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## *Editorial*

National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM) under the Ministry of Education (MoU) is contributing to ensure quality and sustainability through innovative practices in the field of education in Bangladesh. NAEM strongly believes that the development of the ever-changing education system is not possible without holistic research and its proper documentation. Hence, NAEM has been publishing its journal consisting of research works that are in tune with the current trends to spread new knowledge and innovations to ensure better outcomes in the education sector since the Fiscal Year 2005-2006.

The world is changing rapidly with the growing advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and thereof proportionately in the education sector. The government of Bangladesh has sincerely commenced different initiatives in the education sector to meet the multidimensional demands of time and situation and trains its people as eligible human resources for both local and global markets. Besides, Bangladesh is marching towards becoming a digital and smart country attaining SDGs within the given time period. NAEM, therefore, focuses on modernization to be its goal for today's education system keeping the government's people-friendly and sustainable development plan in mind. Nevertheless, the research and documentation division of NAEM thoughtfully operates substantial research projects in education offering grants to the renowned researchers and academicians. NAEM also invites research articles on significant issues of education for journals with a view to assisting practitioners, learners, administrators and policy-makers to develop their professional skills and uplifting the existing education system.

This issue of NAEM journal is a double - blind peer reviewed half-yearly journal which consists of seven original research articles on various contemporary aspects of education including entrepreneurial education for youth empowerment, higher order thinking skills, development and practice of creative questions, Banglish: a new English variety, ICT master plan for teachers' professional development and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on female education. I strongly believe that this issue of NAEM journal will serve as an encouragement for the researchers and all concerned stakeholders.

I sincerely express my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Dr. Tahmina Begum, Director General of NAEM and the Advisor of NAEM journal for his eventful support and encouragement to make this journal surfaced possible. I would like to acknowledge the authors, the editors and the reviewers for their constant and intellectual support to help materialize the ideas. Lastly, I am thankful to all our concerned staffs for their hard work in publishing this issue successfully.

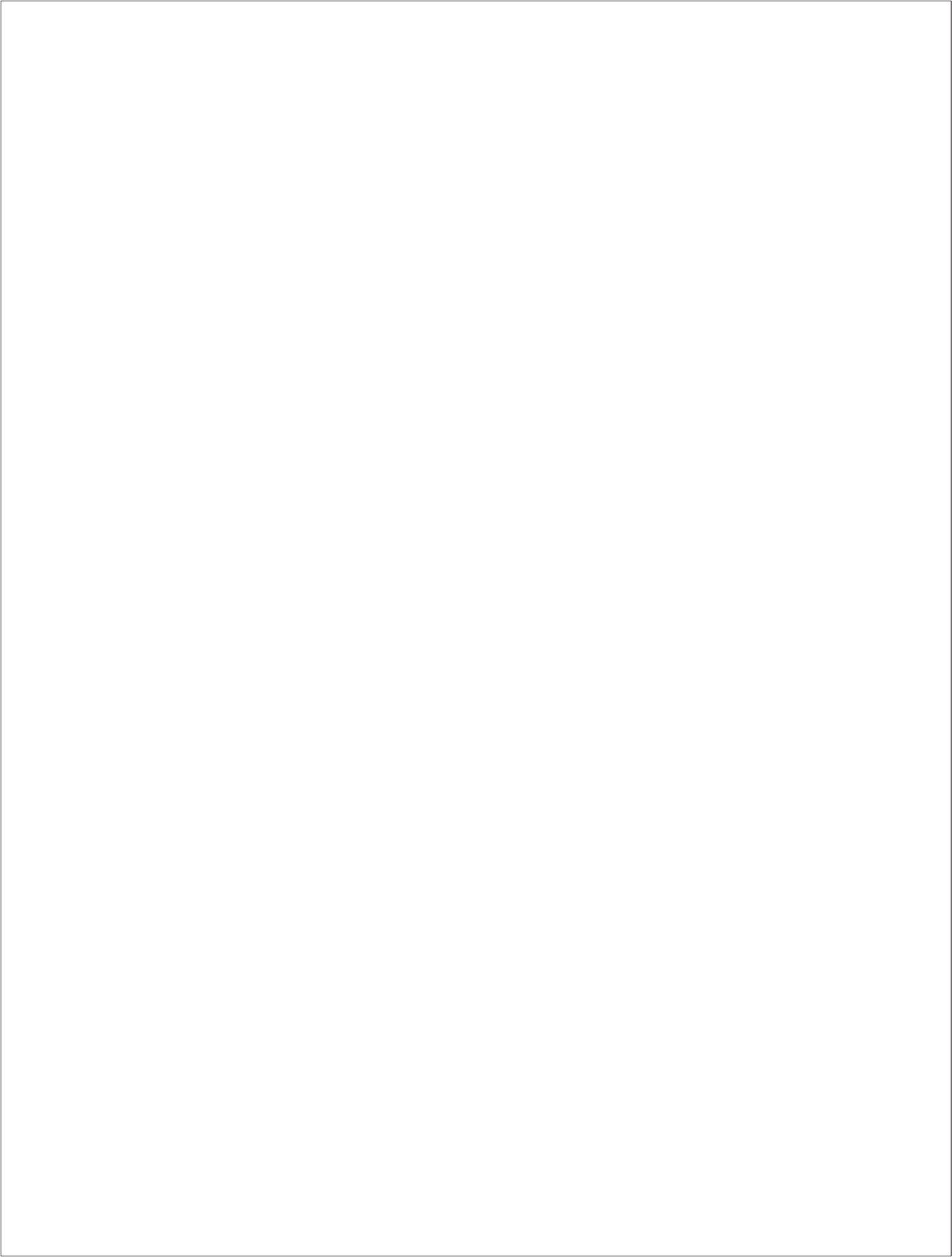
I wish this journal all the success.

**Prof. Dr. Ummay Asma**

Director (Research & Documentation), NAEM  
and  
Editor, NAEM Journal

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## Students' Gangs and their Impact on Academic Environment at Secondary Level of Education in Dhaka City: An Exploratory Study

Kazi Faruk Hossain <sup>1</sup>  
Rahul Chandra Shaha <sup>2</sup>  
Fazlur Rahman <sup>3</sup>  
Abdul Hannan <sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

*Student gangs (SG) are active throughout the world and there is no exception in the milieu of Bangladesh but the number is still in a dark here. Recent years, the gangs are found very active in the capital. Gangs are alarmingly involving the secondary school going students of Bangladesh. The existence of student gang phenomena in the society is a major problem that needs to be looked into with a lot of concern, and conducting research to address evidently is a matter of urgency. The study tried to identify the present status of SG, leading causes and effects of the SG amongst the secondary level students of Dhaka city, and, their ways of involvement in gang. A qualitative research approach has been employed to conduct the study. Data was collected purposively from the teachers and students from the selected 06 secondary schools of the old Dhaka city areas. Data triangulation method was adopted for this research where in data was collected through self-administered semi-structured interview questionnaire, semi-structured interview questionnaire and FGD. Data was collected from 06 police officers, 03 journalist, 12 secondary level teachers, 06 SMC representatives, 12 parents, 06 community representatives, and from 60 students. Among the students 12 of them were the gangs, 06 of them were the peers of the gangs. The result and detailed analysis of the study have brought out that there is a presence of gang (both in actively and inactively) within school premises. Gangs are mostly from class VIII to class X age ranged 10 to 19. Besides, gangs are used to perform different illegal job in their community and schools to keep their control over any situation and to fulfil the agenda of their boss. The study results also showed that family environment, political support, financial status and social issues are leading causes behind the involvement of student in gangs. This study also showed that SG negatively effects on students' psychology and academic environment of the school. Collaborative and constructive role of all related stakeholders are explored as remedy of the issue SG also policy recommendation and further investigation issues related to the study.*

**Keywords:** Student gangs (SG), cause and impact, academic environment, secondary level education, qualitative study

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<sup>1</sup> Kazi Faruk Hossain, Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research (IER), Jagannath University,  
E-mail: kazifaruk@ier.jnu.ac.bd

<sup>2</sup> Rahul Chandra Shaha, (\*Corresponding author) Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka,  
E-mail: rahul.rcs.ier@du.ac.bd

<sup>3</sup> Md Fazlur Rahman, Professor, Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka,  
E-mail: frahman71@live.com

<sup>4</sup> Syed Md. Abdul Hannan, Teacher Trainer, NAEM, Ministry of Education, Dhaka, E-mail: tsmahannan.naem@gmail.com

## Introduction

Gangs issue is not a new matter of the present world. Since mid-nineties, the issue gangs were identified in a prevalent form (Juvenile Justice Bulletin, 1998). Different socio-cultural as well as economic issues push the youths to involve in gangs and also offering through lucrative opportunities to enjoy their life (Decker & Winkle, 1996). Hence, Gangs are active throughout the world and in Bangladesh the number of gangs is still in a dark but recent survey claimed that around 8000 to 10000 teenagers are active in gangs in the capital (Das, 2019).

## Statement of the Problem

Gang members commits different type of crimes at the school premises like they disturb throughout the school day through fighting, teasing, or disturbing the other students, teachers and administrators which hampers the educational environment and achievement of the students (Carson & Esbensen, 2017). Students involved in gangs almost belong to the same ideology and become loser academically as their focus goes on their group activities rather than academic attainment which badly affects them and their fellow mates also as they disturb even at the class time and some of them involves in different illegal job like trafficking, drug business etc. (Das, 2019). Student gangs, therefore uplift in the urban areas in almost every country, which enhance social crimes and violence (Studying Gangs, 1996). Gangs and their activities are also found outside of urban areas (Das, 2019). Thus, the study was undertaken to identify the ways of formation of student gangs and their consequences on education environment and what measures are being taken or need to be taken to tackle this alarming issue to ensure good academic climate for the secondary level students and other stakeholders of both school and society.

Scholars have projected that when gang operations go unnoticed and unmitigated, such outcomes as increased gang activities, uncertain learning conditions, and ineffectiveness of campus security become more pervasive (White, 2002b). By considering all of these, this study had conducted.

## Rationale and Significance of the Study

In recent years, the presence of students' gangs in both inside and outside of school environment are being noticed in an alarming form, where most of the gang members are aged between 11 to 15 years, having multiple reasons of being involved in gangs, which is very shocking to the teenagers as it involves them in manifold social crimes that in a nutshell spoil the atmosphere of development (NCASA, 2010). Recently, the rising of teenage gangs is noticed through daily newspapers and police reports also published through different printing and mostly electronic media. As, Secondary school aged students are being mostly involved in gangs, therefore schools can perform a significant role to save the teenagers through social collaboration with family and inclusion to all (White, 2002a). This study has paved the possible ways of overcoming this emergent issue in the very early stage.

Besides, the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) goal-16 emphasize on peace, justice and inclusive institutions to ensure inclusive society for all (Morton, Pencheon & Squires,

2017). The findings of this research surely be a good resource for the concern authorities and stakeholders to address and trace out this SDG goal in the milieu of Bangladesh. In addition, this study has to uphold the current status of student gangs in schools, reasons of student's gangs, and its consequences on educational achievement through the young secondary level learners of Bangladesh. Besides, this study has come up the possible measures needed to be taken to save the teenagers from gangs. Hence, the study is significant.

Simultaneously, in Bangladesh, very few studies have been conducted regarding students' gangs and its impact on students' academic attainment. Therefore, this study is a very good start to uncover the issue 'student gangs' in the academic environment and most particularly to the secondary level teenager students. Henceforth, the study is significant.

### **Research Objective(s)**

The cardinal aim of the research was to explore the actual scenario of the student gangs in the secondary level of education of Dhaka city in a holistic approach. In order to address the aim of this study the following specific objectives were considered –

- to explore the present situation of student gangs at the secondary schools of Dhaka city
- to identify the factors and the ways of involvement of the secondary level students in gangs of Dhaka city
- to explore the effect of student gangs on students' academic achievement at the secondary level

### **Conceptual Framework**

Considering the reviewed literature, the following conceptual framework is being formed for the study. The study has two aspects accordingly the study will be conducted. Those are-

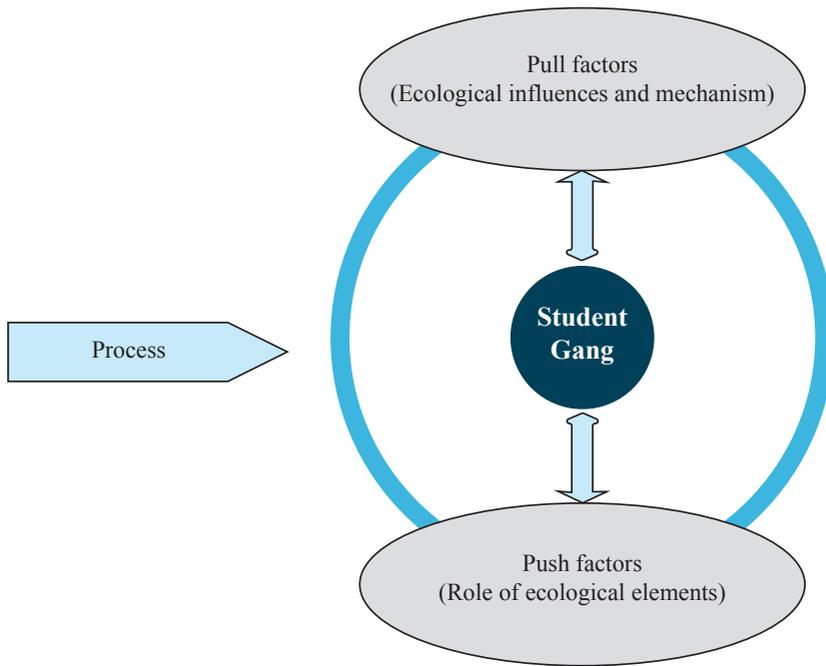
1. Process, and
2. Product.

These two aspects are important in forming and functioning of the gangs. Decker & Winkle (1996) stated for both push and pull factors responsible for involving the youths in gangs. The issues are:

1. Push factors (Why and how they are being engaged?)
2. Pull factors (How they involve others?)

**Figure 1**

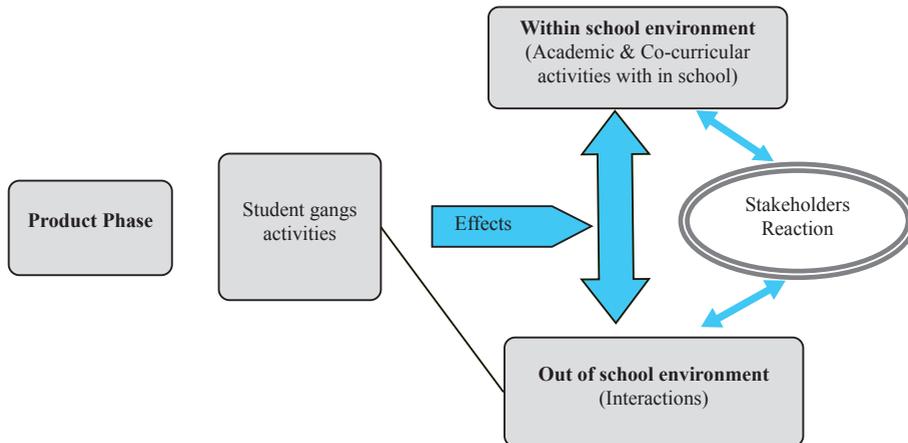
*Conceptual frame work of gang formation*



*As product we generally observe or calculate the behaviour or activities or attitudes of the gangs within or outside of school environment that effects on students' academic environments.*

**Figure-2**

*Conceptual frame work of studying students' gangs*



## Research Methodology

This study was exploratory in nature as qualitative data has been collected. As per the view of Crescentini & Mainardi (2009) qualitative method is being used when the study is explorative and asked for an issue or description or to explore practical problems. At the same time, some quantitative data were also be adopted to make the study more credible and for the better judgments of this study. Among the secondary schools of the Old Dhaka city areas 06 secondary schools were selected purposively for the study. Data was collected from the students, their parents, teachers SMCs, police officials, journalists and community representatives using self-administrated interview questionnaire, semi-structured interview schedule and FGD Schedule. Collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis and presented through coding and sub-coding. The quantitative data wase analyzed using simple descriptive analysis. The scaffolding of the study is given in the following table.

**Table-1**

*Scaffolding of the study*

ResearchTools	Participants	Sample Size	Sampling Techniques	Data Analysis
Self-administrated Semi-structured questionnaire	Students (Normal)	48	Purposive and Random	Thematic
Semi-structured interview questionnaire	Students (Gangs)	12	Purposive	
Semi-structured interview questionnaire	Teacher	12	Purposive	
	Parents	12		
	Police officer (PO1-PO6)	06		
	Journalist (J1-J3)	03		
	SMCs (SMC1- SMC6)	06		
	Community representatives (CR1-CR6)	06		
	Peers(GP1-Gp6)	06		
FGD Questionnaire	Students (Homogeneous group)	03 (No.of FGD)	Purposive	

## Results

The collected data of the study has been analyzed and the findings are explained according to the main themes of the study. The study was explored based on two major themes. The reasons of involving the students in gangs and their impact on academic environment of secondary school. The results of the study are presented below.

### Students' gangs and perception about gangs

Respondents are cognizant about this term “gang”. It is surprising that no one was found who is not familiar with the term gangs most particularly students' gangs. Secondary school going student age ranged 14-19 years are mostly involved in gangs. Gang members are active in the most of the secondary schools although the number varied from school to school depending on different socio-economic conditions. Girls are also involved in gangs indirectly. But still this rate is not so high. They mostly accompany with gangs. Along with the students from lower class families, lower-middle class, middle class and also from the higher-class families are getting involved in gangs.

### Push factors in fluence to involve in gangs

The influential Push factors why the teenagers are getting involved in gangs are identified and the weighted are found as: Family Issues (40%)>Political Support (25%)>Abuse of Technology (15%)>Misuse of law (10%)>Easy earning (3%).

**Family issues:** parents less care and attachment with their children, lack of proper family education and ethics, poor financial status of the family, excess support to the children by their parents, parents' poor communication with schools are the common family issues.

**Financial issues:** gangs offer financial benefits to the teenagers which push the students.

**Political issues:** political shelter is a reason to involve the students in gangs

**Socio-cultural issues:** bad company and self-protection, ignorance from the society and apathy from the seniors and teachers, lack of social resistance, counselling and guidance, boredom towards schooling leads them to involve in gangs

**Technological issues:** misuse of social media using electronics devices, online platform and influence of someone's lifestyle are the prime reasons of involving gangs

**Abuse of law:** political shelter encourages the students to be involved in gangs, abusing the law encourage the students to involve in gangs.

### Pull factors: Factors attracts the students in gangs

The following common issues those are identified as pull factors that attracts the students in gangs

*Give freedom*

*Use of power*

*Better chance for sexual harassment*

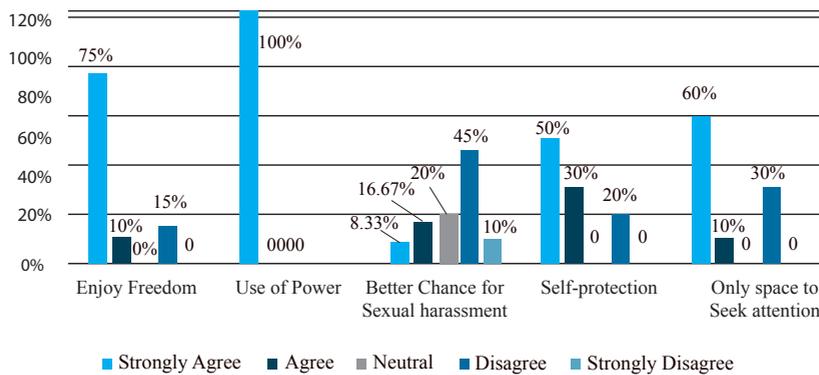
*Self-protection, and*

*To seek attention*

Gang members views and view of the general learners are collected and explored why they are getting involved in gangs. The findings are mentioned in the following figure.

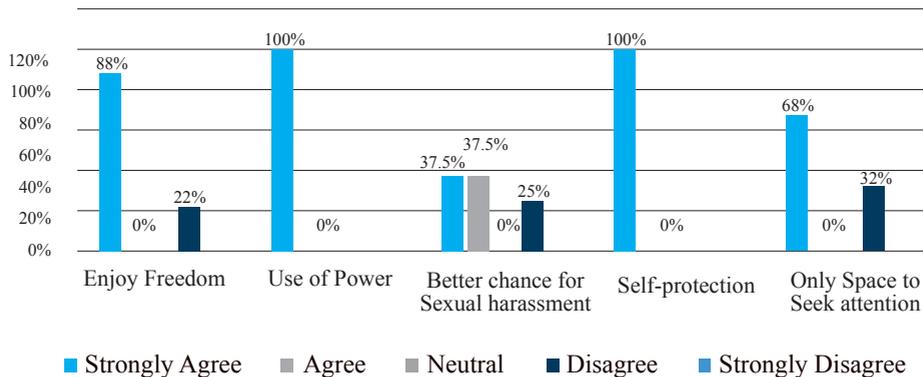
**Figure 3**

*Gang members view on pull factors effects to involve in gangs*



**Figure 4**

*General learners view on pull factors effects to involve in gangs*



## Activities of the gangs

No positive works have been found in their activities; in fact, the activities of the gangs are explored from the two different perspectives. Those are as the followings:

1. Outside of the School,
2. Inside School Premises

## Gang activities at the outside of the schools

At outside of school, gang members committed many negative activities. Some activities are: quarrelling, eve-teasing, drug selling & drug addiction, snatching, rape, extortion, disobeying parents and seniors, etc.

- Most of the quarrelling cases among students occurred among the slum dwelling boys as well as girls also. As a students, it is not desirable to attack someone in addition to quarrelling, but that is what is happening. One of the community representatives (CR2) said,

*“Some teenagers boys move together with bikes and cycles. They used to quarrel most often in the community”.*

## One of the respondents from FGD (FG1S4)

*“They quarrel in the classroom and in the school. They threaten the general students and it keeps us in fear”.*

- Now days, eve-teasing has become a common affair. Mostly, girls become the victims of this. At a stage, girls and their guardians feel unsecure about female child. As a result, the girls live a life confined within a few boundaries and child marriage rates continue to rise.
- Drug selling and drug addiction involved them in gangs. One of the respondent journalists (J1) said,  
*“Gangs are badly involved in drug buying and selling. They quarrel among themselves in managing drugs business also”*
- Most of the snatchers in the city are now young boys. Those who are now of school age snatch people in public instead of going to school. The general learners (GL2S2) said,  
*“Gang members carry knife with them and they threaten the normal students and even misbehave with the teachers”*
- Modern technologies (smart mobile, easy access porn sites etc.) are largely responsible for keeping the students in unhealthy sexual relationship. One of the police officers (PO3) said,  
*“Gang members are the threat of the girls. They disturb girls standing at the gate of the school. Recently, few cases have been filed regarding gang rape by the teenagers”.*
- Adolescents are not comparable to anyone else in terms of extortion. At first parents easily accept all their demands but at one stage their demands become very difficult to

become acceptable. Parents need to be careful about meeting these unjust and forced demands. One of the gang students said,

*“We have to collect money from others and at times we involve in clash in distributing the money collected by others”.*

- Disobeying parents and seniors is a common character of the students who involved in gangs.

### **Gang activities inside of the schools**

The student gangs do some violence inside the school also. Some of those violence's are, quarrelling (Senior-Junior, girls' issue, sports), eve-teasing, drug selling, extortion, threatening (General students and those who deny them or leave gangs), misconduct with seniors and teachers etc. The gangs most often-

- involve into fights with their classmates at school for no apparent reason or for very small reasons. It is very sad and unacceptable that a school going student would attack and injure another student in this way.
- It is sad but true that on the way to school, female students get teased by their male classmates. Many students drop out of school for fear of eve-teasing and dropout rate gradually increased.
- At present the students studying in the school are involved in drug use. Worse still, they are not only involved in drug use but also in selling drugs.
- Students often demand a lot of injustice from the school teachers which if the teachers refuse to accept then the students get involved in the movement. They do not even think that is their claim right or wrong. They are gathered only to fulfill their demands. One of the general learners said,

*“At times they demand for money. Anybody of the classroom may be their choice for extortion. They demand for 10 taka. If we refuse, then they misbehave with us and sometimes they snatch our tiffin also”.*

- Many students in the school engage in threatening activities. They threat other students to involve in gangs. If any of them wants to leave out their gangs, they threat rest of them and make them to be forced to stay in the gangs. More over, many students behave rudely and make threat to the fourth-grade staffs of the school which is a great shame becoming a student. One of the general learners said,

*“We feel afraid to come in the schools due to gangs. We feel mental pressure due to the gang members. We could not concentrate on study properly due to the gangs”.*

- They misbehave seniors and teachers. Their disrespectful behavior, makes others vulnerable and helpless.

## **Gangs' effects on Academic Environment of the School**

Gangs has many negative consequences on academic environment of the school. Student gangs negatively affects students' psychological, academic arena of the school, hence the environment.

### **The psychological perspective of gangs effect on educational environment at school**

- Students (general) feel fear to come in the school
- Hampers learner's concentration on classwork (use mobile in the classroom and see pornography) and examination
- Forced students (mostly girls) to leave school or drop out (Ragging, teasing, extortion, snatching tiffin etc.)
- Create curiosity towards gangs among the general learners
- Forced others students (fellow mates/juniors) to join their team and disturb those who want to ignore or leave them.
- Extra tension of the parents

### **Environmental perspective of gangs effect on educational environment at school:**

- Break institutional rules, misconduct with the teachers
- Involve in illegal and unsocial job (quarrelling, teasing, selling drugs)
- Loss of time and classroom activities
- Spoil the environment of the community

### **Academic perspective of gangs effect on educational environment at school:**

- Decrease the academic performance of the gangs
- Impact negatively on their learner's academic performance

In a nutshell, the activities of gangs in the school are very negative to the students to develop their academic achievement.

## **Discussion**

Gangs, most particularly the student gangs are very active in Dhaka city. School going teenagers mostly aged between 14-16 years are getting involved in gangs. White, 2002a; Lor, 2003, Al-Mamun, 2020, and Mun, (n.d) explored almost the similar studies in their study. They found that, young boys aged between 10-18 years are getting involved in gangs not only in Dhaka but throughout the country. Gangs are known by different titles like, '007' 'Amma group', 'Five star' etc. are found in this study. Al-Mamun, 2020; Helal, 2019; & Mun, (n.d.) found in their study that, gangs are active in different name throughout the city like, 007, Lara

Dey, Disco Boys, Power Boys, Seven stars, Nine M.M. Boys, Jumman Gangs, Dangerous Boys, Gang Star, Mafia etc.

Teenagers form peers first from their locality and they move together considering their security and protection and gradually they involve in gangs consisting of peers and other senior partners. Beazley (2013) also found almost the similar findings from their study.

According to the National Institute of Justice (2011), students gang consists of at least three members and they commit different crimes in their area. Almost similar findings are explored through this study as secondary school going teenagers join together in different number and they usually commit different offensive activities at the community and in the educational institutions like, disturb other students, spoil the environment, tease girls, quarrelling with others, threatening other students and community people, etc.

Students are getting involved in gangs as they feel to get protection, power, and freedom in the community. The similar findings are also explored by White, 2002a; & Lor, 2003 in their study. Gangs' members feel that they get huge opportunity to enjoy their life as found from the study. Decker & Winkle, (1996) found almost the similar findings in their study.

Gangs are occurring due to different push factors as explored from the study. Different issues e.g., poor family bondage, lucrative financial offers, abuse of technology, misuse of law, poor socio-cultural practices push the secondary level teenagers to involve in gangs. Parnell, 2013 explored multiple reasons as push factors those attract the teenagers in gangs. NCASA (2010) also explored the similar reasons of involving the teenagers in gangs. Al-Mamun(2020) also explored poor parenting as a reason of teenager involvement in gangs.

Political issue is identified as a big reason of involving the secondary school going students in gangs. The similar results have been found by Das (2019) and Al-Mamun (2020) in their study that, political shelter is a reason of pushing the teenagers to involve in gangs.

Excess and unwise use of technology, most particularly the Facebook, YouTube, TikTok influences the young teenagers to involve in gangs. Through different online media and channel, they come to know about gangs and their activities. It motivates some of the youths to involve in gangs. Al-Mamun (2020) explored almost the same findings in their research.

Like boys, girls are also getting indirectly involved in gangs and they are still in the dark but helped the gang members to conduct different activities in the schools. Das (2019) explored the involvement of the girls in gangs also. Early dating, poor family bondage as broken families are also identified as the reason of girls' involvement in gangs as identified by Juvenile Justice Bulletin (1998). In this study, the poor family bondage and the opportunity of sex attached both the boy's and girls to be involved in gangs.

Students who involve in gangs, they cannot perform good result in their academic examinations. The study findings reveal that, gangs are the backbencher and many of them are dropout students and some of them cannot continue till university level. Howell (2010) conducted a study and found almost the similar findings that the teenagers who are engaged in gangs they cannot spend more time on study. Hence, they perform poor in their examination.

Teenagers are engaging in gangs due to the poor concentration of the family, community and schools towards them. Parents poor contact with their children and schools also a reason of engaging the teenagers in gangs as identified. Mun (n.d) also explored the similar findings in his study that parents in these days could not get plenty of time to spend with their children. Therefore, the children get freedom and they choose their own company and at times they engaged in gangs,

Along with some push factors, some lucrative opportunities as pull factors attract the teenagers to be involved in gangs. Some issues are identified in the study and those are like freedom, use of power, to earn fame, ensure self-protection, good chance for sex etc. Al-Mamun (2020) explored also the same push factors that motivates the teenagers to involve in gangs. Gang members badly need of self-protection and hence many of them involved in gangs.

Gangs, literally perform different offensive activities in both inside and outside of the schools. Within schools they disturb other general students, disobey their teachers, sell drugs, teasing girls' students, threatening, apply ragging, extortion, etc. Al-Mamun (2020) explored also the same activities performed by the gangs.

Gang members carry different local weapons in the school and they used to threaten others using those weapons. This makes the educational compound ferocious to the general learners. The learners along with their parents also stay in tension about their children. Mun (n.d) explored that gang members carry diverse local weapons and they commit different crimes in the schools. Gangs outside of the school compound commit multiple crime sand even murder. Mun (n.d) in his study explored the similar opinion from the law enforcement authority that the students gang members are directly involve in some murder case allegation as juvenile offence.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations have been made on the basis of the opinion of the respondents of the study. The recommendations are:

- Focus should be given on positive relationship among the family members in family
- Parents should invest more quality time for their children
- Community leaders must be sincere about their responsibility to develop good citizen for their community
- Both family, educational institutions & community should arrange healthy cultural activities for the development of the students.
- School must arrange different co-curricular activities to keep students busy
- Appropriate counseling and guidance service should be introduced in the schools through the professionals. Learners must be informed about the negative consequences of gangs and addiction to drugs.
- Gang students should be considered as 'challenge' not as 'problem'. Then the learners involved in gangs will get positive space for correction.

## Conclusion

Student gang is a serious social issue. Gangs hamper the educational environment with in schools and makes the guardians under anxiety about the safety of their children. Gangs are the threat for the normal learners and most particularly for the girls. School authorities, law enforcement agencies, community leaders and parents are trying to take back the students from gangs. But still some difficulties are over there. The recommendation of this study will definitely be a good document to take necessary and effective policy led decisions to tackle gangs from the schools and from the community.

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## **Authors' Profile**

### **Research Article Title:**

#### **Students' Gangs and their Impact on Academic Environment at Secondary Level of Education in Dhaka City: An Exploratory Study**

1. Kazi Faruk Hossain is an Assistant Professor of the Institute of Education and Research (I.E.R), Jagannath University, Dhaka-1100, Bangladesh. He completed his Master of Education and Bachelor of Education from the Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka. He also completed his Master of Philosophy from the same institution on English language curriculum and teaching. E-mail: [kazifaruk@ier.jnu.ac.bd](mailto:kazifaruk@ier.jnu.ac.bd) Cell: 01778744644.
2. Rahul Chandra Saha is an Assistant Professor of the Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. He was also a former faculty member of the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Jagannath University and University of Chittagong. He completed his Master of Education and Bachelor of Education from the Department of Language Education, IER, University of Dhaka. He also completed his Master of Philosophy on English language and education from the same institution. E-mail: [rahul.rcs.ier@du.ac.bd](mailto:rahul.rcs.ier@du.ac.bd) Cell: +8801764867877.
3. Md. Fazlur Rahman is a Professor of the Institute of Education and Research (I.E.R), University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. He has specialization on Language Education. E-mail: [frahman71@live.com](mailto:frahman71@live.com) Cell: 01711-985446
4. Syed Md. Abdul Hannan is a Teachers' trainer of English in the NAEM, Ministry of Education, Dhaka. E-mail: [ttsmahannan.naem@gmail.com](mailto:ttsmahannan.naem@gmail.com) Cell: 01712140360

#### **Corresponding Author**

1. Rahul Chandra Saha, Assistant Professor, Institute of Education and Research (IER), University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. E-mail: [rahul.rcs.ier@du.ac.bd](mailto:rahul.rcs.ier@du.ac.bd) Cell: 01764867877

## A Study on Online Teaching for the Higher Secondary Level Students in Bangladesh: Prospects and Challenges

Babul Hossain (PhD)<sup>1</sup>  
Mahbubur Rahman (PhD)<sup>2</sup>  
Chanchal Kumar Biswas (PhD)<sup>3</sup>  
Nuruzzaman (MBBS)<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

*This study examines the possibilities and challenges of online teaching for higher secondary level students in Bangladesh. It investigates the availability of devices for online classes, the financial status of parents, the availability of Internet facilities, and attitudes toward online classes. Data was collected through a survey method from class XI & XII students in six government colleges across three different divisions of the country, with a total of 350 participants. Data analysis was conducted using common percentages. The findings reveal that most of the student's parents (about 80%) face financial challenges, resulting in inadequate access to computers/laptops/smartphones/tabs for online classes. Issues such as lack of uninterrupted power supply, limited internet coverage, high cost of internet packages with short durations, call drops, and slow internet speeds were identified as problems for online classes. The study suggests that making online lectures more engaging, increasing monitoring, improving power supply, providing free or improved internet services, or offering financial aid to students could help make online education more acceptable and a viable alternative to face-to-face learning for higher secondary level students in Bangladesh. The study also recommends the availability of student-friendly internet data packages.*

**Keywords:** Bangladesh, Higher Secondary level, Online Teaching, Problems, Students' Perception.

### Introduction

Online teaching is a method of disseminating information through academic-based communication technology in the field of education, allowing interaction between teachers and students. It is a relatively new form of education system where students can attend classes,

<sup>1</sup> Md. Babul Hossain (PhD), Associate Professor & Head, Department of Zoology, Rangpur Government College, Rangpur 5400. (Corresponding author). E. mail: babulhossain2001@gmail.com, Cell: +88 01712693203

<sup>2</sup> S. M. Mahbubur Rahman (PhD), Professor, Department of Business Administration, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Noakhali-3814. E. mail: mmrahman987@gmail.com, Cell: +8801712122849

<sup>3</sup> Chanchal Kumar Biswas (PhD), Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Government Ainuddin College, Madhukhali- 7850, Faridpur. E. mail: ckbiswas68@gmail.com, Cell: +8801712122849

<sup>4</sup> Nuruzzaman (MBBS), Medical Officer, NAEM, Dhaka- 1205, E. mail: nuruzzamanshakil@gmail.com, Cell: +8801717443467

ask questions, and be evaluated by their teachers using certain devices and the internet, all from the comfort of their homes, without physically going to an educational institution (Olugbenga, 2020). Online learning methods are already widely adopted in developed countries, but due to the recent outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, it has been introduced as a way of learning in developing countries since 2020 (Olugbenga, 2019). While there are practical challenges associated with the online education system (Bose, 2003), this approach creates an alternative educational platform to the conventional academic system (Ellis, 2009). The Covid-19 pandemic has posed a threat to the education system in Bangladesh and around the world, with schools, colleges, and universities being forced to suspend traditional teaching activities for more than fifteen months. The government has announced the avoidance of face-to-face classes, and schools have banned gatherings to prevent the spread of the virus through person-to-person contact. Lockdowns have been imposed by the Bangladesh government, resulting in an urgent need for a sustainable alternative to traditional methods of education. Online teaching has emerged as an alternative way, providing opportunities for distance learning for students and teachers, unaffected by campus closures due to shutdowns, strikes, or epidemic situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It is estimated that around 300 million students worldwide have faced disruptions in their school activities due to the Covid-19 epidemic (UNESCO, 2020), posing a threat to the education process. As a developing country, Bangladesh faces challenges in implementing online teaching, including technical limitations, poor internet facilities, low bandwidth, poor socio-economic status, lack of knowledge, and financial capacity of parents (Islam, 2006). The development of online education in Bangladesh is closely related to the availability and development of Internet facilities, computers, and smartphones. Mathrani et al. (2021) highlighted that online education and student skills are critical factors in the successful implementation of this new education system. Therefore, implementing online education in a developing country like Bangladesh may pose challenges in ensuring satisfactory progress for students and creating an alternative platform for transitioning from face-to-face learning. This study aims to delve deeper into the implementation of online education and explore a wide range of opportunities for higher secondary students in Bangladesh, as well as identify ways to mitigate challenges.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The year 2020 witnessed the sudden emergence of a global pandemic, COVID-19, which also impacted Bangladesh, leading to the shutdown of schools to prevent the spread of the virus among students. In response, the government of Bangladesh initiated online teaching as an alternative approach for Higher Secondary level students. However, the successful implementation of online education requires certain prerequisites, such as communication devices with internet facilities (Deli &Allo, 2020). High-speed internet is essential for live video classes, but access to it may be limited, allowing only general internet browsing or social media use. Additionally, a user-friendly, low-cost, and easily accessible teaching platform is required. While there are several options available in Bangladesh, such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Messenger, Moodle, etc., teachers and students may require training to effectively utilize these platforms (Das, 2021). Furthermore, the availability of Internet and technology resources may vary among households in Bangladesh, with limited access to computers and

smartphones (BANBEIS, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the prospects and challenges of online teaching for Higher Secondary level students in Bangladesh, considering the availability of resources, implementation barriers, and potential benefits of online education in the context of a developing country.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The concept of online live classes or online uploaded classes is relatively new in the higher secondary level academic education system in Bangladesh. With many students and their parents having access to the Internet, Wi-Fi, computers, and smartphones, online education is becoming an increasingly important part of teaching and learning. However, there are also many students and parents who lack access to these resources (Pathan, 2005), making the implementation of online education challenging.

It is essential to examine the implications of these changes in the traditional education system and evaluate if they are meaningful for the overall education system in Bangladesh. Additionally, understanding the advantages and disadvantages of online teaching platforms in the context of Bangladesh is crucial.

This study aims to provide insights into the prospects and challenges of online teaching for higher secondary level students in Bangladesh. By comprehensively understanding the advantages and disadvantages of online education, this research will help colleges and educational institutions develop effective strategies to provide online lessons more efficiently, ensuring a continuous learning journey for students.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on online education in Bangladesh and provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders. By addressing the challenges and identifying the prospects of online teaching, this research will inform decision-making processes and help improve the quality and accessibility of education for higher secondary level students in Bangladesh.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i) To understand the perception and perspectives of Higher Secondary level students towards online teaching.
- ii) To explore the prospects of online teaching at the Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh.
- iii) To identify and examine the challenges faced in implementing online teaching at the Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh.
- iv) To explore potential strategies and ways to mitigate the challenges and ensure the continuity of online teaching at the Higher Secondary level in Bangladesh.

By achieving these objectives, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prospects and challenges of online teaching for Higher Secondary level students in

Bangladesh and to provide recommendations for improving the effectiveness and sustainability of online education in the country.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study has several limitations, including the following:

1. **Limited sample size:** The study was conducted in only six colleges located in the Rangpur, Khulna, and Noakhali districts, which may not fully represent the diverse range of colleges in Bangladesh. Different types of colleges, such as city colleges, village colleges, and specialized colleges, were not included in the study due to resource and time constraints.
2. **Generalizability:** Due to the limited sample size and geographical scope, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to all colleges in Bangladesh.
3. **Scope of education:** The research only focused on the general education line and did not cover religious or madrasa and technical education, which are important aspects of education in Bangladesh. This may limit the applicability of the findings to these specific areas.
4. **Lack of comprehensive data:** Due to the limitations in time and resources, the data collection may not have covered all relevant aspects of online teaching at the higher secondary level in Bangladesh, potentially limiting the depth and breadth of the study findings.

It is important to consider these limitations when interpreting the results of the study and drawing conclusions from them.

### **Literature Review**

Literature review is an essential part of research work, involving the study of books, articles, magazines, and other relevant sources related to a particular problem or area of research. The objective of a literature review is to gain a comprehensive understanding of current research and develop relevant arguments related to a specific theme or area of study, resulting in contemporary knowledge presented in a written report. A literature review helps to build our understanding of current research problems.

Online teaching has gained widespread acceptance, particularly in developed countries. However, its implementation has posed challenges in many developing countries, including Bangladesh, which faces limitations in access to Internet technologies (Bose, 2003). The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 disrupted the education system, leading to temporary lockdowns and closures of educational institutions, prompting the need for alternative teaching platforms. Online teaching platforms and various apps are now being considered to continue academic activities during this pandemic situation.

Pathan (2005) noted that online teaching could be an effective alternative platform for delivering quality education to all learners during unexpected college closures. Angelino et al.

(2007) and Oye et al. (2011) also mentioned that online learning is not limited to training and instruction but can also be used for teaching. Different technologies have been used for online learning, with the initial use of computers and the Internet to support classroom instructional methods. Over time, personal computers became more accessible, leading to the initiation and application of online teaching in some private universities in Bangladesh.

However, online education also has both beneficial and harmful impacts on students. Coman et al. (2020) mentioned that online education platforms are convenient for students due to their cost-effectiveness and reliance on technology. Many studies show the positive aspects of online learning, such as the ease and comfort of learning from home, the availability of combined course materials, and flexibility (Fedynich, 2014a). On the other hand, Kumar (2010) identified some disadvantages of online learning, including limited interaction with students and teachers, high cost of internet and other devices, and concerns about the effectiveness of assessments. Poor internet access and disruptions to mobile networks, especially in remote areas, as well as a lack of knowledge about computers and the Internet, also negatively impact the implementation of online education (Jordan et al., 2021; Fedynich, 2014).

Crawford et al. (2020) conducted an analysis of the state of higher education in developing and developed countries and found that developing countries often have differences in their approach to higher education during the pandemic. Some universities keep their campuses open, while others remain closed with no online teaching activity, and some continue online teaching to avoid semester gaps. On the other hand, most developed countries, such as Germany, Italy, Australia, Ireland, UK, and USA, have closed their campuses but shifted to online learning, aiming to avoid semester loss for their students.

Nassuora (2013) mentioned that many learners have positive attitudes towards online learning at the university level, as it has a positive effect on their student life and self-confidence, leading to the development of expertise in information and communication technology (ICT) and e-learning (Liaw & Huang, 2011).

In the context of Bangladesh, the teaching resources are limited, and the teacher-student ratio is not standardized, making online teaching a potential alternative platform for delivering lectures during unexpected circumstances of educational institution closures. However, previous studies have primarily focused on online-based higher education and the advantages and disadvantages of online classes under normal conditions, with little research on online-based higher secondary education in Bangladesh. Therefore, this research aims to fill this research gap by exploring expert opinions and students' opinions about online education, establishing the relationship between online teaching and learning outcomes of college students, examining the impact of online teaching on college students, and reviewing the main research findings related to this research topic. The findings of this study will help shed light on the prospects and challenges of online education for higher secondary level students in Bangladesh and establish the rationale for conducting this research.

## Methodology of the Study

### Sampling

The study employed a descriptive design and the population consisted of students from six Higher Secondary colleges located in the Districts of Rangpur, Faridpur, and Noakhali, under the Rangpur, Dhaka, and Chittagong Divisions in Bangladesh. Purposive sampling was used to select the six colleges, which included Rangpur Govt. College, Rangpur; Begum Rokeya Govt. College, Rangpur; Govt. Ainuddin College, Faridpur; Govt. Sarada Sundari Mohila College, Faridpur; Noakhali Govt. College, Noakhali; and Noakhali Govt. Mohila College, Noakhali.

Data was collected from students belonging to all three groups, namely Science, Humanities, and Business Studies, at the six selected colleges. Due to the current movement restrictions and social distancing measures in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an online questionnaire survey was conducted to collect data from the respondents. Students were contacted through their common *Facebook* groups and individual Email IDs. A reminder was sent to the respondents after one week to ensure data collection.

### Sample Size

The study used the following formula to determine the sample size, as per the guidelines from <http://www.surveysystem.com/sample-size-formula.htm>:

$$SS=[Z^2p(1-p)]/C^2$$

Where:

Z = Z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

p = percentage picking a choice, expressed as decimal (.5 used for sample size needed)

c = confidence interval, expressed as decimal (e.g., .04 = ±4)

Based on the total number of higher secondary students in the six colleges for data collection, which was 6350 (Rangpur Govt. College, Rangpur-1200; Begum Rokeya Govt. College, Rangpur-450; Govt. Ainuddin College, Faridpur-850; Govt. Sarada SundaryMohila College, Faridpur-1450; Noakhali Govt. College, Noakhali-900; Noakhali Govt. Mohila College, Noakhali-1500), the sample size was determined to be 349 (Rangpur Govt. College, Rangpur-70; Begum Rokeya Govt. College, Rangpur-50; Govt. Ainuddin College, Faridpur-65; Govt. Sarada SundaryMohila College, Faridpur-50; Noakhali Govt. College, Noakhali-74; Noakhali Govt. Mohila College, Noakhali-40) using the above-mentioned sample size formula.

## Tools of Data Collection

The following five tools were used for data collection in this study:

- i) Document Analysis Technique: This involves analyzing relevant documents such as reports, policies, curriculum documents, and other written materials to gather data and information related to the research topic.
- ii) Questionnaire for Students: A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from students using a five-point Likert scale (5=Strongly agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral,

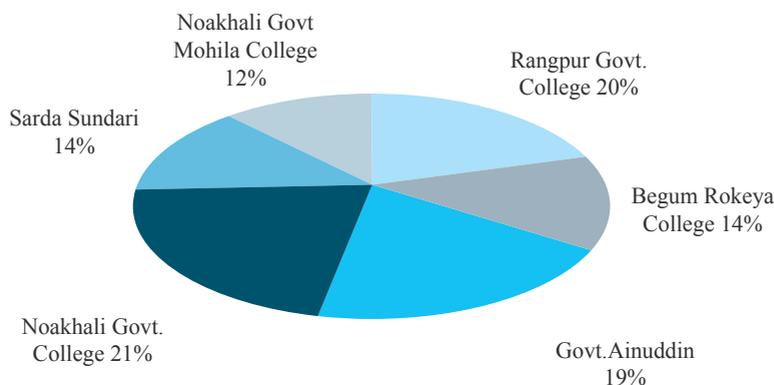
2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly disagree). The questionnaire aimed to assess students' perceptions about online classes. The internal consistency and reliability of the data set were measured using Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test, following the method outlined by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2006) and Islam and Himel (2018).

- iii) Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with teachers: Focus group discussions were conducted with teachers to gather qualitative data. This involved a group of teachers engaging in a structured discussion on the research topic, moderated by the researcher. The aim was to collect in-depth insights and opinions from teachers regarding online classes.
- iv) Informal Dialogue (ID) with parents/guardians: Informal dialogues were conducted with parents or guardians of students to gather qualitative data. These informal conversations provided an opportunity to gather parents' perspectives on their children's experiences with online classes, their concerns, and suggestions.
- v) Key Informants Interview (KII) with educational experts: Key informant interviews were conducted with educational experts who have relevant knowledge and expertise in the research area. These interviews aimed to gather expert opinions, insights, and suggestions related to online classes.

These tools were used to collect a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic from multiple perspectives.

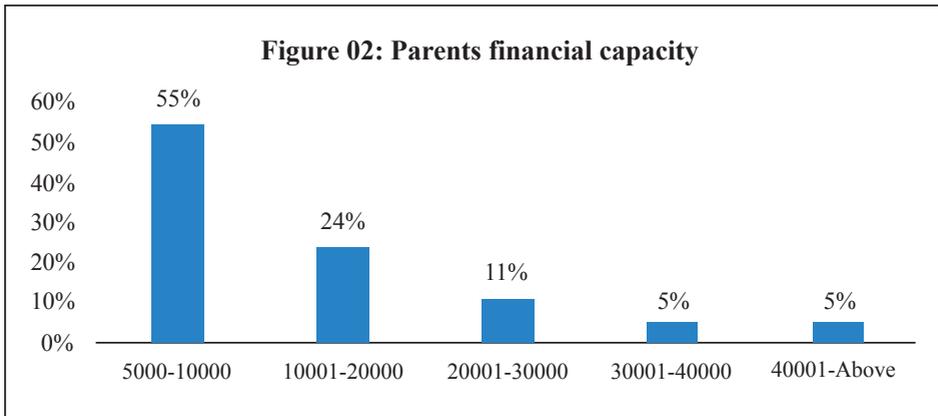
## Data analysis and results

Figure 01: Respondent selected from different colleges



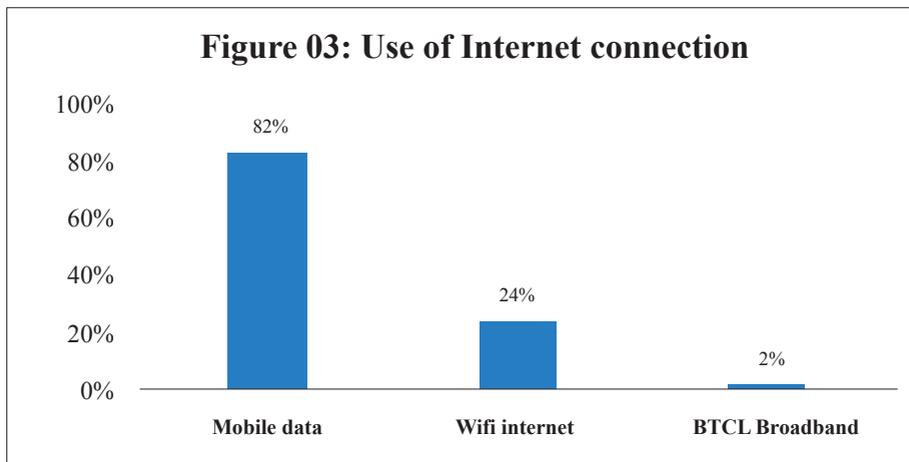
Source: Field survey

The study randomly sampled 350 students from six different colleges. Figure 01 shows the distribution of students among the colleges as follows: 20% (70) from Rangpur Govt. College, 14% (50) from Begum Rokeya College, 19% (65) from Govt. Ainuddin College, 21% (75) from Noakhali Govt. College, 14% (50) from Sarda Sundari College, and 12% (40) from Noakhali Govt. Mohila College.



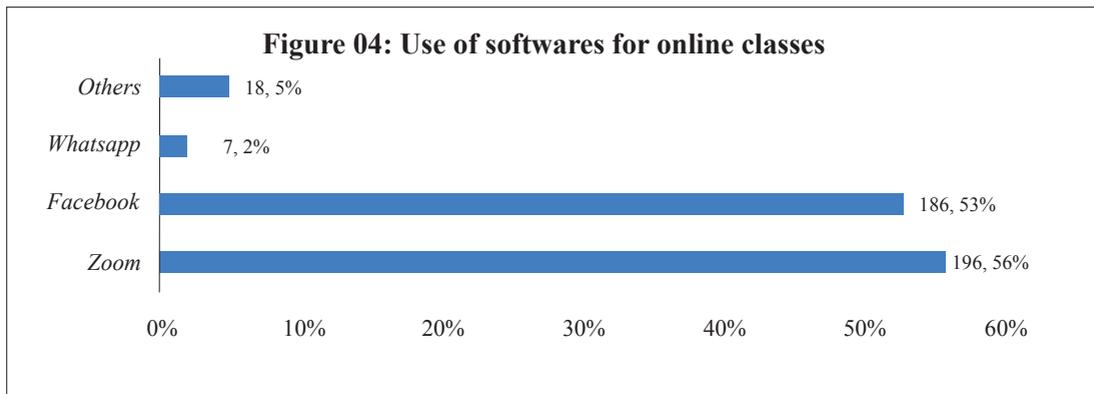
Source: Field survey

Figure 02 displays the financial capacity of the parents of the sampled students. The statistics indicate that the majority of the student’s parents had a monthly income of Tk. 5000-Tk.10000, accounting for 55% of the sample. Additionally, 24% had an income of Tk.10001-Tk.20000, 11% had an income of Tk.20001-Tk.30000, and only 5% had an income of Tk.40000 or more. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of parents may not have strong financial stability. Furthermore, the results imply a potential relationship between online classes and parental financial ability.



Source: Field survey

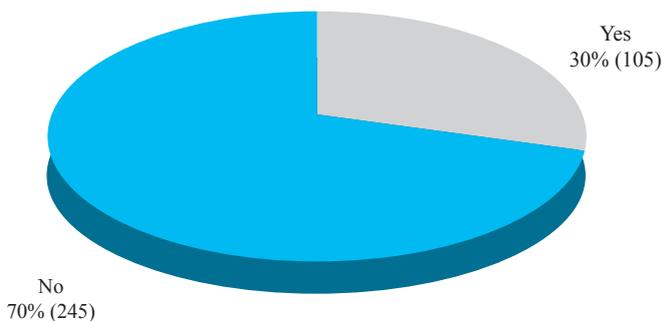
Figure 03 presents the findings that most of the sampled students (82%) utilized mobile data for online classes, while 24% used Wi-Fi Internet, and only 2% relied on BTCL broadband internet connection. The findings of previous studies indicate that mobile data is the most used option for online classes among students, despite limitations with different mobile data packages not being suitable for students. The study respondents also noted that BTCL broadband internet speed is good, but due to the limited availability of infrastructures, students do not have access to this internet connection facility.



Source: Field survey

Figure 04 presents the findings on the use of software for online classes. The survey revealed that 56% of sampled students used *Zoom*, 53% used *Facebook*, 2% used *WhatsApp*, and 5% used other software for online classes. Previous studies have also shown that *Zoom* and *Facebook* are the most commonly used softwares for online classes among students, despite limitations with different mobile data packages not being suitable for these two softwares. Respondents to the survey also noted that due to poor internet connection and unsuitable online class schedules, students often do not fully utilize the complete internet package.

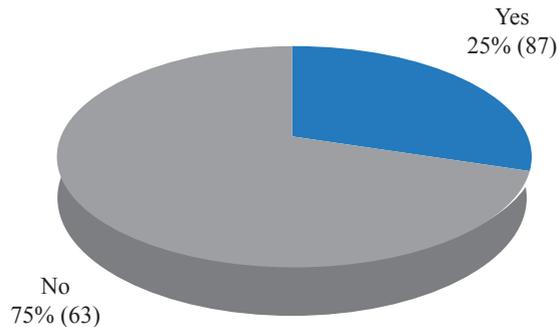
**Figure 05: Purchasing capacity to buy Internet package**



Source: Field survey

Figure 05 presents the purchasing power of an internet package. The survey revealed that 70% of respondents could not afford an internet package, while 30% responded affirmatively. The study also found a positive correlation between parental income (as shown in Fig. 02) and internet package purchase (as shown in Fig. 05).

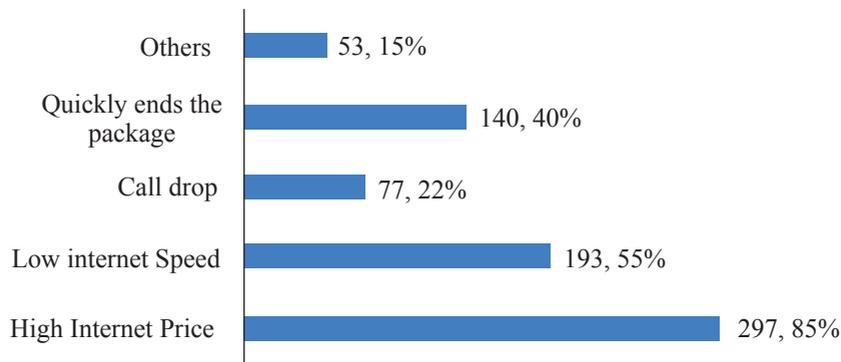
Figure 06: Internet packages are convenient for students



Source: Field survey

Figure 06 above illustrates the advantages of Internet packages for online classes. Only 25% of students responded positively, stating that internet packages are convenient, while the majority of students (75%) expressed that internet packages are not convenient due to perceived lack of adjustment between the price and duration of the packages.

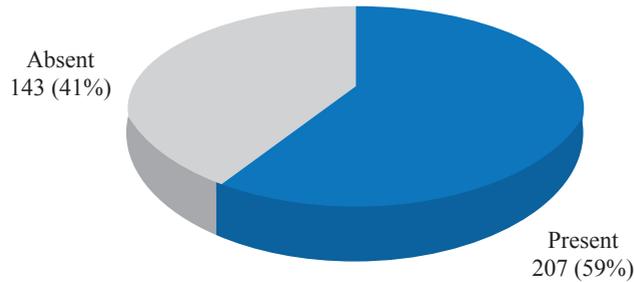
Figure 07: Disadvantages of internet packages



Source: Field survey

Respondents to this survey identified several problems or difficulties with internet packages. As shown in Figure 07, out of 350 students, 297 (85%) identified high internet costs as the main disadvantage. Internet speed was identified as a problem by 55% of students, while 40% of students reported that the duration of internet packages was an issue. Additionally, 22% of students stated that dropping calls during online classes while using internet packages was a problem.

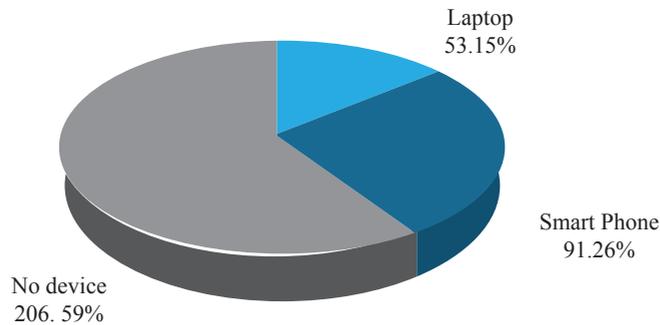
Figure 08: Available seamless room at home



Source: Field survey

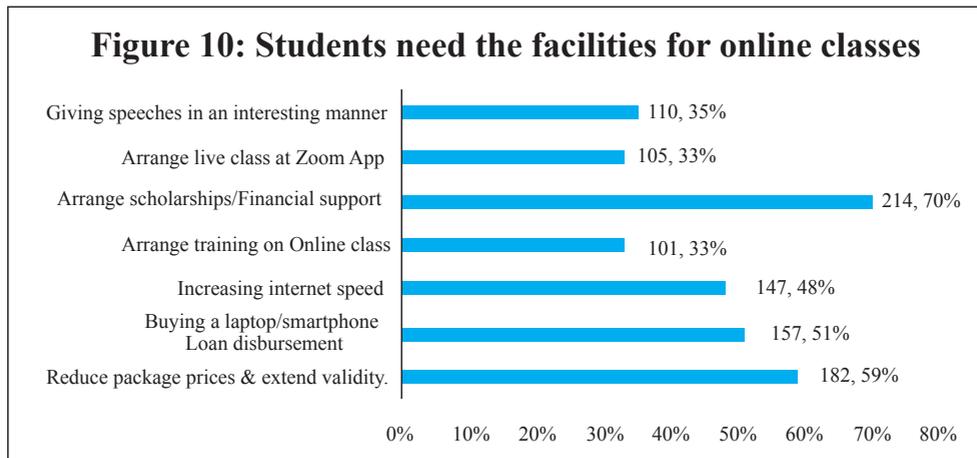
In Figure 08, it is evident that 59% of the respondents reported having a seamless room for online classes, while 41% stated that they do not have a suitable place. Previous surveys have revealed that a significant portion of students do not have uninterrupted room for online classes, which can impact the effectiveness of their learning experience. Ensuring all students have access to a suitable and uninterrupted space for online classes is crucial for facilitating effective remote education.

Figure 09: Use of own device



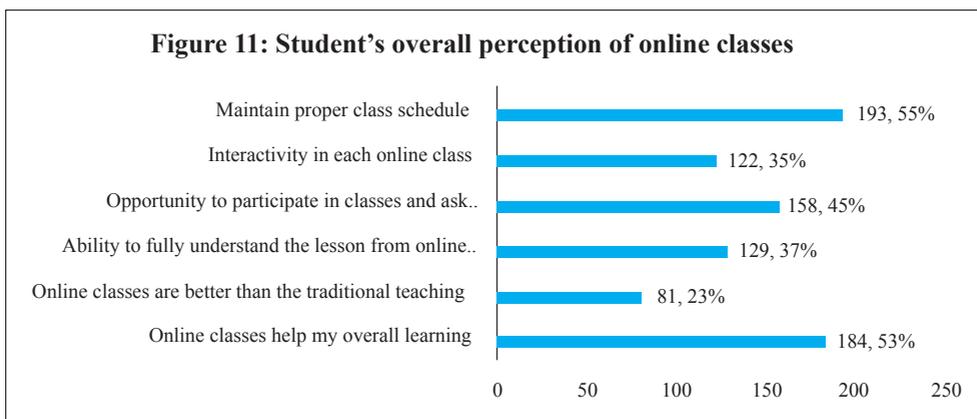
Source: Field survey

Figure 09 illustrates the usage of different devices for online classes. The survey revealed that 59% of students do not have their own devices, 26% use a smartphone, and 15% use a laptop. Additionally, 59% of students reported using other devices, such as those belonging to their parents. It was also noted that students who use other devices for online classes may not have consistent access to all classes. Therefore, it is essential for authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that all students have access to suitable devices for online classes, to facilitate effective remote learning.



Source: Field survey

Figure 10 presents the perceptions of students regarding various factors essential for effective online classes. The survey findings indicate that 70% of students believe that financial support is crucial, as many students' parents may not be financially well-off. Additionally, 59% of students express concerns about the cost and duration of internet packages, highlighting the need for affordable and extended internet access. Moreover, 51% of respondents feel that having their own device is essential for online classes, as it enhances concentration and motivation. Furthermore, 48% of students emphasize the importance of internet speed for effective online classes. Additionally, 33% of students believe that online education requires formal and informal training, as well as more live classes, as it is reliant on an online system executed through computers. These findings highlight the significance of financial support, affordable internet packages, suitable devices, and adequate training in ensuring successful online learning experiences for students.

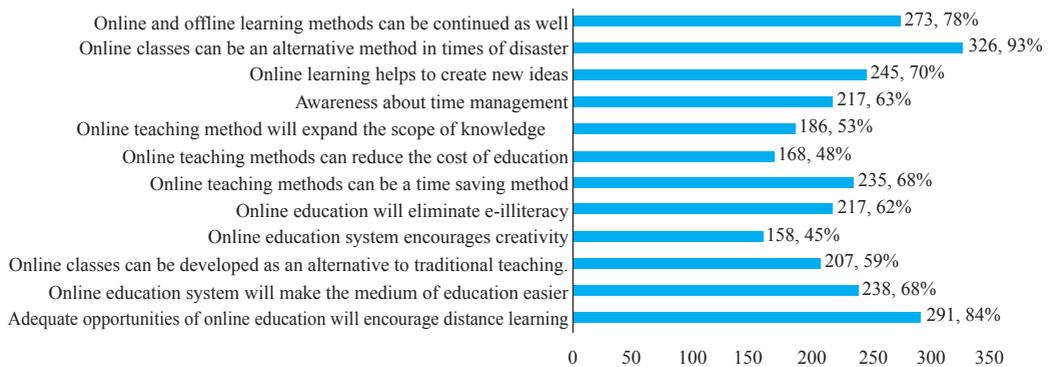


Source: Field survey

Figure 11 illustrates the perspectives of students on various aspects of online learning. The findings reveal that 53% of students express positive sentiments, indicating that online

learning enhances their overall learning process. Additionally, 55% of students believe that online classes enable better maintenance of class schedules compared to traditional classes, which may be disrupted due to natural disasters or other situations. Furthermore, 23% of students express a preference for online classes as they provide flexibility to learn from home when the college is closed and avoid face-to-face interactions. Moreover, 37% of students feel that online learning stimulates their creativity, as it utilizes computers and the internet to enhance their knowledge and creativity. Additionally, 45% of students believe that online classes create opportunities for participation and question-asking. Moreover, 35% of students express that online learning enhances interactivity among peers, allowing them to share information through chat boxes and access various study materials easily. These findings reflect the positive impact of online learning on students’ learning experiences, including flexibility, creativity, participation, and interactivity.

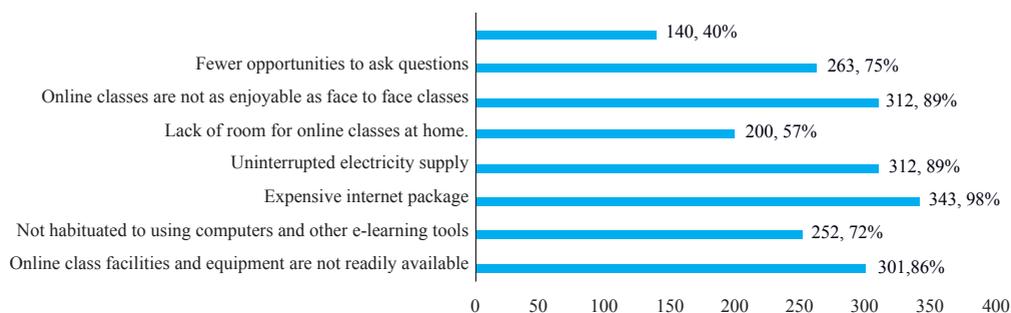
**Figure 12: Prospects of online education**



Source: Field survey

In today’s era, there are various methods of teaching available, including online classes which can be taken from the comfort of home or any suitable location. With the widespread availability of Internet facilities in most households, online classes have become an effective and essential mode of education, particularly during times of epidemics like Covid-19. The online education system has gained prominence not only in villages but also in cities across the country. Students and learners can join online education programs from anywhere, at any time, both within the country and abroad. According to the survey results, 93% of students believe that online education is the best alternative during natural disasters. Additionally, 84% of respondents express the opinion that providing adequate opportunities for online education will encourage distance learning. Furthermore, 78% of respondents believe that educational institutions should continue with a mix of online and offline teaching methods to cope with unexpected situations such as *hartals* or natural disasters. Moreover, 70% of students feel that online classes foster creativity by providing opportunities to access diverse educational resources, enhance communication skills, and facilitate group study. Additionally, 68% of students believe that online teaching is a convenient and time-saving method, especially during unexpected situations when educational institutions can continue using this approach.

**Figure 13: Challenges of online teaching**



Source: Field survey

Despite the potential benefits of online teaching in our country, field surveys have identified various challenges. According to a study by BRAC (2020), only 44.10% of primary and secondary level students are participating in online classes, while 55.90% are not. The participation rates are even lower for Madrasa students (32.40%) and Bangla medium students (45.90%). In rural and urban areas, only 39.80% and 55.80% of students can participate in online classes, respectively. The study also found that 45.50% of girls and 42.70% of boys generally participate in online classes.

Additionally, Figure 13 reveals that students face several barriers to online learning. For instance, 98% of students surveyed reported that internet packages are expensive, and 89% felt that online classes are not as enjoyable as face-to-face classes. Furthermore, 86% of respondents stated that they are not familiar with online classes, and 75% reported that there are no class interaction facilities available. Many students also lack proper devices to attend online classes (72%), are not accustomed to online classes, and do not have adequate space for online learning (57%). Only 55.3% of surveyed students had a suitable device for online classes. Poor internet network and low speed also discourage students from attending online classes, particularly outside the capital Dhaka (Al-Amin et al., 2021).

## Findings

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

1. Financial constraints among parents were identified as a major challenge for online classes, with most parents unable to afford the cost of internet packages (Fig. 2).
2. Students predominantly used mobile data for online classes, but different mobile data packages were found to be unsuitable for their needs. Respondents also reported that the quality of BTCL broadband internet, although good, was limited by a lack of available infrastructure (Fig. 3).
3. The study found that most students used *Zoom* and *Facebook* for online classes but faced difficulties with using these platforms due to issues with mobile data packages (Fig. 4).

4. The study revealed a positive relationship between parental income and the purchase of internet packages, with about 80% of parents having a monthly income of Tk.5000~20000 (Fig. 2). Additionally, 82% of students used mobile data as their internet package (Fig. 3), and 70% of students were unable to afford to buy an internet package (Fig. 5).
5. Students identified high package prices (85% of respondents), low internet speed (55% of respondents), and limited package duration (40% of respondents) as the main challenges of using internet packages for online classes. Dropped calls during online classes were also reported as a problem (Fig. 7).
6. A significant portion of students (41% of respondents, Fig. 8) did not have a separate room for online classes.
7. Many students (70% of respondents, Fig. 2) considered financial support to be essential for effective online classes, as a large portion of parents were not financially well off. The study found that 59% of students did not own a device and used their parents' or siblings' devices, which could affect their ability to attend online classes regularly and on time (Fig. 9).
8. 59% of respondents (Fig. 10) expressed the opinion that reducing the cost of internet packages, increasing their validity, and improving internet speed were essential for effective online classes. Additionally, 70% of respondents felt that financial support or scholarships were necessary to purchase devices or internet packages, and 55% believed that an education loan would enable them to purchase necessary materials and attend online classes effectively.
9. 53% of students (Fig. 11) felt that online classes accelerated the overall learning process, increased interest, and inspiration, and made them more resilient in the competitive world. Half of the students believed that maintaining a proper schedule was possible in online classes, unlike physical classes which could be affected by natural disasters and other situations.
10. The study revealed that 93% of students considered online teaching to be the best alternative during natural disasters (Fig. 12). Additionally, 84% of respondents believed that adequate opportunities for online teaching would encourage distance learning, and 78% felt that online and offline methods for a college education could continue during unforeseen circumstances like strikes and natural disasters. 68% of students believed that online teaching was a simple method that saved time, and money, and made education easier. 70% of students felt that online classes helped in generating new ideas, such as gathering knowledge and improving communication skills through group study.
11. The study found that 98% of students considered internet packages to be expensive, 89% felt that online classes were not as enjoyable as traditional classes, and 86% felt that they were not well acquainted with online classes. Additionally, 75% of students

believed that online classes lacked interactivity, 72% did not have appropriate devices to attend online classes, and 57% felt that they did not have a suitable place for online classes (Fig. 13).

## Recommendations

Based on the survey results and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to improve online teaching methods:

1. **Government funding:** The government, as the proprietor of educational institutions, should provide adequate funding to enable the establishment of e-learning facilities for teachers. This includes setting up a live class recording room with an internet connection and standby power-generating set. The cost of purchasing and constructing this studio should be considered in the budget allocation, estimated to be around Tk.7 to 8.5 lack.
2. **Uninterrupted power supply and ICT equipment:** Ensuring uninterrupted power supply and procuring necessary ICT equipment, such as computers/laptops, for the use of students and teachers is crucial. This will enable teachers to create lecture materials and notes, and students to access online classes without disruptions.
3. **Teacher training:** Lecturers should be trained in appropriate skills for e-learning. This includes training on how to effectively use online platforms, create engaging content, and facilitate online discussions and assessments. Providing teachers with the necessary skills and resources will enhance their ability to deliver quality online education.
4. **Affordable internet packages:** Telecom operators have introduced 'Unlimited' and 'Without Expired' internet data packs, but these often come with limitations such as daily data usage limits and expiration dates. These packages can be expensive for students, limiting their access to online classes. The government can negotiate with internet and mobile operators to establish student-friendly agreements that ensure affordable and reliable internet packages for online classes.
5. **Collaboration with stakeholders:** Collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and other stakeholders such as internet and mobile operators is crucial for improving online learning opportunities. Partnerships and agreements can be established to ensure sustainable and affordable access to online education for all students.
6. **Regular monitoring and evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation of online teaching methods, including feedback from students and teachers, can help identify areas for improvement and ensure continuous enhancement of online learning experiences. This can involve regular assessments of the quality of online classes, feedback collection from students and teachers, and making necessary adjustments based on the feedback received.

In summary, these recommendations focus on providing adequate funding, ensuring uninterrupted power supply and ICT equipment, teacher training, affordable internet packages, collaboration with stakeholders, and regular monitoring and evaluation to improve online teaching methods and create dynamic learning opportunities for students through online education. Implementation of these recommendations can contribute to enhancing the quality and accessibility of online education in Bangladesh.

### **Recommended frame for student-friendly internet package**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for a student-friendly internet package:

1. **Increased data allowance:** Internet providers should increase the amount of data (MB) provided in their Internet packages to make them more usable for students. Taking into consideration the average data consumption of students during online classes (4.5 to 5 GB per week), a monthly data allowance of 18-20 GB should be considered to meet the needs of students.
2. **Reduced package price:** To make internet packages more affordable for students, the package prices should be reduced. This can be achieved by offering special discounted rates for students or providing subsidized internet packages specifically designed for educational purposes.
3. **Extended validity period:** The validity period of internet packages should be extended to 365 days to ensure that students have continuous access to online classes throughout the year. This will prevent disruptions in internet access and ensure that students can avail themselves of the benefits of the package for an extended period.
4. **Flexible recharge options:** Recharge options should be flexible, allowing students to recharge their internet packages in one, two, three, or monthly installments based on their convenience. This will provide flexibility for students in managing their internet usage and budget.
5. **Carry-over of unused balance:** Unused mobile balance should be carried over to the next recharge, allowing students to maximize the benefits of their internet package. This will prevent the wastage of unused balances and provide better value for money for students.
6. **Extension of stipend scheme:** The scope of the higher secondary stipend scheme can be extended to cover the cost of internet packages for students. This will provide financial support to students in accessing online education and ensure that they have uninterrupted internet access for their educational needs.

**Table No. 01: Proposed students-friendly data package**

<b>Data package (GB)</b>	<b>Price (Tk.)</b>	<b>Package duration (days/unlimited days)</b>
120 GB	1500.00	365 days
60 GB	800.00	Recharge every six months, but unused data will be added to the next recharge (package duration 365 days).
40 GB	550.00	Recharge every four months, but unused data will be added to the next recharge (package duration 365 days).
20 GB	150.00	Recharge monthly, but unused data will be added to the next recharge (package duration 365 days).

By implementing these recommendations, internet providers can offer student-friendly internet packages that are affordable, flexible, and meet the data needs of students, ensuring continuous access to online education throughout the year. This will contribute to creating a conducive environment for online learning and enable students to fully participate in online classes without the barrier of internet affordability and accessibility.

That's great to hear! The fact that the internet provider 'Robi' has recently offered 30 GB of data for students at Tk. 220 for 30 days aligns closely with the recommended data volume and price suggested by the study.

## **Conclusion**

This investigation utilized an independent survey to assess the impact of online learning among HSC-level students from 6 colleges in 3 Divisions. Most students strongly agreed that they have acquired basic skills, such as using Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, through online learning. Research also revealed that online learning methods inspire students and make them more enthusiastic about their learning. The convenience and adaptability of the online medium were recognized as positive aspects of online learning. Additionally, online learning was found to promote creative attitudes, generate new ideas for learning, and stimulate creativity.

The online education system provides expanded learning opportunities for students and serves as an effective means to conduct educational activities during unexpected shutdowns. The goal of online classes is to bring learning to the students, removing barriers created by location, closure of educational institutions, epidemics, and other factors. However, in a developing country like Bangladesh, there are challenges in making online education accessible to all. The sudden shift to online education due to the impact of Covid-19 has revealed that

many parents have low financial capacity, resulting in most students lacking the ability to afford classroom equipment such as laptops, computers, smartphones, and broadband internet. Furthermore, internet service providers have overcharged their packages and reduced their validity, making them unsuitable for students.

Despite these challenges, the online learning environment has the potential to overcome limitations of space and time, providing opportunities for inclusive education. Efforts are needed to address the financial constraints and access to devices and internet, and to improve the quality of online learning experiences in Bangladesh. Scholarships, education loans, and measures to reduce the cost of internet packages and increase their validity can contribute to making online education more accessible and effective for all students. Overall, online learning has the potential to remove class barriers and expand educational opportunities, but further actions are required to address the challenges and ensure equitable access to online education in developing countries like Bangladesh.

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## Assignment as a Tool for Assessment at Secondary Level: Challenges and Prospects

Ranjit Podder<sup>1</sup>  
Sheikh Shahbaz Riad<sup>2</sup>  
Asaduzzaman<sup>3</sup>  
Abu Hanif<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

*This qualitative study tried to explore what teachers and students understood by assignment; usefulness of assignments as a tool of assessment; the challenges faced by teachers and students during implementing the assignments; and the ways to consider assignments as a tool for assessment even after the Covid-19 pandemic is over. This study utilized a purposive and convenient sample selection process. Five secondary schools were selected conveniently from Dhaka division and it comprised three schools from Dhaka city, a school from Keranigonj, Dhaka and one school from Narsingdi district. These five secondary schools included government, non-government, co-education, and private schools. The researchers carefully chose the schools so that they included rural, urban, boys, girls, and co-education schools. In this study, 10 teachers from each school were selected for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and thus 50 teachers participated in five FGDs. 10 students of class ten from each school were selected for this study and thus the number of students were 50. The head teachers of the five selected schools were interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. Moreover, a curriculum expert and a teacher educator were interviewed with semi-structured interview schedules. Hence the study covered a total of 107 respondents including students, teachers, head teachers, curriculum expert and the teacher educator. Data were analysed thematically and were presented in a descriptive way. The major findings of the study included: teachers and students had fairly good understanding of assignments; assignments were useful during Covid-19 standstill; the major challenges were problem in understanding the assignments, copying from others, getting the assignments done by others, and the readymade assignments were available in the Internet; and assignments could be continued in normal situation by minimizing the number of assignments and giving the school authority responsibility to set the topics and to decide on the number of assignments. Moreover, teachers and the teacher educator suggested to include items such as singing the national anthem and*

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<sup>1</sup> Ranjit Podder, Associate Professor, Govt. Teachers' Training College, Dhaka; Cell: 01818 30 73 48

<sup>2</sup> Sheikh Shahbaz Riad, Associate Professor, Govt. Teachers' Training College, Dhaka; Cell: 01711 93 58 50

<sup>3</sup> Asaduzzaman, Assistant Director (Common Service), NAEM, Ministry of Education; Cell: 01711 26 0564

<sup>4</sup> Mohammad Abu Hanif, Assistant Professor, Govt. Teachers' Training College (women), Mymensingh; Cell: 01721 33 29 74

*other patriotic songs; reciting poems; project work and report writing; presentation through the use of PowerPoint slides; acting and dramatization; delivering speech in Bangla and English; summarizing stories and poems; preparing physical and electronic teaching aids; anchoring a program, etc. as assignments.*

**Keywords:** assignment, assessment, Covid-19, pandemic, challenges

## Introduction

An assignment is a piece of work that is given to someone as part of their job or as a part of a course of study (Longman, 2009). In the educational setting, an assignment is used to enhance and assess students' learning of a certain program. Although assignment is a well-known strategy of teaching, learning, and assessment, in most cases, it is not usually used at the secondary level of education in Bangladesh. However, assignment has been used to engage students in academic activities and to assess students' learning to promote them to the next grades as there was no scope to organize on-campus educational activities and year final examinations due to the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021 academic years. Assignment is a new experience for the secondary school students, teachers, and education administrators in Bangladesh. As it was not possible to assess students on-campus, Bangladesh education authority employed assignments as a tool of assessment to promote students to the next grades. It is worth mentioning that, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) formulated those assignments on different subjects of different grades and provided them to the students as per the directives of the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh.

## Statement of the Problem

Assignments are means of fostering learning and assessing students' progress. Although the secondary curriculum (NCTB, 2012) keeps provision for assignments as a way of learning and a tool for assessment, the researchers' experiences as teacher educators show that assignments are not implemented in most of the institutions. The paper and pencil based examination system dominates the assessment strategies in Bangladesh education. It has some adverse effects on the way to achieving quality education as it drives the learners to take preparation for examinations and for getting better grades, not for learning. Many researchers (e.g. Spann & Kaufman, 2015; Shohamy, 2014; Booth, 2012; Qi, 2005; Wall & Alderson, 1996) have showed the negative impact of examinations on teaching-learning, teachers, and on students. In this regard, Al Amin and Greenwood (2018) stated that this kind of testing creates considerable educational and social pressures. In this system teachers feel pressure to teach what they believe about teaching (Maniruzzaman & Hoque, 2010) and it compels students to memorize answers instead of understanding (Das et al., 2014). Despite all the stated limitations, paper-and-pencil-based assessment system was in practice.

However, the recent Covid-19 pandemic created a new situation where arranging paper-and-pencil-based examinations were not possible during the 2020 and 2021 academic sessions. Therefore, assignments were introduced to assess and promote the students to the next grades.

As these assignments were a new strategy for assessment in Bangladesh secondary schools, it deserve an in-depth study on the implementation of assignments.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. to explore students' and teachers' understanding of assignments
2. to identify the usefulness of assignments as a tool of assessment
3. to identify the challenges in implementing assignments during Covid-19
4. to identify ways to incorporate assignments as a tool for assessment at secondary level of education in Bangladesh

### **Research Methodology**

The current research employed a qualitative methodology as it is possible to go deep into the research problem (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The method used for the study include FGD (Focus group Discussion) and semi-structured interviews.

### **Sample and Participants**

This study utilized a purposive and convenient sample selection process. Five secondary schools were selected from Dhaka division. These schools comprised three schools from Dhaka city; one school from Keranigonj, Dhaka and one school from Narsingdi district.

The reasons for choosing Dhaka division and the schools include the consent of the schools to take part in the research despite Covid-19 restrictions and the communication to and from the schools were easier for the researchers.

These five secondary schools included government, non-government, co-education, and private schools. In this study, 10 teachers from each school were selected for FGD and thus 50 teachers participated in five FGDs. The teachers who taught especially in grades nine and ten were selected. The grade 10 students were selected as they were at the terminal stage of the secondary level. 10 students from each school were selected for FGD. The total number of students was 50. The students were randomly selected through lottery. The head teachers of the five selected schools were interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. In addition, a curriculum expert and a teacher educator were also interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. The curriculum expert was selected as they remain engaged in assignment setting, formulating marking rubric for assessment. Moreover, the teacher educator was chosen as they were considered experts in the pedagogical areas.

### **Tools for Data Collection**

FGD and semi-structured interview guides were the tools for collecting data for this study. FGD guides were used for collecting data from the students and teachers; and semi-structured interview schedules were used for the head teachers, the curriculum experts and the teacher educator respectively.

## Findings and Discussion

To get to the findings, the researchers transcribed the data, coded and categorized them. During coding of the data, the prominent themes came to the surface and the themes were described individually as findings. The followings are the findings of this study:

### Students' and Teachers' Understanding of Assignments

Students' and teachers' understanding regarding assignments were sought through FGD. The students understood assignment as-an innovative work which is written in combination of textbooks' information and own views; a form of homework developed using data from various sources; and the activities that are given by the teacher of a particular subject for student assessment. The students in FGD-1 have expressed their understanding of assignments by saying that assignment is a creative activity that the students prepare by using textbooks and integrating own ideas and thoughts. In the assignments, students have to provide critical analysis or arguments while writing. In this regard, one participant of this group further added, "In writing this assignment, we have to follow the guidelines given by the authority due to which it sharpens our thinking and reasoning ability".

The students in FGD-2 have defined assignment as a kind of homework given by school teachers which they do with the help from various sources including textbooks, the Internet, teachers, friends, and parents. The following quotation proves what they said in this regard:

*The assignment is a kind of homework given to us by our school during the closure of the schools due to corona virus [Covid-19 pandemic] and we prepared and submitted it to school with the help of textbook, Internet, YouTube and our friends.*

(A student of grade ten of FGD-2)

The students in FGD-3 maintained that during Covid-19, when they were confined at home, they were given some activities from their schools on different subjects. Each of the activities was called an assignment. "We have prepared these assignments using the textbooks on different subjects. We have also prepared assignments with help from the Internet, YouTube, etc." claimed the students.

The students in FGD-3 have further described that assignment as a kind of homework for them to do individually. The students in this FGD claimed that they had the experience of doing such small things before as their school used to give them assignments from long time before but the assignments given during Covid-19 were quite large and sometimes difficult to prepare because only textbooks were not enough to prepare them.

The students in FGD-4 also provided similar opinion regarding assignments. They also believed that assignments were a kind of homework which they had to write with the help from the textbooks and the Internet.

The participants in FGD-5 defined assignments as a set of tasks given from the schools. For instance, one participant said, "An assignment is a written work which an individual has to accomplish and submit to schools for grading". The other students supported him.

The researchers tried to explore the perceptions of teachers about assignment through FGD, and their perspectives predominantly contain- assignment is a series of problems

designed to assess students' knowledge, skill and attitudes, and which students solve using a variety of sources in the light of prescribed guidelines; an investigative work involving report writing; creative writing task; etc. The following descriptions and excerpts in this regard elucidate their perception.

The teachers in FGD-1 defined assignment as “a number of questions that students solve at home following the set guidelines and taking help of the textbooks and other resources including the Internet. Assignment is given to assess the students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes”. The teachers have further claimed that assignments require the students to apply higher order skills, that is, students have to exhibit their higher-level thinking ability in preparing the assignments. According to the teachers, assignments could be given to individual students or to a group and the students could be assessed based on their performance in preparing the assignments.

Again the teacher participants in the FGD-1 claimed that assignment is any work assigned to a student to complete within a timeframe and following specific guidelines. According to the teachers, engaging students in some practical activities and assessing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in performing the task could be called an assignment.

The teachers in FGD-2 described assignment as investigative work in which the students have to study on a particular problem and write a report and that report is called an assignment. They further claimed that assignments given during Covid-19 pandemic were to engage students to study as most of the students remained detached from teaching-learning activities because of the closure of the educational institutions. It was expected that students would write analytical essays on the given topics from their textbooks; it was a try to engage the students to read the textbooks so that they could continue their learning.

The teachers in FGD-3 described assignment as a given task to be completed by students where there would be clear touch of creativity in their writings. Assignments were given with a view to assessing the students so that they could be promoted to the next classes. The purposes of the assignments were also to remove the monotony in the confinement at homes.

Teachers in FGD-4 claim that an assignment is a given work which aims at enhancing creativity of the learners and used as a tool for assessment.

The teacher participants in FGD-5 have claimed that assignments are that which students accomplish in a given period of time and following guidelines. Teachers further claimed that assignments could be written, a project work, presentation, or any practical work related to the course.

The data stated above show that the secondary students and the teachers of the study schools have fairly good understanding of assignments; that is, all the students and teachers have fairly clear ideas about assignments. It is worth mentioning that, in two of the study schools, the teachers and the students were aware of the assignments that were being used for continuous assessment much before the Covid-19 pandemic. It indicates that those schools followed the curriculum guidelines to implement assignment as a tool for formative assessment.

## The Usefulness of Assignments

Students, teachers and head masters were asked about the benefit of the assignment through separate FGDs. Each group expressed different views on its benefits. Again, some of them had mixed reactions in this regard. However, the most important aspects of its usefulness that emerged from the discussion with them are enhancing interest in reading textbooks; developing guided writing skills; improving critical thinking skills and creativity; fostering self-confidence; getting used to rigorous study; increasing subject knowledge; being skilled in searching information and educational resources; facilitating effective learning and assessment; and accelerating an effective way of student engagement. However, the data representative of their views on this issue are as follows:

The students in FGD-1 said that their interest in reading the textbooks increased much as they had to read books to complete the assignments. As they had to spend much time in writing the assignments, they had to cut time from computer games. One of the students maintained:

*Our attention to reading increased as we had to write assignments from reading the textbooks and other materials. We could not play computer games as we had to invest much time in reading and writing. We got back to the textbooks as we had to write assignments.*

The students in FGD-2 asserted that they had to study the assignment writing guidelines again and again. Not only that, they had to read the textbooks to write the assignments. One of the students claimed:

*We have studied the assignment guidelines and the textbooks minutely. We have written the assignments at home and we have been much benefited from the reading of the books and the writing of the assignments. The writing of the assignments gave us a sense that we are moving forward.*

The students in FGD-3 said that they felt the flavor of going to school after a long time when they started to write the first assignment. They claimed:

*We gained knowledge through preparing the assignment as the school was closed due to Covid-19 pandemic. We came across new educational thoughts while doing the assignments. We were able to think creatively and critically. Assignments were good things.*

The students in FGD-4 maintained that they were not interested in studies during Covid-19 pandemic; they were passing time by playing games on the computers. They claimed that by studying to prepare the assignments, they learnt a lot. They further claimed that assignment writing gave them confidence to read, write, and think independently. Assignment compelled them to go back to the textbooks after a long time.

Similar voice was echoed in FGD-5 students. They also claimed that assignments were very good at the beginning but later on, they became useless because of many number of assignments. They were under pressure and they tried to minimize workload by getting the assignments done by parents or house tutors or by copying from the Internet or from friends.

During the FGDs with secondary school teachers, they expressed their mixed reactions regarding assignments. Teachers in FGD-1 claimed that assignment certainly had positive aspects in developing students' subject knowledge. Teachers believed that it was impossible for students to write assignments without reading the textbooks and other materials. Therefore, reading books and other resources minutely would make the learners knowledgeable.

The teachers in FGD-2 focused on the value of student assessment through the assignments. One of the teachers claimed where others supported him:

*Assignment can be used to test students' progress in a particular subject or at least in a chapter. So, our opinion on the assignment is that giving assignment is a positive step. As a result of assignment preparation, the students can have a clear idea about the topic or subject matter of the assignment.*

The teachers in FGD-3 viewed, assignment as a different method of assessment. In the traditional approach, claimed the teachers, they assess students through written examinations. According to them, assignment is a different way of assessing students' progress. They alleged:

*Writing an assignment is different from the conventional method of writing in the examinations. The purpose of the assignment is to make sure that they (students) have acquired the subject matter well through intensive and extensive reading. Through assignment writing, skills and level of knowledge of learners improve gradually.*

The teachers in FGD-4 have maintained that assignments are useful but the way they (assignments) are being prepared is not doing any good to the students because many students are reported to plagiarize in the assignments. One teacher maintained:

*The sad thing was that many students copied their friends' assignments or got them prepared by their parents or house tutors. Readymade answers are also available in the Internet. We do not have time to read and evaluate each and every assignment. So, we are not sure who plagiarize.*

The teacher participants in FGD-5 have maintained that the assignments are useful and they can be continued even when Covid-19 pandemic is over. However, the number of assignments should be reduced and the areas of assignments should be widened. One of the teachers in FGD-5 proposed poster and teaching aids preparation, reading and summarizing, recitation, dramatization, etc. as assignments.

Like the students and the teachers, the head teachers also gave their opinion about the usefulness of assignments. Their opinions in this regard were mostly positive. For instance, head teacher-1 claimed:

*Students started to study during Covid-19 closure because of the assignments. Before giving the assignments, they were passing idle time confined at home. They had to read textbooks and other resources to prepare the assignments. They got something to do while they were confined at home because of the epidemic.*

Head teacher-2 spoke highly of the assignments. According to him, assignments were very effective at the beginning but later on it lost its worth. He maintained:

*Assignments were adopted as a very effective learning tool when the students were living in complete panic during Covid-19 pandemic and were far away from learning by being disconnected from their teachers as well as friends. We received reports from the guardians that their children got addicted to mobile games and they remained awake till the morning and slept until 2/3 p.m. Those behaviours seemed abnormal to the guardians.*

Head teacher-3 viewed assignment as an effective way to engage students when they were away from academic study. He claimed:

*Assignments emerged as an effective method of learning and assessment when students were completely away from studies due to Covid-19 pandemic. As a head teacher, I see this approach as positive; students were also interested to be reconnected with schools as well as the textbooks.*

Head teacher-4 claimed that assignments were considered to be an effective method at a time when education system came to a standstill as a result of adverse effect of Covid-19 pandemic. He maintained:

*Assignment was an effective approach when our education system, like the rest of the world, was completely disrupted due to Covid-19 pandemic. Assignments were able to bring back the students to study. As a head teacher, I firmly believe that assignments have positive effect on students. I think assignments are effective in developing students' creativity and critical thinking skills.*

Head teacher-5 has maintained that assignments are very useful to develop students' intellectual ability. But he further claimed that for some reasons, these good efforts were being hampered because of unethical practice of the learners.

The data stated above show that assignments are effective to develop students' knowledge and academic writing skills. It emerged from the interviews and the FGDs that assignments are good learning and assessment tools. It has also been revealed that because of load of assignments, most of the students plagiarize in preparing their assignments. Teachers, too did not have much time to read all the assignments for assessment and evaluation too. The negative aspects of preparing assignments should be minimized to have better results.

## **Challenges to Implementing Assignments during Covid-19 Pandemic**

Assignments were appreciated by teachers and students during interviews and the FGDs. However, they mentioned some challenges to implementing the assignments. The challenges were disclosed during interviews with the head teachers, FGDs with the teachers and the students. Head teacher-1 claimed:

*Distributing the assignments to the students during Covid-19 was a big challenge. It was very difficult to contact all the students. My colleagues made arrangements to send the assignments to students through parents, and in many cases by students of the same locality.*

Head teacher-2 alleged that understanding the assignment was a big challenge at the beginning. He maintains:

*Some of the learners and their guardians were not able to understand what to do and how to write the assignments. We arranged Zoom Meeting with the students having Internet connections and devices to clarify the assignments but those having no Internet contacted the teachers (teachers also used to call the students who could not be reached otherwise) over mobile phones. In some cases, we invited the guardians to schools to collect the assignments.*

Head teacher-3 mentioned that most of the students could not maintain deadline. The teachers had to call students over phone asking the students to submit the assignments. Head teacher-3 disclosed:

*Maintaining the deadline for submitting assignments for most of students was a big challenge at the very beginning although the situation improved gradually. There was another problem which was students' involvement in plagiarism. They started to copy the assignments from the Internet or from other sources such as copying the friends' writing, getting the assignments written by guardians and private tutors, etc.*

Head teacher-4 asserted that there was lack of creativity practice in the later assignments. He claimed that assignments worked as stimuli at the beginning but later on it became a vain exercise. He regretted:

*Later on, students started to copy assignments from the Internet and submit them for grading. Readymade assignments available in the Internet were a big challenge to engage students in creativity practices. Teachers, too, in many cases did not have opportunity to read and identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing.*

Head teacher-5 appreciated the assignment method of teaching and assessment. However, he mentioned some challenges. He alleged:

*Examining the assignments properly and then preserving them was a big challenge. Students submitted anything in the name of assignments; they lowered their moral standard in writing the assignments. This cannot be allowed to run. Moreover, if the teachers do not provide feedback, what is the use of writing the assignments?*

The teachers in FGD-1 claimed that many students did not understand what they needed to write and how to write them. They alleged that some students submitted the assignments like an application to the head teacher. They used to write in the cover page, "To the head teacher, --- High School, ---". Most of the students wrote assignments with the help from the Internet.

The teachers in FGD-2 claimed that, students became tired of writing assignments as they had to write for a longer period of time. Teachers claimed that they tried to motivate them but because of huge number of assignments, the students became lethargic.

The teachers in FGD-3 alleged that some students became face book addicted; most of the students used to play games on the mobile phones or on the computers instead of searching for resources. One of them revealed:

*The parents complained that their children grew addiction to mobile or computer games in the name of searching the answers of the assignments. This addiction kept them awake for longer period of time at night.*

Teachers in FGD-4 alleged that the difficulty level of some assignments were higher than the students' level. The teachers claimed that sometimes they themselves did not understand what was to be written. They claimed:

*Some of the given assignments were higher than the level of learners. As a result, learners were in a fix regarding how to write the assignment. It was sometimes impossible to clarify as we were not well-connected with students. So, learners were bound to find answer from the Internet, face book, and YouTube from where readymade assignments were downloadable.*

The participants in FGD-5 expressed similar opinions as FGD-4. They were worried about the way the students wrote the assignments. According to them, students' learning is close to zero if they copy and submit the assignments.

The students in FGD-1 alleged that the number of assignments was too many to finish in the allotted time. The students said, "The number of assignments was big and some assignments were difficult to understand".

The students in FGD-2 also claimed that the assignments were very difficult. They maintained:

*We could not find the answers of some of the assignments from the textbooks. It was difficult to understand the question of the assignments and answers were not available in the textbooks. Moreover, there was no time to do so many assignments!*

The students in FGD-3 also alleged that they did not understand some of the assignments mostly because the assignments were new to them. They claimed:

*Assignment was new to us as some of the assignments were given from chapters that we did not read or teachers did not discuss. That was a problem for us all. Why did the authority give us assignments from the chapters our teachers did not teach us? Moreover, it is difficult to prepare assignments simultaneously with the classes and home work.*

The students in FGD-4 complained regarding the number of assignments. According to them, the numbers of assignments were too many to be able to meet the deadline. They, like the students in FGD-3, did not understand the assignments. They claimed:

*We could not concentrate on other activities when doing the assignments. Our eyes hurt and there were physical problems because of sitting at a place for a long time to finish the assignments.*

The students in FGD-5 claimed that although they liked the assignments at the beginning, it had become a kind of torture for them later on because of the pressure of writing consecutive assignments. The students requested the researchers not give so many assignments when the schools run normally after Covid-19 pandemic. They requested the researchers to inform the government about their demand.

The challenges, teachers and the students mentioned, seem valid. Therefore, the education authority need to try to minimize the challenges related to plagiarism and the number of assignments. There is no provision for giving feedback on students' writing; moreover, the number of students in a single class is a big problem. That is, one of the reasons why teachers do not provide feedback to students' writing that would be helpful for students' development. In this respect it is worth mentioning that most of the teachers are poor in providing appropriate feedback and assessment skill. In this regard Farhana et al. (2020) from a study at secondary level claimed that teachers lacked training on implementing assignments as well as assessment.

However, the researchers believe that despite challenges, the assignments benefitted the students much during Covid-19 pandemic at secondary level of education in Bangladesh. The researchers' belief is supported by Maison et al. (2020) where the positive influence of assignments on students of Physics Education at Jambi University, Indonesia was 72%.

### Considering Assignments as a Tool for Assessment at Secondary Level

Although no literature was available about how assignments influence the secondary students, Maison et al. (2020) confirmed the positive impact of assignments on tertiary students. The Bangladesh secondary teachers, too, revealed in the FGDs that assignments could be used as an assessment tool if some challenges are minimized to have the positive result of the assignments.

#### **The teachers in FGD-1 claimed:**

*Alongside the traditional assessment strategies, assignments can be used as a tool for assessment but there should be check-bulb to identify if the assignments are authentic or not. There should be proper measures taken so that the students cannot cheat in preparing the assignments.*

The teachers in FGD-2 maintained that too many assignments would confine the students at home and that would hamper their physical and mental wellbeing. A small number of assignments could be effective to nurture creativity of the students.

The teachers in FGD-3 have claimed that if a small number of assignments are continued to check students learning and understanding after the Covid-19 pandemic is over, that would be effective. They claimed:

*If the assignment is taken as a tool for evaluation on a regular basis, some aspects need to be considered such as giving a small number of assignments, assignments must be based on the textbook topics, and assignments should be on topics that interest the students. Again, it must be ensured that the learners themselves are preparing the assignments.*

The participants in FGD-4 claimed that assignments can be incorporated with the other strategies for assessment. But according to them, the number of assignment should be less as students have to do other tasks when the schools run in full swing. Moreover, according to the participants, there should be arrangement to provide feedback to the students' writing before final submission for grading as this feedback and students' edits improve students' intellectual level and writing ability.

The participants in FGD-5 asked the authority to include some other activities as assignments. They suggested that, poster and teaching aids preparation, reading books and summarizing, recitation, dramatization, etc. to be treated as assignments.

The data collected from teachers and the students were similar; they talked in the similar tone. Students in FGD-1 alleged that assignments during Covid-19 pandemic were good to engage themselves in learning activities but then after some months, the schools started to function normally. Then, assignments became a burden for them. They demanded, “Assignments should be stopped now as the schools are going to start in full swing”.

The students in FGD-2 claimed that it was very difficult for them to write assignments when schools are functioning after Covid-19 pandemic as they have to spend the whole day in the school and then they have to write assignments at home.

The students in FGD-3 echoed the same voice. They asked the authority to stop assignments or to give them easier and small number of assignments. They suggested that assignments could be given when the schools are closed for a longer period of time.

The students in FGD-4 demanded that they did not want any more assignments as the schools are organizing regular activities. According to them, assignments are good but they need much time to prepare an assignment. So, they can be given when schools are out of session for 5/6 days or more. One student claimed:

*During the pandemic, to focus on the textbook assignments was important but now that the school is open, I don't think it's necessary. Assignments have lost their importance.*

The students in FGD-5 have maintained that assignments can be there, but they should be given from their books or from areas related to their life. The school teachers should set the assignments; they should not be given by any other organizations. They claimed that there were some assignments that even their teachers did not understand!

The curriculum expert expressed his views by saying that assignment is a good way to develop students' intellectual ability and academic writing skills. However, according to him, the students and the teachers must go through a rigorous process. In that process, students would study intensively to write a particular assignment and the teachers would provide positive feedback for students' development. Teachers' corrective feedback and the learners' edits before final submission for grading benefit the both.

The teacher educator, too, appreciated the inclusion of assignment as assignment writing improves intellectual ability of the students and improves their academic writing skills which are required in the tertiary education as well as in practical life. However, the number of assignments should be less and there should be variation in the assignment activities. Alongside written assignments, the teacher educator mentioned some other activities that can be included as assignments. He mentioned that singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs; reciting poems; delivering speech in Bangla and English; oral presentation through using Power Point slides; acting and dramatization; working in the garden, growing plants and describing the activities; preparing different teaching-learning aids; rearing fowls; and similar other items can be treated as assignments.

The teacher educator further emphasized on teacher training for providing effective feedback on the students' writing and assignments assessment. He said:

*However, for proper implementation of the assignments, teachers should be provided with training so that they can provide appropriate feedback on the students' writing and can assess the assignments based on the rubric.*

He (teacher educator) additionally maintained that plagiarism may be reduced if assignments are completed at one sitting in the schools. Books can be allowed to write the assignments but the assignment writing should be proctored until the assignment is completed.

The above data show that assignment can be used as a tool for assessment but the number of assignments should be less. Besides, the area of assignments should be expanded. For example: alongside written assignments, singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs; reciting poems; delivering speech in Bangla and English; reading books and oral presentation through using Power Point slides; acting and dramatization; working in the garden and growing plants; and similar other items can be included as assignments. Although the students spoke somewhat negative about assignment, it is believed that if the stated items are included, the students will take part in those activities happily and their real learning will happen.

### **Summary of the Major Findings**

- The teachers and the students have fairly good understanding of assignments.
- All the respondents (head teachers, assistant teachers, students, curriculum experts, and the teacher educators) supported assignments as useful for learners' intellectual development and assessment.
- Initially, the challenge was to reach the assignments to students. But later on new challenges emerged. The major challenge was plagiarism. Later on, most of the students copied friends' assignments or they copied from the Internet. As a result, the learners' morality degraded much and their learning was minimal. Moreover, the students grew addiction to mobile/computer games. Another challenge was lack of feedback opportunity. If teachers cannot provide feedback on students' writing, students will not be much benefitted from the assignments.
- Assignments can be continued in secondary level institutions. But before that, the following things should be considered:
  - The number of assignments should be minimized.
  - Plagiarism in assignments should be strictly checked.
  - Sources where readymade assignments are available must be banned /restricted!
  - Students can be engaged in assignment writing during the school hours and the textbooks and reference books can be allowed. However, it should be proctored.

- New items such as memorizing and singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs, recitation, reading books and summarizing, acting and dramatization, Bangla and English speech, video editing, organizing workshops, planting in the garden, taking care of them, and writing the growth of the plant, etc. can be included as assignments
- According to the teacher educator, teachers must provide written feedback on each assignment. If necessary, teachers will arrange face to face oral feedback.

## Recommendations

The followings recommendations are made from the study:

- In order to maintain the quality of assignments, almost all the categories of respondents in this study expressed their opinion about reducing the number of assignments. Researchers also think that the number of assignments needs to be judiciously minimized.
- Available sources where readymade assignments are available should be banned. Measures should be taken so that plagiarism can be stopped. The teacher educator suggested creating provision for one-sitting open book and on-campus assignment writing in order to avoid unethical activities.
- Alongside description, there must have some opportunities for higher order thinking in the assignments. Scopes should be created for critical thinking.
- It is emerged from the opinion of students and teachers that one of the major challenges faced by the students in the implantation of the assignments was the problem in understanding some of the assignments. Therefore, the assignments should be in easy language so that almost all the students and the teachers easily understand them. Moreover, schools can be given the responsibility to set the assignment titles considering the level of ability of their students.
- To make the assignment more effective and meaningful, the suggestions from the teachers and the teacher educator can be seriously considered. According to them, assignments should cover a variety of activities related to affective development and psychomotor skills such as planting and taking care of the plants; memorizing and singing the national anthem, and other patriotic songs; reciting poems; delivering speech in Bangla and English; reading books and summarizing; organizing workshops; acting and dramatization; video editing; and many similar assignments can be chosen.

## Implications

The policy makers and the education planners, especially NCTB, can ponder upon the recommendations regarding how to implement the suggestions. If the recommendations can be implemented, it is hoped that there would be positive changes in the area of learning and assessment.

## Conclusion

The study explored what teachers and students understood by assignment; usefulness of assignments as a tool of assessment; quality of the assignments given by DSHE; the challenges to implementing the assignments; and the ways to consider assignments as a tool of assessment even after the Covid-19 is over. The major findings of the study included teachers and students had fairly good understanding of assignments; assignments were useful during Covid-19 standstill; the assignments lacked higher order thinking opportunity; the major challenges were understanding the assignments, copying from form others, getting the assignments done by others, assignments were available in the Internet; and assignments can be continued in normal situation by minimizing the number of assignments and giving the school authority responsibility to set the titles of the assignments.

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## Performance Analysis of Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC): Ensuring Quality Higher Education in Bangladesh

Jannatul Ferdous<sup>1</sup>  
Md. Foyjul-Islam<sup>2</sup>  
Munmun Muhury<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*In today's knowledge-based and competitive world, a country like Bangladesh must have access to high-quality higher education if it is to succeed. A project with the financial help of the World Bank was run by the University Grants Commission, which is in charge of making sure that all the public and private universities have an "Institutional Quality Assurance Cell" (IQAC). The primary mission of IQAC is to ensure a quality management mindset among the students of the universities. The fundamental objective of this research is to learn about the present situation of higher education. Using a qualitative research design, this study attempted to examine the current situation of Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) functioning at higher educational institutions in Bangladesh, to recognize the IQAC's current challenges in improving higher education, and to determine how to address the IQAC's problems for improving the quality of higher education. Some of the key results include that IQAC has some considerable hurdles in its attempts to enhance educational quality, such as a lack of autonomy within the program or department since the majority of decisions are centralized. Infrastructure is deficient or unsatisfactory. Students are not permitted to use research facilities. There is a deficiency in terms of strategy or activity for continual improvement, visible government efforts are being made to encourage academics to pursue their study/continue their studies. There is no foundation training provided for new teachers also found. Students who are being graduated from the science faculty are facing insufficient access to adequate laboratory facilities. Additionally, IT resources are inadequate. The university's primary objective must be the advancement of research and the creation of new opportunities. Additionally, the authorities should promote practical instruction above theoretical education and should take measures to eliminate the use of conventional note systems in the process of practical learning. The curriculum should be changed regularly to reflect the passage of time. The university's primary objective must be the advancement of research and the creation of new opportunities.*

**Keywords:** performance, quality, IQAC, university, education, SDG.

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1 Jannatul Ferdous, Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Comilla University, Cumilla-3506, Bangladesh.  
2 Md. Foyjul-Islam, Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Comilla University, Cumilla-3506, Bangladesh.  
3 Munmun Muhury, Teacher Trainer, NAEM, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205

## Introduction

Education is responsible for the overall growth of a nation. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) of UNDP emphasizes the significance of quality education in improving sustainable and resilient communities and how it leads to all other SDGs (Karim, 2020). Education aims to impart specific values and strengthen people's capacity to deal with environmental and development issues in any country (Islam, 2008). The essence and quality of higher education play a significant role in the growth of modern societies. Consequently, higher education's job is to prepare capably informed and foresighted individuals to take on various higher responsibilities (Monem & Baniamin, 2010). Quality higher education is undoubtedly a crucial component of the growth of a nation like Bangladesh. It must be achieved to thrive in today's knowledge-based and competitive world. The quality of education is the most critical factor in ensuring that individuals keep current on the newest advancements in all topics and areas of life. Bangladesh, classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC), can only close the wealth gap with developed global economies by using the information gained by university graduates (Momin, 2016). Bangladesh currently has 46 public and 105 private universities (UGC, 2020). The economy must develop knowledgeable and capable leaders, businesses, investors, and skilled workers (Tasnima, 2008). Ensuring the achievement of the MDGs' primary objectives, it now seems relatively simple to meet the indicators of the SDGs by 2030 since Bangladesh is becoming a middle-income nation by 2021 and a developed country by 2041. However, it is not as straight forward as it seems. There is the possibility of several domestic and international obstacles to fulfilling the SDGs and its indicators, adopted by the UN in 2015 and ratified by the 193-member states. Bangladesh also will encounter several difficulties. To fulfil the development milestone of 2030 in Bangladesh via quality education, one of the problems is assuring the quality of education at the institutions dedicated to higher education. Despite studies and conclusions on enhancing the quality of education, nothing has been discovered concerning institutional constraints in this area. Academics, education experts, and other stakeholders agree that the quality of higher education in Bangladesh has deteriorated in some areas over the last two decades.

## The Rationale of the Study

Bangladesh's higher education system is currently facing several problems with deep roots and connections to each other. Insufficient enabling climate for improving teaching and inquiry efficiency, weak control and transparency, ineffective arrangement and management ability, and inadequate financial support are just a few. The lack of a large academic culture exacerbates all of these issues. Most nations with a long-term perspective have realized that education, in general, and high-quality higher education, are essential for overall development. They are dedicating a significant portion of government resources to improve educational institutions and pushing the private sector to do so. Bangladesh will continue to fall behind in the world economy if it does not follow suit. To do a critical self-analysis of their programs and institutions' abilities, the different institutions must implement ways to ensure they provide the best service possible. Higher education with high quality prepares individuals for a knowledge-based economy while also stimulating creativity and innovation. Universities must

guarantee that education meets worldwide quality standards and is academically and socially conscious of 21st-century realities. Higher education institutions must enable graduates to find employment in a globalized society on an equal footing.

Regrettably, for Bangladesh, higher education has been stagnant for a long time. Naturally, the lack of care has led to a significant drop in higher education quality, especially in teaching and research. This drop happened when higher education faced problems like more students, less money, and the loss of academic talent (Momin, 2016). Bangladesh's current government has set out to achieve the visual pathway of becoming a middle-income country by 2021 by implementing "Vision 2021," then reaching the development crossroads by 2030 by implementing "SDGs 2030," and becoming a developed nation by 2041 by implementing "Vision 2041," also known as Bangladesh's Perspective Plan 2041.

The government is projected to complete the main development agenda in 2030, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. It is also expected that if the SDGs are met by 2030, the government will be able to move forward with the long-awaited "Vision 2041." The GOB and the World Bank have generously supported the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) to achieve the goal of quality education. With the assistance of project officials and the World Bank, the University Grants Commission meticulously implemented it.

Developing quality assurance systems is one of the essential aspects of HEQEP. The IQAC Operation Manual (IQACOM) lays out procedures and guidelines to ensure that the IQAC runs smoothly. Its goal is to improve teaching, learning, and research in Bangladesh's higher education institutions. In these conditions, the current study will help evaluate the IQAC success of public and private universities. This research is vital for many reasons:

1. This study will add to the obtainable body of knowledge by providing new literature on quality education, particularly quality components and structures, prepared for IQAC. Quality higher education is needed to succeed in the era of globalization. In this situation, the researcher would look into how IQAC affects the quality of higher education in Bangladesh's public and private universities.
2. The study's results would help education policymakers develop potential interventions for IQAC and higher education in Bangladesh.
3. The study would include an effective implementation strategy for improving the IQAC and the standard of higher education in Bangladesh.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The primary goal of this study is to learn about the current state of university higher education. The study's other specific goals are as follows:

- a) to explore the present status of activity of the Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) at public and private universities;
- b) to recognize the contemporary challenges of IQAC in enhancing higher education; and
- c) to find out how to address the IQAC's problems in improving higher education quality.

## Methodology of the Study

Methodological considerations for the research are discussed in this section. To meet the study goals, we used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods are used to address questions about experiences, meaning, comprehension, and perspective, most frequently from the participant's perspective (Hammarberg et al., 2016), whereas the quantitative approach is the systematic examination of observable phenomena using mathematical, numerical, or data-driven techniques (Given, 2008). As a result, the findings would be interpreted using qualitative data.

## Sampling

In purposive sampling, definite units are taken purposefully as per the judgment of the researcher. Here, the critical effort of the researcher is to make the selection representative. However, this technique followed a small sample but was highly representative (Aminuzzaman, 2011b). Targeted respondents' manageable sample size for interview purposes in the four universities (two public and two private). Based on gender, faculty duration spending in the institution, and institutional affiliation, 80 participants were selected for the Key Informant Interview (KII). Eight case studies and four Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were chosen to complete the study. There were 8 respondents for FGD.

## Tools of Data Collection

Several data-gathering technologies will utilize to acquire primary data. The study targeted a manageable sample size of respondents in the four universities for interview. The structured interview technique was chosen to collect data for this study, and it is the best way to do qualitative research because it can get participants to give detailed answers to questions about the study. Second, face-to-face in-depth interviews with 80 KII (Key Informant Interview) participants would be conducted. Eight case studies and four Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were also conducted. Finally, the researcher incorporated study course materials, associated papers, and websites to aid with comprehension. Each organization conducted one focus group to collect a large amount of data used as a foundation for several data sources to validate the survey findings.

**Table 1:**

*Criteria and Number of Respondents*

Method of Data Collection	Criteria	Number of Respondents
Key Informant Interview (KII)	officials, teachers, and director/ additional director of IQAC	20 from each institution (Total 80)
Case Study	officials, teachers, and director/ additional director of IQAC	2 from each institution (Total 8)
Focused Group Discussion (FGD)	officials, teachers, and director/ additional director of IQAC	8 from each institution (total 32)

## Conceptual Framework

It is regarded that study without the need for a conceptual framework makes it difficult for readers to find the scholarly point and underlying components of the researcher's argument. As a result, a conceptual framework is a design that the investigator feels may explain the natural course of the phenomenon under investigation (Camp, 2001). The conceptual framework of this research, on the other hand, is described in the next section.

## Quality

When discussing educational quality, it is essential to reflect on what is meant by the word quality, since various professions, such as educators, researchers, and politicians, interpret this phrase significantly (Ashraf et al., 2007). Quality is a multi-faceted concept. It's also a matter of perspective. People's perceptions of quality can differ. A variety of factors determines it. The word "quality" comes from the Latin word "qualities," which refers to a thing's level of excellence (Oxford Dictionary, 2003).

## Quality Assurance

Various quality assurance papers demonstrate internal and external quality assurance methods. Internal quality assurance refers to the process by which an educational institution guarantees the quality of its product inside its intra-organizational structure. Whenever national-level institutional rules and procedures are employed in quality assurance, this is referred to as the external process of higher learning. In the case of higher education, every institution has rules and processes in place to ensure the quality of instruction (Rabbani & Chowdhury, 2014).

## Previous Works on the Issue of Quality Education

Following articles and books have been appraised for this study, but no one has a comprehensive impression of our research issue.

During the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh, Genilo (2021) recounts the involvement of institutional quality assurance cells (IQACs) in implementing the University Grants Commission (UGC) instruction to convert to online education. It emphasizes the government's efforts to provide high-quality education, notably via the use of IQACs in public and private institutions. The article begins with the country's pandemic scenario, followed by the government's general actions, including its directions on the execution of higher education.

IQACs seem to have aided in the transition to fully online learning during the pandemic era. Governance, teaching and learning, and student support services were among the areas where universities reacted to the crisis. The IQACs (with the support of other university units) surveyed their staff and students on their access to the Internet, financial issues, and mental health status to help guide policy development. From there, they established academic regulations (attendance, student evaluation, and online teaching), performed capacity development activities, assessed faculty performance, formulated student online behavior rules, and urged participants to trust the online system.

Ehsan (2008) wants to know whether our current tertiary education system is providing excellent education to turn our young into productive human resources. The study claims that the present higher education system is failing to develop qualified human resources, resulting in poorer returns to the economy, using qualitative social research methodologies and information from multiple secondary sources. There has undoubtedly been numeric growth in tertiary education; nonetheless, the quality of that education has been a source of concern. The crisis did not occur as a result of a lack of proper policy framework, but rather as a result of its implementation. This study makes a modest recommendation for the government of Bangladesh to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations contained in the main policy equipment connected to training and education, as well as a significant increase in public financing for the tertiary education sector.

According to Sawant (2016), IQAC's primary role is to start, organize, and oversee different actions that are required to improve the quality of education provided at an institution or university. Because the role of IQAC in sustaining quality standards in education, learning, and assessment is critical, the current study is conducted on a smaller scale to identify the actual state and functioning of IQAC, as well as its results.

## Analytical Framework

Higher education has a big potential to help underdeveloped nations become more prosperous. In modern times, higher education ought to be standard, well-being, and feasible growth-focused. The purpose of this essay is to look at Bangladesh's higher education system, with an emphasis on quality and accessibility (Ferdous & Islam, 2019). According to the literature review, there is a void in previous works exploring the current status of institutional quality assurance cells (IQAC) operating in public and private universities. Table 2 reveals the conceptual structure for conducting the proposed research.

**Table 2:**

### *Analytical Framework*

Independent Variable	Measuring Indicators	Measuring Techniques	Dependent Variable
Governance Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Management</li> <li>• Program Management</li> <li>• Academic Documentation</li> <li>• Peer Observation &amp; Feedback Process</li> <li>• Internal Quality Assurance Process</li> </ul>	KII, FGD, Case Study, Observation	Performance of IQAC in Public and Private Universities
Human Resource Management Quality (Teacher and Staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching Learning and Assessment (Teaching quality maintenance)</li> <li>• Career management</li> <li>• Skill Development</li> <li>• Research Facilities</li> <li>• Physical Facilities</li> </ul>	KII, FGD, Case Study	
Student Quality Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum Design &amp; Review</li> <li>• Student admission requirements, admission process, progress, and accomplishments</li> <li>• Physical Facilities Support</li> <li>• Student Support Services (co-curricular)</li> </ul>	KII, FGD, Case Study	

*Source: Researchers' synthesis.*

The study is an attempt by the researchers to determine the current state of quality, with a particular emphasis on IQAC results. The research would be helpful in the areas of high-quality education, problem detection, and potential solutions.

## Analysis, Discussion, and Findings

Several variables were chosen based on the theoretical review to examine the link between the dependent and independent variables. The research made several assumptions about these characteristics and attempted to evaluate them empirically via data analysis. For this, the performance of the IQAC is regarded as the dependent variable, and this variable is partially explanatory since it allows for the derivation of other components other than the standard idea created in the past. Additionally, to ascertain the most relevant aspects affecting IQAC's performance.

## **KII Findings of the Study**

A total of 80 KIIs have been conducted in the selected university. The KII's findings are organized around participants' responses, and the following topics represent the finding of all KII Participants.

### **Lack of Financial Support**

The budget has not been met as per the requirement. Financial management at public institutions relies entirely on UGC funding, and private universities depend on their sources. Students cannot be assessed due to a staff shortage because there is no research cell or equipment lab and cannot maintain quality due to the lack of money; specific research training programs are not executed. It is struggling to improve its university education. IQAC does not have sufficient funding to cope with its financial management.

### **Inefficient Program Management**

According to the participants, the institution lacks the requisite space to host IQAC seminars and events. The meeting space is limited. Everyone cannot be trained at the same time. Participants do not attend online classes or training; thus, there is not enough way to get feedback. Resource Person is challenging to manage. It is necessary to deal with structural issues. Because of the inefficiency of the financial resources, practical training is impossible.

### **Unsuitable Peer Observation & Feedback Process**

Peer observation has not been developed yet. It was unable to collect input because of covid-19. The peer observation and feedback process are managed by IQAC; however, they don't have enough observable activities. They have recently started working at the institution, and their management has yet to be assessed. Peer observation is yet to be developed in all departments.

### **Inflexible Teaching Learning and Assessment**

There are insufficient resources and facilities available to the students. The library, classrooms, and seminars are ineffective. Political, geographical, and economic factors are inefficient, and inappropriate environments during class time could also be a matter of concern. Teachers are committed to delivering their efforts and services each semester, but they are limited in their ability to do so. There are a limited number of shift-based class lectures and study tools. During the Pandemic, they struggled to conduct assessments. Since the class tests were conducted late, the curriculum is being put under pressure on students at the end of the semester.

### **Poor Career Management**

All students do not get adequate support from the university, although they have done their best. The departments have a limited number of students. The fragmented seminars are being held at the university but are not well-coordinated. Career management programs are available, but they are not sufficient to compete in the current job market. Only the BBA, Law,

English, and CSE departments organize many seminars and courses to ensure a successful job after graduation. “The promotions and increments, i.e. career growth, are slow,” one of the participants said. “They do it informally, but there is no definite process.” In the institutions, M. Phil and PhD degrees are not offered. There is no university replacement unit.

### **Insufficient Skill Development**

Students are more interested in extracurricular activities such as debating society, language clubs, and sports clubs. Co-curriculum programs, on the other hand, have a lower participation rate. “Our university’s instructors are actively participating in skill development-related activities,” one faculty member said. They are also actively participating in academic conferences in various areas of the globe, in addition to attending 30-40% of in-house seminars and training.” Because of a lack of funds and equipment, there is a low level of participation. There is no adequate skill development program in place.

### **Poor Research Facilities**

Students do not have access to an extensive research facility. The teacher is the one who performs the research activities. “The university can combine research facilities for the teachers,” one of the professors stated, “but it is at a minimal level.” It has just recently begun to provide the service, and it is unsatisfactory. There is no setting in which the study can take place. Research-based skills are not widely featured in the academic curriculum. Only a tiny percentage of students participate in research, and only a few collaborate with professors—insufficient ability to establish an atmosphere conducive to the differentiation of research facilities. Because of budget constraints, research facilities are limited, yet students are eager to participate in research.

### **Lack of Sufficient Physical Facilities**

There aren’t enough accommodation options for students. It was impossible to assure a balanced food supply. The primary difficulties include inadequate research facilities, the absence of a Guest House, an Auditorium, and sufficient classroom space. Physical facilities are insufficient since practice is not extensively exercised on the campus. Medical services are inadequate for the student’s needs, and there is no vital network infrastructure, seminar rooms, auditorium, or multimedia classroom and department. The classroom doesn’t have a lot of space, and there aren’t enough places for namaz.

### **Traditional Curriculum Design & Review**

Every three years, the syllabus is generally reviewed. Initiatives to collaborate with Alumni experts on the need for a new curriculum have not been taken. According to UGC norms, IQAC must modify the syllabus and create the curriculum. Our instructor performs it regularly and in a professional manner. The behavior curriculum is in place, although it may improve it. Within six months, we will complete the semester, and the work is ongoing to create a UGC-directed OBE curriculum over two years. The departments examine the curriculum

every two years, although it is very conventional. Universities were unable to organize an event in the case of a pandemic.

### **Lack of Physical Facilities Support**

Participants are dissatisfied owing to various factors, including a lack of a research lab, financial constraints, teacher shortages, and a lack of a standard facility and no prayer room for girls. A gym, a central field, a badminton court, and a volleyball court are all available. There is a housing shortage. There is a transportation issue, and we don't have enough hostel space. The university does not adequately meet the student's demands.

### **Lack of Student Support Services (Co-Curricular)**

Some co-curricular activities organizations work towards this on the university campus. Many stage dramas from other departments, as well as a debating club, are all part of the cultural program. Various special days are observed, and the university maintains the cultural activities of its initiatives. Multiple groups, including theatre, engage in cultural events. Although the departmental culture week is taking place, the sponsor cannot organize the cultural program. Due to a lack of funding, the co-curricular activities are seldom extensively attended.

### **FGD Findings**

A total of four focus group discussions (FGD) were performed by interviewing individuals from a particular university. The results of the FGDs are summarized based on the responses of the participants, and the FGDs' overall findings are as follows:

Most of the participants said that the peer observation and feedback process are managed by the IQAC, which has no public activity. They are still unable to engage them regularly, causing the peer-learning process to be delayed. It is possible that stakeholders' views are not being considered and assessed by the appropriate agency. There is a lack of autonomy within the program or department. They added that infrastructure facilities are substandard, and students do not have access to research facilities. A continuous improvement strategy or activity is absent. For new instructors, there is no foundation training available. IT resources are insufficient, among other things. The opportunities for recruiting high-calibre candidates are narrowing due to the high degree of political consideration. Adequate resources, poor infrastructure, political activity of the teacher, and partisan politics all contribute to IQAC's underwhelming overall performance. The participants also found insufficient financing and the unwillingness of necessary parties to cooperate. Faculty and students are demotivated. Students struggle to find interest in studying, and inadequate infrastructure in educational institutions is a significant problem. Instructor-to-student ratio and teacher motivation are essential considerations, and this is a continual process that has made several steps in the direction of future career management from time to time. Over the academic year, the university provides seminars and training, but this is not enough to support their career management plans.

## **Case Study Findings**

A total of eight cases have been investigated by interviewing individuals from a particular university. The case results are formed based on the responses of the participants, and the overall case findings are as follows:

IQAC has significant challenges in its efforts to improve the quality of education. They are unable to articulate a clear vision and participate in ineffective actions. There is a disparity in activities. IQAC is involved in creating higher education programs at the programmatic level. IQAC is being encountered some difficulties in its functioning. It is becoming more challenging to break the format of the conventional education system, which has been in place for a very long time. The members of IQAC have insufficient knowledge and experience. The Internal Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) needs to be more capable of being implemented by IQAC. Because the activity is still in its early stages, it is impossible to assess its potential for growth and development.

## **Way Forward**

This interconnected educational environment enables students to study international education in their home country while increasing their exposure to knowledge through curiosity, creativity, and critical reflections, thereby contributing to the country's progressive improvement in the quality of tertiary education. In every sector, the quality of the products is essential to the business's sustainability. Similarly, the standard of education is accountable to society for its future members—the graduates. As a result, by addressing gaps within higher education, we will be able to contribute to the development of a more knowledge-based, skill-oriented, and fair economy (Ahmed, 2021).

## **Financial Management**

The University might be able to give considerable financial assistance, which is necessary to pay the wages needed to recruit and retain the world's top academics. The annual budget is adequately used and implemented in the right way.

## **Program Management**

The IQAC should maintain transparency and accountability regarding program management, and everyone should be held accountable. They need to raise leadership capacity.

## **Academic Documentation**

IQAC must initiate, prepare and supervise the academic documentation to improve the quality of education imparted in an institution. They also need to oversee the preparation of all the academic documentation, peer reviews the self-assessment reports by internal and external experts, and take appropriate measures.

## Peer Observation & Feedback Process

Can do different kinds of feedback sessions from students, parents & other stakeholders on quality-related institutional processes. For institutional self-assessment, a peer review team must be more prudent. The peer review team will update internationally accepted standards and best practices in this regard.

## Teaching Learning and Assessment (Teaching quality maintenance)

Bring modern education facilities should reduce the theoretical study and practical study should be the primary focus, should provide proper resources and facilities. Teachers should be professional, careful, and sympathetic to the students.

## Career management

Career-oriented programs should be arranged for the students of first-year 2nd year to prepare a competitive mind for the future and focus on their studies should provide career-related counselling.

- There should be quality in teaching, responsiveness, and extra-curricular activity so that a person can be dynamic in the future after graduation.

## Skill Development

- IQAC should focus on PhD and thesis-related research and arrangement of seminars and workshops about skill development. Teachers should have more training.
- IQAC should maintain good collaboration with various stakeholders. The student should have raised their hands for their living facilities and skill-based work.
- To increase Skill Development activities, IQAC should collaborate on the upcoming challenges. They are counselling the student and relating with the stakeholders.

## Research Facilities

- Physical research support should be provided and student-friendly facilities for consulting with the students and the University administration. The institution should enable experts in a particular discipline to come forward and teach or conduct research of various lengths.
- UGC should provide facilities for the university to conduct research activities powerfully. Physical Facilities: It should improve technical development and provide internet connection on campus. Proper planning, executions, and a monitoring process should make changes.
- Well managed & skilful training, extended physical & non-physical facilities are needed. Proper coordination among teacher, admin & employee. There should have an increased library facility, and we must arrange career-oriented seminars now and then. Infrastructural facilities should be increased like hygienic water and bathroom facilities.

- University should provide library facilities, medical treatment, research facilities, female common room & prayer room, etc.
- IQ type education, research-based teaching motivating, and skilful class lecture. Increasing multiple classrooms, a short time syllabus should exist.

### **Curriculum Design & Review**

- Traditional question patterns and syllabus are needed to be changed. Need to focus on career-oriented activities. Need to develop related research sector. It would be more beneficial for students if they could act faster.
- IQAC needs to focus on practical study, and its vision should be career-based. The curriculum should be designed by an international standard like developing problem-solving skills, analytical ability, and leadership quality through academic courses.
- The curriculum should be updated with the flow of time. IQAC must focus on research development and opportunity. The authority should also encourage practical education rather than theoretical and should take steps to stop traditional note systems from being involved in the experimental learning process.
- Research-related course introduction should be increased. Skill development programs should be highlighted in the curriculum.
- The traditional teaching system needs to be changed, and they should arrange practical guidance for the students to earn practical experience and knowledge.

### **Student Admission Requirements, Admission Process, Progress, and Accomplishments**

- Ensure the proper rights of the students. Inject mobility, ensure investment in research activity, and try to find precisely what the students need.
- The admission test should be competitive. University has its campus. The number of courses should be added so students can choose any subject independently. The number of faculty members should increase.
- Provide work opportunities as a teaching and research assistant with the faculty members after graduation. Exam time could be in a proper routine as there is no specific exam routine for mid-term. IQAC is the best, but they can publish more to get the best students every year.
- The class schedule should be followed correctly. Students should be adequately judged during result-making.

## Physical Facilities Support

- Students need a lift facility and need a computer classroom. A suitable education environment should be ensured for students by providing proper food, resident, and security.
- If the university increases the library facility online, it will be helpful. If teachers provide lectures by providing lecture sheets.

## Student Support Services (co-curricular)

- Encouraging co-curricular activities by takeout students from student politics. Direct engagement with students by different fieldwork or various researches. Assessing and strengthening capacity for teaching-learning, research, and community services. Coordinate all QA-related activities at the national level.
- The teaching process must be improved so that students can relate the lesson in practical life, extra-curricular activities should be provided to make students more skilled, and research work and publication of those research would be ensured so that students can learn the actual situation of any social or scientific fact.
- The quality of the environment needs to be improved. Reform the structure of academic activity. Switch to the semester process.
- IQAC activities should be smooth, timely maintenance, and no red tourism, and they should take proper initiative to improve the educational system. If the IQAC is more careful about their activities, then students will have more progress.
- New learning methods like research, and fieldwork, should be adopted. Copy-paste tendency in the exam paper should be removed. Teachers must be cordial. Toxic political activists should be avoided from campus. Teachers should be stopped their political activists on campus.
- More close monitoring by the university to ensure better quality. Providing quality education also with practical implementation should be the primary objective.
- Raising awareness among the student and students need to know about IQAC. Only then will students be able to express their views on the importance and merits of IQAC.
- Authority should take more initiative activities to improve the quality of education through IQAC and Ensure the activeness of all students. As some students are always unprivileged to show their potential abilities.

## Conclusion

Despite several challenges along the road, Bangladesh's education has gone a long way in 50 years. It can only go higher from here, creating a future worth viewing during the nation's 100th birthday celebrations (Munira, 2021). Students should be able to create an engaging connection with outstanding academic staff and generate critical ideas in an intimate and intense academic atmosphere at the institution. In this situation, the university should ensure that no students are disadvantaged and that student and staff rights are protected. Universities, once again, should be worldwide, allowing individuals from all around the world to attend. A campus with individuals of varied cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, religions, and levels of expertise may provide a better academic atmosphere and foster mutual respect. The university should not conceive as a single physical area but rather across national boundaries. The university's leader should be one of the most critical prerequisites. Who runs the institution and how inventive the leader is may have a profound effect on the campus? A strong leader can draw excellent academics to campus for a higher academic environment.

To enhance and maintain the quality of Higher Education Institutions, educational institutions must be more responsive to the changing demands of all stakeholders worldwide. Higher education institutions must understand what they'll do and how they can improve further to fulfil the needs of Higher education institutions' environmental scanning. The university must respond to the development of the local and global environment that might be established in Bangladesh. Other support systems for students should be installed by higher educational institutions, including affordable housing, food, sporting activities, healthcare facilities/first-aid, a fitness center, civic engagement, heritage, cultural, and social programs, as well as removing language barriers. To create an ideal paradigm of excellence in the field of higher education. Employability skills such as inventiveness and an ability to innovate are essential. As a result, visionary fervor, missionary excitement motivated by a lofty objective of enhancing the quality of education at higher educational institutions, and execution via focused strategic planning and collaborative effort are critical.

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## The Efficacy of Religious and Moral Education Textbooks to Promote Morality and Ethics among Students: An Evidence from the Secondary level of Education in Bangladesh

M. Abdul Aziz<sup>1</sup>  
SM Rabiul Islam<sup>2</sup>  
Rowshan Zannat<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*The study found that Religious and Moral Education (RME) textbooks are necessary for instilling ethics and morals among secondary-level students in Bangladesh. The RME textbooks of major religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism advocate similar social and ethical principles, such as empathy, sympathy, thankfulness, honesty, compassion, communal harmony, and forbearance. Despite of containing a substantial amount of religious and ethical materials, the books may not always achieve the expected learning outcomes due to problems with pedagogy and assessment that prioritize memorization of exam-centric content rather than practical application. Additionally, the books may seem monotonous because of their unappealing illustrations, inadequate content, outdated stereotypes in story presentation, insufficient practical examples, linguistic ambiguity and publication issues. Therefore, the research advocates for the comprehensive inclusion of morals not only in textbooks but also in pedagogy and learning environments to produce a values-oriented generation with strong national and social commitments at the secondary school level.*

**Keywords:** Values, Religiosity, Spirituality, Schoolbooks

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. M. Abdul Aziz, Professor and Director General, Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT) & Visiting Faculty at the Islamic University of Technology (IUT), OIC. Email: [aziz@iiitbd.org](mailto:aziz@iiitbd.org)

<sup>2</sup> SM Rabiul Islam, Professor and Principal, Government Nagarkanda College, Nagarkanda, Faridpur. Email: [rabiulnaem@gmail.com](mailto:rabiulnaem@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Rowshan Zannat, Assistant Teacher, Bangladesh International School and College (BISC), Nirjhor, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka, Email: [rzannat79@gmail.com](mailto:rzannat79@gmail.com)

## Introduction

The expansion of social and moral values is considered the most effective way to develop society by influencing individual. It plays a role as one of the criteria for social, state, economic and political excellence. The value of life lies in making students aware of their duties and responsibilities. If we can sow the seeds of values in them, they will be meticulous (*The Holy Bible, 1984, Galatians 6:6-7, Genesis 8:22*).

Value education accelerates the mental development of the citizen, which paves the way for good governance and puts an end to social degradation. Home is the first place while schools and teachers are the second place to influence the morality of the children (Kotaiah mentioned in Gui et. el. 2020). The students, teachers play their role mainly in the Textbook-centric education system. So, the significance of the textbooks in gearing up the students' knowledge, motivating and reorienting their mode of thinking is immense. Again, Harvard study reveals that children who had a religious upbringing are likely to be healthier and have a higher degree of well-being in early adulthood than those who did not (Chen, 2018).

Religious education should help students acquire and develop knowledge and an understanding of religion, as well as the ability to form reasoned opinions that lead to informed judgements about religious and moral issues (Sajjadi, 2008). This study mainly targeted the major religious textbooks of secondary level, how much efficacy does it have in integrating ethics and morals among students.

## Statement of the problem

In Bangladesh, the society is experiencing with the growing number of chaos, obscenity and various criminal tendencies. The situation of school going children is getting worse. Sources in the social welfare directorate said that, in the first six months of 2020, for 821 cases 1,191 teenagers were arrested and convicted for drug, murder, and rape (Dewan, 2021). Morality and immorality are getting ambiguous and right or wrong became unclear to them. Parents are not able to combine constructive social and cultural activities. In addition to this, social networking sites act as platforms for adolescents to commit various illegal acts (Gupta, 2021). Another important thing is to fantasize about crime, to take crime to the level of heroism (Yar, 2014).

In order to prevent this sure decline, it is necessary to give equal importance to the moral education of the children as well as the religious education. Archbishop Vincent Nichols warned that treating students as “consumers” and neglecting their “innate spirituality” would damage society and school play a key role in developing virtues and responsibilities (Nichols, 2009). Bangladesh government has a national integrity strategy, where a special section is added with fostering integrity in all levels of education (National Integrity Strategy, 2012). National Education Policy 2010 has also prioritized the issue mentioning that, “Morality is rooted in religion.”

With the aim of developing positive behavioral change, religion books have been renamed as “Religion and Moral Education”. The TBs have been prepared with the consideration that

the learners will be sympathetic to family, society and nation irrespective of cast and creed of all religions (Saha, 2020). Despite of those advocacies and efforts, the RME textbook could not have significant role in upbringing the moral values. Hence a critical review of the current RME textbooks are required. In order to get the real picture of textbooks' contribution over the students, this study is indispensable.

### **Rationale of the study**

The education must be based on strong moral and ethical values. It contributes to the individual improving its character, mode of life and way of thinking. The secondary level of education is that stage, where students are assigned to get prepare for higher education and they are in their teenage or adolescence time of life. It is considered to be the best time to learn moral education. In response to the Bangladesh National Integrity strategy, national Education policy and national education curriculum, which have placed moral education at utmost priority, NCTB textbooks were formulated for preparing a generation featuring strong moral and ethical stands.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to explore the efficacy of Religious and Moral Education (RME) Text Books (TB) in developing morals and values among students.

The specific objectives of this study are-

- To explore the state of students and teachers' understanding of religious and moral values;
- To analyze the content and identify the strengths and weaknesses of text books in promoting morality and values;
- To explore the necessity of having RME Textbooks to promote morals.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In considering the demographic proportion of four major religions, the study primarily set its target of sampling. However, it was not an easy task to maintain an equal proportion. Teachers from Christians and Buddhists were so rare, particularly of teaching religious education at his school. On the other hand, due to Covid-pandemic, most of the schools were not fully opened. In such situation, interview was taken over by audio and video call. Following that, the key benefits of the phenomenological approach: considering facial expression and observation, were not achieved completely.

## Literature Review

### Studies on Religious and Moral Values among Bangladeshi People

Affinity to religion has been evident among Bangladeshi people for a long time. Prothom Alo, a leading Bangla daily, conducted a study on religiosity of youth in 2019. The survey found that about 94% of respondents admitted to have a strong belief in religion. The similar survey conducted by Prothom Alo (2016) found the opinion 84%. It indicates that the religiosity among youths have been increased by 10% between 2016 to 2019. Another survey published by The Daily Star (2019) found that those educated in modern education were more likely to become militants than those educated in madrassas. The study further reveals that limited knowledge of religion creates opportunities to encourage and persuade youth towards militancy.

According to the survey conducted by the World Faith Development Dialogue (WFDD) in collaboration with the Berkeley Center for Religion (2020), the people of Bangladesh are more sensitive and closer to religious leaders and religious organizations. The survey also shows that religion is considered always a priority for those people.

Mahajatoq (মহাজাতক) in his book ‘শুদ্ধাচার’ opined that ধর্মের ফলিত রূপ হচ্ছে শুদ্ধাচার আর অধর্মের ফলিত রূপ হচ্ছে দুরাচার। আপনার আচারই বলে দেবে আপনি ধার্মিক, না অধার্মিক। আসলে ধার্মিক যেমন দুরাচারী হতে পারে না, তেমনি দুরাচারীও কখনো ধার্মিক বলে গণ্য হতে পারে না (মহাজাতক, ২০২১)।

According to the survey conducted by International Institute of Islamic Thought (2018), about 86% of interviewees maintain a relationship with religion (Religiosity). 63% of the students have empathy and 61% have the ability to do moral reasoning. But from the lowest level it is forgiveness (3.3) and self-efficacy (3.5). This also indicates that Religiosity should be one of the strongest predictors for forgiveness. But the result shows that religiosity has comparatively less correlation with forgiveness and self-efficacy. It specifies that Morality has to be incorporated through religion and efforts should be given on how to develop true religiosity/ spirituality among students.

### Morals according to the four (4) Major Religions

All major religions’ moral values lead us to build a peaceful society. Ignorance misguides human from religion and turns away toward a chaotic society. As Buddha identified Ignorance and Delusion as one of the cause of sufferings or Tanha. So, Buddhist are advocated to gain knowledge. Again, Knowledge in the Bible is always emphasized as a high priority (New International Version Bible, 1984, Psalm 92:6). Hindus believe that knowledge is a blessing bestowed by the Divine. As Swami Vivekananda remarked: “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man” (Vivekvani, 2020). According to Islam’s moral teaching Muslims requires researching and learning to develop themselves and be useful to their communities (Al-Quran, 2022, 35:28, 20:114, 58:11, 96:1).

## Review on Religious and Moral Education Textbooks by WFDD

World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) based in USA and Center for Peace and Justice (CPJ), BRAC University, Dhaka (2020) have conducted a study on the NCTB's Religious and Moral Education textbooks (Rob et. al. 2020). Importance of moral education TBs is identified by the study as mentioned below-

‘Studies have shown that children are usually aware of the social ills around them, which they pick up from non-formal learning cues. Textbooks could provide a more nuanced and systematic approach to addressing these social justice issues, offering opportunities to engage children in critical thinking and problem-solving activities’ (p.22).

## Methodology

A qualitative research approach based on interpretive paradigm was applied in this study. Following the phenomenological approach, researchers seek to understand meaning in events and in human interactions. The data collected in a qualitative study includes more than words; attitudes, feelings, vocal and facial expressions, and other behaviors are also involved. This research is not adhered only to statistical data but also observed the participants expressions. Selected 3 research questions involved with respondents' feelings. Students and teachers have expressed themselves spontaneously and with an urge to communicate their feelings and demand.

## Sampling

Interview was conducted with 7 secondary Religion school teachers and FGD (4x4= 16) for students. A convenient/purposive random sampling method was used to determine the respondents.

## Sources of Data

Types	Source
Primary Sources	Students and teachers of secondary education, curriculum experts, Religious Education experts
Secondary Sources	Existing curriculum, Education Policy, RME Textbooks for class 9 & 10, research articles, documents and other literature

## Table 1: Sources of Data Collection

### Tools of Data Collection

<b>FGD for students</b>	<b>In-depth interview for teachers</b>	<b>Round Table Discussion</b>	<b>Book Review</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended Questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended Questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactions based on book review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check List &amp; Reviewers notes</li> </ul>

Table 2: Tools of Data Collection

Tools are developed according to the guideline prescribed by the experts of NAEM and these have been finalized having at least 2 (two) sittings with the experts.

**Book Reviews:** 4 prominent educationists and religious experts were invited to review the RME Textbooks on their respective religions. A designed checklist was provided focusing on targeted objective of the research.

**Focus Group discussions** was also organized with the educational and religious experts for further clarification and supplements.

## Methods of Data Analysis and Presentation

Book review notes were written in conjunction with the interviews, FGD and in accordance with subjects. The data collection and the ongoing literature review processes were blended throughout the study then thoroughly examining the transcripts to find final codes and themes. Developing the codes and themes “grounded” in the data analysis was completed and then researchers compiled the information by writing a report.

## Analysis, Findings and Discussions

The data was presented by classifying the responses into three specific research objectives.

### Understanding of Religious and Moral Values

In response to the questions, a Muslim Teacher opined that,

‘Morals and Religion have no fundamental difference. Both talked about the welfare of the people, truthfulness, and good deeds. In addition, in religion there is rituals for which religion subject is needed to added in school curriculum’.

A teacher from the Hindu religion emphasized the socialization process while a hindu student fell that the rituals brought a sense of morality in their attitude and behaviour.

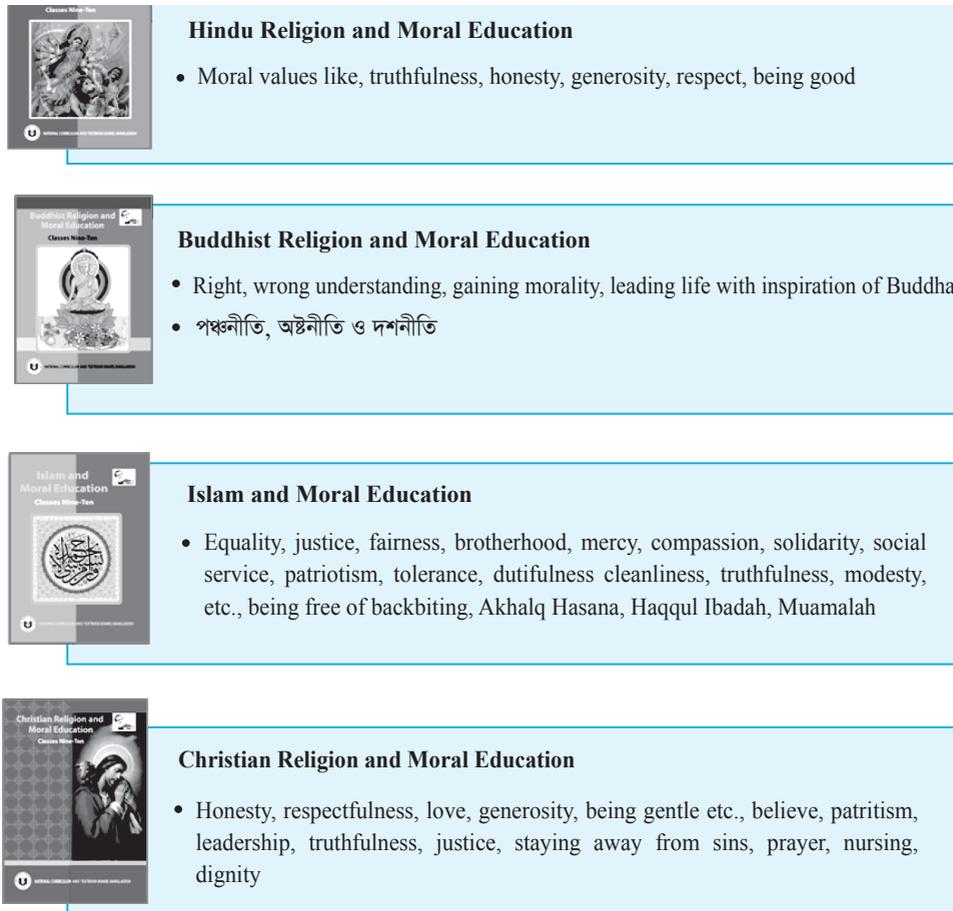
A teacher from Christian religion indicated about the behavioral development while a Christian student talked about the mixture of conscience and rationality in morals. According to them, values of Jesus is the true path. It is the emotional freedom like free from envy, pride, selfishness etc.

Buddhist teachers explained moral as the conglomeration of good deeds. Students from the Buddhist religion also said almost similar things mentioning that-

‘If we learn about the life of Buddha then we will be able to maintain morals and ethics in our life.’

## Morals Presented in RME book

Moral values necessary for students are discussed in RME books.



**Figure 1:** Morals presented in RME books

## Strengths and Weaknesses of RME textbooks

### Islam and Moral Education Book

According to the religious experts' view this book seems to be prepared mostly in line with the guidelines of the national curriculum, but some points or issues need to be explored

more clearly. This book has potentialities to grow a deeper spiritual realization in a reader's mind for being moral if it is read and taught with a spiritual feeling.

Both teachers and students complained that it is taught to memorize the birth and death dates, years of great personalities rather than learning lessons from their life story. As teachers said,

আমাদের বইগুলোতে উদাহরণের মাধ্যমে আদর্শ দেখানোর ঘটনাগুলোর অভাব আছে। মনীষীদের জীবনী থেকে যে শিক্ষা আমরা নিতে পারি সেটা যথাযথভাবে আসে নাই।

Teachers have also identified that there is repetition of same discussions in RME textbooks of different classes.

### **Hindu Religion and Moral Education Book**

The teacher from Hindu Religion emphasized the particular religious' scriptures and the stories in the textbook, which promote social values and morals among students. Therefore, he criticized the explanation and examples of the religious scriptures are not that much deliberate. They also indicated that examples here are not sufficient.

As he said that,

'Even better examples could be given in explaining different morals. But even though, I think students can learn a lot from here. It is mentionable that there is a lot of opportunities to incorporate moral short stories from Gita, Beddant, Mahabharata'.

### **Christian Religion and Moral Education Book**

Christian teacher necessitated as-

'It would be nice if it is possible to make the stories of the Bible inserted in an interesting approach to the learners'.

Christian students urge to include references from the Bible. As they commented:

“বাইবেল থেকে কিছুই নাই, থাকলে আমাদের পড়তে, বুঝতে সুবিধা হত। যদি আমরা ইসলামে বইটা দেখি, এখানে কোরআনের কথা আসছে, কিন্তু খ্রিস্টান ধর্মের বইতে বাইবেলের কথা আসেনি।”

It is found that according to expert's review; students' and teachers' response, language of Christian and Moral Education textbook is not suitable for the secondary students.

### **Buddhist Religion and Moral Education Book**

Moral has been described properly for uplifting students' morality.

According to the Buddhist students the language of TB is hard for them. Like, they have to memorize *Shutra* without understanding. On the other hand, they love to read *Jatok*, which was meaningful and inspirational story for them. They had a mind to apply the learned lessons

in their daily life, like helping others.

### Teaching Methods/Strategies are followed

Most studies on teaching strategies for moral education recommend a problem-based approach. This approach gives room for dialogue and interaction between students, which is considered to be crucial for their moral development. On the contrary, traditional methods are used in teaching RME subjects in Bangladesh.

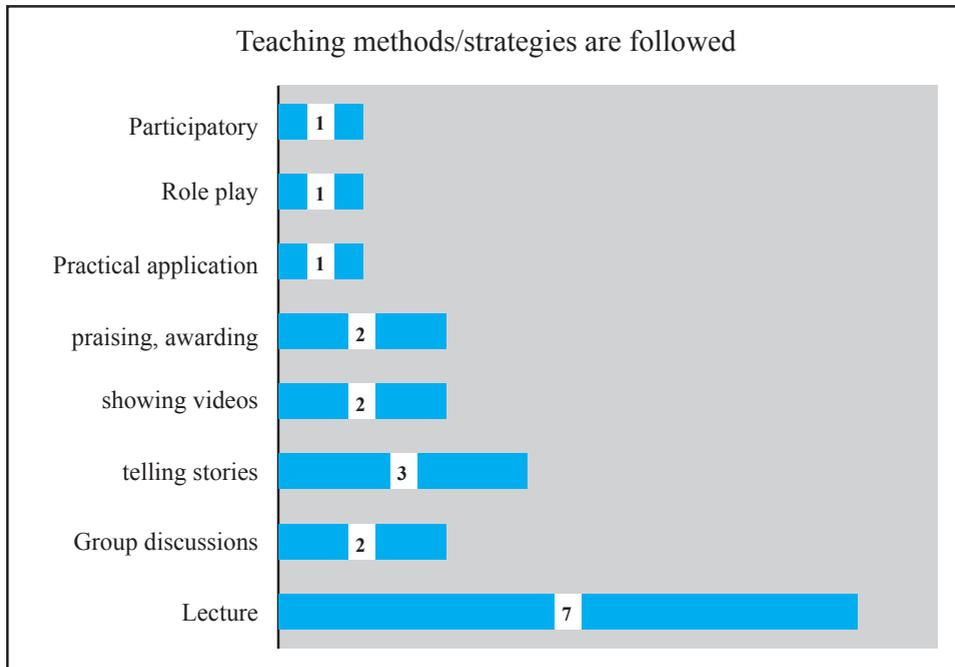
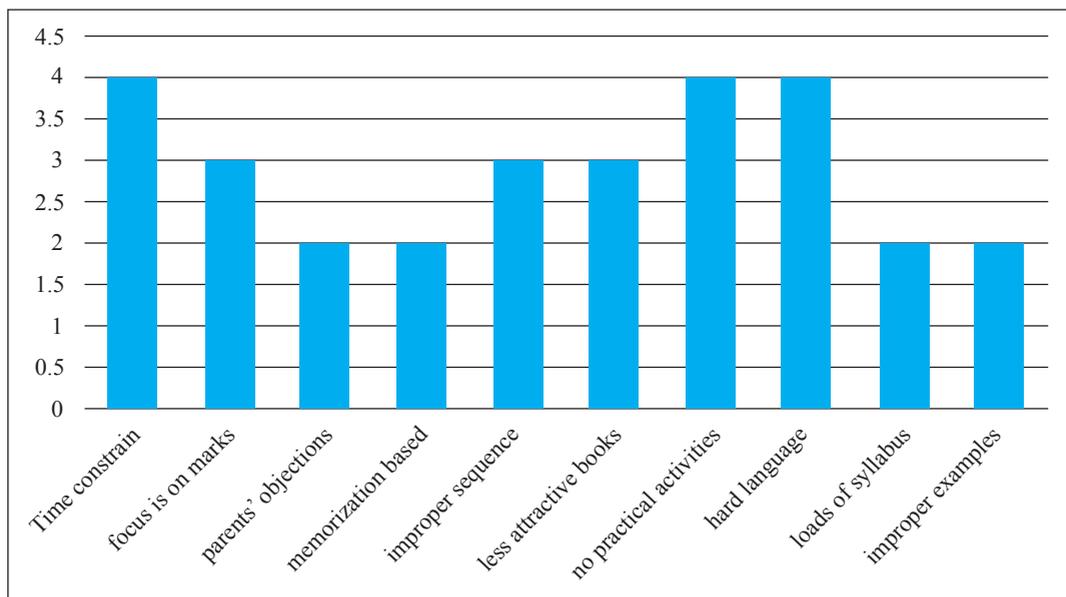


Figure 2: Teaching method used in RME classroom

Teaching methods for morals are Analysing Values, Brainstorming, Clarifying, Consequence charts, Drama, Debate, Discussion, Decision Meeting, Moral Dilemmas, Problem Solving and so on (Tajin, 2008; Schuitema, 2008). Some teachers expressed that using some other methods would be fruitful like, Role playing. But teachers don't get enough time to apply other methods as they remain busy to complete the syllabus.

In addition to textbook contents, teachers have talked about limitations of resources, and facilities in delivering the quality teaching to the students. Following figure described some limitations, mentioned by the teachers during their interviews.



**Figure 3:** Problems faced by teachers while teaching RME

Problems faced by the RME teachers in their class, almost half of them (4) said about not having sufficient time for classes. However, more or less teachers have said about the lack of illustration, proper sequence, sufficient examples and etc.

### **Necessities of Religion and Moral Education Book as Text**

All the 7 (seven) teachers and 4 (four) experts have suggested to keep the RME as a subject of Moral Education. Only 2 teachers added that Moral Education may be added separately as co- curricular classes once in a week or quarterly.

Muslim students supported for RME books. According to their views,

‘If there is no religious education then there will be no modesty in society. Human being will have nothing to follow or afraid off. Then it will create an anarchy. We can learn moral and religion lessons from many sources also but it’s better to learn from school. Otherwise, it can be a wrong learning. Anyone can misguide us.’

Hindu teachers opined that, ‘Religion is like to be under laws and rules. And being loyal to these laws, one can become the worthy citizen of the country.’

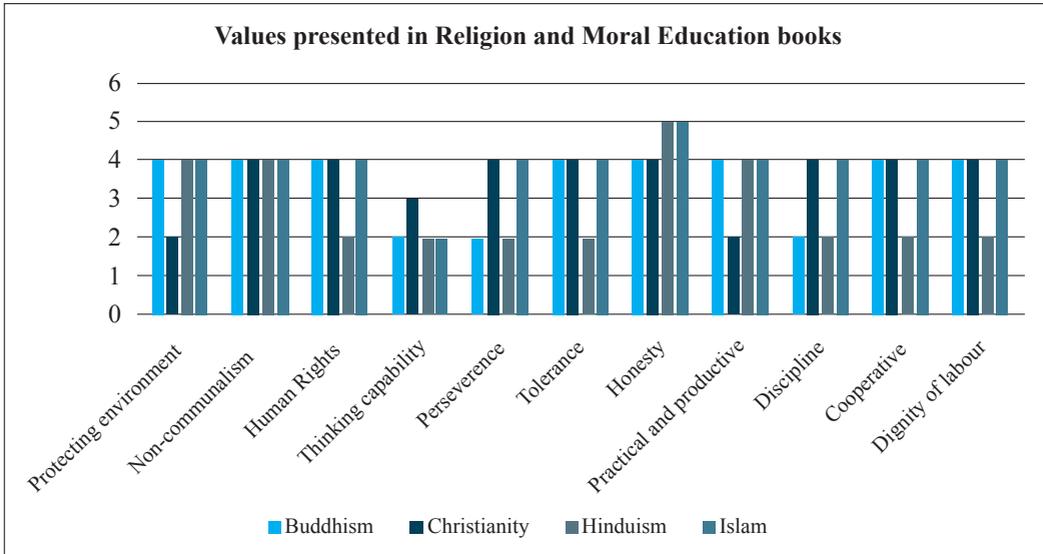
According to Christian teacher, ‘More importance should be given while implementing RME TBs. Teachers should assess theoretical, practical and attitude of the students then students will practice moral at least for grading and they will be habituated with practicing moral.’

Buddhist students responded that ‘Religion book portrays a picture of life of Buddha in front of us so that we can understand why so many people follow Buddha, Buddha was kind, he could understand the truth, he could understand the world.’

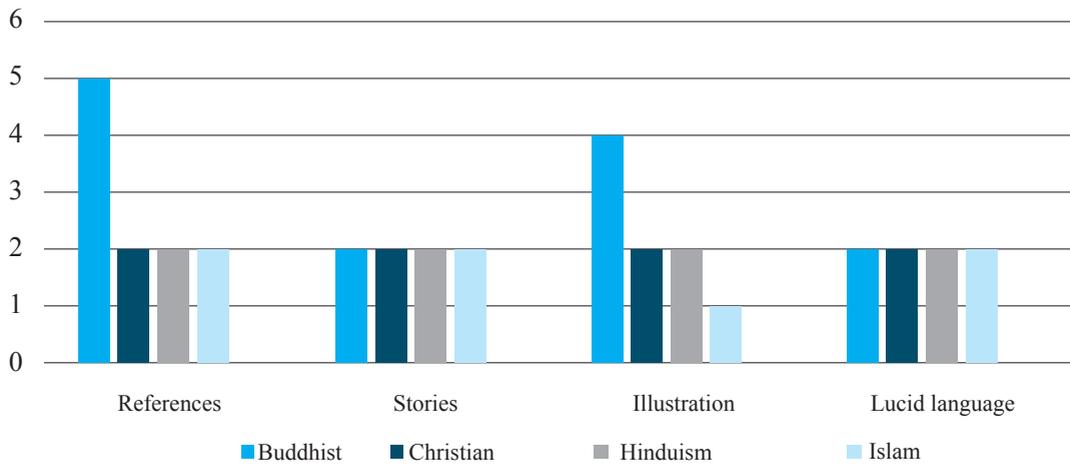
According to Buddhist teachers, ‘Now a days students are not getting moral education from family as both parents are busy. So, responsibilities go to teachers.’

### Book review done by Educational Experts

Four renowned educationists and religious experts were invited to review the textbooks. Their review findings are presented below here:



**Figure 4: Book Review (Values)**



**Figure 5: Book Review (Content Presentation)**

The above graph depicts that some necessary morals are missed in RME books. In some cases, morals are discussed without any story. Which need to be incorporate. Teachers and

students' interview also expressed in the same line that there are opportunities to incorporate morals through stories and religious instructions.

Through the graph it is clear that “Thinking” is not promoted in RME books. It is however indispensable to have a high level of thinking skills and it can be learned and can be taught (Zannat, 2013).

### Expected RME books

This is suggested that, if morals are presented with stories of prophets (peace be upon them), and other religious persons, that influences children to be morally uplifted.

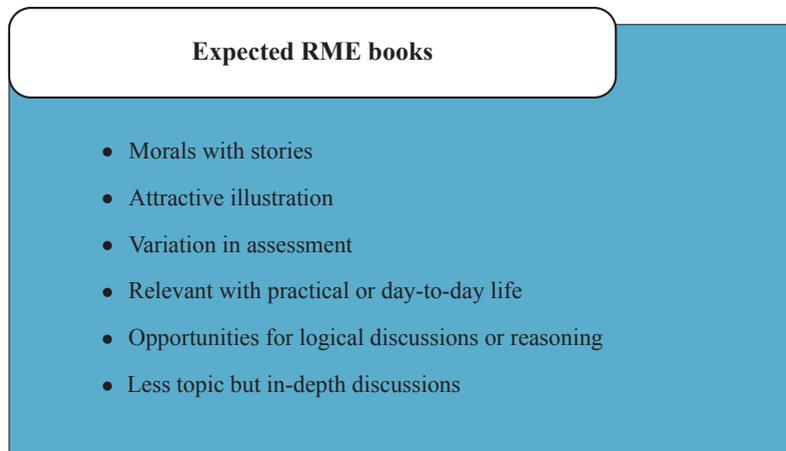


Figure 6: Expected Religious and Moral Education Text Book

### Recommendations in general

#### Policy Level

- i. Appointing more dedicated, committed and sincere teachers in order to convince the students for accepting moral. In this regard implementing effective Teachers' Training is essential focusing on 'Critical Pedagogy'.
- ii. It is recommended to have diversified teaching methodologies instead of depending on lecture method only. Teachers should follow National Curriculum and Teachers' guide. In this regard, monitoring is necessary.
- iii. Recruiting teachers for all the 4 major religions is necessary. If it is not possible, in the meantime, at least have to train teachers for specific religions. Like, if any school has Christian students, a Christian teacher of other subject may be trained to take the Christian religion classes for time being. Again, a specific religion teacher might be recruited for a catchment area for respective religious students.
- iv. Compulsory RME is necessary for school children otherwise they might be destructed by outsiders' wrong influence and adopt the RME in an erroneous and dangerous way.

- v. Special training and guiding support are suggested for the RME teachers to use ICT in their teaching methods as well as in mentoring students for ethical and safe uses of online Media and sites. Engaging students actively in RME can play a significant role in control use of media which will also develop an accountability among students.

### **NCTB Level**

- i. It is recommended to plan curriculum in a sequence or step by step process from class one to Secondary classes. So, there will be neither repetition nor gap of information.
- ii. Christian students have urged to include lessons from the Holy Bible. Religious expert also mentioned that it is needed to include lessons about Jesus.
- iii. Secondary students are going to learn second language in an age when it is difficult for them to learn new language, like Arabic, Shanskrit or Pali. Learning language should not be left for teenage years. It has to be started before 10. This is when the language sound is established through the brain neurons and interconnections(Altalib, 2013).
- iv. Curriculum should be planned to promote thinking. So that students can understand the religion with logic, thinking and reasoning.
- v. Language of RME book must be simple, lucid and coherent.
- vi. RME books should be made more interesting. Like introducing inspiring, interesting moral stories of religious scholars, leaders, personals. i.e., teaching morals through stories with adequate and accurate references.
- vii. Related illustrations should be clear and unambiguous.
- viii. Unnecessary memorization should be avoided. Rather presentation should be like that way which grows the inner feelings of students.
- ix. Emphasis should be given in understanding or internalization of RME rather giving priority on exams or grading. So, some practical activities should be incorporated in RME.
- x. In addition to quality writing, quality publication is necessary, most specifically in presentation, bindings, and cover designing.
- xi. In response to the growing scenario of cyber-crimes: spreading hatred, bullying, addiction to pornography, destructive griming, and involvement in hacking, circulating fake and disinformation, it has been a burning necessity to include a special section for ethical and safe use of cyber tools, and social media in the RME Textbooks.

### **School Management Level**

Teachers or administrators must talk to the students as a second guardian. There must be at least a teacher or administrator with whom students can express themselves easily.

The classroom environment must provide children with a sense of emotional security. There should be respect among students and between the teachers and students. Students must feel free to express themselves without fear of ridicule or discouragement (Moslimany, 2018).

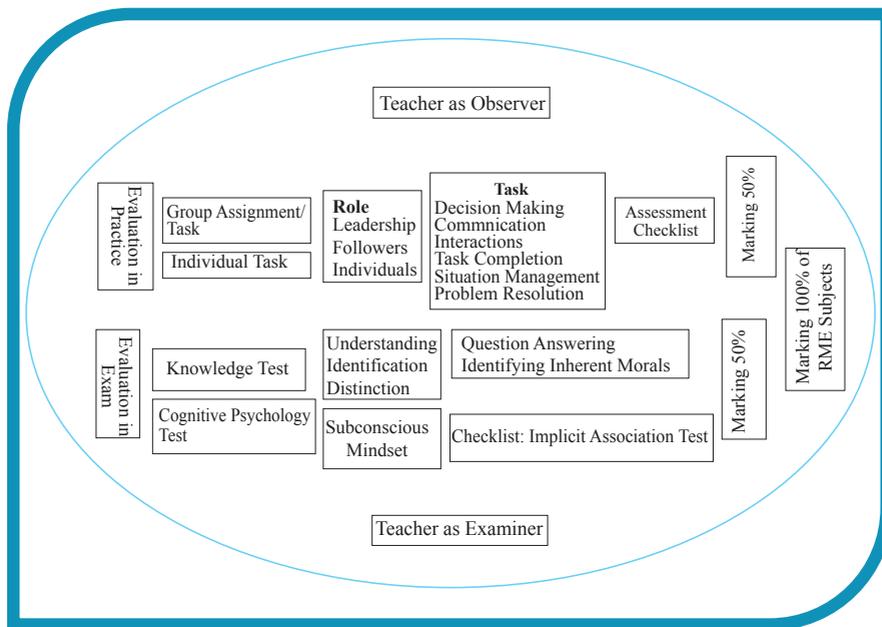
Lack of family awareness, lack of pure entertainment, mechanical urban life, deterioration of relationship between children and parents plays major role behind juvenile delinquency. Adolescents are more likely to become criminals if they constantly observe conflicts and abnormalities in the family environment (Mannan, 2021). Considering all these school managements must arrange regular “Parents’ counselling Session” or “Parents-Teachers Communications”.

Arranging Study tour. Visiting orphanage, graveyard, masjid/pagoda/mandir/Church with students. Giving opportunities to students for voluntary or social work.

### Special recommendation for effective evaluation system

National Education Policy (2010), and National Education Curriculum (2012 & 2021) (Proposed) clearly mentioned the particular learning objectives of RME textbooks. It focuses on graduates with strong moral and ethical commitment. From other subjects, RME subjects are different, as it requires students to be practical in morality and ethics, not merely knowledge of those. So, the evaluation system of these subjects should have proper accommodation of assessment of knowledge and practice. Most specifically, the evaluation system given below followed by a number of education systems in some developed countries like Sweden, Turkey,Albania (Qattawi, 2014; Nasche, 2011;and OECD, 2019).

### A Proposed Framework for Evaluation in RME Subjects



**Figure 7:** Evaluation Framework in RME Subjects

The figure depicts two evaluation approaches for RME subjects. The main objective of both evaluations is to assess key morals and values stated in the curriculum’s learning objectives. The first approach is through examination, which involves prioritizing students’ understanding of specific learning objectives from stories, texts, and illustrations. Additionally, a checklist

can be used to assess students' understanding of the inherent morals in particular contents, which can be expressed in their own words. Another experiment can be done to measure students' subconscious mindset by adopting approaches used in cognitive psychology, such as the implicit association test.

The second approach is through practical evaluation, which involves assessing students' roles in various projects and assignments. Teachers will assign students different tasks such as social volunteering and extracurricular activities, as well as group assignments and homework in one hand. These activities facilitate leadership roles where students must make decisions, solve problems, and deal with challenges and difficulties to achieve specific targets. On the other hand, the teacher will silently observe students based on a specific checklist of ethics and morals such as integrity, consistency, patience, sympathy, empathy, cooperativeness, regularity, and transparency. Based on this, the teacher will score the students.

This proposed model is a guideline that will help teachers to design their assessment framework.

## **Conclusion**

According to the National Curriculum (2012), lifeskills-oriented education is essential, but desired benefits will not be achieved if the person with lifeskills does not have morality. So, moral education in the life of a student is very essential, whether it achieved through religion or any other means.

In order to analyze the causes of juvenile delinquency, we need to take a biological, psychological, economic, sociological, geographical and institutional perspective. Excessive addiction to mobile and internet, degradation of social values, lack of playground, the negative impact of social media, lack of family awareness, lack of pure entertainment, mechanical urban life, deterioration of relationship between children and parents plays a major role behind juvenile delinquency (Mannan, 2021). In this consequence if institutional support is not given to the students from religious aspects, they might be misguided and divert to wrong path easily.

Every great religion has its own values which eventually lead human being to believe in oneness of Almighty awing His Supreme Being. It helps them to establish strong religious values in society which ultimately leads to a peaceful society. RME subjects could not contribute to promote morals, it is not the fault of religion but it's wrong implications. We have to revise the syllabus or content, assessment methods and teaching strategies.

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## A Study on Blended Teaching-Learning Approach at Secondary Level during Pandemic Situation

Kabir Hossain<sup>1</sup>  
Abul Kalam Azad<sup>2</sup>  
Humayun Kabir<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

Since 17 March 2020, schools were closed in Bangladesh due to pandemic. There are around 1 million teachers in primary, secondary, madrasah and vocational education institutions in Bangladesh. With the technical support of a2i the government of Bangladesh had introduced alternative distance education immediately using different channels e.g offline and online version, TV channels so that the students of the country could continue learning while staying at home. The teachers of secondary level were the population of this study. The study was endeavored to explore the access to the digital technology, know the teachers' current capacity level to use EdTech and the challenges & possibilities regarding blended learning for future scale-up. The study integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the study concern areas based on all data and analysis. The tools of data e.g. were Survey Questionnaire for secondary level teachers who are active and not active in online teaching learning, Semi-Structured Interview for Head Teacher, FGD with secondary school teachers and students, KII in policy makers and secondary documents review. Special emphasis had given to the participatory approaches in all aspects of the study. The research findings revealed that the access to TV was 82%, Feature Phone 75%, Smart Phone 100%, Tab 13%, Laptop 57%, Desktop 38%, Mobile data 100%, Wi Fi (self) 24%. Most of the respondents (88%) used ICT devices for conducting the classes during the pandemic. 81% respondents self-trained on conducting the class using ICT devices and 19% didn't use of ICT devices. 50% respondents opinioned that their class quality was good. Almost half portion's opinioned was average. 25% respondents opined that the problem was willingness and training. More than half portion of the respondent (55%) opined that the device and connectivity they used for educational purpose. One third opined that it was used in professional work. Rest of the respondents (12%) opined that it was used in entertainment during the pandemic. Half of the respondents (9) had average knowledge about TPACK. On the other hand, 3 respondents responded that they have high understanding about TPACK. Other 3 respondents never knew about TPACK model.

**Keywords:** Blending Learning, Online Education, TPACK, devices, connectivity, platforms, information-technology, access, distance

<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Kabir Hossain, Associate Professor, OSD, DSHE, Attached: a2i

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Md. Abul Kalam Azad, Inspector (Assistant Professor), Directorate of Madrasah Education, Bailly Road, Dhaka

<sup>3</sup> Kazi Humayun Kabir, Accounts Officer, National Academy for Educational Management, Dhaka.

## Background and Rationale of the Study

The education system in the world is now-a-days experiencing unprecedented shock of discontinuing regular face-to-face schooling to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. With the advancement of technology in education, numerous teaching techniques had been implemented throughout the world. Many countries have made technology a vital part of their classrooms and others had worked hard to integrate it in a variety of ways. This research analyzed the obstacles and prospects of blended learning in rural and remote schools using a literature review. This study investigated how blended learning assisted school districts in rural and distant places in balancing teacher demand and supply difficulties. The current study found that blended learning was significantly more beneficial than face-to-face solely, home-schooling and pure online education and provided various advantages for learners such as no teacher retention concerns and schools in their neighborhood. Since 17 March 2020, schools were closed in Bangladesh, impacting an estimated 38 million children and adolescents, which was predicted to last up to March 2021 or beyond. In addition, due to the school closure, teacher education and training programs were initially halted for a considerable period, with gradual resumption of online modality of teacher training, though to a limited scale. As countries were reopening schools, many were going for phased reopening combined with blended options to be able to maintain safety protocols and social distancing. To some extent remote and blended options of teaching-learning had to be continued. Government had decided to institutionalize the distance learning modalities as part of longer-term strategies under COVID-19 response and one that further supports the robust education system the government is interested in building, specifically around increasing quality and access for all. While the remote learning options were emerging as a strong complementary approach to face-to-face instructions in schools and teacher training sessions, there were still issues of universal access, quality of instruction and monitoring progress using distance modalities. Both logistical and attitudinal preparations of important stakeholders did not seem to be adequate at this stage of operations to have a system-wide transition from low/no tech to moderately tech-enabled modalities. To facilitate remote learning effectively, it is important to figure out the capacity and readiness of secondary level teachers by addressing necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to facilitate blended modality of teaching-learning. It is also important to explore what their current capacities of using educational technologies were including access to devices and connectivity, technology knowledge and ability for technology-pedagogy integration to actively participate in the remote learning platforms. Only face to face education is not capable to ensure the current education system in the pandemic situation. Blending learning was vital issue to continue the quality education in pandemic situation. The research explored on this ground. As Bangladesh is a large populated country, our classroom size is also large. The teachers of secondary level education were facing various types of challenges regarding classroom management during the teaching learning process. When we went through online or blended way of teaching and learning it was more thought-provoking to us. Without any preparation or even the authority guidelines teachers were started their teaching learning activities in online through different type of tools. Considering the online or remote learning principles teachers need to take preparations. According to World Economic Forum (WEF) “Despite the positive prospects

of technology in enhancing teaching and learning by changing the way learners experience studies, the nature of teaching and learning, particularly in secondary education (SE), has not been effectively transformed through digital technologies.” Thus, this study was mainly focus to investigate the teacher’s preparation, readiness, tools, technology, access, connectivity and devices also. This research was also endeavor to identify the physical and mental situations, emotional wellbeing, learner’s integration during teaching learning, online behavior etc.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to explore the scenario of teachers-stakeholders regarding strength, weakness and effectiveness of remote or blended teaching learning and recommend the roadmap of blended education in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of this study were to:

- assess their access to digital technology in terms of connectivity and device
- know the teachers’ current capacity level to use EdTech including their knowledge, skills, attitude
- identify the demand and supply-side factors including adoption with the change in teaching-learning modality
- inquire into the challenges and possibilities regarding blended learning for future scale-up

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study demanded both a quantitative and qualitative research approach. It integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the study concern areas based on all data and analysis. Special emphasis had given to the participatory approaches in all aspects of the study. The study covered 8 Schools from 8 Upazilas of 8 districts of 4 divisions. School of Urban and rural area also considered in this study.

**Table-1**

Division	District	Name of the School	Upazilla
Dhaka	Kishoregonj	Shaheed Alauddin High School	Pakundia
	Narsingdi	Nurul Majid Humayun High School	Monohardi
Mymensingh	Mymensingh	Latu Mondal High School	Sadar
	Netrokona	Noapara High School	Kendua
Chottogram	Chottogram	Jamal Khan Kusum Kumari City Cor. Girls School	Sadar
	Cumilla	Homna Adarsha High School	Homna
Khulna	Khulna	Salahuddin Yousuf Govt. High School	Labonchora
	Jessore	Deyapara Secondary School	Mathavanga

*Teachers (A)	*Teachers (B)	Head Teachers	Educator (Policy Level)	Schools
Survey Questionnaire	Survey Questionnaire	Interview (Semi-Structured)	KII	FGD Secondary School Teachers
8×1 = 8 Teachers	8×1 = 8 Teachers	8	18	4×2×1=8 Schools
2 teachers from district wise each selected school	2 teachers from each district wise selected school	1 Head teachers from each district	2 DSHE 8 DEO 8 USEO	2 schools (1 urban, 1 rural) of selected 2 districts in each 4 division
Purposive	Convenient	Convenient	Purposive	Purposive
* Teachers (A) = Secondary level teachers who were active in online teaching learning				
* Teachers (B) = Secondary level teachers who were not active in online teaching learning				

## Data Findings and Discussion

This study incorporated the findings through Survey Questionnaire, Semi Structured Interview Schedule, KII and FGD in the study. The findings were presented on the basis of the digital technology access in terms of connectivity of device and understanding the teachers' current capacity level to use EdTech, including their knowledge, skills and attitude. The study also explored to identify demand and supply-side factors, including adoption with the change in teaching-learning modality investigate the challenges and opportunities for blended learning on a larger scale in the future. Though this study tried to balance the gender equity in collecting the data from field level. But majority of respondent was male (62%) and rest of the portions of respondent was female (38%) of the study. On the basis of the object there

were type of respondent (teachers) was selected from each school. A was who (50%) were active in online teaching learning during pandemic 50% and B was who (50%) were not active in online teaching learning during pandemic in this study. There were three type of educational qualified people participated in this study. Three fourth of selected respondents had B.Ed (Bachelor of Education) degree (75%) and almost one fourth of respondents had M.Ed (Masters of Education) degree (20%). Few respondents achieved others degree but they realized the necessity of professional degree for quality teaching. Not only had that teacher’s professional development also aligned with their professional qualification that also brought to light by this study.

### Access to Digital Technology

The study presented the findings concerning participants’ access to technological devices. The study was explored both rural and urban respondents by asking about television, feature phone, smart phone, tab, laptop, desktop and internet. In the matter of Blended Education, ICT based device is very important element to run the blending teaching-learning education system modality smoothly. There were 16 respondents in the study.

**Table-2**

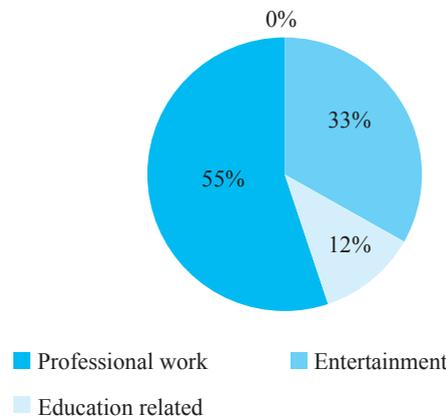
Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Television	Feature Phone	Smart Phone	Tab	Laptop	Desktop	Internet/ Wi-Fi	Mobile Data
R-1	√	√	√		√	√		√
R-2	√		√		√	√	√ w	√
R-3	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
R-4	√		√		√	√		√
R-5	√	√	√	√				√
R-6	√	√	√					√
R-7	√	√	√		√		√ w	√
R-8	√	√	√					√
R-9	√	√	√			√		√
R-10	√	√	√		√		√ w	√
R-11		√	√		√			√
R-12	√		√					√
R-13		√	√				√ w	√
R-14	√	√	√			√		√
R-15		√	√		√			√
R-16	√		√		√			√

There were 8 ICT devices e.g. television, feature and smart phone, Tab, Laptop, Desktop Internet (Wi-Fi) and Mobile Data. The table 4 showed the access of devices. 100% had accessed

to Smart Phone with Mobile Data. But only one fourth portion occupied with Internet (Wi-Fi) facilities to connect to net world. Most of them have television/phone. There was two areas e.g urban and rural in the study. Laptop and desktop were not available in all respondent. Most of the urban respondent (87%) had access in laptop or desktop computers. On the other hand, few respondents (13%) had access in laptop or desktop computers. The data disclosed the findings with percent at a glance

**figure : 1**

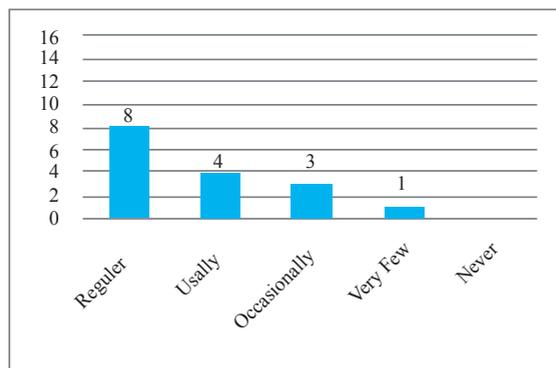
**Using the Device and Connectivity**



Blended Education required minimum device to ensure of connectivity for ensuring education through online modality. More than half portion of the respondent (55%) opined that the device and connectivity they used for educational purpose. One third opined that it was used in professional work. Professional work means educational work and official work. Rest of the respondent (12%) opined that it was used in entertainment during the pandemic.

**figure : 2**

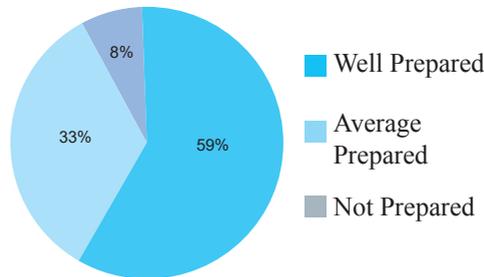
**Use of ICT Device inside Classroom or Outside the Classroom**



As presented in figure-2, it is evident that half of the respondents in this study used ICT device regularly in classroom and outside the classroom to conduct the classes. Covid-19 forced them to use that type of device to conduct the classes and home schooling also. In terms of use of ICT device or experience, the respondent had variations but access to the device is 100% percent.

**Figure : 3**

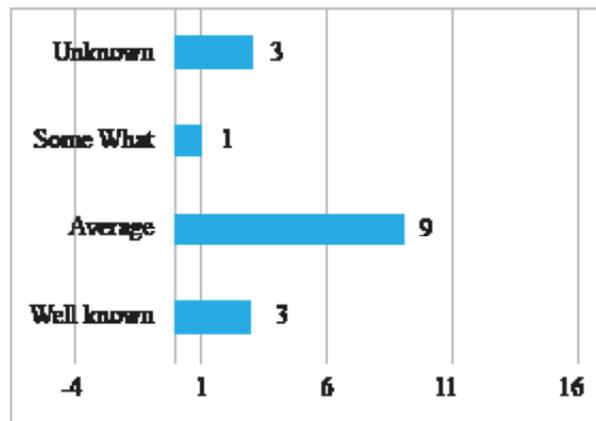
**Preparation to continue Education during Pandemic**



A sudden change happened in the time of pandemic. After the directions of government, the respondent engaged themselves in blended teaching-learning during pandemic.

**Figure : 4**

**Teacher’s knowledge on TPACK**



The data showed that more than half of the respondents (9) had average knowledge about TPACK. They also shared that they used the ideology of TPACK in their professional life also. Not only that they believed that to become a quality professional this need to be known for every teacher. On the other hand, 3 respondents responded that they have high understanding about TPACK. Other 3 respondent never knew about TPACK model.

**Figure : 5**

**Training on ICT in Education**

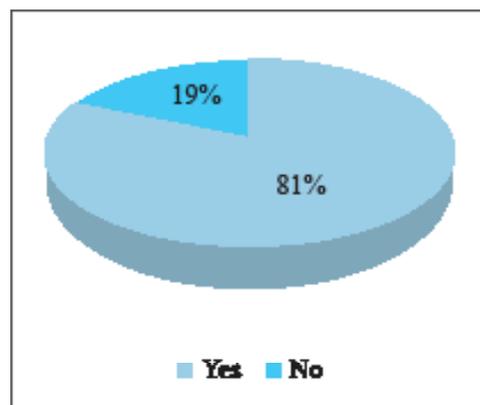


Majority respondents (89%) opined they had received ICT in Education training. Few (12%) respondents believed they had not been trained. Through several types of initiatives, the government has made ICT in Education training available to secondary level teachers. It was not possible to train all secondary school teachers due to time, cost and visit (TCV). One of the participants opined:

*If we want get the benefit from the trained teacher, first we need to train all the teacher. The government should have the policy on training so that all teachers can receive the training in raised concept.*

**Figure : 6**

**Using ICT devices for Teaching-Learning during Pandemic**

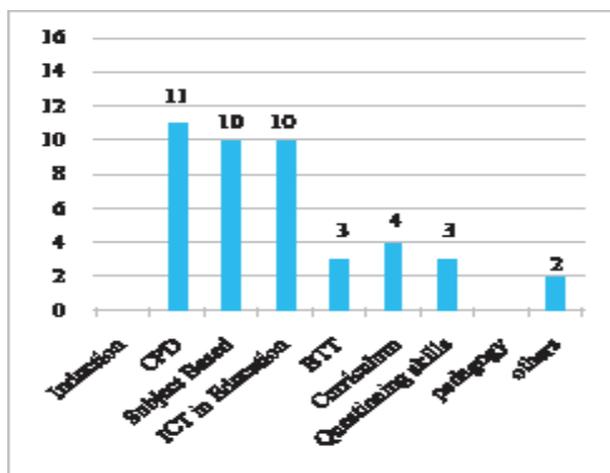


To enable the teachers with ICT skills the government has taken different initiatives in last 10 years. Before Pandemic 3.5 lakh teachers had trained on ICT skills out of 1 million teachers. But during the years of Pandemic most of the teachers (81%) self-trained on conducting the

class using ICT devices and rest of the respondent (19%) didn't use of ICT device during pandemic. The figure-6 disclosed the scenario of teachers' habituations.

**Figure : 7**

**Professional Training of the Respondent**



From the figure it is evident that participants in this study engaged in different kinds of professional training. Among the participants most of the respondent (11) participated in CPD (Continuous Professional Training) training according to their career purpose. More than half respondent (10) participated in Subject Based and ICT in Education Training. Half of respondent participated in multiple training. On the other hand, few respondents did not get the equal opportunity in training. Pedagogically trained respondent was not found in this study. One of the respondents explain that this limited pedagogical knowledge resulting from this lack related training had constrained their ability to engage learners in the teaching learning activities:

*Due to COVID learners mind set has changed. Both in online or offline, they were not interested theoretical discussion in the classroom, they wanted to solve the problem or participate in teaching-learning activity. Sometimes we failed to engage the learners to the teaching-learning due to insufficient knowledge of Blended Pedagogy. So, we needed special training on Blended Pedagogy*

A significant number (25%) of institution heads in this study agreed with this claim. They think that lack of training is constraining teacher's ability to teach online using technologies. One of the head teachers explained:

Of course we need training, but need to reshape the training system. Some teachers received the training several times. On the other hand, someone didn't get the opportunity in the whole working life. Moreover, projects have limited scope, they didn't include the all

teachers in training. So, there is a training divide in our education system. We need alternative solutions like blended training, so that include all the teachers in training

They had started taking class recording. Our beloved teacher overcome all the barrier and participate to the recording. We have to utilize and continue last two years' experience. Face to face and online class can be continued simultaneously in the future.

*During the Pandemic our teachers done a lot. They didn't demand any refreshment or remuneration. They enjoyed their work by DSHE leadership. We have to motivate and recognize them.*

## Conclusion

In the palm of pandemic, new improvements and innovations occur at a rapid speed in the public realm. Updates or more recent types of these innovations are never far behind and have massive followings which are proving to have a significant impact on human existence. Education no longer has accessing barriers worldwide. These advancements and innovations due to the inclusion of ICT devices are expected to have an impact on how people acquire data and learn to improve their technical knowledge. Students have always been exposed to educator-driven practices in both conventional classrooms and home environment. They are more opinionated when understanding which teaching method suits them better. When the teacher employs a single educational technique for the whole class and depends on the same textbook year after year, students tend to lose focus and interest in the curriculum. However, in this study we have seen a sizable portion of the student body is in favor of personalized care and customized lesson plans. They prefer to have self-directed learning approaches instead of traditional teaching methods. Majority of the respondents were eager and well-motivated to continue their duties or services regardless of the crisis. However, on the other hand it has given us tech-savvy teachers and technically sound students in the age of 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. While blended learning is still a relatively new idea at many educational institutions; nevertheless, recent research appears to imply that if the concept is applied correctly, blended learning may significantly improve the students' experiences and motivate teachers further in building their careers around educational development. The current study sought to investigate the impact of blended learning on teaching and learning. As a result, the current evaluation of the literature has aided in demonstrating the impacts of blended learning on English language teaching and learning. So, we need to plan the use and implementation of blended learning in post-pandemic times across secondary level education.

## Recommendations

- To continue face to face and online class simultaneously across all educational institutions as majority of participants have complied upon.
- Encourage the existing practices of online teaching-learning with interactive activities which will in return benefit the learners to think creatively and objectively.

- To blend the face-to-face class by using Zoom, Meet, Teams etc. and prepare long-term alternative solutions for respondents with limited financial abilities or access to devices.
- To prepare the blended education guidelines for teachers to follow accordingly for future crisis aversion.
- To incorporate the use of modular design in a blended course would be easier to navigate through for teachers with limited access to devices as they learn to make improvements.
- To reshape the teacher training policy in blended education, especially by providing a pedagogical support system to engage in reflective practice.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge and thank the National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM), Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education, NAEM Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh for their funding to conduct the research work in the fiscal year 2021-22, without which we could not imagine to accomplish this study.

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## Barriers Faced by Young People with Disabilities to Access Educational Institutions in Bangladesh

Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan<sup>1</sup>  
Dr. Md. Arizul Islam Khan<sup>2</sup>  
Karishma Ahmed<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*Persons with disabilities are some of the most marginalized and vulnerable group in Bangladesh. Violation of their rights and social exclusion starts from the very beginning of their life and right from their own family. However, Bangladesh government has promulgated several policies and laws to ensure their rights and has recognized their equal rights in all walks of life. However, still persons with disabilities are being deprived from one of their fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution which is right to education. Students with disabilities are denied admission in educational institutions or getting dropped out before completing schools. This research has identified the reasons due to which persons with disabilities are still being excluded from the schools despite such strong legal and policy backup. Through this qualitative study, range of students with disabilities, their support persons and education professionals were interviewed. This research has revealed the stigma, superstitions and negative attitudes that still exist in the society against persons with disabilities which act as some of the key factors behind exclusion or violation of their rights. Students, their caregivers, teachers and other education experts revealed the factors responsible for inaccessible education system and identified the resources required to ensure reasonable accommodation and accessibility. Thus, at the end of this study, the researchers have given a set of recommendations to ensure accessible and quality education for students with disabilities.*

**Keywords:** Disability, Education, Inclusive Education, Inclusion, Discrimination, Stigma, Exclusion, Educational Institutions, Accessibility, Reasonable Accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan, Assistant Professor, IER, Jagannath University, Dhaka-1100

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Md. Arizul Islam Khan, Deputy Director, NAEM, Ministry of Education, Dhaka-1205

<sup>3</sup> Karishma Ahmed, Director-Program, SEID; karishmavarisha@gmail.com

## Introduction:

Bangladesh has a population of 45 million young people (aged 15 - 29), 40% of them are not in school, employment or training. The percentage of Bangladeshis with a disability ranges from 10% [1] to 16% and is higher among lower income brackets (World Bank, 2016). Young people with disabilities are highly marginalized in terms of access to education, training jobs and income, with higher unemployment rates, and lower average incomes than their non-disabled peers; and it is worse for young women with disabilities (BBS, 2015).

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is committed to include young people with disabilities in the education sector. Supported by advocacy from the disability movement, the GoB ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), enacted the Disability Rights and Protection Act (2013) and developed the National Strategy for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Skills Development (2013). The National Plan of Action has been developed in 2015 to implement the Disability Rights and Protection Act, 2013. Furthermore, the government had adopted National Strategic Plan for Neurodevelopmental Disorder 2016-2021.

According to this plan, Neuro-developmental Disability Protection Trust has been formed to implement the strategic plan. Despite this, there has been little progress in improving educational outcomes for young people with disabilities in the last fifteen years. Enforcement of the law and strategic plans is very slow. Budget to implement the laws is highly inadequate. For instance, according to the Disability Rights and Protection Act, 2013 committees were supposed to be formed in every district and upazila to monitor the enforcement of the law.

However, in many districts and upazilas the committees have not been formed yet and where the committees have been formed, these are not at all functional. As a result, persons with disabilities, particularly children are still facing a wide range of discriminations including exclusion and drop out from educational institutions. According to UNICEF, where enrolment rate at primary school is over 97 percent in Bangladesh, only 11 percent children with disability receive any form of education in Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2017).

Therefore, for the long-term improved wellbeing and inclusion of young women and men with disabilities in Bangladesh through increased and equitable access to education and training, it is essential to understand and address the institutional barriers preventing the effective and independent participation of persons with disabilities.

## Objective of the study

- Recognizing the barriers young people with disabilities face in the educational institutions
- Identifying the stigma and discrimination that people with disabilities face in their everyday life accessing education and training
- Providing recommendations for educators to ensure inclusion and accessibility in educational institutions

## Literature Review

In 1784 AD Valentin Haüy established a school in Paris for the students with visual impairment where the students were taught in contemporary curriculum (Punani and Rawal, 1993). By establishing this school Haüy opened the door of modern education for persons with disabilities. At present, educational rights of students with disabilities has been recognised globally by the UNCRPD.

In many countries students with disabilities get special protection and stipend from the government to continue their education. For example, in the United Kingdom students with any form of disabilities are protected under the Equality Act, 2010 which compels educational institutions to treat the students with disabilities equally with the students without disability (Khochen, 2013). Moreover, in the UK students with disabilities entering full time or part time higher education also enjoy Disability Students Allowance funded by the government (Khochen, 2013; Barer, 2007).

Although a bit late, Bangladesh government has also established strong policy initiatives to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in educational institutions. Bangladesh's constitution, formulated in 1972, guarantees education as a fundamental right for all children regardless of any socio-physic-economic characteristics. Article 17 and 28 of the constitution have made the government solely responsible for ensuring education for all children and making education completely free from any type of discrimination.

Bangladesh government's National Education Policy, 2010 also ensures education for persons with disability. The policy states that the government will take steps to include "handicapped children" into mainstream education and also provide special education to children with disabilities.

However, in terms of practice, Bangladesh is still at an early stage in exercising inclusive education (Malak, Begum, Habib, Banu and Roshid, 2014). One of the reasons behind this is some terminologies and provisions of the aforementioned policies cause conceptual confusion among educational leaders and practitioners (Malak, Begum, Habib, Banu and Rashid, 2014). In many cases, special education is considered as the most effective method for educating persons with disabilities (Malak et.al 2014; Ahmmed, 2015). Even, policymakers and educational leaders still possess that traditional thought that children with disabilities can learn better if segregated from non-disabled children which may cause obstacles in including these children into mainstream schools (Malek et al 2014: Ahmmed 2015). Theoretically teachers are in favour of inclusion of children with disability in mainstream school but they also consider it unrealistic, often consider children with disability as liability and most of them are not fully confident that children with disability can be taught together with non-disabled children (Ahmmed, 2015).

## Theoretical Context

The research methodology of this study is qualitative in nature and procedures and techniques from "Stories of Experience and Narrative Enquiry" (Connelly & Clendenin, 1990)

have been adopted to conduct the study. The methodological choice to perform the study was guided by the following assumptions which were obtained from the literature review:

- Education and educational research are the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories (Connelly & Clendenin, 1990).
- Students with disabilities face stigma and discriminations in the society and in the educational institutions (Arulchelvan & Viswanathan, 2006; Macgregor, 2011; Anderson & Boyles, 2012).
- Students with disabilities in the developing countries are facing higher levels of discrimination to access education (Bhambhani, 2011, 2013; Sahu, 2014; Sabbir, 2016; Habib, 2012).
- During literature review concrete statistical data could not be found about the disabled students' access to educational institutions in Bangladesh.
- Enquiry of the narratives i.e. dividual stories of the disabled students and their caregivers would focus on their access to educational institutions and educational materials (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).
- Enquiry of the narratives i.e. individual stories of the disabled students and their caregivers would focus on the discriminations and negative attitudes they face in the society and how they affect their lives (Connelly & Clendenin, 1990).
- A focus group discussion with the student participants would focus on the concentrated set of observations and recommendations on the existing issue within a short time (Asbury, 1995).
- Based on the narratives of the students and observations from the focus group discussions, an enquiry of the narratives i.e. stories of the education professionals in Bangladesh regarding ensuring access to education for the disabled students would focus on the facts concerning disabled students' access to education and its influence on their lives.
- A focus group discussion with the education participants would highlight the specific issues and recommendations regarding the study topic within a short time.

So, the study consists of mainly two consecutive phases of interviews and focus group discussions; one is with the students with disabilities and their caregivers and another is with the education professionals. The interviews with the students were conducted to know deeply about their access to academic content and educational institutions. And focus group discussion with the students highlighted common experiences from all the students.

On the other hand, individual interviews and focus group discussion with the education professionals focused on the experiences of teachers and education administrators regarding ensuring access to educational services for the visually impaired students and its influence on the educational activities in tertiary level formal education of Bangladesh. Thus, obtained data from these two sets of interviews and focus group discussion were analysed to reach conclusion and recommendation of this qualitative research.

## Methodology of the Study:

### Sampling Method & Sample Size

Purposeful sampling has been done to identify OPDs, students with disabilities and their parents, NGOs and INGOs working on disability inclusion, and government officials concerned. Potential interviewees were determined through purposeful and in some cases snowball sampling method.

Sampling Unit	Sample size	Method
Students with disabilities (5 to 19 years old)	24 Students 2 students from each of 12 types of disability (Gender parity will be tried to ensure)	Purposive/snowball sampling
Parents/caregivers of disabled children	12 Parents/caregivers	Purposive/snowball sampling
Teachers	6 Teachers (2 from each type of schools)	Purposive
*OPD Leaders	8 Members (each from 8 divisions)	Purposive
Government Officials	5 Officials (Responsible Officials of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Jatiyo ProtibondhiUnnayan Foundation (JPUF) Neuro-developmental Disability Protection Trust, MoE and MOPME)	Purposive
NGO Officials	5 Persons	Purposive
Policymakers	2 Members (2 members of the standing committees on MoE and Ministry of social welfare)	Purposive
Government Institutions	2 Institutions (One from Dhaka, another from an upazila)	Purposive
Private schools in Dhaka	2 Schools (Two Bangla medium schools including one based in Dhaka, and two English medium schools including one based in Dhaka)	Purposive

Table-1: Sampling Method and Sampling Size

## Research Instruments

### The Interview Questionnaire

The interview questionnaire for the study was formed guided by the assumption that narrative interview for qualitative study is considered as a form of unstructured, in-depth interview with specific context (Lamnek, 1989; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Riesman, 1993; Flick, 1998). Questionnaire for the student was prepared with 5 open ended questions which were designed to motivate interviewees to tell their stories about personal experience and social context on the basis of research questions. The interview questionnaire first started with some introductory questions to trigger the interviewee to open their mind to share their personal stories. The questions were made in such a way that do not compel interviewee to take a particular opinion rather the interviewee shares his/her spontaneously and if necessary, the interviewee spontaneously comes to a rationalizing opinion or statement.

On the other hand, while interviewing education professionals, the 5 questions were also open ended but most of the questions centered on the facts shared by the students with disabilities. Questions to extract their stories were also included in the questionnaire.

Thus, the interview questionnaire was the main instrument to extract information from the interviewees in narrative form. Sample questionnaires used during the interview have been attached in the Appendix of the main study.

### Focus Group Discussion

The stories shared by the student participants were exhaustive and extensive. Therefore, after summarizing their stories, the commonly shared topics were carefully selected and to initiate a further discussion on these shared topics a focus group discussion was arranged with the visually impaired student participants of the study. During the interviews disabled students have shared their stories of challenges and obstacles to access educational institutions. They also shared their experiences how they felt about the importance of accessing education in their lives. After summarizing these observations, a questionnaire was developed for the focus group discussion with the aim to validate the summary observations from the shared stories. Two questionnaires were developed for the two set of participants that is one for the focus group discussion with the student participants and another for the focus group discussion with the education professionals. In both cases, the questionnaires were developed mostly to validate the specific findings from their stories. However, during both the focus group discussions participants spontaneously recommend various steps that could be taken to ensure barrier free media access to facilitate higher education of visually impaired students.

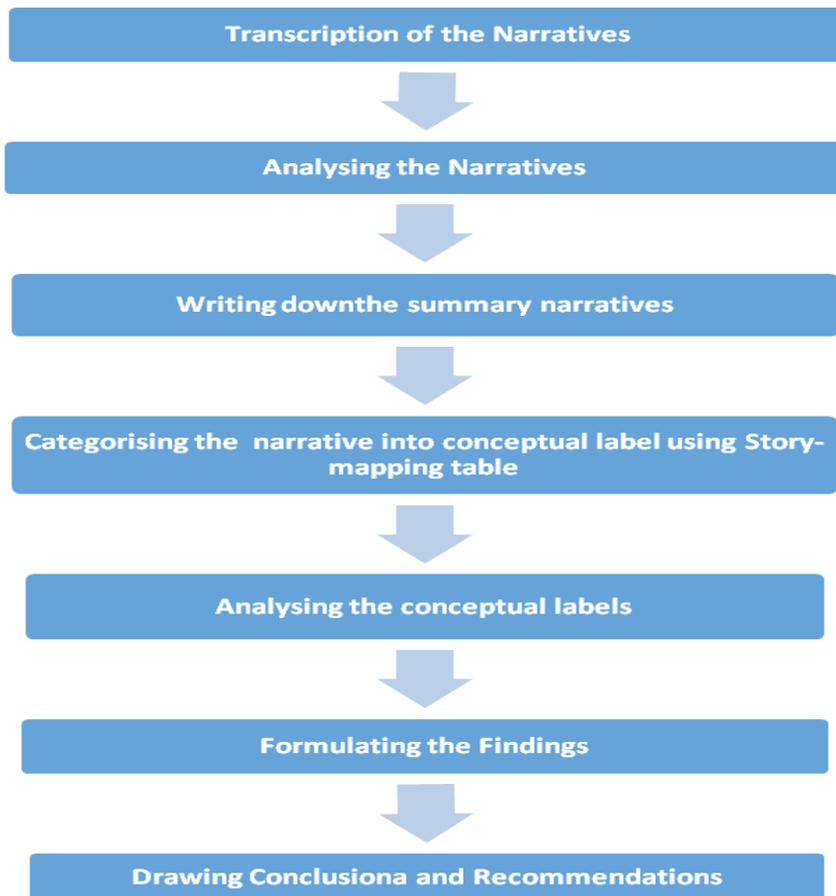
### Personal Information Checklist

To start with the narrative interview, at first some personal information of the participants were collected by the researcher in a form of friendly questionnaire. This personal information was mostly to the condition of their disability, treatment of disability conditions etc. This personal information which is also relevant to understand the current social context of the interviewee has been documented in a self-developed checklist of personal information. This personal information were kept confidential to other participants and not shared during any other part of the research. It was also carefully maintained that this personal information only helped the researcher to understand the social context of the participants and to facilitate the interview process, however, this information in no way influenced the research methodology or the research findings.

## Data Analysis

The research chose a story mapping technique for organizing data (Richmond, 1999). In this technique, at first the collected narratives were transcribed carefully. Then, by analyzing the transcription summary of every narrative has been documented and a story-mapping table has been placed under every summary narrative to label the narrative under different conceptual topics. Labelling of the narratives under different conceptual topics with the help of story-mapping table facilitate the researcher to derive findings from the research (Richmond, 1999). Then, by analyzing the social context and experiences of the participants through their narratives categorized under different conceptual topics and studied literature the findings of the research have been documented in this chapter.

So, the data analysis process and formulating the findings using Story-Mapping Table (Richmond, 1999) can be shown as follows:



*Figure 2: Step by step process of data analysis and deriving findings by Story-mapping table (Richmond, 1999)*

To extract relevant data from the FGD's and in-depth interviews, a three-dimensional narrative inquiry table according to Connelly and Clendenin's Three-Dimensional Space Narrative Structure (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) has been developed for each interview or FGD session. This table will categorize data into three major dimensions and five categories such as: Interaction (Feelings about conditions of persons [specially related to employment] with disabilities from personal and social context), Continuity (Employment rights of persons with disabilities in the past, present situation and future directions), Situation/Place (How the interviewee's current position [personal and social capital] can influence employment of persons with disabilities).

### The table for in-depth interview

Interaction (Feelings about conditions of persons [specially related to employment] with disabilities)		Continuity (Educational rights of persons with disabilities)			Situation (Identified Barriers and Proposed Solutions)	
Personal Context (A child of grade six with visual impairment)	Social Context	Past	Present Situation	Future Directions	Identified Barriers	Proposed Solutions
Being treated as burden in the family Restrictions to play with siblings and peers Restrictions to go to school Mostly stay confined to home Cannot access mass media and entertainment	Cannot participate in prayer in mosques Cannot participate in maqtab to learn Arabic Cannot attend invitation in the social gatherings such as marriage ceremony and feasts	Discrimination in the family Shunned by friends and peers Treated as burden in the community Cannot access any reading material and television programs Staying confined to home	Attending grade six in an inclusive school Often face discriminatory attitudes by the peers Often experience negative attitudes from the teachers and school staffs Very few experiences of positive attitudes	Uncertainty about school completion Fear of joblessness Worried about income and survival May get dropped out and get admitted to a madrasa	Negative attitude in the family Negative attitude by the education professionals Lack of community acceptance Lack of participation in the community	Recognising disability as a part of human diversity Awareness of disability among education professionals Inclusion of disability in the textbook Flexible curriculum and exam system

Table-2: Findings through FGD

### Table 3: A sample of narrative inquiry table which extracted information from a student participant

Through this process, an interviewee's personal reflections on disability rights, his/her insights on social recognition or acceptance of these rights, his/her detailed experience about employment rights, specific barriers and solutions can be effectively determined from the obtained narratives.

In fact, it was possible to specify the social factors which have been marginalizing persons with disabilities. These social factors can be divided into four categories which are as follows:

## 1. Social Stereotypes

Interviewees spoke about a lot of stereotypes which act as one of the key factors behind delimiting their rights and accessibility. Some of the frequently mentioned stereotypes are as follows:

**Helplessness:** Persons with disabilities are helpless and they always have to rely on others to lead their lives. They will always have to depend on charity to survive in the society.

**Dependent:** A person with disability always will depend on a family member to perform their daily living activities.

**Unemployed:** A person with disability will never be employable. They will always have to depend on charity or others' income. So, families do not want to invest on their education and training.

**Burden:** In low income families, persons with disabilities are often treated as burden as they have to invest hard earned funds for the disabled member's daily living but the member cannot earn for the family. The disabled members are often considered as economic drain.

**Cursed:** Society often thinks that a person with disability is born as the consequence of sins of the parents. They are often treated as curse from the God.

## 2. Negative Attitudes of the Society:

Persons with disabilities frequently experience harsh and demoralizing attitudes from the society. In the interviews, students with disabilities frequently mention about the following negative attitudes, they commonly encounter in the society:

**Prejudice:** One of the biggest reasons which discourage children with disabilities is they become victim of prejudice from their non-disabled peers. Non-disabled children often exclude them and neglect them from their groups. Even, the study found that many parents of non-disabled children discourage their children not to mingle with their disabled peers. This creates a lot of prejudice and exclusion for children with disabilities.

**Discrimination:** Children with disabilities frequently face discriminatory attitudes from the society and the school authorities. They cannot access the school infrastructure, they do not get reasonable accommodation during academic activities and so on.

**Denial of opportunities:** Students with disabilities are often denied opportunities on the ground of their disabilities. Many students stated that they could not study science during secondary level education due to their disability as teachers thought that they would not be able to participate in the laboratory classes. Many students also cannot get admitted to schools due to their disability. Persons with intellectual disability are mostly rejected even from the primary level institutions.

**Denial of Autonomy:** Persons with disabilities cannot take their own decision. The teachers and caregivers who accompany them to schools often take decisions about their academic life and future without even asking them as persons with disabilities are considered less intelligent and less capable in our society.

## 2. Effects of these factors on students with disabilities:

Effects of stereotypes and negative attitudes make profound impacts on the development of children with disabilities. The outcomes of these factors that were frequently shared by the interviewees are discussed below:

**Internalization of Stigma:** As children with disabilities face stigma and discrimination from the very beginning of their lives, they start to internalize the stigma. For instance, children often believe that their disability is the result of their parents' sin. Children often start to believe that they will never be able to succeed in life and they are completely helpless and good for nothing in the society.

**Low self-esteem:** All the student interviewees said that they always suffer from very low self-esteem. Even, their family members never encourage them to do anything. They always feel depressed about their disability. They feel discouraged to continue their education as they think that they will never be able to do a job and earn for their family. They also feel helpless about having a family life. They think that nobody will marry them and they will never be able to have a family life.

**Lack of self-advocacy:** Self-advocacy is very rare in Bangladesh. Presence of self-help groups is very rare in most of the rural areas and small towns. As a result, persons with disabilities are forced to lead an isolated and excluded life.

**Dependency on Charity:** Persons with disabilities are often sent to religious schools which are run by communal charity. Families often think that persons with disabilities will never be able to earn for the family, so they feel reluctant to invest on their education. As a result, they are often sent to religious schools where education, food and accommodation is free. Many interviewees informed the researchers that their parents were thinking to stop their schools and send them to religious schools. In this way, persons with disabilities become heavily dependent on charity from the very beginning till the end of their lives.

**Intersectionality of deprivation:** Persons with disabilities often face double marginalization due to intersectionality of deprivation. The interviews revealed that female children with disabilities face more discrimination than male children with disabilities. Female children with disabilities are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and bullying in the schools and thus are more vulnerable to drop out. Children with disabilities from impoverished families, rural areas and indigenous communities face more barriers than their richer, urban and Bengali counterparts. However, they receive almost no additional services or facilities for their double or triple marginalized conditions.

**Synchronization of Data:** Data obtained from document analysis (gaps in the policy and legal instruments) and interviews and FGDs (barriers of inclusion in the current educational practices) were synchronized to form a comprehensive report on gaps in policies to ensure decent employment for persons with disabilities and barriers faced by them in this regard.

## Findings and Recommendations

According to the research questions and additional questions of interest, the interviews were conducted and focus group discussions were conducted to validate the observations from the interviews. The story-mapping tables of each interview narrative helped to summarize the key findings according to the research questions. According to the research questions, the findings from the narratives have been divided into three parts that is,

- *Barriers to access education: comments from the parents;*
- *Barriers to access education: comments from the students;*
- *Barriers to access education: comments from the teachers;*
- *Barriers to access education: comments from the education professionals*

The findings and their analysis have been described below:

### Barriers to Access Education- Comments from Parents

Parents and caregivers in our country play a vital role in ensuring the right to education for their children. Parents and caregivers have become more conscious about their children with disabilities and are exploring different educational opportunities nowadays, but the options are very limited. The barriers for parents not to send their kids to schools that have been prominent during the discussion are given below with some direct quotes of the interviewees:

#### Negative attitudes

Social stigma, bullying from fellow students and rejection from the school authorities, guardians of students without disabilities often and still detest the parents and caregivers to send them to schools or opt for home-based education. People often blame families, especially the mother, for having children with disabilities as a punishment from the God for any of their ill deeds. Recently, a Bangla drama was made on the theme which portrays the societal stand on disability. Therefore, families, both affluent, educated and non-educated poor, opt for keeping their kids with disabilities at home and hidden.

One of the parents commented, *“The more my daughter gets exposed, the more people humiliate us, blame us. People still carry misconception on disabilities in heart. A guardian once told me that how dare I sent my mad son to school. He is spoiling others. My son has mild autism only.”*

#### 1. High tuition fees and lack of reasonable accommodation

In private schools, families most of the time have to arrange for reasonable accommodation themselves as the public schools have lengthy procedure. Inclusive infrastructure and building code or accessibility are not incorporated in the inception level. On the other hand, private schools charge from Tk 1 lakh to 2 lakh for a single admission which is hard for many families to afford.

One of the parents commented, *“Private schools charge plenty of donation for admission and other tuition fees. After a few months or years, they again force us to leave schools based on other parent’ complaints. On the other hand, public schools are reluctant to admit our children.”*

## **2. Inaccessible infrastructure**

Another great factor is inaccessible infrastructure that also contribute to the drop-out rate of children with disabilities. Most of the schools were found to have no lift, no alternative education materials or ramp. All the guardians who send their children to the government schools said they had to arrange for the reasonable accommodation like installing a high-commode. But, still limitations exist, so do scopes for alternative solutions.

A parent asked in desperation, *“How can my son on wheelchair enter his classroom on the third floor?”*

## **3. Lack of accessible public transport/ Expensive private transports**

Students with disabilities are often refused access to public transport. No bus, CNG-run auto-rickshaw, rickshaws can carry wheelchairs. They have to cover long distances to reach schools either by walking or hiring private transports which are very expensive. Guardians of children who needs wheel-chair either have to shift to a house near the schools or have to walk and push the wheelchair to the school due to lack of alternative solutions.

A parent asked during the interview, *“Do anyone ever realize how hard it is to ride the bus or an auto-rickshaw with a teenage girl having cerebral palsy and her wheelchair. It is way harder for a single mother than it seems. Using private car is something that everyone cannot afford.”*

## **4. Lack of cooperation in schools**

Teachers often complain and threaten guardians to take their children with disabilities to some other schools or recommend special schools claiming that they are a ‘bad influence’ for other students. In public schools, the classrooms are already crammed with students and their extra work for attending students with disabilities is ‘not recognized’. However, the private school authorities are introducing different methods like ‘shadow teachers’ which again call for a huge amount of money.

A parent asked in desperation, *“My daughter complains of teachers’ lack of attention or rude behavior: If we want to talk to them, they threaten us to leave the schools. What can we do?”*

## **5. Inaccessible curriculum**

Curriculum is already rigid for the students without disabilities, let alone the learners with disabilities. Our study system requires the learners to fit in their system rather than being modified for the learners. Giving just 10 minutes extra to the students with disabilities is not even sometimes enough for children with visual disabilities. It may vary for students to students based on their type and intensity of disabilities. But, the authorities concerned are yet to acknowledge the fact.

A parent shared his experience during the interview, *“My son with down’s syndrome often asks me why he can do all the sums at home and not in schools. The school authorities do not understand that he is not yet prepared for three-digit sums. And after a few months, they will*

*start pressurizing us to leave the school using this as an excuse”.*

## **6. Lack of alternative educational material**

School authorities do not provide any alternative educational materials to students with disabilities. School authorities do not allocate any budget to purchase alternative educational materials. Students with disabilities face difficulties to access academic content and have to rely on their support persons or friends to participate in the academic activities. One of the parents of a student said, *“There is no green board at my daughter’s school. Braille is available only in schools meant for students with visual impairment.”*

## **7. Safety concerns especially for girls**

Parents of female children with disabilities are reluctant to send their children to school fearing sexual abuse and bullying. One of the parents commented, *“We, the parents of girl child have to take extra precautions. Nowadays, the boys are even being physically and sexually abused by their fellow students or teachers, let alone girls. It is better to keep our children safe at home than sending them schools to become more vulnerable and violated.”*

## **Barriers to Access Education-Comments from Students**

From interviews of the students with disabilities, diverse range of barriers to access education have come out through this research. These barriers are as follows:

### **1. Rejection by fellow students**

All the students claimed that the unfriendly behaviors of the other students demotivated them. They often get bullied and harassed. The students use the words *“Disabled/ Autistic/ Protibondhi”* to abuse each other. One of the student interviewees said, *“No one wanted to sit beside me. They called me mad and would yell at me. I did not like school, I like to stay at home.”*

### **2. Lack of cooperation and support of teachers**

Students shared that teachers cannot understand their needs and thus they do not provide adequate support in the classroom. For special assistances, the teachers often tell parents of the students to get admitted to coaching centers which are quite expensive for most of the students. Teachers often use harsh and abusive words when students with disabilities cannot perform regular academic activities with non-disabled peers. Again, many teachers have pre-conceived perceptions that students with disabilities will not be able to get good scores, so, they do not provide adequate support for the disabled students. Trust between teachers and students and teachers and guardians is yet to build. Lack of proper training and reasonable accommodation contribute to this factor. Parents/caregivers needs to know all about the classroom system which the teachers take as a challenge or humiliation. One of the student interviewees said, *“My teachers would also yell at me. They often got angry when I asked any question repeatedly.”*

### **3. Inaccessible infrastructure and washrooms**

Schools in general do not have accessible washrooms. The toilets could hardly

accommodate a wheel chair inside. No pictorial signage or use of tactile tiles was found in the schools. One of the students said, *“The washrooms are very narrow. I cannot enter with my wheelchair. There was no high-commode either. The support staffs were reluctant to help me. All laughed and got angry when I peed in my pants. I felt so humiliated.”*

#### **4. Inaccessible classrooms and labs**

Classrooms in most schools are also inaccessible. Benches were placed in several rows in such the ways that students with crutches, white sticks or wheel chairs will face difficulties to move around the classroom. Again, some classrooms and labs were in the upper floors and the building does not have any lift or ramps so students with physical disabilities cannot reach. Most of the schools do not have trained laboratory demonstrator to guide students with disabilities. As a result, in all the schools it was found that students with disabilities are being forced to study business studies or humanities in the secondary level.

One of the students said, *“I wanted to study science in secondary level. However, I was forced to take humanities due to my physical disability. My teachers said that I will not be able to work with chemicals due to problems with my hands and forced me to cancel science and take up humanities for the upcoming SSC exam.”*

#### **5. No alternative educational material**

Accessible education materials for students with disabilities are not available in inclusive schools or regular schools. These materials can be found only in special schools. As a result, students with disabilities who study in inclusive schools or regular schools face serious obstacles to perform their academic activities. The schools neither have any teachers trained on alternative learning methods nor any alternative educational materials.

One of the student interviewees said, *“I had to leave my previous school as it did not have any teacher to teach me in Braille method.”*

#### **6. No scope for recreational activities**

Students with disabilities were excluded from recreational activities. During recess when all the non-disabled students get involved in playful activities, students with disabilities were left alone in the classroom. The schools do not have suitable playing equipment or safe space for students with disabilities.

#### **7. No scope for co-curricular activities**

Students with disabilities also cannot participate in the co-curricular activities. During cultural activities or sports competition, these students cannot participate at all. Students with disabilities are rarely included in any cultural show. Stigma, misconception and lack of training contribute to this matter. One of the student, interviewees said,

*“I never got the chance to sing or participate in any cultural show. But you know I can sing well.”*

## 8. Inaccessible or expensive transports

Student with disabilities often get dropped out due to lack of accessible transports to schools. They are often denied access to public transport and have to hire private transport to go to school. When they cannot bear the cost of transportation, they often stop going to school. One of the interviewees said, *“My father took me to school for a month. But decided to stop my schooling as everything became so expensive for him to afford. Now, only my brother goes to school.”*

### Barriers to Access Education-Comments from Teachers

Teachers, in general, are sympathetic towards children with disabilities. They agree, in theory, that educating children with disabilities is possible but they said that enrolling students with disabilities is not pragmatic under current circumstances. They pointed out many obstacles to ensure accessibility in schools. These are mentioned below:

1. Lack of suitable training for teachers, headmasters, support staffs and caregivers;
2. Lack of partnership/coordination between special schools, mainstream schools and inclusive schools;
3. Insufficient salary and facilities of teachers which discourage them from investing extra hours;
4. Lack of support staff and resource teacher in the schools;
5. No application of Individualized Education Plan (IEP): The school authorities and teachers have no idea about IEP. Only some special schools do practice and prepare it, encouraging segregated education system. Therefore, the education system has become something that need the students to fit into it rather than being modified to fit the learners;
6. Absence of resource teachers: No teacher in mainstream schools, particularly in public schools, are trained to handle and educate students with disabilities. A few private schools do have some trained teachers but they charge a lot but often lack in terms of accountability and transparency with guardians;
7. Absence of sign language interpretation: What we have now in the country is special schools, which means segregated schools, and some integrated schools. However, sign language interpretation which supports multiple disabilities is absence in almost all the schools we interviewed;
8. Shortage of Braille books & mathematical instruments: Likewise, education materials are very hard to find in alternative forms such as braille books and suitable mathematical instruments;
9. Non-allowance of support persons: Already classrooms and schools are mobbed with students way more than its capacity. Therefore, support staffs deem supporting students with disabilities as extra burden as they do not get any extra paid for the additional effort;

10. Negative attitudes of teachers: Teachers get often rude as they are not trained and also because their extra effort is not recognized through payments or other means.

### **Barriers to Access Education- Comments from Education Professionals (GO/ NGO Leaders)**

1. Activating national and district level coordination committees: Every district has a coordination committee formed with government officials concerned. They are assigned to support admission of students with disabilities and their sustainability, and also to probe any discrimination and thereby ensure compensation. Unfortunately, these committees are still inactive.
2. No system/practice for mainstream schools to exchange knowledge: Only a few schools get necessary modern training from the government but do not share it, resulting in lack of resource schools and teachers.
3. Lack of knowledge on potentials of persons with disabilities: Most of the school authorities are unaware of all the types of disabilities. Moreover, neurodevelopmental disabilities are still a myth. So, early detection and early intervention is still absent.
4. Lengthy procedure to make reasonable accommodations especially in public schools: Public school authorities often are reluctant to arrange for any reasonable accommodation and look up to NGOs and individual donations.
5. Lack of advocacy campaigns from OPDs: OPDs still favour segregated or special schools for their own benefit which hampers the advocacy for inclusive education.
6. Unwillingness of families: Families prefer to keep their children with disabilities at home fearing social stigma and security issues.
7. Sustainability issues of foreign funded projects: Foreign funds are available for short-term projects mainly focused on particular activities. Foreign funds on sustainable advocacy and support are rare to get.
8. Inter-ministerial coordination: Lack of coordination among the social welfare ministry, education ministry, primary and mass education ministry, education board, and teachers' training institutes is another big challenge.
9. Lack of employment opportunities: Lack of employment for person with disabilities devalue them in the society, indirectly discouraging families, educational institutes to come forward to establish inclusive education system.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the identified barriers and discussions with the interviewees during interviews and FGDs, a set of recommendations has been developed to remove the barriers and make educational institutions accessible for students with disabilities:

1. Ensuring accessibility in educational services and infrastructure

2. Ensuring reasonable accommodation wherever children with disabilities face barriers. The existing schools need to consult with authorities to find alternative solutions to make the infrastructure accessible while the under-construction buildings need to run accessibility check during planning and incorporate the necessary technology. Many school authorities seem reluctant to adopt accessible features terming it expensive but many public university students are successfully working on making cheap alternatives such as bamboo lift. Therefore, a coordination is needed to promote the technologies.
3. Ensuring suitable training for teachers: To make an inclusive education system, teachers' training needs to be incorporated in the basic training module. For this, coordination is needed among Teachers' Training Institutes, PTI, Institute for Educational Research, and related government institutes.
4. Advocacy with different stakeholders, both public and private, is needed for making the curriculum conducive for children/persons with disabilities
5. Special attention should be given on under-represented groups such as children with neuro-developmental disabilities, children with visual and hearing disabilities and children with severe and multiple disabilities
6. Effective media campaigns & awareness programs are needed to inform the people about disability and the ongoing preparation of government to make the society inclusive to eliminate existing misconceptions

## Concluding Remarks

The ultimate goal of this study is to ensure accessibility to children with disabilities so that they can fully utilise their potential and flourish their capacities and contribute to the betterment of the society they live in. This research has endeavored to figure out the challenges these students have been facing to get access to educational institutions, which is one of the most fundamental rights. From the bleak scenario and numerous barriers discussed earlier, we can easily assume how much difficulties our citizens with disabilities have been facing to lead their lives in this society. To improve this bleak condition, persons with disabilities see education as the most effective tool for empowerment. Education can change this situation positively and significantly by raising awareness and by making them employable and economically self-sufficient. Therefore, government, non-government stakeholders, mass media, community workers and persons with disabilities should work together to establish a more inclusive, discrimination and barrier free society where rights of every citizen will be respected in all parts of the society.

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