

The impact of COVID-19 Pandemic: Education sector of Bangladesh

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With the onset of COVID-19 Pandemic, the global education system is going through an unprecedented disruption. In the global arena, students of all levels are momentarily out of their respective educational institutions due to the temporary suspension because of COVID-19 pandemic. In an attempt to control the devastating spread of COVID-19, there was nationwide shutdown across 150 countries affecting almost 80% of the world student population, according to UNESCO. To keep track on the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the governments of South Asia have imposed lockdown and temporary suspension of all kinds of economic activities alongwith the closure of all educational institutions across the region.

Though different mode and strategies of learning by different countries have resulted in an almost balanced continuation of the learning process but has not been fruitful for all levels of students. The most popular E-learning methods have been opted by almost every nation and at times considered to be successful. Though E-learning boom is here to stay, the process also indicates the growing divides between the rich and poor receiving education through online platforms. Economic recession impacted heavily students all over the world as well. According to UNICEF, in South Asia, almost 430 million children are affected by school closures and are at risk of dropping out of the education system due to the economic impact on their families. Individuals with psychosocial challenges, mental health issues, hindrance in personal growth and development, unequal access to education materials, economic impact on the family income are acting as barriers that need to be overcome with the help of short and long term approaches in Bangladesh.

On March 16, 2020 the Government of Bangladesh declared closures to all academic institutions, dormitories and coaching centers as well, considering the devastating spread of corona virus. With the growing public concern the closure period got extended time to time, till June 15, 2020. According to different news sources around 30 million students in all categories of institutions and close to a million teachers as well as education personnel in Bangladesh. The government also argued the public to confine themselves in homes by maintaining social distancing. These prolonged closures are not only affecting the academic career of these students, it is also hampering their mental health as well. Considering the present reality, there is a high possibility of session jams at the universities. The SSC examination of 2020 luckily has been taken and results have been published recently but the HSC candidates of 2020 are still in huge uncertainty. Most of the candidates and their families are going through an unimaginable mental pressure, thinking of their future career prospects. The present situation also shows that it will increase the disparity between the students living in remote rural areas with their urban counterparts. Students living in the rural areas fear that they would be left out as they lack the access to high speed data connectivity along with other facilities.

If school closure can be looked through different lens, the growth and development of students are hindered significantly. This longtime closure due to COVID-19 pandemic is negatively impacting the overall learning capacity of the students. When schools remain open, students can learn interactively and stay active with different kinds of activities such as sports. But this prolonged closure in Bangladesh as well as globally significantly affecting the mental health and growth of these young minds. Global economic recession are impacting the lives of all levels of working people in South Asian nations but in Bangladesh, the lower middle and below social class are affected the most. As a result, the children with a lower social standing in Bangladesh are more likely to be dropout from their respective schools as their parents would be unable to continue the expenditure. The reality is there is no hope to get these dropouts as they might turn into child laborers due to combating the poverty.

The tertiary level students, meaning the high school and college students are most likely losing their interest to overall learning procedures. This student population of tertiary level are mostly teenagers who are not used to be confined for this long time period. Due to this these students are getting more addicted to internet and social media platforms. Mental health are highly

compromised of these population as they are going through a lot towards an uncertain period of life. As most of the people are losing jobs it will impact the educational lives of these students as well.

On April 30, 2020, the government asked the public and private universities to continue their curriculum through online classes and start their academic activities online. Now 63 private universities and 7 public universities are conducting their online academic activities as per the UGC rules. Distance learning or online learning have been a productive measure in this global pandemic crisis for many. To some extent the percentage of unmet demand of the students is also increased due to the scarcity of online access in remote and unprivileged communities. Unequal access to educational resources to different levels of students are creating barriers to their learning process. Benefits of digital services are a lot in terms of using it in the digital mode of education but not all the students have access to a smooth internet access and other educational materials. As a result, though the online learning process impacts the overall outcome of a student of a country.

To combat this pandemic and design a better life for the student population of Bangladesh certain approaches are essential. Alternative means of education are needed to develop at all levels, to facilitate learning process of the students regardless of their region or financial status. Implementing measures for an inclusive distant E-learning program is needed to cater the unmet demand of all students in the country regardless of the medium. Students from low-income backgrounds are at high risk of dropping out, which will initially give an increase to social problems like child labor, early marriage etc. Aiding the low-income students' families and giving proper digital support to the remote area students needed to ensure in terms of access to E-learning education. Ensuring financial support and basic facilities for the teachers are needed to keep the learning procedure continue and a special incentive can be introduced addressing their needs. Another possible challenge that needs attention is the psychosocial issues faced by the students. In this pandemic, students' mental health is affected severely and the development process is not going well. Different psychosocial challenges are arising in their lives which needs proper observance. Prioritizing solutions to the psychosocial needs of students should be considered. Though many institutions are giving free access to online courses to enhance the skill development process of the students, it is also needed to monitor the procedures for

transparency. Defining a regulatory platform either individual institutional level or Government level, needs to be addressed for a transparent E-learning procedure. As this new pandemic of 2020 showed us the need of alternative modes in different sectors, educational sector is no exception to it too. A suitable mode of reform of the education system is a “Must” for the student population of Bangladesh. A unified approach in the primary level can be a good start to the reformation of education system. COVID-19 pandemic has shaken the whole world to the core and along with all other sectors global academic sector is affected as well. To combat this situation in Bangladesh in long term, we need to focus on managing the post-covid Bangladesh more by ensuring a smooth continuation of learning process now. Introducing different mode of learning and alternative learning systems with appropriate inclusion of student population can be a great approach for Bangladesh educational sector.

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