

Understanding Primary and Secondary Schooling in Bangladesh In and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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1. INTRODUCTION

This research note article focuses on primary and secondary education and schooling in Bangladesh. More than ten years ago, the author stayed in Bangladesh almost for two years, and conducted the field research. The field research examined some alternative primary schooling programs in Bangladesh, particularly targeted at and arranged for children from low-income families living in the poverty-stricken areas of the capital city, Dhaka.

Like many other countries, the COVID-19 (Corona Virus Infectious Disease emerged in 2019) pandemic caused “an unprecedented shock to livelihoods and education in Bangladesh” (ADB 2021). The Bangladesh Government enforced the nationwide school closure twice: the first closure was for more than 18 months between March 2020 and September 2021, and the second one was for one month in February 2022. The Government estimated over 36 million children were affected by the closures (World Bank 2020).

In order to prevent children's learning loss, on March 29, 2020, only twelve days after all the educational institutions were closed on March 17, 2020, the Bangladesh Government began providing primary and secondary school students with distance (remote) and virtual learning contents, through television, online, and radio broadcasting platforms (ADB 2021). Meanwhile, the Government and some international organizations, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and UNICEF, monitored and conducted survey studies on how the educational sector, particularly primary and secondary schooling, had been influenced by the COVID-19 outbreak.

This article employs the results of those studies. After introducing some background information of Bangladesh, its education system, and recent schooling data, the article will first review some of the new educational modalities and virtual learning resources initiated by the Bangladesh Government during the COVID-19 outbreak. Second, it summarizes how the pandemic affected primary and secondary schools, children, and their families in Bangladesh. This section describes some inequalities and disparities generated during the COVID-19 related school closures. Finally, the paper discusses what would be crucial in considering some recovery strategies from the significant learning loss. It yet concludes the discussion

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with an optimistic perspective toward the future primary and secondary education in Bangladesh.

2. SCHOOLING IN BANGLADESH

The name of the country, Bangladesh, means “Country (*desh*) of Bengal (*bangla*),” and the people, Bengalis, have “evolved a peasant culture of their own based on wet rice cultivation” (Blanchet 2001:229). The title and very first phrase of their national anthem, “*Amar Shonar Bangla*” (“My Golden Bengal”), *shonar* (made of gold) expresses the color of the paddy field and rice crops, just before harvesting. Agriculture has been one of the country’s major industries. About 60 percent of the population resides in rural areas, and 37 percent of employment are generated in the agriculture sector (World Bank 2023).

The population of Bangladesh in 2022 is estimated at 171 million. Compared to the other sixth most populated countries (e.g. China, India, and the U.S.), the size of Bangladesh is incredibly small. That makes Bangladesh one of the most densely populated countries. The population is also predicted to reach more than 200 million people by 2030 (UNDP 2010; World Bank 2023). Since the mid-1980s, the vast amount of the domestic and foreign investments led to economic boom in Bangladesh’s largest industry, the ready-made garment sector. It has drawn a number of young male and female migrants to urban cities, particularly to Dhaka and Chittagong (two largest cities in Bangladesh), and changed the pattern and nature of internal migration in Bangladesh (Afsar 2003). More than half of the low-income migrant population in Dhaka is now estimated to be younger than 35 years of age (Hossain 2008).

Population pressure is one element of Bangladesh that is often referenced when the country is mentioned. As a country, Bangladesh is often portrayed as having serious and multiple severe challenges, from population pressure to natural calamities (e.g. floods and cyclones), political infighting and corruption, labor unrest, and inequalities in economic advancement and provision of social welfare and services. These stereotypes and images of Bangladesh have attracted and justified a vast amount of foreign and international development assistance and aid flowing into the country. The Bangladesh Government seeks funds and assistance from foreign nations and international donors, and on the other hand, interventions in nation building and plans under the name of “development” programs and projects continue. The Government received US\$5.04 billion worth of multilateral and bilateral development aid in 2021, and 14.5 percent of the government’s expenses in 2021 was financed from the official development assistance (ODA) (World Bank 2023).

2 - 1 History in Education

In Bangladesh, no nation-wide indiscriminate or compulsory institutionalized education existed before 1971. The first institutionalized but exclusive education was the English language education offered by missionaries during the early British period (the latter half of the 18th century). More formal and systematic education gradually appeared; however, the colonial state apparatus limited the English-medium education to the Hindu upper-class elites. Most of the Muslim population was, on the other hand, in *madrasa* schools initiated by local religious leaders. Although there were also a few British-educated Muslim elites, they share the view of the colonial state and were strongly against making primary school “universal,” because they did not find it “cost effective or economically profitable” (Latif 2004:69). A Muslim elite class began to see the need for tertiary education in the 1870s; however, little was devoted to the primary level of education (Latif 2004). This shows that not only did a systematic formal education for children of low-income agricultural laborers and sharecroppers exist, but it was not even considered a necessary government social service or function until the 1970s.

When the new Constitution was enforced in 1972, “education” became one of the “basic necessities of life” for the state to deliver, in addition to its responsibility to provide “food, clothing, shelter, medical care, jobs, reasonable rest, recreation, leisure, and social security.” The new policies had promised to “increase access to basic education for ... masses for the rural poor and females, and for greater functional relevance of schooling at all levels of the system” (Latif 2004:82). The first educational programs in the 1970s and 1980s taught technical and vocational skills, in order to produce “educated and skilled workers” for a new nation building; and thus, primary schools were not expanded across the country until the 1990s (Latif 2004:275). Few non-formal education programs were introduced and implemented at that time, but the programs were all small-scale and not a priority of the Bangladeshi government or international donors. The programs were rather “rhetoric, lip service, and promises” gesturing in and outside of the country (Latif 2004:271).

The critical turning point for the Bangladeshi educational enterprise was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, and the World Conference on “Education for All” in 1990 held by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. The CRC has altered the “truth” about education from “a basic necessity of life” to a fundamental “right” (White 2002; Latif 2004). Following these events, in the last two decades in Bangladesh, the number of formal and non-formal schooling programs dramatically increased. Furthermore, an independent ministry, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), was newly established in 1992, exclusively to look for primary and non-formal education, and non-formal primary education (NFPE) programs became a priority of the administration along with formal education. Another ministry in charge of education, the Ministry of Education (MOE), was, on the other hand, established in 1972 (shortly after the independence), as the Ministry of Education, Religion, Sports and Cultural Affairs, and became the current MOE in 1993 (Bangladesh Ministry of Education 2012). The Compulsory Primary Education Act was also enforced in 1993 to make primary education compulsory and free (Latif 2004).

2 - 2 Schooling System

The formal school system in Bangladesh consists of many different levels and types of institutions: pre-primary, primary (compulsory), junior secondary, secondary, higher secondary (intermediate college), cadet college, degree college, university, graduate schools, and *madrassa* (*ebtedayee* (primary-level), *dakhil* (secondary-level), *alim* (higher secondary-level), *fazil* (bachelor-level), and *kamil* (bachelor- and masters-level)). Each level of schooling is linked to another level. A student enters and completes one level of education, and then he or she can move up to another level to meet his or her goal.

Approximately at the age of six, children enroll either in primary school or *ebtedayee* of the *madrassa* education system, both of which last for five years (Grade 1 to 5). (Some students attend both types of primary schools.) Students graduate when they are ten years old. To complete primary education, they are required to take the national “Primary Education Completion” exam. After primary school, they move up to junior secondary (Grade 6 to 8 (age 11 to 13)), secondary (Grade 9 to 10 (age 14 and 15)), and higher secondary school (Grade 11 and 12 (age 16 and 17)). After each level of secondary education, students take public examinations known as the Junior Secondary School Certificate (JSC), Secondary School Certificate (SSC), and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), respectively. The scores of each student’s exams will determine which school he or she is eligible to enter and public scholarships he or she can receive. After Grade 12, students continue to the college and university level of education.

In Bangladesh, the primary school level of formal education alone consists of seven different institutions: 1) Government; 2) Experimental; 3) Registered non-government; 4) Non-registered non-government; 5) Kindergarten; 6) Attached to high school; and, 7) Community. Among different types of primary schools, the MoPME runs “government” and “experimental” schools.ⁱ⁾ The “registered” and “non-registered

non-governmental” schools, “kindergarten,” as well as “primary schools attached to high school” are all private institutions; though the “registered” schools receive financial support from the Government for teachers’ salary (while the “non-registered” schools do not). The “registered” and “non-registered non-governmental” schools do not mean they are run by non-profit NGOs, and are not equivalent to NFPE programs. The “registered” and “non-registered non-governmental” schools are private institutions pursuing profits (e.g. “non-governmental” implies “private”), while the NGO-led NFPE programs are operated without any commercial interest (e.g. NGOs means “non-profit”). In addition, what they call “kindergarten” is not only for pre-primary school children, but covers up to the Grade 5 level. It usually implies English-medium schools, and intends to offer (or imitate) foreign (often British or American) teaching programs to the upper, middle, and lower-middle class children. Some villages operate their own “community” primary schools that are exclusively found in rural areas. Nearly 75 percent of an estimated 16.4 million primary school students are either enrolled in the government or registered non-government school (54 percent and 21 percent, respectively), and more than 60 percent of approximately 320 thousand teachers work at either of these two types of primary schools (45 percent and 19 percent, respectively) (Nath and Chowdhury 2009; UNICEF Bangladesh 2010).

Bangladesh, where estimated a few hundred thousand children are still out of school, continuously gives room for alternative schooling, Non-Formal Education (NFE) programs today. Meanwhile, the “world’s most ambitious NFE campaign” in Bangladesh has been exposed to criticism for decades. They, for example, state that the Bangladeshi NFE programs “suffer from a lack of management and implementation capabilities, lack of vision amongst the political leadership ... an absence of sustainable post literacy and continuing education schemes, increasing politicization, and corruption in the form of ghost NGOs, ... and ‘messed’ literacy statistics” (Latif 2004:278). Nonetheless, at the time of 2010 when the author was in Bangladesh, 830 international and national NGOs run approximately 50 thousand small-scale NFPE schools (generally referred to as “learning centers”) with funds from the Government and foreign donors. Of these, the Government was responsible for two primary school programs: the Basic Education for Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) project in urban cities, with the support of UNICEF, and the Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) project in rural areas, with the support of the World Bank. In addition, there were three major NGO-run NFPE programs: Save the Children USA’s SHIKHON (Learning Alternative for Vulnerable Children) Project, supported by Dubai Cares and the European Commission (EC); the largest Bangladesh NGO, BRAC’s Primary School (BPS) Program, funded by UK Department for International Development (DFID), Dutch Government, Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), Norwegian Government, UNICEF; and, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), the local NGO’s Up-scaling NFPE through Institutionalizing Qualitative Endeavour (UNIQUE) Project, also supported by the EC. For all NFPE programs across the country, more than two million children participated, and nearly 50 thousand teachers were recruited (Nath and Chowdhury 2009).

2 - 3 Recent Schooling in Numbers

The gross and net primary school enrollment rates were: 54 percent and 52 percent, respectively, in 1970; 78 percent and 75 percent in 1990; 100 percent and 91 percent in 2010; and, 118 percent (and the net enrollment rate is unknown) in 2020 (World Bank 2023). The primary school completion rate in 2010 remained as low as 65 percent of all students enrolled in primary school at Grade 1 finish the full course of primary education, though it was 108 percent in 2022 (World Bank 2013).

The following table (Table 1) shows the summary data of the Government’s recent study on children’s education across all 64 districts of the country. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), together with

UNICEF Bangladesh, conducted the survey with 9,000 households between December 2021 and January 2022, in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak and school closure. The result report was published in March 2023. It clearly shows the changes in the status of children's education before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (BBS 2023).

Table 1. Schooling Related Data Before and During the Pandemic and School Closure

	Before the COVID-19 pandemic (2019)	During the pandemic (Dec 2021 to Jan 2022)
Percentage of children attending school at their official age (%)	(Not available)	Primary: 77.7 Lower secondary: 66.2
Gross intake rate to the last grade of primary and lower secondary school (%)	(Not available)	Primary: 88.7 Lower secondary: 83.6
Primary and lower secondary school completion rate (%)	Primary: 82.6 Lower secondary: 64.7	Primary: 78.2 Lower secondary: 64.1
Primary and lower secondary school drop-out rate (%)	(Not available)	Primary: 3.1 Lower secondary: 5.0
Transition rate from primary to secondary school (%)	94.5	94.1
Repetition rate in primary and lower secondary school (%)	(Not available)	Primary: 3.7 Lower secondary: 2.4

Source: BBS et. al. 2023; Reliefweb 2023

3. NEW EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Bangladesh Government quickly responded to the sudden school closures after the COVID-19 outbreak. All the educational institutions were closed on March 17, 2020, and the first distance (remote) and virtual lessons were broadcasted through television (TV) on March 29, 2020, only twelve days after the school closure. The lessons were developed based on the national curriculum, and targeted pre-primary, primary, and secondary students. In addition to the TV, the Government expanded the services through radio as well as online platforms including e-konnect, Facebook, YouTube, and Google Meet (ADB 2021; JICA 2022; World Bank 2020).

The major reason why the Bangladesh Government could promptly initiate the distance education resources available for primary and secondary school students was probably the Digital Bangladesh Vision 2021 and the SMART Bangladesh Vision 2041. In the Vision 2041, the Government set a goal to become a high-income country by 2041, and to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) along the way. To achieve the vision, the “a2i” (Access to Information) program was launched in 2007. It is “a multinational digital transformation organization,” and its objective is to make information and communication technology more accessible to citizens (the general public) nationwide, and improve public services (including educational services), through information technologies. Its “educational” services may include digitalizing educational materials, implementing e-learning platforms, improving information access for students and teachers, and making technology useful to speed up administrative processes in educational institutions. The a2i program also assisted in developing the virtual learning (schooling) system during the COVID-19 school closures (a2i 2024).

3 - 1 TV-Based Distance Learning Program

As mentioned above, in less than two weeks after schools were closed due to the COVID-19 in March 2020, the MoE and the MoPME began broadcasting the educational programs on TV, through the Sangsad Bangladesh Television known as “Sangsad TV.” Sangsad TV is a state-owned parliamentary television launched in 2011, a sister channel of another state-owned national television network called “Bangladesh Television (BTV).” During the COVID-19 outbreak, the Sangsad TV and BTV aired live lessons for primary and secondary school students (The Business Standard 2020).

The program was called “Ghore Bose Shikhi” (Learn from Home). It aimed at ensuring learning (schooling) opportunities for children, and preventing learning loss even in the midst of the pandemic and school closure. The class started at 2 p.m. and ended at 4 p.m., and the hours are divided to 20 minutes for each subject. When this program started, students were required to submit assigned homework once school reopened (The Business Standard 2020). It was probably not expected the school closure would last for 18 months. The MoPME posted the weekly broadcasting schedule every week, and schools instructed their students to watch the programs accordingly (Padeco 2020; World Bank 2020).

3 - 2 Radio-Based Distance Learning Program

During the first school closure, the educational program immediately became available via TV for school children; however, in Bangladesh, only 56 percent of the households had access to a television. Thus, the MoPEM launched the same “Ghore Bose Shikhi” (Learn from Home) program through radio broadcasting too in August 2020, with the support of UNESCO and the Government's a2i Program (UNESCO 2020).

By October 2020, the MoPME prepared “600 engaging audio lessons in Mathematics, Social Science, Bangla, and English,” and at that time, there were 310 more lessons to be recorded. The radio programs also followed “the national curriculum and official textbooks,” and each lesson lasted for ten minutes per subject (in comparison to 45 minutes for a regular lesson at school). The contents of the lessons were developed by 40 trained teachers. In addition, a “toll-free hotline” was established to offer students an opportunity to interact with teachers, and to obtain clarifications when they have questions. Feedback from students, teachers, and parents was frequently collected too in order to assess the students' learning outcome and monitor and evaluate the lessons (UNESCO 2020).

The Bangladesh's state-owned broadcaster “National Beter” and community radio stations were the main broadcasting partners, and the lessons became also available through Facebook, YouTube, and the other online sources. During the pandemic, the radio stations were also broadcasting the general awareness programs on COVID-19 to the public in local dialects every day. The “Ghore Bose Shikhi” program too integrated some “awareness raising messages (to children) on COVID-19” (UNESCO 2020).

4. LOSS AND DISPARITIES IN LEARNING

Despite of those new education initiatives and attempts, there became “high learning loss during school lockdown, as well as slow learning recovery due to possible high dropout rate and low attendance rate after the school reopens” in Bangladesh (ADB 2021:7). While there were some schools that could maintain the same number of students before and after the pandemic, the other schools suffered the dramatic decrease (approximately 40 percent) in the number of students in two years. School teachers claimed children left school because many parents had lost their work in Dhaka, and migrated to their villages or other regions in search of work (JICA 2022).

4 - 1 Disparities in Access and the Use of the Distance Learning Modalities

It is obvious that to be able to benefit from the distance and virtual educational resources, access to television, radio, computers, phones, and/or internet is fundamentally crucial (ADB 2021). As described in the previous section, the Bangladesh Government promptly responded to the school closure, and prepared the distance learning contents and lessons on television, radio, as well as online; yet, some studies disclosed that only one in five children ever attended the virtual classes. Serious disparities in access and the use of digital devices were revealed (ADB 2021; BBS 2023; UNESCO 2020; World Bank 2020).

In Bangladesh, at the time of the COVID-19 school closure, for example, only 44 percent of households had a television, and six percent had a radio. Differences among urban non-slum, urban slum, and rural villages were significant too: 76 percent in urban non-slum owns a television, 74 percent in urban slum, and 31 percent in rural villages. Of all the sampled students, 86 percent knew about the Sangsad TV; and, of all the students who had access to a television, 92 percent was aware of the TV channel. Among those who had access to a television; however, only 43 percent recently watched the Sangsad TV. Overall, only 39 percent of the students had ever accessed the TV-based distance learning program via the Sangsad TV channel. In addition, only 54 percent responded that they in fact had used any virtual educational services, over the period of one year after the TV-based distance learning program was launched in March 2020 (ADB 2021; World Bank 2020).

Fewer students were aware of online platforms and materials. A few percent of the households or the students had a computer, 35 percent of the students had a smartphone, and approximately 20 to 25 percent of the students had access to internet in the past six months (ADB 2021; World Bank 2020). By August 2021, 75 percent of the sampled households were aware of the Google Meet classes; yet, only 24.5 percent of whom attended those classes (ADB 2021). In addition, while 21 percent of the students had access to the online learning programs, “only about [two] percent of them chose to access them” (World Bank 2020:1).

In contrast to the television, radio and online platforms, 96 percent of the surveyed households were reported to have a mobile phone (96 percent in urban non-slum, 97 percent in urban slum, and 96 percent in rural villages). 73 percent of parents also agreed that the child was most interested in learning through mobile phones, because they were the most available device and involved person-to-person interactions. ADB forecasts that the virtual teaching and learning through mobile phones may be “promising” in the future (ADB 2021).

4 - 2 High Learning Loss

High learning loss of children became the uppermost concern for parents. In the midst of the COVID-19 related school closure,

Students spend less time studying and more time on household chores after school closures. This is doubly striking because students are not only losing school learning time (i.e., not replacing that with home studying), but even time they would normally have spent studying at home is reduced (World Bank 2020:4).

Compared to before the COVID-19 outbreak and school closure, about 15 more percent of students are engaged in household chores more than one hour a day (World Bank 2020). In contrast to the World Bank's study as cited above, the ADB describes the hours studying at home slightly increased. It states 69 percent of the children could continue either virtual or physical schooling by utilizing the remote learning options (ADB

2021). The differences in numbers between the studies of ADB and the World Bank are observed probably because the World Bank's study focuses more on economically disadvantaged families. Both ADB and the World Bank have analyzed besides household chores and non-paid work (helping domestic and other tasks of their families), many children were spending more time on physical playing too, such as sports, recreation, and socializing with friends (ADB 2021; World Bank 2020). The table below (Table 2) shows the change in hours how children are spending a day, before and during the COVID-19 school closures.

Table 2. Change in Hours How Children Are Spending A Weekday

	Before school closure in 2019	During school closure in 2021
Schooling (either physical or virtual)	Grade 1-2: 4.5 Grade 3-5: 5.8	1.62
Study at home (excluding physical or virtual schooling)	2.63	3.04
Physical playing and socializing	1.34	2.58
Domestic and other tasks	0.46	1.27
Paid work or activities outside of household	0.04	0.03

Source: ADB 2021

According to the ADB report (2021), more than half of the sampled children said they were less motivated to study compared to before the school closure. The sampled children were asked whether if they were planning to return to school full-time once schools reopened. While only one percent of students said they would “drop out” in August 2020; a year later in August 2021, “more than 13 percent of the [children] currently enrolled [answered they] planned to drop out” (ADB 2021:3). The number was slightly higher (17 percent) among the children living in urban slum. In addition, the same children were inquired how frequently they would attend school after the school closure ended. The majority of respondents showed a preference for in-person learning at school than distance and virtual lessons at home; however, only 67 percent mentioned their attendance would be the same as before the pandemic (70 percent in rural areas, 64 percent in urban non-slum, and 50 percent in urban slum areas). Among those children who said their school attendance would be less, 75 percent claimed the most reason was education expenses, and 11 percent attributed to “the fear of contracting COVID-19 itself” (ADB 2021).

4 - 3 Limited Support from Schools and Families

Declines in children's study time may be also associated with insufficient instructional assistance by school teachers and parents. During the school closure, 49 percent of students did not receive any assistance with their studies (of the distance and virtual learning programs) either by teachers or parents; 43 percent of the students reported not being contacted by teachers for monitoring or guidance for one month (47 percent in rural, 35 percent urban non-slum, and 32 percent in urban slum areas) (ADB 2021). In addition, even among those who had a contact with their teachers, the frequency was once a week or less. A form of the contact was phone communication, more than in-person interactions (ADB 2021).

The absence of any kind of assistance and support were notably higher in economically disadvantaged

households (52 percent) as well as families in rural areas (52 percent) (ADB 2021). The same result was also found in the World Bank study: among their survey respondents, 39 percent from the bottom quartile received family assistance, while 62 percent in the top quartile. Children from the families without access to the Sangsad TV channel were much less likely to have support from a family member, 38 percent (without access to the channel) and 51 percent (with access) respectively. Besides, among the family members, mothers are likely to engage twice more in their children's education than fathers (World Bank 2020). Meanwhile, it is encouraging that more than 90 percent of the children mentioned their family members provided them with “a suitable study environment” during the school closure, and they are “considerate” toward them studying at home (World Bank 2020).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: POSSIBLE RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Understanding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures on primary and secondary schooling, and the students in Bangladesh, it is indispensable to comprehensively examine the changes in the socioeconomic status of households, before and after the outbreak, especially of those families living in the most poverty-stricken areas of Bangladesh, rural villages, and slums. While most children were ready to attend in-person school again, a larger number of children may have not been able to do so, due to more severe economic and social constraints their families were facing after the COVID-19 pandemic (ADB 2021).

5 - 1 Key Indicators for More Comprehensive Assessment

In preparing and proposing some recovery strategies from learning loss and disparities in learning, resulted from the school closures in Bangladesh, it is critical to observe and assess the current situation of primary and secondary schooling in a more comprehensive point of view. Some additional key indicators to be included can be household composition, household income, spending on schooling, household expenditure on education (in addition to schooling), stipends received, learning environment, use of private remedial lessons, housing characteristics (utilities and sanitation), and so on (ADB 2021; BBS 2023; World Bank 2020).

The COVID-19 outbreak shut down most of the businesses, that led a decline in the income of students' families, while facilitated internal migration back to rural villages (ADB 2021; World Bank 2020). 74 percent of the families responded as their income declined after the pandemic, by 35 percent on average; their expenditures declined by 17 percent; and, 53 percent faced their income became less than the expenditure, which was 4 percent before the pandemic. Many families used their savings, sought financial and material help from their friends and relatives, looked for a new means of earning money, sold assets, and relied on the Government, NGO assistance, and/or donations (ADB 2021; World Bank 2020). In addition, in order to meet essential needs, 28 percent of households adjusted their household expenditure by decreasing the quantity of meals, and 36 percent by choosing less expensive ingredients (World Bank 2020).

Furthermore, in Bangladesh, it is common for some (both public and private) school teachers to conduct supplementary, remedial “coaching” classes outside the official school hours, where teachers help children do their homework. The coaching class is not mandatory, but it is a shared practice for teachers to have the extra income. Each student is asked to pay an additional Tk.300 (approximately 400 Japanese yen) per month as a “coaching” fee. The decrease in the household income could reduce children's chances to participate these remedial lessons (World Bank 2020). Some children mentioned that when their families are unable to pay the coaching fees, they would feel uncomfortable sitting in the regular classroom too, due to teachers' pressures, and discontinue schooling.

5 - 2 Some Possible Recovery Strategies

One of the recovery strategies can be financial assistance, such as stipends to students. According to the ADB's study (2021), the average educational expenditure per household dropped from Tk. 7,805 (about 10,500 yen) in August 2020 to Tk. 4,770 (6,400 yen) in August 2021. In 2021, 50 percent of households received the stipend of Tk. 811 (1,000 yen) on average. ADB also calculates that after the COVID-19 pandemic, “13.4 percent of children ... [would] face financial difficulties in attending school,” and the same children would become in need of the monthly financial support worth of Tk. 3,277 (4,400 yen) (ADB 2021).

In addition, ADB suggests “adjust[ing] the [existing] curriculum, ... and provid[ing] students with remedial and bridging programs” are crucial (ADB 2021:7). It also explains scaling up e-learning opportunities using mobile phones could be useful. As mentioned above, mobile phones seem to be, in comparison with television, radio, and internet, “the most well-received approach” even among the socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Teachers and community leaders are also in need of being specially trained to understand the new educational initiatives, and to support the students, both in traditional in-person and new distance and virtual lessons (ADB 2021).

5 - 3 Conclusion

When the author was in Bangladesh between 2007 and 2010, the official gross and net primary school enrollment rates were close to 100 percent, and 60 percent for secondary schools. On the other hand, there were still large gaps in accessing formal schools due to the socioeconomic condition of their households and families. Many governmental, non-profit, and private schooling programs were implemented all over the country, aiming to ensure every child to have a schooling opportunity.

After the two COVID-19 related school closures through March 2020 to February 2022, the existing inequalities in schooling had become much more severe in Bangladesh. The disparities in accessing primary and secondary schooling and in the usage of the distance and virtual educational services became much more noticeable. In Bangladesh, however, there are accumulated experiences in the education and development sector, such as knowledge, skills, human resources, and wisdom to approach and tackle these issues. Additionally, because of the Bangladesh Government's growing momentum for digitalization, the combined, both in-person and virtual, educational services can be a powerful means in ensuring primary and secondary schooling for all children.

Notes

- i) The “experimental” school is a government school managed by the Primary Training (Teacher) Institutes (PTIs) under the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) of the MoPME, for the purpose of teacher training. About 10 thousand students (0.05 percent of the total primary school students in Bangladesh) were enrolled in 54 experimental schools in 2007 (Nath and Chowdhury 2009).

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要旨

新型コロナウイルス感染症の感染拡大がもたらした
バングラデシュ初等・中等教育における変化

内川 明佳

本稿は、バングラデシュの初等・中等教育に注目し、新型コロナウイルス感染症（COVID-19）の感染拡大とそれに伴う休校が、学校教育の機会、子どもたちや家庭にどのような影響をもたらしたのかを考察する。近年、バングラデシュ政府は、公的サービスのデジタル化を主要な政策として推し進めている。そのためか、COVID-19の影響で、2020年3月17日に全国一斉に休校になってからたった12日後の3月29日、テレビ放送による遠隔授業が開始された。その後、ラジオ放送、オンラインによる遠隔授業も次々と始まり、学校の教師と話すことができる電話サービス等設置された。一方で、長引く休校の間、これらの授業やサービスにアクセスできる子どもたちは限られ（例えば、テレビがある家庭は44パーセント）、またアクセスができて、実際にはサービスが十分に利用されていないことも明らかになった。その結果、バングラデシュ全体として、子どもたちの勉強時間は減少し、学校が再開された後も学校に戻らない子どもの割合も増加した。コロナ禍に家庭の働き手が仕事を失い、収入が減ったこと等も関係している。本稿では、今後は、コロナ禍で培った遠隔授業のサービスを従来の教室における学びとともに発展させることで、バングラデシュにおける子どもの教育機会がより確保されることになるだろうと結論付けている。