

**CURRENT SITUATION OF NGO RUN UNDERPRIVILEGED
PRIMARY SCHOOLS ON ‘CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION’
DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK**

By

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of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my 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 have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all the educational institutions shut down in Bangladesh and around the globe. As a result, a huge amount of underprivileged students was also out of school. So, this study is conducted to understand the real scenario of NGO-run underprivileged primary schools of Dhaka. The strategies schools are taking to cope with changes and how the students are continuing their education were the main areas where the study is focused to. Through qualitative research, the findings have been presented from in-depth interviews and the FGD of the participants. Findings show that during the pandemic children studying in underprivileged schools have faced a pause in education but it didn't stop. Overall, the pandemic was extremely challenging to cope with but people have adapted over time. Although schools are closed and it seemed like underprivileged children might severely suffer but the reality was not that harsh. The findings of the study would be really helpful to better understand the initiatives by the schools during the pandemic and their thoughts behind them.

Keywords: Pandemic; COVID-19; Teaching learning; Communication; initiatives; relief; classes.

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List of Acronyms

NGO – Non-Government Organization

MoPME - Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

MoE - Ministry of Education

DPE - Directorate of Primary Education

WHO - World Health Organization

FGD - Focused Group Discussion

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

BRAC IED - BRAC Institute of Educational Development

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the continuation of almost every sector of humankind across the world. Although Bangladesh is trying to adapt to the new normal and opening up different sectors, educational institutions are closed from the 17th of March, and closure has been extending time to time by the government. UNESCO said 9 out of 10 children around the world are out of school which never happened before (UNESCO, 2020). Among all educational institutions primary schools, especially NGO-run underprivileged primary schools are facing major discontinuation of education despite the government's initiative of television classes by 'Shangshad Bangladesh TV'.

1.2 Research Topic

The long closures of schools and relatively vulnerable economic conditions of the families, influence continuation of students learning during the pandemic. English medium schools started educating through online classes; capable educated parents are trying to ensure students are learning at home under their supervision, but the ultimate challenge is facing underprivileged schools and their students, neither they had access to digital technologies nor parents are competent enough to guide them. So the research topic is '*Continuity of education during COVID-19 outbreak*'. This research is specially focused on NGO-run primary schools for

underprivileged students, so the research title of the study is “*Current situation of NGO run underprivileged primary schools on ‘Continuity of education’ during COVID-19 outbreak.*”

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh is no exception than the whole world from the current reality. The income of people is declining, physical and mental healths are not well, and there is panic and stress of coronavirus. In such a situation when marginalized people are more concerned about bread and butter, education remains at the bottom part of the priority list. Moreover, the crisis in Bangladesh has magnified the educational inequity. In Bangladesh, 1.7 million students are enrolled in underprivileged primary schools and many of them are run by different Non-Government Organizations (NGOs). Secretary of Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) Md Akram-Al-Hossain has stated that multi-dimensional approach including broadcasting classes on ‘Shangshad Bangladesh TV’ as well as uploading video classes online which are added to YouTube channels. Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) is also developing portal with all videos so that student can access according to their convenient time. In addition, many teachers either as a group or as an individual are taking live classes or making videos from their sense of responsibility. In order to attend the classes students and teachers need an Internet connection, Smartphone/ Laptop/ Tab, and functional knowledge (Abbas, 2020). But the students of underprivileged schools are mostly from low socioeconomic backgrounds so most of them do not have comfortable access to digital technologies. Hence, there is a disruption in the continuity of their education which might bring significant impact in the future.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is deliberately concentrated on two questions keeping in focus.

1. How the NGO-run underprivileged primary schools are dealing with the coronavirus pandemic by addressing the long closure of the schools?
2. How the teaching-learning of NGO-run underprivileged primary schools are taking place to minimize students learning gaps during the COVID-19 outbreak?

1.5 Purpose of the study

The major purpose to conduct this research is to understand the scenario of NGO-run underprivileged primary schools during the coronavirus pandemic. How the schools are reacting to the closure period? Whether teachers and students are having any kind of communication and how? - finding the answers of these sort of questions are part of the research purpose. Another important purpose is to know about the teaching-learning process of NGO-run underprivileged primary schools in this crisis within limited resources. This research will focus to know about the teachers' involvement in students learning process through any available media during the pandemic.

1.6 Significance of the study

During the Ebola virus, a lot of children were out of school. Researchers conducted studies to know about the steps and initiatives taken in the education sector during the Ebola outbreak so that students can continue learning (Santos & Novelli, 2017). Those findings are helping now to take measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the findings of this research might help policymakers to prepare guidelines in the post-pandemic situation or any other epidemic/pandemic in the future (if it happens). Moreover, Educators will get insight to prepare and set teaching-learning strategies in the 'new normal. And Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

(MoPME) will also get an overall scenario that will help to support underprivileged schools, teachers, and students so that they can minimize the learning gap.

Chapter 2

Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

2.1 Impact of the pandemic on education

World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 Pandemic on March 11, 2020. In response to the unprecedented situation around the whole world, the majority of countries announced temporary school closure which impacted 1.6 billion children and young people worldwide (Miks & McIlwaine, 2020). In Bangladesh 17.3 million students are enrolled in primary schools from grades 1-5, currently, they are out of school due to closure (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, 2018; Hasan, 2020). As a result, a large number of students are facing major discontinuation of education during the pandemic (Uddin, 2020).

Although the whole world is facing school closure at the same time right now, during the Ebola outbreak around 5 million children missed the school (Fisher, Elliot & Bertrand, 2018). School closure and other effects of any infectious diseases have a disproportionately negative impact on learning and the overall wellbeing of the vulnerable children of the poorest family (Hallgarten, 2020). Likewise, 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). Right after the lockdown started average household income reduced drastically, 76% of respondents of the survey have a declined household income which is even greater (79%) in the urban areas (BRAC, 2020). Besides, isolation and lockdown related

to COVID-19 are causing both mental and physical concerns for children all over the world (Capurso, Dennis, Salmi, Parrino & Mazzeschi, 2020).

2.2 Distance learning opportunity in Bangladesh

Regardless of all the adversity during the pandemic countries are taking measures so that students can continue learning from home; depending on the context and availability of resources radio, television, online and mobile apps are being used in many countries (Miks & McIlwaine, 2020). National Education policy, 2010 states that the Bangladesh government is responsible to ensure the primary education of all children of the country. From April 7, 2020 Directorate of Primary Education started broadcasting 'Ghore Bose Shikhi' (Learning from Home) classes through state-run 'Shangshad Bangladesh Television' (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education & Ministry of Education, 2020). Since 95% population have a mobile phone, so MoPME and MoE with the technical support of 'Acces to Information' (a2i) of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, and development partners are developing radio and mobile-based distance learning programs (MoPE & MoE, 2020). At the local level educators and educational professionals are also working so that students can continue learning. For example, boat schools in Bangladesh adjusted, rescheduled, and organized classes in small groups in different time slots to continue teaching their underprivileged students (Commonwealth of learning, 2020). On the Contrary few schools in Dhaka offering education to the underprivileged community were not been able to manage rent and other operational expenses due to lockdown and school closure. The founder of a school wanted to sell the study materials and furniture to pay the debt of 4 months, even teachers sold fruits in the street to earn livelihood during school closure (BBC News Bangla, 2020).

2.3 Challenges of underprivileged family

The low and middle-income countries were struggling to ensure that majority of the students attain basic reading skills by the end of primary school even before the coronavirus pandemic; now during the school closure, the most obvious impact has been students learning (Sharma, 2020). COVID-19 outbreak has changed the paradigm of teaching-learning towards distance learning using technologies. Despite the Bangladesh government's initiatives, one of the major challenges to reach more children through TV classes is only 50.6% of houses have access to Television which is much lesser (43.9%) in the rural areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS] & UNICEF Bangladesh, 2019). It is noticeable that education has adopted and adapted to technology over a long period, new technology merges with previous and starts a new era (Blates, 2015). Using television for education has emerged with the contribution of the World Bank and UNESCO during the 1970s; but very soon it was also realized that lack of electricity, access, and other factors were limitations for mass use of television for education (Jamison & Klees, 1973). Blates (2015) suggested that whatever technology (broadcasting or communicative) government or educational professionals use should support the teaching-learning process.

2.4 Technology and learning environment

To select the appropriate technology for teaching-learning the focus should be on 'technological affordance' which refers to the availability and cultural values of the technology rather than features (Blates, 2015). During COVID-19, school closure and distance learning initiatives by the government have significantly reduced the interaction between teachers and students which is an important component of learning (Commonwealth of learning, 2020). According to Vygotsky's view on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) students need guidance or support

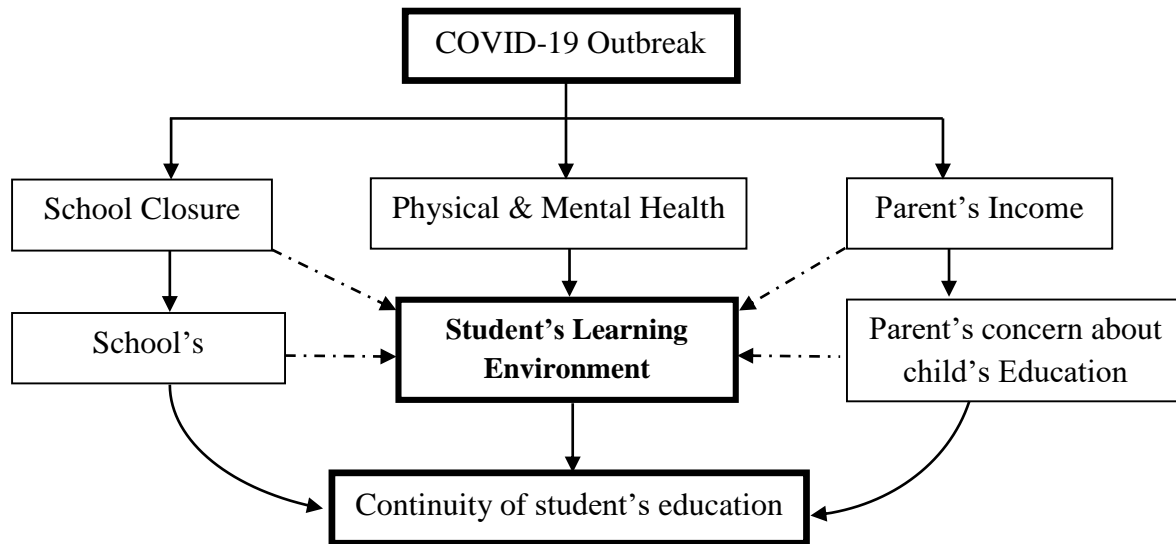
to push through their limit to improve their level of knowledge, for supporting learners it is essential to maintain communication and interaction emphasizing ZPD (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003).

The learning environment influences students to construct knowledge, for instance, cooperation, positive behavior, motivation, nutrition etcetera are very important elements to create a learning environment that shapes children's learning experience (Warfield, 2016). The learning environment is determined by a wide variety of factors such as school policies and initiatives, governance structure, materials, and technologies (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Since the students are staying at home and adjusting to a different situation so improving communication from the adults is very crucial (Stein, Rapa & Dalton, 2020). Moreover, the discontinuation students are facing during the coronavirus pandemic substantially depends on the activities during this period and steps after reopening the schools to minimize the learning gap (Capurso et al. 2020).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

COVID-19 outbreak has forced to look for alternative ways of teaching-learning so that students can continue education. Naturally, digital technologies are playing an important role in the learning of students. But in absence of face-to-face interaction and regular guidance of a teacher, it is quite difficult for the primary students to continue study. Furthermore, when it comes to underprivileged students the problem is magnified with other details. Blates (2015) in his 'Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning' book has mentioned components related to students learning, such as digital technology, appropriate media, effective pedagogy, parents and teacher support etcetera. So during the COVID outbreak what's impacting

students learning of NGO-run underprivileged primary schools? The answer will create the conceptual framework of the study.



According to the flow chart, the impact of the pandemic on education can be traced in three categories. Schools were closed down; students, teachers, and everyone else were in panic which impacted physical and mental health; another direct impact was decreased parent’s income due to lockdown. As the schools remain close so different schools took different initiatives to support their students. On contrary, when parents faced a significant reduction in their income that changed their priority list. Rather than children’s education, they were more concerned to earn a livelihood. Eventually, all the components have a direct impact to shape student’s learning environment. From school closure to their initiatives or physical & mental health or parent’s income to their concerns; all are related to the learning environment which determines the continuity of education during the pandemic.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research approach

The spread of coronavirus is equally harmful to everyone, but different people may have a different experiences depending on their context. Through a qualitative approach, it would be possible to capture people's feelings and thoughts towards children's education during the pandemic. Moreover, qualitative research has the scope to uncover participant's views respecting diversity (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). A degree of systemization while questioning will help to get insight into the student's education during COVID-19.

3.2 Research site

This research has been conducted at Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh where the majority of the underprivileged schools are operating. The responding schools are run by different NGOs to serve the underprivileged school. Data have been collected from 3 schools -

- Program for Sustainable Development (PSD) School (Moghbazar & Basabo branch)
- Mohila Samity primary School and
- Megh School.

PSD School has 2 branches in Moghbazar and Basabo. Mostly, the children come to this school are from slum and families having a very low income. Apart from the annual fee which is 300 BDT, PSD school doesn't take charge of any other fees. Moreover, the school provides uniforms, backpacks, books, and other study materials as well as snacks in tiffin time. In the Moghbazar branch, they also have different skill development skims (computer, sewing, and beautification)

for the adolescents, especially those who completed their primary education from the school. The school is mainly funded by ‘Agami Foundation’, but they have multiple other donors too.

Mohila Samity primary school is taken care of by ‘Bangladesh Mohila Samity’, a voluntary organization working for the welfare of women. The school is situated on bailey road, Dhaka. Along with the study, this school emphasizes co-curricular activities like science fairs, drama, songs, etc.

Another school that participated in the data collection is ‘Megh School’. This school serves underprivileged students living in slum areas in Gabtoli, Dhaka. It started its journey to serve the most unserved community. Many of their students were and still are involved in child labor. For operating the school, they collect funds from different organizations and also from individuals.

Respondent schools are not run by large NGOs. Usually, larger NGOs have larger operations and manage larger funds. But small NGOs do not always have a proper flow of funds, hence seek for multiple individual and organizational donation that has been tougher to manage throughout the pandemic. For this reason, this research has been conducted in schools run by relatively small NGOs so that the real scenario of underprivileged schools can be portrayed.

3.3 Research participants

Data has been collected directly from 4 groups of participants. Teachers, students, parents, and educational professionals participated in the research. Participants were from 3 different NGO-run underprivileged primary schools of Dhaka. For collecting data, 2 educational professional, 2 teachers, and 2 parents were interviewed over the phone (1 educational professional were interviewed face to face). One educational professional is the CEO of PSD school and another is the founder of Megh school. Both of them carry huge experience working in primary education

especially for underprivileged children. 1 teacher participated in an online interview from Mohila Samity School who is also a fellow of ‘Teach For Bangladesh’. A teacher from PSD school also participated who has experience of over 5 years, working in the same school. The FGD students were selected from grades 3 and 4 depending on the group attendance schedule of the school. 8 students participated in the discussion. One male and one female parent were interviewed over the phone. One of them was a housewife and also provide homemaking service part-time. Another participant was day labor.

3.4 Sampling procedure

Considering the pandemic sample of this research was selected by ‘purposeful Sampling’ which is a form of non-probability sampling.

3.5 Data collection methods

Data was collected in 3 methods

1) Telephone Interview: Considering the pandemic, health safety, and convenience, the majority of the participants were interviewed over the telephone. A telephone interview is one sort of strategy to collect data that let interpersonal communication without a face-to-face meeting with participants (Carr & Worth, 2021). In total, 4 interviews were taken over the phone and it took around 15-25 minutes each. From the personal connection, the senior management of the schools was familiar. They suggested who to interview and provided contact details. Firstly, the potential participants were communicated, given the details of the purpose of the study. When they showed interest and were given verbal consent then an appointment was taken for the interview according to their convenience. This initial conversation helped to build a rapport with the participants. Moreover, to make them more comfortable during the interview, compatible

language was used depending on participants. 2 parents, 1 educational professional, and 1 teacher participated in the telephone interview.

2) Online Interview: Online interview refers to communication through digital technology which allows real-time dialogue between researcher and participants (Salmons, 2011). And in an online interview, it is also possible to see and observe facial expressions through video calls. During the initial conversation, 2 participants said that they are comfortable with online interviews and also have uninterrupted internet access. So, both of them were interviewed by 'Facebook messenger' (according to participant's convenience), one of them was a video call and the other participant didn't feel comfortable turning the camera on; so it was a voice call.

3) Focused Group Discussion: Focus group discussion is a situation where a moderator keeps a small homogenous group (6-12 people) focused on a discussion of any particular topic or issue (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). For this study, 1 FGD was conducted and 8 students participated in the FGD. Participants were the students of PSD school, 4 of them were grade 3 students and the rest were from grade 4. By telephone interview with the teachers, it was found that PSD school has started taking classes. So, instead of conducting online FGD, it was more convenient to visit the school and have a more lively discussion in person. It's mentionable that during the FGD, the social distance was maintained and everyone was wearing a mask.

3.6 Data analysis

Data has been analyzed through content analysis. Content analysis is a form of 'conversational analysis' which allows categorizing the participant's opinion under common themes (Punch, 2004). Interviews were recorded with participant's consent; at the same time, necessary notes have been taken during interviews. From the record and interview notes data were translated and

transcribed. Reading the transcribed data over and over again helped to draw few common themes. According to the themes each participant's transcribed speech was colored so that it could be identified easily. After critically analyzing the data, the information is finally presented in categorized themes. Data have been presented in a way that represents the opinions of majority participants, different and exceptional data have also been presented with equal importance. In the result, section findings are paraphrased based on the participant's opinion and in few cases, direct quotes have been used to make it more credible. In addition, as the participant's speech was translated so to better understand the insight quotes were written in Bangla with English letters.

3.7 Ethical issues

Throughout the study ethical issues were strictly maintained. Participants of the study were communicated beforehand to take permission and consent so that they feel comfortable as a participant. They were well explained about the purpose of the study and how important their opinions are to understand the real scenario. It was also mentioned that at any point in time they can refuse to take part in the study. Every participant was assured about the confidentiality of their information and no other use of the data apart from this study. To ensure confidentiality no one's real name or address has been presented rather used pseudonyms of the participants. Besides, safeguarding participants was always top of mind while conducting the study.

3.8 Credibility and rigor

As a post-grad student of Educational Leadership and school improvement at BRAC IED, BRAC University I got the opportunity to learn about the educational theories, world best practices of education, Bangladesh contexts, curriculum, assessments, school improvement strategies, etc.

Moreover, BRAC IED offers two courses EDU 504: Research Methods 1: Reading Research and Writing Reports and EDU 602: Research Methods 2: Planning and Preparing Research in Med program; the course works were really helpful to be confident on the gained knowledge to conduct research. At the same time, I got to learn from experienced teachers who have been working in the education sector nationally and internationally for a long time. Besides, I have completed 2 years fellowship from ‘Teach For Bangladesh’. During my tenure, I was a teacher at an underprivileged primary school in Dhaka. So, I got the experience to directly work in a school context.

To conduct this study, I have followed the guideline provided by BRAC IED. At the initial stage, I have shared my draft idea with my supervisor. After getting the green signal I have outlined the research and started preparing a research proposal. The proposal was presented to the panel virtually and I got some significant feedback from there. After incorporating the feedback and getting approval from my supervisor I started collecting data. During data collection, each step was followed maintaining the safety and confidentiality of the participants.

3.9 Limitations of the study

The period of this research was very unprecedented and the whole world was facing a new reality. So initially, data collection was a bit challenging. The plan was to conduct an FGD with the parents but due to the unavailability of the parents and schedule mismatch, it was not possible rather they were interviewed separately through telephone. All the Interviews were recorded but one of the interviews could not be recorded because of the mobile phone’s problem. The publication of this research took a longer time than expected, which creates a little gap between data collection and publication.

Chapter 4

Results

The study followed a qualitative approach to find out the results. In this chapter, the results have been presented by a dint of in-depth interviews with ‘Educational professional’, ‘Teacher’, ‘Parent’ and an FGD with ‘Students’ to explore the answers to the research questions. According to the Bangladesh government’s instruction, all the educational institutions remained closed from the 17th of March, lockdown started in April. This unprecedented situation was overwhelming for every student all over the country but it became worse especially for the NGO-run underprivileged school students. Due to their socioeconomic background, they were already in a vulnerable situation. The lockdown put them in a genuine budgetary emergency, so education went down to the need list. Responding to the situation different schools reacted differently but many of the schools shifted their priorities to ensuring food and safety of the students as well as their families. At the beginning of the pandemic educational professionals took some time to understand the situation but later they tried to adapt as much as possible. Student's learning and continuation of education have been impacted drastically due to the long closure.

By critically analyzing the participant’s response from the interviews and focused group discussion, data is categorized under 4 major themes.

- Teaching-learning ways
- School’s response and initiative during the pandemic
- Learning environment of the students
- Post pandemic Plan

4.1 Teaching Learning ways

There were various sorts of initiatives from individual teachers to organizations for student's learning. Because of the uncertainty of school opening, students were studying at home. Stakeholders of primary education were thinking that at the end of the year government might reopen the schools. Then it would be difficult to cover the syllabus. To tackle the situation in advance, schools started taking offline physical classes, online classes, and life skill training.

Online Classes

Most of the students do not have regular internet access; even if they have the connectivity is poor. But taking ownership a teacher took the initiative to give it a try for the online class. Sarmin Akter, teacher of an underprivileged school stated that

Just after the Pandemic began I communicated with my grade 5 Students. I gave them instructions to be secure, to begin with, and remain at home. Along with the students as a class teacher I was also worried about the PECE. They had classes not even for four months, so I communicated with them. I have 8 students in my class. Fortunately, 6 of them have smartphones and internet access. From June I started taking classes online. (Personal Communication: Interview# 2, Teacher-2, 02.10.2020)

But taking online classes was very challenging due to network issues and cost. One of the Parents, Kuddus Mia mentioned that

“...When the lockdown started everything was closed and we couldn't go to work. That was a very tough time. Today I have food but it was uncertain whether I can feed my children tomorrow or not. So, in such time how would I afford mobile data for online classes?” (lockdown shuru howar porpori shob kichu bondho hoye gelo ar amrau kaje

jaito parlamo na. somoy ta khub kothin chilo. Ajke ghore khabar ache kintu eita jani na je kalke polpander khawaite parbo kina. Taile oi rokom ekta shomoye ami kibhabe online class er jono MB kine dibo bolen) (Personal Communication: Interview# 4, Parent-1, 10.10.2020)

Offline classes

One of the challenges that underprivileged students face is that they have almost no one to guide their studies at home. When the schools were closed and people were maintaining health safety measures, students couldn't go to anyone for any help if they required it. According to Shobuj Sarker,

From the school we told students to study at home, Shangshad TV was broadcasting classes regularly and we asked them to watch the lessons. But in reality, the majority of students started losing interest in the study. It was difficult for the children to adapt to the massive change and keep attention to their studies. Parents also asked to take their children's classes over and over again. So, from July when the situation improved a little, we started taking classes three days a week. We started with grade 5 to prepare for the PECE. And gradually we included grades 3 and 4. We divided students into groups to ensure health safety and didn't allow more than 10/12 students in a class to maintain social distance. Moreover, wearing mask and washing hands before coming to the classroom was mandatory. (Personal Communication: Interview# 1, Educational professional -1, 01.10.2020)

Teacher Rabeka Sultana has stated that

Primarily we were very worried about PECE, which is why started with grade 5. But when we heard about the cancelation of PECE then our concern was grade 4 since next year they will seat for PECE. Now we are taking classes in grades 3 and 4. Many parents asked but we are not taking classes of preprimary, 1 and 2 because of their young age.

(Personal Communication: Interview# 3, Teacher-1, 04.10.2020)

Considering student's betterment schools started taking classes bypassing government instruction. Teachers and the school authorities were worried about their initiative. Along with other challenges chances of being questioned by the community, people were one of the main concerns.

Our students actually needed help during the closure but bringing them to school was not lawfully very legal at this time; we didn't have other convenient ways either. So, we suggested students not to wear school dress while coming to school and to carry 1/2 books in a shopping bag instead of a backpack. (Personal Communication: Interview# 1, Educational professional -1, 01.10.2020)

Life skill training

The unprecedented situation occurred due to the pandemic bound people to rearrange their priority list. Rather than focusing on children's education parents were more concerned to earn livelihood and feed the family. According to one of the educational professionals Sohan,

We observed that many parents didn't have any other option than sending kids to work. When we tried to talk about children's education, an expression of less importance was pretty evident on parent's faces. But they were studying at home as much as they could by themselves. We are providing groceries every month; from September 2020 we started

life skill training for our students. We teach them how to make a small bag, necklace, and design pottery. The main reason behind this is to engage students in something productive. Besides, during the pandemic domestic violence has risen significantly. So, staying home for a long time is not that enjoyable for our children. (Personal Communication: Interview# 1, Educational professional -2, 25.10.2020)

4.2 School's response and initiative during the pandemic

Shobuj Sarker, CEO of a school has explained the initial scenario of the pandemic. When the school closure started every school was closed. Teachers, students, parents, and educational professionals had given top priority to health safety and social distancing. Children used to stay at home, there was a fear of going outside, people were locked down; overall, mass people were in panic. In 1 or 2 months few schools adapted to the situation as much as they could. Schools took the initiative to communicate with students and their families. As soon as lockdown began, many people started losing jobs. The income of most of the student's families decreased significantly because of the salary cut. So, at that time health safety and food security became the foremost concern for the students and their families (Personal Communication: Interview# 1, Educational professional- 1, 01.10.2020).

Relief distribution

Sohan Rahman, co-founder of an underprivileged school was stating about the shift of priorities.

“.....We thought that the most important thing we have to arrange for them now is not the education that is food. So we communicated with different organizations and raised funds. From April we started providing relief to every family of our students. Besides, from our school till now we could serve more than 1200 families around our school

community.” (Personal Communication: Interview# 2, Educational professional -2, 02.10.2020)

With the help of different organizations and donors, schools distributed relief to every student’s family from April. They provided a package of Rice, Dal, Soap, Salt, Potato, and Oil. In April and May reliefs were provided twice. While distributing the reliefs social distance was properly maintained and everyone was careful. (Personal Communication: Interview# 2, Teacher-1, 02.10.2020)

During the pandemic many organizations have worked being driven by conscience for the sake of humanity; they have collaborated with different community people, groups, and individuals. In the same way, many schools took the initiative to support their underprivileged students. But there is another side of the coin also. There are schools, which couldn’t or didn’t arrange any sort of support or relief for their students and their families.

Rebeka Sultana, teacher of an underprivileged school stated that

From our school, we didn’t see any sort of initiative during the pandemic. Many parents of our students have lost jobs, can’t go out for work. And the uncertainty of getting back to normal has made the situation worst for them. But at our school, we couldn’t give them anything. Students used to call us and we advised them to stay safe. We also called them and asked about their families; although it wasn’t always possible for every teacher to do it on regular basis because of financial issues. (Personal Communication: Interview# 3, Teacher-1, 04.10.2020)

Communication with students

Regular communication between teachers and students was disrupted as soon as schools were closed. Teachers living in the same community got to meet few students sometimes when they were outside. With the prolonged closure communication gap increased. So the schools felt the urgency to communicate with the students and their families. Fahim, a student of grade 3 said that

Initially, school closure was like a vacation. I used to play a lot more than before and it was fun. Sir/ Madam called us and asked us to study at home. Whenever we met outside Madam asked about family and told us to wash hands regularly as well as advised us to stay at home. (Personal Communication: FGD notes# 1, Students, 26.10.2020)

The communication between students, their families, and schools increased when schools started distributing the reliefs. On contrary, few students and their families moved to hometown and few were unreachable through mobile phone. As a result, they couldn't be communicated. According to Sohan,

By the grace of the almighty, we have been able to support our students as much as we could every month. So we have regular communication with their families. If we do not take care of them, many students might drop out because they have to work to earn and support their families. Although few students were unreachable because the number was switched off and went to their hometown but rest in the community were in our touch. (Personal Communication: Interview# 2, Educational professional -2, 02.10.2020)

4.3 Learning environment

Deeply analyzing the data from every group of participants, it was found very common in everyone's opinion that there is an adverse environment for student's learning during the pandemic. And the resulted discontinuation in student's education was driven by many other factors along with school closure which can be mainly categorized under 2 sub-themes.

Family Income & Migration

Decreased income of parents was a harsh reality in the lockdown and initial 3/4 months of the pandemic. A housewife parent, Morjina Khatun has said

“.....My husband is a CNG driver. When the lockdown started, no one used to come out and he used to roam without any passengers. We have passed many days when he couldn't even earn a single penny. We had to starve (Participant's sobbing)”
(Personal Communication: Interview# 5, Parent-2, 10.10.2020)

For some families it became unbearable. Those who were thinking to migrate in the village from before; pandemic was the last catalyst to make that happen. Shobuj Sarker said,

“.....Few of our student's families permanently shifted to their hometown to get rid of their home rent and other expenses in Dhaka. As result students are no longer in touch with us; we are also not sure whether they will get admitted into school again or not.”
(Personal Communication: Interview# 1, Educational professional -1, 01.10.2020)

Mental & Physical Health

The overwhelming impact of COVID-19 affected almost everyone both physically and mentally. Especially for the children, it was quite difficult to adapt to the new normal. One of the students from FGD, Lamiya said that

The coronavirus is very bad; when lockdown started we couldn't go out. Even if we went, parents used to scream for that. Every time we touched something immediately washed our hands. Although we studied at home but couldn't concentrate on it. We don't like the situation at all and hope it goes away soon. (Personal Communication: FGD notes# 1, Students, 26.10.2020)

Another student of grade 4 Nazmul described that

In our area, one COVID patient died a few days ago and our relatives also got affected. Although we were safe the overall situation was scary. Once I got cold and everyone became worried. Many people didn't want to come close to me. Although I understand the social distancing that was a sad time for me. Now the situation has improved a lot, we can come to school and there is no lockdown. (Personal Communication: FGD notes# 1, Students, 26.10.2020)

One of the noticeable things in the FGD was a couple of students find coronavirus as a blessing for humankind. According to Sabbir, a student of grade 3,

Due to coronavirus people are coming back to Allah, we are praying more than before and asking for forgiveness to Almighty. As the schools were closed and now we come to school 3 days a week for lesser contact hours so we get more time to read the holy

‘Quraan’. Moreover, we can study our textbooks more at home as well as do other household chores. (Personal Communication: FGD notes# 1, Students, 26.10.2020)

4.4 Post pandemic plan

From March onward schools are closed and students are out of formal education. Despite all adversities, children’s education did not stick for a long time. Undoubtedly in the initial 2/3 months, there was a learning gap for the students. But gradually students started to go for private tuition, school started taking classes, joined online classes, and had life skill training. Neither education of NGO-run underprivileged schools is stuck nor going very smoothly. So according to participants, the discontinuation in education was there but it is not as visible as it felt. Shobuj mentioned that

Although we are conducting classes in a limited edition but waiting for government instruction of school reopening. In this uncertain situation, we don’t think sticking to any particular plan would be helpful. Rather we will observe and decide according to situation demand. But of course, when the school will reopen our primary target would be minimizing the learning gap as much as possible. (Personal Communication: Interview# 1, Educational professional -1, 01.10.2020)

The ultimate stress needs to be taken by the students and the teachers in the post-pandemic time. According to a teacher, Sharmin Akter,

It would be really difficult to cover up the syllabus when school will reopen. Students and teachers need to work very hard. We are mentally prepared for the extra work. Initially, I plan to cover the most important topics which have a continuation in the next classes, and then cover the rest. (Personal Communication: Interview# 2, Teacher-2, 02.10.2020)

Parents think opening the school will help their children to study well. One of the interviewee parents, Morjina Khatun stated that

“.... Now a day everyone is going out and children also go for tuition and play outside. So what’s the point of a school closure? If the government opens the schools, then teachers can help students more and they can study more. (Ekhon to shobai baire jacche, baccha rau private porte jay ebong baire khelteu jay. Taile school gula bondho rekhe ki lav? Jodi shorkar school khule dey taile teacher rau bhalo moto poraite parbe ar baccha rau porte parbe)” (Personal Communication: Interview# 5, Parent-2, 10.10.2020)

Chapter 5

Discussion And Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

In this research four groups of participants (Teacher, Parent, Student, and Educational professional) have shared their viewpoints and the unprecedented reality they are facing during the pandemic. The interviews and FGD helped to get the in-depth feeling of the participants and ensured the reliability of the collected data. Different groups of participants had different perspectives; there were very common similarities in few issues from every group of participants, there were few interesting exceptions as well. One of the most common opinions from everyone is that the situation they are going through and the steps they have taken to overcome, everything was challenging during the pandemic. Although the initial panic is not sustaining anymore but adapting to the changes is not easy either. In addition, a sense of uncertainty because of the outbreak was quite evident in everyone’s speech.

The pandemic in 2020 has forced people to shift their priorities in many ways. It was very much visible among NGO-run underprivileged schools and their families. Many parents lost their jobs and many faced severely decreased income. According to UNICEF, 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). As a result, many schools also responded according to their needs as much as they could. One of the main priorities for many of the underprivileged and even middle-class families was food security. So, instead of focusing only on education schools started providing food to their student's families. Mostly, schools collected funds from different individuals and donor organizations to support the children. Although all the schools couldn't make it many schools did it according to their capabilities. Unlike the school had to sell their furniture to pay rent debt and teachers had to sell fruits (BBC News Bangla, 2020), respondent schools were able to tackle the situation by managing resources. However, there are also underprivileged schools continuing their support from April 2020 onwards and hoping to continue till the situation becomes normal.

Schools tried to maintain communication with their students. Teachers were instructed by the educational professionals to contact respective class students. Although the teachers couldn't teach any lesson or discuss any textbook topic through mobile phone, students and parents felt good to hear from teachers. While many primary school students were struggling to attain basic reading skills even before coronavirus affection, during the pandemic, the impact on student's learning has become obvious due to long closure. Many students made contact with their teachers by themselves and asked about school openings, shared their concerns. When the lockdown became a little relaxed then students met teachers outside while walking on the road or in Bazar. So, during the pandemic schools had initiated providing relief and maintaining

communication with students. One of the reasons that schools prioritized providing relief and maintaining regular communication is to mentally support their students and families. While students are at home and have fewer contact hours with teachers; cooperation, positive behavior, motivation, nutrition, etc are very important elements to create a learning environment that shapes children's learning experience (Warfield, 2016).

One of the most interesting findings is the teaching-learning of the students during COVID-19. At the beginning of the research, it seemed like the underprivileged students might have to go through a severe consequence due to school closure. Different national and international organizations were also predicting the possibility of drop out of underprivileged schools. And many students might not come back to school when school will reopen after a long closure. A large number of students are facing major discontinuation of education during the pandemic, which eventually may result in permanent dropout (Uddin, 2020). Cofounder of an underprivileged school had also thought that their school might lose a chunk of students. Fortunately, the reality didn't come around that cruel. In that school, until October 2020 there is no record of dropout. One of the main reasons for that can be some excellent initiatives by the schools. They started supporting their students and families from April 2020 onwards every month. Not only their support was limited to school parents but also they reached 1200 more families in the community. This sort of support helped schools to connect more with the students and restricted parent's thoughts to give children to work or ignore their studies.

Few schools started taking classes from July 2020 keeping the PECE in mind so that students can get prepared. For instance, many schools take PECE as their performance indicator, so the results of the students are very important for the teachers and the overall impression of the school. Moreover, teachers have mentioned that many students do not have anyone to help with their

studies at home. So, if they face difficulty understanding any topic they just cannot go forward. As Vygotsky's view on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers that students need guidance or support to push through their limit to improve their level of knowledge so that was the most influential driving factor to starting classes. As a result, to better support the students to improve their knowledge, the school decided to start with grade 5 students. The students were divided into groups and seat in the classroom keeping social distance. It was noticeable in both teacher's and student's speeches that they were highly aware of the health safety measures, especially wearing masks and washing hands regularly. After few days of starting class government announced the cancellation of PECE. That has driven the priority shift from grade 5 to grade 4. Since grade 4 will face the PECE in 2021 and had very few classes in 2020 so instead of grade 5 they continued with grade 4. Later they have also started with grade 3. But the school didn't include preprimary, 1 and 2 because of their maturity to maintain health safety properly although parents insisted. Most importantly, teachers and educational professionals were a little hesitant about taking classes in school even after they started. On one side they were not following the government's instruction and on the other side, there was fear of being questioned by the community people.

In order to select the appropriate technology for teaching-learning, the focus should be on 'technological affordance' which refers to the availability and cultural values of the technology rather than features (Blates, 2015). Moreover, only 50.6% of houses have access to Television which is even lesser in rural areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS] & UNICEF Bangladesh, 2019). Right after the school closure, the Bangladesh government started distance learning, broadcasting television classes. Only half of the population have access to television, on top of that Bangladesh is not a country where the students are used to distance learning

culture yet. So, the interviewed students couldn't keep their curiosity up for continuing television classes for long. Similarly, none of the interviewed schools were able to take online classes due to technological constraints and lack of access. But there was an initiative from the individual teacher. One of the grade 5 teachers found that the majority of the students have smartphones and internet access. So, the teacher started taking online classes overcoming many challenges, and considering affordability.

There was also an exceptional initiative by a school. As the schools were closed so teachers couldn't take classes; teaching over the mobile phone was also expensive. Simultaneously, parents couldn't earn much for a regular livelihood. So, the school arranged life skill training for the students. They teach students to make handcrafted products like a small bag, necklace, and design on pottery. It helped the students to learn a skill which they can utilize for earning. Parents were also happy about it and the school authority is thinking to scale up so that this initiative can generate profit to help their students in a better way.

In order to learn, an environment is very necessary either in school or at home. The learning environment is determined by a wide variety of factors such as school policies and initiatives, governance structure, materials, and technologies (The Glossary of Education Reform, 2013). Data shows that during the pandemic learning environment of the students was disrupted because of family income, migration, and physical & mental health conditions. In the beginning, everyone was frightened, children were a bit more. The outbreak of the virus, the number of affected people, and news of deaths all over the world made children vulnerable both physically and mentally. Not only children, but the nature of the pandemic was also traumatic for humankind as a whole around the globe. Moreover, the decreased family income had an impact on children's education as well. During the outbreak, children had to face and deal with things

which are not appropriate at a young age. Families have migrated to their hometowns to get rid of the extra expenses in Dhaka. One thing is mentionable here; the migration from the underprivileged school's student's families was not only because of the pandemic. But pandemic is the last and major catalyst to drive in that way. Many of the migrated families were thinking to shift even before the pandemic started. So, the overall uncertainty has impacted children's learning environment heavily, especially in the initial 2/3 months of school closure.

The discontinuation students are facing during the coronavirus pandemic substantially depends on the activities during this period and steps after reopening the schools to minimize the learning gap (Capurso et al. 2020). While asking about the plan for the post-pandemic situation, the common answer from everyone was that they are not sure about it rather it will be determined by time. The yearlong plan has gone in vain in 2020. So rather than planning they are focusing on school reopening and take decisions according to the situation. According to the teacher's perspective, it would be tough to cover the loss student have gone through. Teachers and students need to work really hard in the upcoming days. So their priority would be covering the most important lesson. By 'important lesson' they meant the lesson have a continuation in next grades. Besides, every participant has mentioned maintaining health safety measures strictly to be safe in the future.

5.2 Conclusion

The underprivileged schools have had and having a complex time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was no unified initiative but every school tried to respond to the situation according to their capability although sometimes few contradicted government instructions. The finding shows how the schools have communicated and supported their students, taking care of their study as well as the overall learning environment of the children. So, findings serve the

purpose of the research very well. In addition, the research helped to see the education system in a completely different situation and understand the changes. Despite adaptation with the changes facing the challenges, everyone wants quick recovery for mother earth.

5.3 Recommendations

To overcome any unprecedented challenge in the future and better deal with the current pandemic there are few recommendations of the study -

- Instead of long closure MoPME might find alternative approaches of teaching-learning considering the age of primary students within available and affordable resources.
- NGO-run schools might support their students with daily necessities from their organization and with the help of others. Because when life is uncertain education goes down to the priority list.
- The continuation of education is very important to keep the flow. To keep students in touch with education, schools might communicate with them in any possible way.
- In the crisis period, underprivileged people become more vulnerable. So the government might consider opening dedicated skim for underprivileged people of the country.
- Mental health is as important as physical health. So schools might think over ways to educate their students about the basics of physical and mental wellbeing techniques.

- Further researches might be done on a larger scale to better understand the scenario of other areas of the country; findings might contribute to creating a national emergency guideline for the future.
- Underprivileged schools might continue maintaining and increase this regular communication with their students and their families during any crisis period or emergencies in order to reduce drop out.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent letter

Consent to participate in the research

My signature below ensures my consent to willingly participate in the research. I understood the purpose of the research titled “Current situation of NGO run underprivileged primary schools on ‘Continuity of education’ during COVID-19 outbreak”.

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

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

- The identity of participants will be protected. The data collected on the surveys will be completely anonymous.
- Information gathered during 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 be 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 Fahad Bin Touhid at +8801739951328 or through email at fahad.touhid@teachforbangladesh.org

Signature : _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Telephone Interview guideline for Teachers

Interview Guideline

- Introduction and clarification of terms
- Permission to start
- Questions:
 - How are you doing during this pandemic?
 - How your organization is addressing the need of students and what are the measures you have taken for your students learning?
 - What type of challenges are you facing due to school closure?
 - In which ways you are overcoming the challenges (if you face any)?
 - What sort of support underprivileged school requires to adapt better to the situation?
 - What is the post-pandemic/ school reopening plan?

(Lastly, summarize the answer and check with the participants to confirm)

Appendix C: Telephone Interview guideline for Parents:

Interview Guideline

- Introduction and clarification of terms
- Permission to start
- Questions:
 - How are you and your family doing during this pandemic?
 - What school is doing for their student's learning?
 - What is the reaction or response of the students during this time about school initiatives?
 - How are you monitoring that your children are learning?
 - How are you supporting your children?
 - What do you and your families require for supporting your children to learn more?

(Lastly summarize the answer and check with the participants to confirm)

Appendix D: Online interview guideline for the Educational professionals:

Interview Guideline

- Introduction and clarification of terms
- Permission to start
- Questions:
 - How is the school doing during the COVID-19 outbreak?
 - How your organization is addressing the need of Teachers, students, and parents?
 - What are the mechanisms to monitoring students learning during this period?
 - What type of challenges are you facing due to school closure?
 - How you are overcoming the challenges?
 - What sort of support underprivileged school requires in order to adapt better to the situation?
 - What is the post-pandemic/ school reopening plan?

(Lastly, summarize the answer and check with the participants to confirm)

Appendix E: FGD guideline for the Students:

FGD Guideline:

- Introduction and clarification of norms
- Permission to start
- Discussion point
 - How are you and your family doing during this pandemic?
 - What is your daily routine?
 - When do you study? And How?
 - Who helps you for study purposes? How?
 - How do you communicate with teachers during school closure?
 - What study-related Problems you are facing in the current situation?
 - How do you perceive the overall scenario?

(Lastly, summarize the answer and check with the participants to confirm)

Appendix F: Sample Data Transcription

How is the school doing during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Participant: At the beginning of the pandemic naturally we were in panic. From the 17th of March, schools were announced closed and in April we were in lockdown, so we could not connect our students. But from the following month, we started communicating with them. Sometimes, students and their guardians used to call, in the same way, we called them and requested to stay at home. Children usually want to go out, don't want to stay home for a long time; we tried to aware them. Meanwhile 'Agami Foundation' arranged some relief. Because of lockdown, no one had work, and since our students are underprivileged so they were in huge trouble. So we distributed the reliefs from 'Agami' in 2 phases. Aahh....! I don't remember the exact date, I can let you know later but perhaps after April, in the next month of April we distributed the reliefs the first time; those include (Rice, Dal, Soap, Salt, Potato, and Oil). We provided among each student and their families by maintaining social distance. We made a card to keep records and proper distribution. One month later we distributed relief in the second phase. This time we provided 7 kilograms of rice, 5 kilograms of potato, and dal; the amount of dal was less but the rice was more. As a result, we could meet them and got the opportunity to connect, so we tried to make them aware of the pandemic and the health safety measures. We had regular communication with students and guardians from that time onwards. We the teachers had to go to school sometimes, after few days we were informed by the office that schools are closed for a long time, although we are saying that children are studying at home but ultimately that is not happening. Moreover, examinations were ahead but it was also uncertain and we were confused. So, from the office, Shibnath Da told us to start taking classes 3 days a week maintaining social distance and health safety measures. Students will be divided into groups and

everyone will seat on a different bench. 4/5 students may join and the primary focus would be on Mathematics, Science, and English So, according to Dada's direction we started taking classes, and firstly we started with grade 5 students. We emphasized social distancing and students also followed those. But all the students didn't come. Few used to say they are sick, having colds, even if they didn't have we had nothing to do; we also didn't force them to come to school. We prepared them a syllabus and gave them a guideline so that they can study at home. After grade 5 we brought grade 4. When we heard that PECE is not going to take place then we became a little worried about grade 4 because they couldn't attend almost any class and in the next year, they are going to grade 5. So from then, we started taking the class of grade 4, accordingly from the previous month (September) we also started with grade 3 students. We continued teaching as much as possible those who were around. Maximum students went to their hometown because there was no work, no security if food. So they moved there although few came back now. Those who can come to school we are continuing with them without creating any pressure.

Probing Question: How about grade preprimary, 1, and 2? Do you have any communication with them?

Participant: Yeah! Parents were asking us; why don't take their classes too? We told that preprimary to 2 students are very young, so we didn't want to take the risk. As a result, we don't have that much communication with lower-grade students. For the lower grades, we used to provide handouts to the students. In this year we could give it once in the beginning but later we couldn't. We don't have that much communication with them. Another thing that we noticed while distributing relief is students of grade 1 and 2 have moved to hometown more, most of their parents moved. Moreover, Dada didn't give us any such direction to take their classes. Besides, grades 1 and 2 will get time to cover up and we can try our best to do that but it would be

difficult for 3 and 4. Since grade 5 will get an auto pass so we are focusing on 3 and 4. We are thinking that grades 3 and 4 will not get enough time in the future to learn, so we are emphasizing Math, Science, and English.

What type of challenges are you facing due to school closure?

In which ways you are overcoming the challenges (if you face any)?

Participant: Initially I had a fear! Since the government has declared the schools closed but we are taking classes that are not right. I am a teacher, I may have to go to school, I may accept that. But we are bringing children to school, what will happen if someone gets affected! Who will take that responsibility? We always had that fear in mind. That is why we told the parents that it is your discretion to send the children to school. If they are sick you should not let them come to school. You may inform us. It is important to be safe first. Moreover, one can infect others, so it's better to stay at home if he/she is sick. So maintaining health safety was our initial challenge.

Another fear was the pressure from local people. What if they ask us why we are operating school right now? Why are you bringing the children? There is a school nearby. We heard that one of the school's teachers was coaching students and at that time police came. They took the teacher in the custody and fined him. We just heard it but not sure (Emphasized). Still, we had that fear in mind also. Fortunately, till now we didn't have to directly face this sort of situation or any obstacles.

What sort of support underprivileged school requires to adapt better to the situation?

Participant: This is particularly a problem in our school, which might not be the case for others. Space is a problem in our school, you also know it well. I want to give a single bench to everyone but I can't; students seat on two sides of the bench maintaining distance. That's how I

have to conduct classes. Besides, I can tell them to wash hands regularly and to wear mask mandatorily.

We tried to take online classes but everyone doesn't have smartphones or access to the internet. So we couldn't start online classes, therefore we had to go to school. Now students come to school and space is the problem. If we could get an open space then that would be helpful for social distancing. Since we lost one room so the space issue became scarcer. Other than that we don't have that many problems, my job is teaching so I have to go to school.

What is the post-pandemic/ school reopening plan?

Participant: Till now we don't have any plan for the post-pandemic situation, neither we got any instruction from Dada. Because of the coronavirus outbreak, our communication with Dada has lessened. He cannot come to school, sometimes gives instruction over the phone and we do according to that. Besides, we do things by ourselves and we are concerned for the kids. We have also some targets to fulfill but students could not study and there is a huge learning gap. So it will be difficult to cover up both for the students and teachers. Initially, we are thinking that we will first start with the important lessons. The lessons have a continuation in the next grades; we will first start with that. And gradually we will touch on other topics and will try to go as far as we can. So this is my opinion that we can take a weekly test to evaluate students as there will be no final examination. When we will seat with Dada and other teachers then I think we can better analyze the situation and take steps accordingly.