and parents' attitudes and perceptions towards the importance of mobile learning in distance education. The current findings on this topic can be helpful for those who are working on similar topics and those who may work in the future.

Currently, there are very few studies on the current practices and challenges of distance learning in GPS in the Bangladeshi context. In this research, I have tried to dig deeper into this issue to determine the current practice and distance learning challenges at the primary level. I have tried to look for the practices and challenges from several dimensions. This study includes the students, parents, and teachers from both government primary schools and privatization primary schools.

1.2 Research Topic

“Exploring The Distance Teaching-Learning In Primary Education During Covid-19 Pandemic: Practice, Challenges And Beyond: A Qualitative Study.”

The COVID-19 pandemic is a new phenomenon, and the sudden hit of this coronavirus across the world has deeply changed almost everything of normal life, including the education system,

and the teaching-learning process had to shift in a remote mode overnight. As the spread of this virus was very rapid and has turned into a pandemic, world leaders have developed some strict rules to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization has suggested social distancing, country-wide lockdown, and so on. These decisions from the world leaders made the situation crucial, and several countries took several decisions. But one common scenario was observed all over the world, and that is full school closer. According to UNESCO (2020), as many as 1,186,127,211 students were affected across the world, or about 67.7% of the total enrolled students from 144 country-wide closures, and nations had to change their learning systems due to COVID-19. These changes in teaching-learning systems forced schools to implement distance education or online learning, e-learning, and distance education as schools closed to ensure students' safety.

As no one in Bangladesh was prepared for the distance learning method, some challenges came while practicing it. It is the first time our whole education system in Bangladesh got broadly introduced with the online trend of teaching-learning and continuing for a very long time. According to Jaques & Salman (2007), adapting to an online environment can be a challenge for both facilitators and students. As an educator, it drew my attention, and I felt the necessity of the study to explore the current scenario so that it can help in further studies to take new policies on distance learning.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Distance education is a common source of teaching-learning nowadays. Online education is one of the ways of distance education. E-learning, distance education, or online learning refers to the method of content dissemination and rapid learning through the application of information technology and Internet technology. The “e” of e-Learning stands for electronic learning, efficient learning, exploratory learning, experiential learning, expanded learning,

extended learning, easy-to-use learning, and enhanced learning. For the very first time, the United States started the practice of e-learning. Since 1998, e-Learning has spread worldwide and has rapidly expanded from North America and Europe to Asia. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), e-learning plans have been implemented, including digital and distance learning options, as feasible and appropriate to ensure the continuity of education for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent report from The World Bank (2020) stated that several countries had implemented different learning systems as physical schools were closed due to COVID-19. Such as, In February 202, China shifted its learning system to e-learning, Bulgaria shifted to online learning in April 2020. Though the Bangladesh Government and the Education ministry declared a country-wide school closer in mid of March 2020, it took some time to introduce a remote learning approach, (e.g. online learning, mobile phone support, learning through radio, television). In Bangladesh online education is not affordable or reachable for all though it creates a healthy and comfortable learning environment. In Bangladesh, during COVID-19, we have seen a divide between rural and urban students. It has found that wealthy urban children can avail education via online platforms during the coronavirus pandemic, yet the rural poor or even urban poor/underprivilege cannot avail or have access to education due to the lack of resources and infrastructure. So, teachers and parents are also facing challenges in providing proper education to their children. Though there are some studies on online education at secondary education and university level, there are very few studies on the practice and challenges of distance education at the primary level. This issue drew my interest, and I am eager to know more about the current practice and challenges of distance education in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It may contribute to future studies to develop new policies and strategies for primary education.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the current practices of distance teaching-learning in primary education during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the challenges teachers face to provide distance education?
3. What challenges are the students and their families facing to avail distance education?
4. How can current distance education be made more effective?

1.5 Purpose of the Study

There are very few studies that focus on the current distance learning overview of primary education during this pandemic. School teachers, parents, and students cooperatively are the participants in an education system, as parents play an important role in the teaching-learning process, specially for the primary students. According to the Education Ministry, “Bangladesh has about 10.75 million students at the primary education level, and most rural students are impoverished (Uttom & Rozario, 2020)”. Despite having many learners, the primary education system in Bangladesh is still being operated in traditional ways, limited to textbooks and centralized resources. Therefore, most of the students at the primary level are not familiar with the modern education system (Sultana, 2016), and this has become a severe problem due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, the students from ultra-poor families who live from hand to mouth and do not have access to technologies have been suffering significantly as their learning has entirely stopped. This group of learners can be regarded as having zero access to technology users because they do not have any access to technological devices such as smartphones, televisions, and radios (Hossain, Rahman, & Karim, 2020). Students and parents face challenges to avail of distance learning due to their socio-economic condition, education, and digital literacy. In distance learning, in terms of lesson planning and writing, classroom

management, and meeting the varying needs of their learners' teachers have to face numerous challenges and difficulties in performing their role efficiently in today's rigid teaching practices and activities (Burgess, 2015; Thormann et al., 2012). In-person classrooms had to shift into a distance learning module due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study aims to find out the current practice of distance learning in the primary sector and some challenges the teachers face to provide distance learning. The study explores the perspective of both the government primary school teachers and the teachers of private schools about their practice of distance learning and the challenges. It is also seeking the view from the students and the parents about their experience of distance learning and the challenges from their end. As Bangladesh has experienced a distance teaching-learning system for the first time, the primary intention of this study is to find out an overall scenario of distance teaching-learning in Bangladesh's primary education during this COVID-19 pandemic.

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are several studies on online teaching-learning or remote learning in Bangladesh. But the practice and challenges of distance teaching-learning and the struggle behind the practice in the primary section in Bangladesh from both teacher's and student's end are yet to explore. This study will explore the current practice and challenges from primary school teachers' and students' perspectives. We are not well aware of the actual scenario of distance learning in the primary sector. The study will try to find out the practice, challenges, and needs from a teacher's perspective and a student's point of view.

The study will answer if a government primary school teacher's perspective differs from a private school's teacher and the perspective of a government primary school student and parents. It may help the policymaker take a new policy in the primary curriculum.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

The following literature review is prepared based on my research and study on several books, articles, and journals on distance learning in primary education during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have organized my literature review under the following themes.

1. Education during COVID-19
2. The practice of distance learning
3. The challenges of distance learning
4. Effective ways of distance teaching-learning

The literature of this research will be reviewed under these three themes. In the first theme, the study will explore the education system during the COVID-19 pandemic, then the current practice of distance teaching-learning in primary education. After that, it aims to discover the challenges of distance teaching-learning from both the facilitator and the participants.

2.1.1 Education during COVID-19

According to an article titled "Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: the challenges and opportunities", Huang et al. (2020), a novel coronavirus, was discovered in the last month of the year 2019, in a seafood market in Wuhan. The virus's clinical analysis results showed person-to-person transmission (Li et al., 2020; Paules et al., 2020; Wang, Cheng, et al., 2020). Due to this sudden hit of an epidemic that quickly turned into a pandemic, everything was changed. According to (Red Cross, 2020), to curb the dissemination of the disease, social distancing is a conscious increase in the physical gap between people. This pandemic has

compelled to close business institutes, in-person sports activities or entertainment events, and schools by pushing all institutions to shift to online platforms. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is worldwide and drastic for all the countries. According to a report by UNESCO, “The COVID-19 pandemic has long-term adverse effects on education and broader consequences in terms of economic growth and development by pushing the education systems with the closure of schools in both developed and developing countries (UNESCO et al., 2020).” The European Data Portal (2020) report stated, “Worldwide, 50,134,558 students from partially-closed schools and 1,130,169,834 students from fully-closed schools were affected by the pandemic.” Educational Technology (EdTech) is considered a solution to minimize the effect of school closures and handle this situation by providing distance education on a global scale (Malik, 2020). As a developing country with a high poverty rate, it has become more complex. In Bangladesh, nearly 18 million primary students are out of school due to school closure. However, According to UNICEF (2020), non-enrolled children in schools are 22.8 million, drop-out number is 5.3 million, and 17.5 million children have never attended school (Bank, 2019; Danjou, 2020).

Due to the sudden hit of COVID-19, homes worldwide have become classrooms just in a few days or weeks. The learning environment dramatically changed, and many schools had to create distance learning platforms overnight. The transition to home learning in such a short time without warning or preparation has raised concerns that will focus on researchers, educators, policymakers, and all those interested in young people's educational and social welfare for years to come. Except for schools for children of key workers and children with special needs in the UK, schools were closed on 20 April 2020. As the reopening of schools may increase the infection rate, schools are probable to stay closed until the next school year. A research by Bayrakdar, Sait & Guveli, Ayse (2020) says that the current home learning may create new and even quicken the existing inequalities between children from underprivileged families and their

privileged peers. Still, they suggest that distance teaching might mitigate these disparities during the school interruption by schools' involvement in home learning and provision. This article investigates during the lockdown how schools' delivery of learning opportunities helps minimize these inequalities and if parents' educational background gives rise to disparities in students' time on schoolwork. Another research shows that the teaching practices have fundamentally changed for a long time for the school teachers who would typically be used to classroom teaching, the COVID-19 pandemic situation has remained unchanged. (Zhang et al., 2020).

The worldwide effect of the COVID-19 in education sectors is the shut down of many institutes and suddenly keeping most students out of school. In controlling the spread of COVID-19, most countries have temporarily closed their educational institutions. Though some countries reopened schools after a certain period, they had to close the schools again due to the rapid transmission of the coronavirus infection. In Bangladesh, nearly 40 million students are now out of school. Besides this universal disruption of education, the mass population's socioeconomic status, access to technology, and parental capabilities are causing the differentiation of out-school learning deprivation. During the pandemic, to deliver education to the students, most countries use online or satellite television platforms, which is not adequate to meet the contrasting levels. Third-world countries are struggling to provide distance education though the developed countries are making good progress with online teaching. On the students of Bangladesh, the significant impact of the Covid-19 is a disruption in learning opportunities with multiple other aspects. In spite of the government's attempts to handle the situation, COVID-19 is negatively affecting Bangladesh's students for several reasons. (Emon, E. K. H., Alif, A. R., & Islam, M. S., 2020)

The scenario is also not the same for all the countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Countries that are well resourced and have a high education rate are struggling less than those

that do not have enough resources to support online or distance education. Countries like Bangladesh, where 100% of citizens still do not have access to android phones, television, or radio, are struggling the most to provide online or distance education.

2.1.2 The practice of distance learning

Since February 4, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Leading Group of the Ministry of Education of China has issued the “Guiding Opinions on Online Teaching Organization and Management of General Colleges and Universities during the Period, Notice on Supporting Education and Teaching with Information Technology during Epidemic Prevention and Control, and Several Suggestions on Targeted Teacher Work during Epidemic Prevention and Control Notice” to reduce the impact of the pandemic on education while resisting the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic to schools. The proposal in the notice is to guide students to understand “School’s Out, But Class’s On,” i.e., “School is closed, but student learning is continuing online” or “Online Home Study during the COVID-19 epidemic, schools, use internet platforms.” (<http://en.moe.gov.cn/>).

Several countries have introduced numerous solutions worldwide during the pandemic to continue the education process. In at least 96 countries, an alternative of the physical classroom was introduced like TV/radio telecasts, learning guidelines and resources, recorded lectures, online libraries, online channels. To expand the reach of the school lessons to the population, the ‘Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of Georgia’ has started the educational project titled - “Teleskola” (TV School) in cooperation with Georgian Public Broadcaster’s First Channel. The TV channel lessons on different subjects are broadcasted nationwide through live transmission. EL.GE - a platform supported by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport has hosted thematic resources based on the national curriculum. (UNESCO 2020, National Learning Platforms and tools).

During this pandemic, several online platforms have made a significant impact. For its users, Microsoft has lifted existing user limits and offered a free subscription of Microsoft Teams' premium version for six months to any user. By July 1, 2020, another major platform Google for the customers of G Suite and G Suite for Education, has offered its enterprise video conferencing features like meetings up to 250 participants and recording functionality for free. By request in Italy, China, Japan, and the US, Zoom has upgraded the time limit of video calls. (Rani Molla, VOX. 2020).

The private schools didn't get any support from the government to continue the education process online. They had to figure out their ways independently, where the government provided significant support to the public schools. Several alternative communication solutions like Zoom and G-Meet were discussed and used. The number of users in Microsoft teams on March 10 was only 750, and on March 24, the education management information system has reported the growth and showed that the number of users had increased to 138 698. (OECD, 2020)

Different researches have found that although there are some plans to use distance/online learning during the pandemic, they are not focused on a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic but rather mainly concentrated on small cases. Countries with minimal technological facilities have problems in schools and are unable to implement countrywide online education (Sintema J, 2020).

2.1.3 The challenges of distance learning

Education during the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most challenging sector for the world and specially for the 3rd world country like Bangladesh as population, and socio-economic is not very well to handle such a huge pandemic. A study shows that not everyone can afford or access online education in Bangladesh, even though it creates a healthy routine and a

comfortable learning environment (Tariq, S.B., & Fami, T., 2020). There are several more challenges on the way of pursuing online education that has come out through several studies. Another study shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic, privileged urban children can access online education and continue their learning; on the other hand, underprivileged rural or urban poor remain without education due to the lack of resources and framework. (Rafe, R., 2020)

Training on online teaching methods and resources and practical knowledge is a must to conduct online classes for teachers. A study conducted on primary school teachers by Tariq, S.B., & Fami, T. (2020) says that Bangladesh's primary school teachers mainly struggle with a lack of practical knowledge of online teaching. Most teachers in rural areas do not have a PC or even own a smartphone. Therefore, the students and the teachers are also in a hazardous situation.

There are few studies on students' perspectives of online learning. A study by Song et al. (2004) found that students feel that the major barriers to online learning are technical problems and difficulties in understanding instructions. Another study found that coping with online teaching-learning can be a challenge for both teachers and students (Jaques, D., & Salmon, G., 2007). In his study Alam, A. (2020) has said that, as it is their first experience to connect with the online class, the teachers and students are struggling with good adaptability with this shift from the traditional classroom to a computer-based virtual classroom. It is also making the teaching-learning experience entirely different for them.

Other studies also show that online teaching has been a substitute for classroom teaching. Limited technical knowledge, insufficient and weak framework, issues with online connectivity, and tutoring capabilities are several major obstacles in pursuing online teaching-learning. Similarly, in rural areas, a gap in learning outcomes also occurred where common

issues related to the uninterrupted power supply and internet availability are present (Uwezo, 2020). The Digital Action Plan of the European Commission (2020) stated that above 60% of the student population had been affected by school closures in most countries. For all European member states' online teaching practices and strategies, 'The Digital Action Plan' also emphasized applying for a necessary support and development program.

2.1.4 Effective ways of distance teaching-learning

There are few studies on effective ways of distance learning. Though most of the studies on distance learning say that it cannot replace face-to-face teaching-learning, some studies propose ways to make distance learning effective. These studies emphasize the technological use and instructional part of distance learning.

There is evidence that the technologies have a positive effect on distance learning. Hackman and Walker (1990) noted that learning outcomes are influenced and impacted by communication technology. Other than the use of technologies, there are some human factors that influence the participants' reaction to the technology-based teaching-learning process. In his study, Hiltz (1986) found that the technological experience of the participants in a virtual classroom has a strong correlation with learning outcomes.

In his study Schamber (1988) says that though the technology is an essential and fundamental part of distance education, focusing on students' instructional needs is a must for any successful program, rather than the prime focus on technology only. Considering other aspects like age, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, educational levels, interests, and experiences, familiarity with distance education methods and delivery systems is also essential.

Instead of active learning in the classroom, interaction among students, teacher-students, students, and the learning environment are also important. In his study, McNabb (1994) stated that lack of dialogue is present compared to face-to-face classes in telecourses. However,

students felt that the lack of dialogue exceeds the issue of accessibility of distance learning. Interactivity takes many forms. It indicates the students' connection with the distance teacher and their peers. Garrison (1990) stated that the quality and authenticity of the educational process depends upon two-way communication. Without contact with the teacher and peers, the students lose interest in distance learning; as they become separated and isolated in the classroom, they procrastinate to learn and gradually drop out from the learning process. An individualistic form of learning is not an effective distance education; rather, it should be interactive.

Though the effectiveness of distance learning is still a question, these methods of conducting or availing of distance learning can make it effective for both the learners and the provider.

2.2 Conceptual framework

The study has been conducted following the framework:

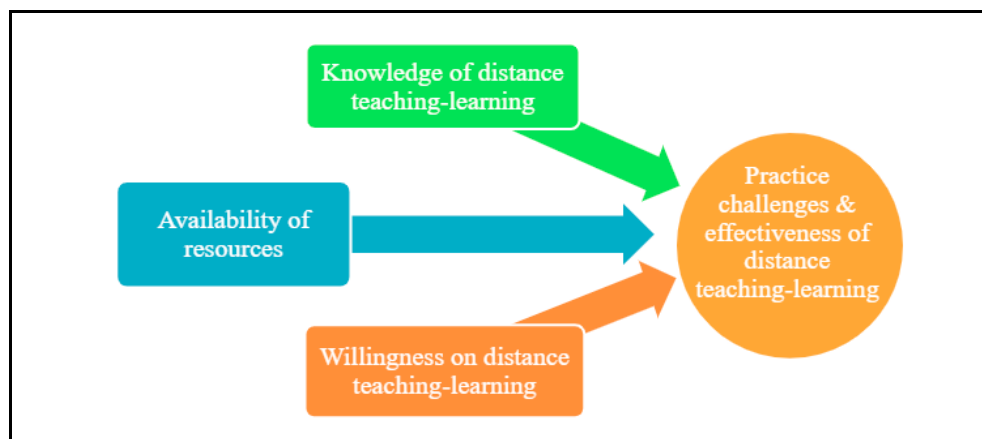


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

Practice and challenges of distance learning experience during the COVID-19 pandemic can be different from place to place, from person to person. To better understand the participants' perspectives on the issue, we need qualitative data. So, the research approach has been selected as the qualitative method. From the concepts of the qualitative research approach by Creswell (1998) and Merriam (1998), the qualitative approach of the research came into account. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is a process of understanding a social or human problem based on available data collected from different methodological investigations. In qualitative studies, the researcher analyzes participants' perceptions, information, and words to find out and understand the context. Similarly, Merriam (1998) stated that individuals' interactions with the social worlds to construct reality contribute the qualitative research. Therefore, the qualitative approach paradigm supports the researcher in understanding the meaning individual means and how they make sense of their world and experiences. As this research aims to see the current practices and challenges of distance teaching-learning, this method will allow us to understand the perspective deeply and multidimensionally.

3.2 Research Site

As this research aims to explore the practice and challenges of distance learning, we will have to depend on many participants. So, I have conducted this research on two types of schools: 1. Government primary schools and 2. Privatization schools. These schools have been selected based on the differences in availability of resources, socio-economic differences between the school community, practice of distance teaching-learning during the pandemic, and authority. These primary schools are located in Panchlaish Education Thana. There are three government

primary schools and three privatization primary schools. I have selected these schools to make a comparison of data between these two schools, where some schools are under-resourced, some schools are well equipped and the student's socio-economic background is also different. (distance education practice, grades,

3.3 Research Participants

To explore the issue, I need the perspective of teachers, students, and parents. These three types of participants are directly involved with the practice of distance learning and are experiencing it from different angles. They may have different kinds of opinions, which will help to conduct the research. Also, I have chosen half of the population from government primary schools and half of the participants from privatization schools. I have selected 2 teachers, 1 student and 1 parent from the government primary schools and 2 teachers, 1 student and 1 parent from the privatization schools. In total 8 participants have been interviewed. The students that participated are from grade 4 and 5, and the parents are of the same students who were interviewed.

After the initial background study of the schools to look into the presence of distance teaching-learning, I choose some interview participants based on the need of my research topic and questions.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Stuter (2006), mentioned that based on the study's research question, qualitative research helps collect detailed and essential information and understanding of the research participants. As I have conducted this research based on the qualitative method, I have chosen 8 interview participants for in-depth understanding and qualitative data on the topic. The participants are from Education Thana but belong to different socio-economic backgrounds. Throughout the interview with the participants, I clarified my queries by one-o-one intensive conversation. I

have also observed 2 online classes to understand the Teacher and students' actions, practices, and challenges during an online class. I also observed 2 phone call conversations between the teacher and a student who has no online access.

3.4.1 Interview method

A semi-structured interview was my main data collection tool for this study, as I wanted to collect the data directly from the participants of distance teaching-learning. I have interviewed 8 participants from March 2021- to May 2021. I collected the data, and before conducting the interviews, a consent letter was presented to each of the participants as I conducted the interviews via online and mobile phone. The participants gave their consent and attached their electric signatures to the consent letter. As this research involved students from the primary level, I took the consent of the guardian or parents first to interview the students. The interview was scheduled based on some pre-communication and the preference of the participants. Each interview was around 35-40 minutes.

3.4.2 Observation

In the first week of September 2021, I observed 2 online classes and 2 phone call conversations. I was a silent observer in all the classes. In both the online classes, I observed the teacher's actions, the teaching-learning interventions, classroom environment, methods used to teach the topic, use of materials, students' interaction, responses, and understanding of the topic, internet stability, and the level of following teacher's instruction. In a phone conversation, I observed the teachers' approach towards the student, the way of giving instructions, delivering the topic, and assigning homework. I observed the student's response, promptness of asking questions, and responding to the teacher's query from the student's side. I observed the socio-emotional learning practices for both online and phone call classes.

3.5 Role of the Researcher

In the successful pursuit of a study on a social phenomenon, the role of a qualitative researcher is very important. In this study, I could highly connect as I was a teacher and had some experience of distance learning practices and challenges faced by the teachers and students. From March 2021, I have studied students, teachers, and parents' practices and challenges in distance learning. During the in-depth interview process and classroom observation, I tried to be conscious as a researcher in this particular context and remembered that I should not be biased on my previous experiences and draw any conclusions. As a researcher, I played several roles. Firstly, as an interviewer, I collected data from the research participants by building a rapport with them during the interview, I collected the desired data by asking probing questions, and during the observation, I took note of the activities of students and teachers in the classroom. As a transcriber and encoder, I maintained an Excell document to transcribe all the recorded interviews and translated organized them correctly into a standard English statement. Lastly, I implemented a fitted analysis method to find the research result as an analyst. As a novice researcher, I sometimes faced struggles to frame the probing questions and transcribe the data from the recordings. I also struggled to manage participants due to the pandemic.

3.6 Data Analysis

After collecting the data using a semi-structured interview method and observation, I used a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data to determine the result section. In psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), health care (Braun & Clarke, 2014), and many other fields (Boyatzis, 1998), thematic analysis is typically used for the qualitative data analysis approach. So, after collecting the interview data, I transcribed the data, and then the transcribed data were coded, categorized, and ordered according to the theme and conceptual framework. In the next step, I examined the available data to find similarities and dissimilarities within the categories. I took

descriptive notes of the determiners mentioned above for the classroom observation. And to analyze the data collected from the observation method, I categorized, coded, and ordered all the data according to the theme.

3.7 Ethical Issues and Concerns

I have taken prior verbal and written consent from the research participants. I used a consent letter that I sent to the research participants using an online platform (email, WhatsApp) to take the written consent. After adding an electronic signature, the research participants sent it back to me. As there are minor participants in this study, I took consent from their guardians. I have consciously avoided using any identification indicator (participants' names, school names, etc.) in the research paper to maintain confidentiality. As a researcher, for the sake of fair research, the researcher needs to be aware of the biases. As I was a classroom teacher for two years, I consciously avoided choosing research participants from the school I was affiliated with. I consciously withheld my judgment topic and depended fully on the participants' responses.

3.8 Credibility and Rigor

As a new researcher, I have gathered knowledge on research methodology throughout the courses of my two several postgraduate degrees. As I was a teacher for two years in a GPS on the same education thana of the research site, I had prior knowledge of the research site and the context. Also, I taught in a very under-resourced GPS during the school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. So, I have a deep understanding of the research topic. After determining the research topic, I developed a research proposal based on the prevailing knowledge of the academic content. After getting feedback and finalizing the research proposal by incorporating the feedback, I conducted the research according to the research proposal.

3.9 Limitations of the study

As this research was conducted during the lockdown period of the corona pandemic, one of the major limitations of this research is the absence of face-to-face connection with the research participants. The lack of opportunities to connect with the participants and build a human connection with the participants was present. As the interviews were conducted via phone calls and virtual calls, technical difficulties were also encountered. Another limitation of this study is failing to manage a focus group discussion that I intend to conduct for a deeper understanding and more data collection due to the sudden school re-opening and shift in the whole teaching-learning process. There was no funding for this research, and the timeline was also limited, so I could not prolong the research to connect with more research participants and collect more data. Though there are several limitations of the study, I consciously tried to avoid any kind of error or tried to address the limitation to find out the best output from this study.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I have presented the findings of the qualitative data analysis. This chapter gives an overview of the current practices and challenges in pursuing distance education in Bangladesh's primary education from teachers, students, and parents' perceptions. Along with a complete description and analysis of the collected data from semi-structured telephone and virtual interviews with the GPS and private school teachers, students, and parents, classroom observation in an online classroom setting and on phone call class setting was held to find out the current practices and challenges of distance education by the teachers, students, and parents. After cataloging and analyzing the data, three themes in alignment with the four research questions are developed according to the responses from the participants. The themes include 1. Education during COVID-19 2. The practice of distance teaching-learning and 3. The challenges of distance teaching-learning. In this section, these three themes are discussed.

4.1.1 Education during COVID-19

After the COVID-19 hit the community and the school closure since March 18, 2020, the participants were asked what the education scenario was in their context. Different participants shared different kinds of answers in response to this question. Responses of GPS participants were different from those of private schools.

One of the private school participants from phone interview #1, 30-3-2021, has mentioned:

“ Our school conducts regular online classes and holds online exams, so I have to join the classes. I join the online classes using my Father's mobile phone before he goes out for work as my mother's mobile phone does not have a data connection, and we have no wifi

connection in our home. But as the school is closed, I do not like to study at home, though my tutor comes daily in the afternoon.”

Another participant of GPS from phone interview #2, 06-04-2021, has mentioned that:

His parents do not know how to read or write. Also, both of his parents work in a factory, so they leave home early in the morning and come back in the evening or sometimes at night.

So, they cannot help him in his studies. In the evening, he goes to a tutor to study with a batch, and his tutor helps him with his studies. As the school was closed, he had no communication with his teachers at the beginning, so he did not feel interested in studying.

Also, the exams were canceled, so his parents did not give pressure on studying.

Both the GPS and private school teachers shared similar types of responses on education during pandemics. All the teacher participants shared that during the school closure due to the Pandemic, they operated remotely, via mobile phone and online platforms. But the availability of students’ information deferred from the private schools’ teachers to GPS teachers. For the private schools, all the students’ basic information, including contact details, was available to the school; on the other hand, the students’ contact information in GPSs was very minimal. They initially worked to collect the contact information of students from the community.

One of the participants of GPS from virtual interview #6, 05-06-2021, mentioned:

The parents of their students are not very aware or concerned about their children’s education. In the initial stage of the pandemic, no one cared, so did they as teachers were relaxed as there was no instruction from the government. Also, they had limited contact information as the school’s data was not updated; those who got a stipend had only their contact information. Also, many students shifted to their hometown, so they lost communication. Slowly they started calling students, but in 2020 they were not very serious about taking classes. But from the beginning of this year, they were more regular on online classes and providing worksheets.”

Similarly, another participant from a private school from virtual interview #4, 09-05-2021, mentioned:

“As the schools were closed for a long time and we realized the school re-opening is uncertain, our school authority took the decision to conduct classes online and assess the students through online classes. We started online classes from the second or third month of the pandemic. As we assigned homework for students, the parents were also very concerned about the children they took care of at home. It was helpful for us. But we sometimes failed to connect with 100% of the students.”

The responses of parents were very different from participant to participant. The parent of the private school student shared that as they do not have a wifi connection at home, it was sometimes difficult for him to manage the work time and with the online class schedule. But they took care of their child's study even though the schools were closed. A tutor regularly came to support the student, and the student's mother also helped the student at home. On the other hand, the parents of the GPS student shared a total opposite reflection. They shared that as the schools were closed and there was no pressure of exams, they did not put much pressure on their child. Also, both parents were working in a factory, so they initially did not send their children to online classes. But they send their children to a tutor for study support.

From Interview # 7, 20-05-2021, a parent of a private school student mentioned that:

“As students cannot go to school, it's okay to join online classes. But giving access to devices is harmful. My kid's school's system is perfect. They gave us training. They provide links. Exams are also going on.”

4.1.2 The practice of distance teaching-learning

All the participants of this study were chosen intentionally from the schools that conduct online classes to understand the practice of distance teaching-learning. The participants shared in their schools a regular practice of online classes, phone classes, and worksheet distribution.

The participants shared that the practice of distance learning is present in every school in one form or another. But the effectiveness of it or its authenticity is a question. The participants from GPS shared that they started online classes at the end of last year. But they maintained phone call communication with their students to check if they were doing well or sometimes to check if they were watching the Sangsad TV lessons. They had to prepare a report to submit to the authority to report on the weekly communication, student's Sangsad TV lesson update, etc. According to all the Participants from both GPS and private schools Sangshad, TV lessons are not effective as the student does not watch them. Sometimes the students watch as the teachers ask them to watch the lesson and complete the task given at the end of the lesson, but it is not effective as they did not check any of these tasks later on. But in the case of online classes, private schools started taking online classes at the beginning of the lockdown, but the GPS was not taking online classes pro-actively and regularly as the authority was flexible about it. Also, GPS teachers were struggling to connect their students to online classes. They shared that when the government declared to distribute weekly worksheets, the students and the parents were collecting those, but for the GPS teachers, they had to call again and again to ask the students and parents to collect the worksheets.

The participants of GPS from virtual interview #6, 05-06-2021, mentioned that:

The online classes started at the end of August 2020, but it was not a regular practice. The government did not give any specific instructions for taking online classes, so they were flexible. As a teacher, they did not have enough information about students to start the classes. Last year students joined online classes using IMO, Facebook messenger, zoom, and this year

most of the students joined in G-meet as the government instruction, but still, many students cannot join using G-meet as their devices do not support the G-meet. Last year initially, they called students at their phone number to give them the schedule of Sangsad TV classes, but later on, they did not do any follow-up with the lesson.

On the other hand, from Interview #5, 10-05-2021 with a private school teacher, the participant mentioned that they started taking online classes from mid of April 2020, as they realized the lockdown would prolong. Their student's parents are very concerned about their children's studies, so student attendance was satisfactory. They did not focus much on other distance learning activities like the Sangsad TV lessons as the online classes were regular.

In this same question, the students shared that their schools regularly conduct online classes and, provide worksheets, give homework through phone calls to those who cannot join the online classes.

The participant of a private school from phone interview #1, 30-3-2021, has mentioned,

In their school, the online classes started in April 2020. She said online is not as fun as school; the network is an issue to join the online classes. The online classes were regular at the beginning, but later on, it was not regular later on. She added the teacher does not say anything if the students were not present. She thinks it is not that serious; only attendance was needed. Though they know about Sangsad TV classes, their school students never watched any classes.

Similarly, the participant of a GPS from phone interview #2, 06-04-2021, has mentioned:

“ At the beginning of the lockdown last year, my class teacher sometimes called me to give me the schedule of Sangsad TV classes, and asked me to share it with other students around my home. But most of my neighbors do not have a TV in their homes. I also do not like to watch the classes as I do not understand anything. In our school, my teacher started taking

online classes at the end month of the year. But those classes were not as regular as this year. Now our teachers regularly conduct online classes.”

Parents of the students also shared their perspectives on this issue and shared many interesting points to the discussion.

From Interview # 7, 20-05-2021, a private school student’s parent mentioned that;

In mid-April 2020, the online classes were started in his daughter’s school. Initially, the school conducted classes regularly, but he noticed that it became irregular after some time. He has no idea about the contents or lessons the teachers taught in the online classes. But he does not think it is effective enough. He added that online classes could not replace in-person classes. As there was no other way at that moment, it was okay for them to continue their child’s education.

From Interview #8, 20-05-2021, a parent of a GPS school student mentioned that:

Last year the teacher called her sometimes to talk to her kid. and she heard that they were asking her kid to watch classes on TV. But her child did not watch those and said he does not understand the lessons, and it’s okay if he does not watch them. The teacher is not going to ask him again. After a few months, the teacher started taking online classes, but it was not regular. This year the teachers started taking regular online classes. So her son joins the classes, but sometimes he cannot join for some reason. After a few months, the teacher also asked them to collect the worksheet from a photocopy shop and submit it to the school after completing it.

4.1.3 The challenges of distance teaching-learning

Participants of this study have mentioned several challenges they face while pursuing or providing distance learning. Though the practices varied from school to school, challenges sometimes were similar and sometimes different from the participants from GPS and private

schools. From Observation # 1, 02-09-2021, in the online classroom of a GPS, I tried to notice the challenges a teacher faces while teaching online and the challenges students face while learning online from home. There were 7 students in that class. I have noticed that the major challenges in an online class both for the teacher and the students are internet stability, availability of devices, time alignment, and the unfamiliarity of the process. The teacher was using a mobile phone to teach the students where they did not use any presentation and they were holding the mobile phone sometimes in their hand and the screen was so small that they could not see all the students at a time. Similarly, according to my observation, students were also struggling with their devices. Most of the students own a minimal quality android phone. One of the students' mobile phone's front camera was not working properly so the teacher could not see the student's face or the written tasks she was showing on the camera. Another student was not using an earphone as they do not have one, making extra noise. As for the internet issue, it was not stable both at the teacher's end and at the students' end. Though the teacher was using a broadband connection, it was not stable all the time. And the students were mainly using mobile data, and they were frequently dropping out from the call and rejoining. While I was trying to schedule the observation call, the teacher shared that they will let me know after talking to the students as their parents are mostly working in the garments or in any local factory and the office hour prolongs till late in the evening. Then we were able to schedule a class for that evening from 8:00-9:00 pm. Now, another observation and challenge I noticed was the use of several applications to join an online class. The teacher was using an IMO group to provide all the classroom links, homework, and class tasks, while the class was in the G-meet platform as the instruction from the government. So, the students had to learn the use of several applications and install several applications when their poor quality mobile phone does not support a high storage capacity. These are the common challenges the students and teachers face just to avail an online class. On the other hand, in execution, the teacher's content that day

for the grade 4 students was not planned well enough for an online class. The activities were too general and the assessment system to check the understanding or outcome of the lesson was missing. For the students, I noticed some of the parents/siblings were beside the student and helping them with all the tasks given to them.

From Observation #2, 4-09-2021, in an online class of a private school, I observed the class in the morning as they conduct online classes during school hours and the schedule was fixed. I noticed some differences in some points in an online class of a private school from the government school. The participation of students was higher in the private school's online class than in the GPS online class. They maintain a fixed schedule to accommodate the students. Also, the availability of devices for both the students and teachers were different here. The teacher used their PC to conduct the class and most of the students kept their video on during the class. In the execution, the teacher created a PowerPoint presentation to deliver the content, I also noticed that the teacher brought related material to teach grade 4 science. Though the teacher was using the broadband connection, it was not stable all the time, and most of the students were using a broadband connection to join the online class, and some were using mobile data. But both the connections were not stable all the time. So, students sometimes were dropping out from the call. The teacher also used a common Facebook group to maintain communication with the students. They had several Facebook groups that were maintained centrally from the school. In execution, though the teacher used a Powerpoint presentation and related materials, the assessment to check the outcome of the lesson was not ensured from the teachers' side. And the students were performing their tasks on their own, but sometimes the parents were helping here as well.

Another point I noticed was the classroom environment in the classroom and outside the classroom. Both in the classrooms, the students were participating less. They were not asking

many questions but replying to the teacher's questions. Sometimes the students in both the classroom shared if they missed any instruction or got dropped out from the call.

I got some more detailed information from the data collected through interviews with the participants. These responses varied from participant to, according to their context.

The responses from the participants of private schools and GPS were similar. Though they have devices available and all of their students are able to join online classes, they can also accommodate all the same grade students in an online class as the student's number is standard, the parents are also aware of their children's education, and they face many challenges to conduct online classes. The technological knowledge of all the teachers and students is not the same. The teachers who struggle with technology are not comfortable taking online classes; they also struggle to create quality content for the online classes. Though they have arranged an internal training session for all the teachers, it was not enough to deliver quality content in an online class. Internet instability is a major issue in conducting online classes as the internet service for broadband and mobile internet is the same. On the other hand, during the pandemic, the mobile companies increased the internet cost, which is not affordable for all the students though most of the students are from middle-income families. They also share about the online classroom environment being so robotic. None of the students gets enough chances to interact with each other, which is impacting badly on their mental health. They also struggle to ensure 100% attention of the students as they attend class from their home, and so many incidents keep happening around them at home. During class time, family members also keep watching TV just in the next room, and the students get impassioned and distracted. Sometimes students do not want to attend online classes as they find it stressful to attend 90 mins, long classes. They also shared that after they started distributing worksheets, they got enough positive responses, but the authenticity of participation from the students was missing, as they could take help from their tutor, parents, siblings to perform the assessments in the worksheet.

From the phone call, Interview #5, 10-05-2021 with a private school teacher mentioned;

Though the school is strict about the online classes as it is a private school, they were failing to maintain the quality of lessons. The parents are not all the time enthusiastic about sending their children to online classes as most of the students have a house tutor. They also face challenges in conducting a class from home, as they cannot fully concentrate on the class only. And they are not used to the distance teaching-learning module. Technological knowledge is not on the same page as all the teachers. Before this pandemic, we hardly attended meetings on Zoom or G-meet. Also, the internet cost is another added expense which is not usual for all.

Responses from GPS teachers were pretty interesting. All the participants shared that the economic background of their students' families is the major challenge for them in providing distance learning. The participation of students in online classes is minimum. Only 5% of students are able to attend online classes, though the attendance is not regular. So, they had to maintain communication via phone calls with the maximum number of students. And this communication is not enough to deliver content. They mostly assign tasks through phone calls without properly introducing the lesson. They also shared that the internet cost is too high for both the students and the teachers. The teacher does not get any financial support from the authority to conduct regular online classes and make phone calls. The monthly salary they receive is also not enough to bear this additional cost. And the student number is huge to communicate with. They shared that most of the teachers at GPS are not competent enough to give distance learning support as they had no prior knowledge or training on that. The training they received from the government during the pandemic was too basic. No content-based training was conducted for the teachers. In the normal classroom setting, they usually do not prepare any PowerPoint slides, so maximum teachers had no skill in creating digital content. When the teacher calls any students, they mostly talk with the parents as most of their parents are working people.

Participant from Interview #3, 09-04-2021, mentioned that;

Challenges are many, like the financial crisis of the parents, unavailability of the device to join online, even phone call classes, those who have a device its quality is very poor, so students cannot see the screen properly or cannot take clear pictures of their homework. Parents are job holders or day laborers, so they cannot stay home and give time for classes and lack digital literacy. From their end, they do not have enough resources to conduct online classes, enough training, even they were not provided with any extra financial support. Network issues both for the students and them were present all the time.

The participants also shared their struggles with distributing worksheets. After the government's instruction to distribute the worksheet became another challenge for distance education. As the students had to bear the cost of worksheets after receiving 2-3 worksheets, they started becoming costly. Many parents shared their dissatisfaction with them. Also, while the students returned the worksheet after completing it, the teachers found that it was visible that the students did not solve the problem on their own, as they sometimes noticed the handwriting of an older person.

The teachers share that maintaining household chores and providing distance education when most of the students are out of internet access becomes the main barrier.

From Interview #6, 05-06-2021, the participant mentioned that;

The situation is very challenging for them. As they were working from home, their concentration was diverted. When they used to go to school regularly, they had a fixed schedule, but now everything has changed. Their kids are at home and they have to take care of them do household chores. She cannot communicate with her students in the daytime, and there is also a distraction in the evening. On the other hand, while they call the students most of the time, she had to call at least twice as the student was not available at that moment.

Students also feel shy to talk, so they do not ask any questions even if she pushes them when she assigns homework. In the case of performing the worksheet, the parents think their children will be assessed on these tasks, so they help their children directly by writing the answer instead of their kids.

The participants of this study were those who attended regular online classes. From their end, they shared some really amazing responses. The challenges they were sharing were mostly about using the device and several new applications, concentrating on the lesson, network instability, and difficulties in understanding the lesson. They also shared that they do not feel interested in joining the online classes.

The participant of a private school from phone interview #1, 30-3-2021, has mentioned:

“ My main challenge of joining the online class is the device and internet connection. Teachers usually do not face problems. One day my teacher was not available after giving work. We were calling her to inform her that our task was done. I do not like online classes; I enjoy physical classes. As I cannot meet my friend in zoom class, I can not play, have the fun that I had at school.”

On the other hand, the participant from the GPS shared that there are only 7-8 students in their class who can attend an online class. The challenge for them is to manage a device to join online classes; the application they use to join the online classes is new to them. They do not know how to operate it properly. Initially, they struggled even to join online classes, keep the microphone off while others were taking it, and unmute it to respond. After the classes were very regular this year, they also shared that the internet cost was unbearable for their parents. They shared that in their area, the internet is very unstable in their area, and in the evening due to the load shedding, the struggles become even bigger. Their parents go out with the device to their workplace, and if some days the parents can not return home timely they cannot join the

class. The student shared that the worksheet they receive is already in their textbook but they had to buy it and buying a worksheet every week from a photocopy shop was costly.

The participant of GPS from phone interview #2, 06-04-2021, has mentioned:

It was good when the school was open. He does not like to join online classes and his parents cannot buy mobile data every week. The cost of the worksheet is also high. He takes the help of his tutor to solve the worksheets. The tutor solves all the problems for the students in their tutoring group.

The challenges that parents face to avail distance education for their children are many. Internet cost, managing devices, additional costs to buy government-provided worksheets, etc., are mostly the challenges shared by the parents. The negative side of allowing the students to use the device is also the inappropriate content on the internet.

The participant from Interview # 7, 20-05-2021, a parent of a private school student, mentioned that:

He had to go to the office, as the kids needed the device to join the online class, and he needed to stay back at home till they finished the class. He added that he could stay back as he is a businessman, but for those who are jobholders, the class time of their kids is also their office time. The Internet cost is also high, which increases their monthly cost. And he said he cannot connect Wi-Fi as kids may misuse it. The calling cost is also high. There are students in his daughter's class who cannot attend the online class regularly. So when they are absent, they miss the lesson. Also, he noticed his daughter sometimes starts playing games during the online class, instead of listening to her teacher. He also shared concerns about non-child-friendly content on the internet.

From Interview # 8, 20-05-2021, a parent of a GPS school student mentioned that:

He works at a local factory, and his wife stays at home. But they have only one mobile phone. So, when he had to do overtime, his kid couldn't join the online class. Also, the cost of the internet is an extra expense for them. Maintaining the living cost only during the lockdown has become a challenge for them. He said that it was tough for him to provide extra money to buy weekly worksheets for his children. He also said that he does not know much about the smartphone's functions. He struggles to understand all the functions and how to join the online class.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

In this last chapter, concluding remarks on the findings and recommendations of the study conducted on current practice and challenges of distance education in Bangladesh's primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed and given.

The findings from the first research question of this study show that in Bangladesh, specially in the GPS and private schools, the practices are different. In all types of schools, education was stopped for the time being, as no one was prepared for this sudden hit of such a pandemic situation. But in private schools, distance learning is being practiced earlier than the GPS. Also, the practice of distance learning is more regular than the private schools. It can be said that everyone agrees on the necessity of distance education during the pandemic. It is also shown in the other studies that distance education is a popular practice special during epidemics or pandemics. During this COVID-19 pandemic, almost all the countries shifted to a distance education approach to block the spread of the virus and keep the students safe. Most countries decided to close the educational institute. Approximately 862 million school students have been affected worldwide by these school closures, representing almost half of the school-age population (Jackson et al., 2016; Abuhammad et al., 2020).

Turkey took the distance education approach In the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of National Education provided distance education through television and the Internet. Through Educational Information Network (EBA) and television, weekly course programs in primary and secondary schools were restructured and provided (MEB, 2020).

The need for distance education is undoubtedly necessary. Many studies show that distance education is a beneficial approach for the education sector and for our students. Distance education has many advantages, like ensuring education sustainability (Akinbadewa & Sofowora, 2020; Bruder, 1989; Omiles et al., 2019; Seage & Türegün, 2020). This study's finding also complements the previous studies on distance education during pandemics.

Then it is also found from this study both from the interview and the observation the practice of distance education being present but the effectiveness of this practice is still a question. Teachers are not well trained for the distance education approach and online classes. The online class is one of the modules for distance education. During the pandemic, the use of online platforms has increased dramatically. It is stated from detik.com that during the Covid-19, the most downloaded online learning application was Google classroom. (Rachmatunnisa, 2020).

Distance education created a different learning environment and a new atmosphere for both teachers and students. The practice of distance education in Bangladesh is still very narrow, as only online teaching or phone calls have become the main platform for it. Other distance learning modules like distance education through TV, radio, and other platforms are not being practiced effectively. Though there is evidence of distance learning through radio or TV in Bangladesh during the COVID pandemic, its quality and reach to the students are still limited. The channel that is being used to telecast the lessons is not available to everyone, even if someone owns a TV but not the cable connection. Also, in execution due to lack of expatriates and interest from both the teachers and students is also not making the practice of distance education much effective.

From the last research question, the findings show us the reason behind the ineffectiveness of distance education practice. From the observation, it was found that both the teacher and the students face several challenges to practicing distance education. The challenges are 1. lack of

digital literacy, 2. financial crisis, 3. internet instability, 4. unavailability of the device, 5. access to the internet, 6. cost of internet connection, 7. motivation for education during the pandemic. These are some of the common and major challenges found both from the observation and the interview. My study also found that technical barriers (connectivity issues and insufficient devices) are also an obstacle to distance learning. That is also aligned with a previous study (Astri, 2017. Mousavi et al., 2011), who found that teachers' inability to maintain new technology confided students from availing distance learning effectively and efficiently or obstructing them from enjoying the benefits of distance learning.

Furthermore, My finding is also consistent with Irvin et al. (2010), who identified in the United States, a common barrier in distance learning is the lack of trained professionals.

My study found that parents also shared their understanding of distance education and challenges from their end. Apart from the students and teachers, parents also face many challenges to ensure distance learning for their kids. They face challenges in terms of knowledge, trust in the process, and alignment of time with the teachers. According to Bukhkalo et al. (2018), parents should know and understand technology. Parents are sometimes not even aware of and invested to avail distance education for their children. The parents are not competent enough in terms of technology. So, they struggle to send their children to online classes.

Lastly, my study found that the monetary issue is a big challenge for parents to ensure distance learning because the internet cost and the cost of buying devices for distance learning lessons are high and result in financial challenges, especially during the pandemic and countywide lockdown. This finding is in line with an earlier study that showed that parents who practiced distance learning classes, those who practiced distance learning in the past, and those who did not utilize distance learning all indicated the financial issue as a barrier to distance learning

(Hannum et al., 2008). Parents lack technological knowledge, absence of devices, and access to the internet (Barter, 2008; Irvin et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2010).

5.2 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore distance education's current practices and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh's primary education. To that extent, this study was successful as it generated some findings based on the current practices and challenges faced by the teachers, students, and parents in distance education.

The practice and challenges faced by the students, parents, and teachers are mostly related to socio-economic conditions and technological expertise. The challenges to avail distance learning are hampering its practices. Unless the parents, students, and the teacher can overcome the challenges, the practice will remain ineffective, and no one will be able to benefit from distance education. Moreover, these issues are also somehow related to the overall education system. Thus, the result of the study provides the necessary information to think about the solution to these challenges to ensure the practice of distance education during any emergency situation.

5.3 Recommendations

The study would like to provide some recommendations as follows. These recommendations emerged as a result of this study, and they have emerged directly from the parents', students', and teachers' responses to the questionnaires.

- Teachers should receive training on the concept of distance education and what are the possible ways of implementing distance education in emergency situations.
- Technological skill-building on online education, classroom management in online classes, and digital content creation-based training should be given to the teachers. Also, training on online education and basic technological skills on using online education applications should be given to the students and parents.
- To solve the internet instability, countrywide broadband and mobile data providers need to upgrade and fix their survey. Also, minimizing the internet cost is also essential.
- Ensure safe internet for the students and maintain an easy and child-friendly online platform so that the students can avail themselves of online classes without any harassment or facing any inappropriate content. Limiting the categories for ads on online education-based platforms.
- Upgrading the living standard for the marginal people and making resources available for the people who live below the poverty line.
- Finally, it emphasizes the necessity of continuing education even in a global pandemic and spreading awareness on distance education. Also, making people aware of the consequences of a long-time education gap.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Consent Letter

Title: Exploring the current practice and challenges of distance teaching-learning in primary education during COVID-19 pandemic: A study on Panchlaish Education Thana, Chattogram.

Dear Respondent,

Greetings!

I am Sanjida Hannan, here with you for my thesis purpose and seek your cooperation. My thesis title is “Exploring the current practice and challenges of distance teaching-learning in primary education during COVID-19 pandemic: A study on Panchlaish Education Thana.” I am a Master's (M.Ed) student at BRAC University. In partial fulfillment of my Master’s degree, I must prepare a research monograph. For this purpose, I’m undertaking the research mentioned above project. In this respect, I seek your generous co-operation, and you are cordially requested to take part in this interview session. Note that all the information provided by you/your child will be strictly confidential, and your answers will not be published under any circumstances. Your kind response will be used only for this academic research, and this monograph report will not be published in the future. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, feel free to communicate with the interviewer. But you are requested to share your authentic reflection on the questions you are asked.

I would really appreciate it if I could take 35-40 minutes of your valuable time.

Thanks in advance

Sanjida Hannan

M.Ed Student

BRAC University

Do you agree? (Put tick)

1. Yes

2. No

Signature

Appendix B. Interview Guide

1. Practice and challenges of distance education interview guide for teachers:

I would like to ask you some questions about your experience with distance education as a teacher. There is no right or wrong answer. This conversation will be confidential. Please feel free to share your authentic reflection.

Q.1 When did the classes start?

Q.2: As a teacher, what is your experience with the practice of distance education in your school?

Q.3: In what medium do you and your students avail of distance education?

Q.4: What type of challenges do you face in providing distance education?

Q.5: What type of challenges do your students face to avail of distance education?

Q.6: According to you, what are the few setbacks of distance education?

Q.7: What type of support have you got to provide distance education and how helpful it is?

Q.8: What are some suggestions you want to give to improve online teaching-learning?

2. Practice and challenges of distance education interview guide for students:

I would like to ask you some questions about your experience with distance education as a student. There is no right or wrong answer. This conversation will be confidential. Please feel free to share your authentic reflection.

Q.1 When did the classes start?

Q.1: As a parent, what is your experience about the practice of distance education for your child?

Q.2: In which mediums does your child avail distance education?

Q.3: What type of challenges do you face as a parent to avail distance education for your child?

Q.4: What do you think about the effectiveness of distance education?

Q.5: As a parent, what is your suggestion about distance education? According to your response, why do you think so?

Q.6: Do you think distance education is helpful for your child? According to your response, why do you think so?

Q.8: What are some suggestions you want to give to improve online teaching-learning?

3. Practice and challenges of distance education interview guide for parents:

I would like to ask you some questions about your experience with distance education as a parent. There is no right or wrong answer. This conversation will be confidential. Please feel free to share your authentic reflection.

Q.1 When did the classes start?

Q.1: As a parent, what is your experience about the practice of distance education for your child?

Q.2: In which mediums does your child avail distance education?

Q.3: What type of challenges do you face as a parent to avail distance education for your child?

Q.4: What do you think about the effectiveness of distance education?

Q.5: As a parent, what is your suggestion about distance education? According to your response, why do you think so?

Q.6: Do you think distance education is helpful for your child? According to your response, why do you think so?

Q.8: What are some suggestions you want to give to improve online teaching-learning?

Appendix C. Observation note template

Section	Teacher's Action	Student's Action
Teaching-learning practices		
Learning environment		
Interaction		
Challenges		