

Impact of COVID-19 on Pedagogical Practices at Secondary Education in Bangladesh: Retrospective and Prospective

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted education systems around the globe, including in Bangladesh, which has pushed a greater number of students provisionally out of school. Bangladesh is among the countries most affected by a complete shutdown, as the government has temporarily closed educational institutions for the last nine months in an attempt to control the spread of the virus. This nationwide closure has adversely affected millions of students' learning and mental health. The proposed article will highlight the pedagogical practices of students and teachers at the secondary level during the pandemic, which may include students' unequal access to education, digital skills, dropping out of school, girls' early marriage, child labour, economic impact on family income and teachers' preparedness in digital technologies and professional capacities. The switch from an in-person to an online mode of teaching-learning practice can also impede the attainment of gender parity in secondary education. This project will gather primary data through a multirespondent survey and in-depth interviews from representative student and teacher populations. The article will also suggest future directions for a post-COVID long-term approach for the balanced continuation of effective and alternative learning systems for all levels of students at the secondary education level from the socioeconomic perspectives of Bangladesh.

Key words: COVID-19, Secondary Education, Pedagogical Practices, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 has seriously affected education systems and pedagogical practices across the globe, leading to the near-total closures of schools, colleges and universities. The majority of governments decided to temporarily shut down educational institutions to protect people from the spread of COVID-19. As of January 2021, approximately 825 million learners were affected due to school closures in response to the pandemic. According to UNICEF's South Asia Regional Office report, 23 countries are currently implementing nationwide closures, and 40 are implementing local closures, which are impacting approximately 47 percent of the world's student population. More than one hundred countries' schools are currently open and functioning regular school activities (as of September 2020).

Long-term closures of educational institutions affect not only students, teachers, teaching-learning practices and families but also have far-reaching effects on economic and societal dynamics. Prolonged school closures in response to the pandemic have underpinned different critical issues, including student drop-out, learning discontinuation, online learning, safety and psychosocial issues, teacher engagement and development, and youth unemployment food and economic insecurity. The overall impact of the pandemic on education has been more serious for marginalized students, particularly teenage girls and ultra-poor students in developing countries such as Bangladesh.

According to a situation analysis report of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), a total of 12,885,346 students, of whom 6,951,936 girls and 5,933,410 boys, in secondary education (from 6th to 10th grade) in Bangladesh have been directly or indirectly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, students' learning and classroom pedagogical practices are greatly interrupted due to this worldwide crisis. Bangladesh, as a densely populated and poor country, has been facing many challenges in combating the pandemic, and the Ministry of Education has undertaken numerous initiatives and interventions to respond, recover and transform the education sector to be a responsive and resilient system for future education management in the country.

2. COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh: arrival and acceptance

The COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh is a part of the worldwide coronavirus outbreak, which originated in China in November 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic was first identified in Bangladesh on 8 March 2020, when three cases were reported by the National Level Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR). From that time, new cases have been reported every day, and the number of active cases has increased quickly. Initially, to control the spread of the virus, the government decided to close all schools and other educational institutions from 18 March onwards. The closing period was then extended periodically based on the situation, and the latest update is that the closure has been extended through February 16, 2021. In addition, the government

announced a general holiday from 23rd March, and it also extended later up to 30th May. As of 25 January this year, Bangladesh ranked third in South Asia after India and Pakistan, with 531,799 confirmed cases and 8,023 deaths overall. Bangladesh health officials have directed people since the inception of COVID-19 in the country to maintain social distance measures, and later, it was obligatory to wear masks in all public places.

To protect the people, initially, the government declared a "lockdown" throughout the nation from 23 March to 30 May and prepared some necessary steps to raise awareness to manage this virus. Bangladesh has been facing substantial challenges in combating COVID-19, as it is a densely populated country. Most people live below the poverty line, and they desperately need to go out for daily earnings. It was difficult to maintain social distancing and keep hands washed. Particularly, in the capital city, many people live in houses with more than five members in a small space. Local administrations have mandated mask wearing when outside and prohibited citizens from going out in the evenings. However, people have been reluctant to believe in the virus' existence. They did not care about lockdown rules. The government has also encountered difficulties ensuring proper lockdown.

Some people also argued that if they did not go to work, they would die of hunger, so it was better for livelihood to go out even though they may have become infected with the virus. Another issue was that from May to August, Bangladesh faced hot temperatures across the country. In the summer, load shading is very common in, especially in urban places. As most of the poor live without electricity, it was not possible to stay in a small house without an electric fan all day. Religious beliefs also hindered people from becoming aware of the spread of COVID. Even some expatriate Bangladeshi who recently returned to the country overlooked quarantine and isolation rules set by the government. Bangladesh also has significant migrant populations living in Italy and other countries affected by coronavirus. In short, the lack of sufficient education and proper health awareness of Bangladeshi people were responsible for the rapid spread of coronavirus within the country, and eventually, it was too out of control to begin obeying the government directives.

3. Objectives and methods

The current article is basically a systematic desk review. A systematic review framework, which is followed in a qualitative study in social science, was employed to aggregate the required information for this review. As the scarcity of literature regarding COVID-19 and its impact on the education sector is a major barrier. A few institutional reports and documents and daily newspaper reports were the main sources of information for this article. This article was designed and written for the following purposes:

- a) to analyse the multidimensional effects of COVID-19 on secondary education in Bangladesh.*
- b) to formulate implications and recommendations to overcome the crisis and for policy reformation.*

Since March 2020, when the outbreak was first discovered, influential and reliable daily newspapers in the country have been considered as a great source for data collection. The regular news bulletins of the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), the organization responsible for COVID updates, was also considered an authentic data source. UNESCO and UNICEF publications on the topic served as reference guides. In addition, all government directives and regulations were followed to understand the current scenario and future challenges.

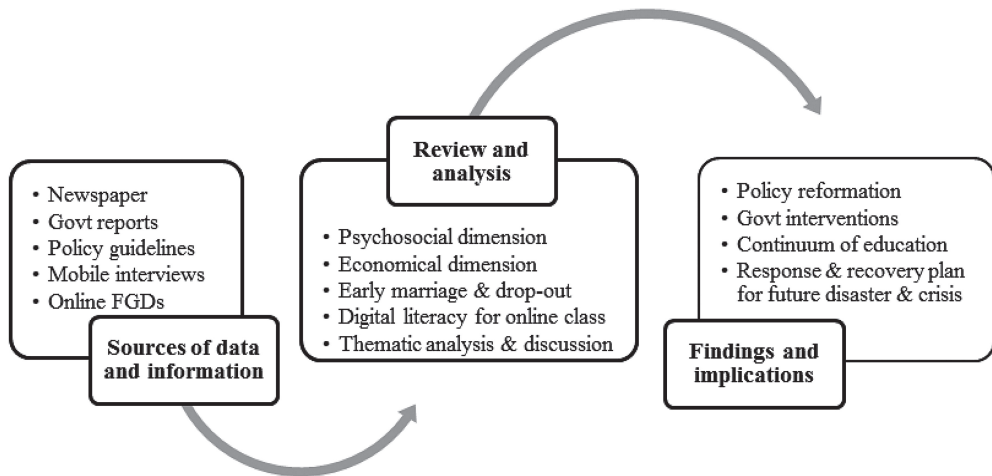


Diagram: Framework for review study design

Apart from document review for secondary data, mobile phone interviews and online virtual focus group discussion (FGD) through the Zoom application were also conducted with secondary school students, teachers, teacher trainers, relevant government officials and education experts from the Institute of Education and Research (IER) of Dhaka University. In selecting secondary students and teachers, the gender-balance principle was highly maintained. Because of the risk of coronavirus infection, no face-to-face interviews or discussions were held.

4. Multidimensional effects of COVID-19 on secondary education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has approximately 200,000 educational institutions across the country and over 40 million students. In March, Bangladesh closed all of its educational institutions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Initially, on 17 March, when Bangladesh had eight confirmed cases, the government announced that all schools would be closed until the next announcement. Eventually, this closure was extended and remains in place at the time of publication. This long-term closure has influenced various aspects

of education in the country, especially at the secondary level. Multidimensional impacts associated with the socioeconomic context, the preparedness of government and other agencies for education management in crisis, and digital literacy among teachers and students are described below.

Long-term school closure

Long-term school closure as a consequence of the pandemic has had a significant impact on the overall education of students in the country. A large part of student life consists of routine discipline and repetition of learned materials. This helps provide the stable environment and work ethic that young minds require to retain and expand learned experiences. By any measure, schools have been the most efficient provider of these necessities. However, with the countrywide lockdowns as well as stricter local lockdowns occasionally enforced across many communities, it has become an impossible challenge for parents, juggling the uncertainties of financial and familial crises, to replicate the standards of discipline and quality education that trained teachers and staff at educational institutions are equipped to handle.

On the other hand, teachers themselves have suffered from an identity crisis and financial insufficiency because of these circumstances. Students have also lost their previous zeal and commitment to education, the social appeal of meeting friends, having playtimes and shared experiences, and gradually their previously learned class lessons that could not be followed up or improved upon. Online education, although an appropriate alternative considering how social distancing standards are met, cannot substitute for the real, mentally rewarding experience of regular school for any stakeholders.

Students' access to online education

It has been a highly troublesome experience for students to access online classes during the pandemic. The fact of the matter is that a large section of the population, ranging from the lower classes to the middle class, are living hand to mouth, barely scraping by enough to ensure an education for the often-large families that are common in these parts of the world. As such, not all families have access to a reliable smart device that can be used for online education, and even so, families with more school-age children and less money to spare have the same problem to a magnitude great enough that often these children simply have to let go of their classes. Even for families where a smartphone or two can be set aside during choice hours of the day, the high cost of internet data packages to ensure hours' worth of video conferencing is impractical and out of reach.

In addition, Bangladesh has long suffered in the inability of its power supply stations to provide undisturbed electrical supply to all localities; load shedding (the occasional redirection of electrical power from one locality to another) is an all-too-common phenomenon for almost every group of people. As a result, electrical devices used for online learning become disconnected, home Wi-Fi connections become interrupted and internet availability dwindles with every load shedding in a nearby community. In many

homes, the living situation also does not allow for a separate place or long hours of the day dedicated to undisturbed education. Especially in families with younger siblings or homes where extended families live together, there are frequent interruptions that break students' concentration on their classes. Some may have to skip classes entirely because there is help needed when at home. Furthermore, factors of slow internet connections, faulty devices, technical difficulties and many other minor factors together play a large part in reducing the overall quality of the learning experience. In these instances, the basic human right of an equitable and quality education has been reduced to one exclusive to the financially well-off.

Students' mental health

Needless to say, this pandemic has taken a severe toll on the mental and emotional health of the entire world population. The whole duration has been one of fear, anxiety, paranoia, fear-mongering and misinformation. Many people across the country have suffered prolonged illnesses, have not been able to receive proper treatment or have not survived the battle against coronavirus. Naturally, these very human concerns have bled into students' educational circumstances. It is hard indeed to concentrate on the monitor screen when members of the family are ill, hospitalized or have recently passed away. The health aspects aside, this pandemic has given rise to a massive overall financial decline. Young students have seen their families endure unprecedented financial instability and all the consequences that follow.

The cases of domestic violence and disruption of home life and conflicts arising from being packed in close quarters have threatened the home lives of young children and proved detrimental to their psychological development and education as a whole. In their growing years, children become more self-conscious about their perceptions and impressions among peers; as such, the financial difficulties that some have inevitably faced during this pandemic to afford the necessities for online learning platforms, be it a device or the internet connection to go along with it, financial insecurity and the psychological effects it has on adolescent children are much more severe than what may be perceived from a distance. Parents, as well, have suffered a great deal in their exhaustive endeavours to handle the added responsibilities of delivering school education and looking after the children at a time when they are desperate to earn enough to provide for the family. In addition, staying months on end, cramped together in close quarters with an often-large family, not being able to have healthy recreational outlets, being unable to meet close friends or simply not spending a few hours under the open sun severely harms the mental health of young minds. All these distressing psychological factors that are detrimental to healthy home life are also hugely damaging to students' mental health.

Digital literacy for both teachers and students

Regardless of how digitized the modern world has become, it cannot be denied that the transition to digital media for education has not been easy for anyone. Even the young

population, who we deem much more digitally literate and technologically enthusiastic, has struggled to understand the ins and outs of different online learning platforms. Every social media platform has its own set of features to thoroughly understand before attempts at a smooth meeting are made. Not being completely educated in these digital skills has often resulted in humiliation, worry and disturbance of both teachers and students. Teachers especially have suffered a great deal more than students in the struggle to provide a quality online class. Teachers are not the generation that grew up with many of the devices and social media platforms that are required of them during these hard times. They have had to learn an entire medium of communication in their later years of life and reshape their routine structure of teaching.

In addition, it is not uncommon to hear that students have taken advantage of their teachers' technological shortcomings to cause disruptions during class time. More importantly, due to the unprecedented nature of this crisis, there was little prior training available to most teachers on topics related to the handling of digital classrooms before the full force of the pandemic had hit. All things considered it has been an added psychological pressure for all parties involved to manage a regular, undisturbed and well-rounded teaching-learning experience.

Surge of child marriage

Another important side to this prolonged social distancing period is the change in the social dynamics experienced throughout the country. The empowerment of girls has regressed in these times, as many families opt to marry off their adolescent daughters whom they can no longer provide for. A recent UNICEF report states that cases of child marriage reports to the Child Helpline have increased during this pandemic. "Going by the number of pleas received from adolescent girls and community members to stop child marriages, we see an increasing trend in attempted child marriages in recent times as opposed to pre-pandemic days", says a UNICEF spokesman. A BRAC estimate suggests that this increase may be approximately 220 percent over the period of July to September of the 2020 lockdown period. This marks a significant shift in the state of women's empowerment in the country, threatening to roll back the last 25 years of progress, which saw a steady decline in these numbers. Consequently, it also indicates a probable surge in teenage pregnancies and school dropouts within the next few years. This puts them at a greater disadvantage of ever returning to formal education or securing an independent future for themselves.

School drop-out rates

As the sources of income dwindle and an increasing number of people are left jobless due to the economic crisis, younger members of the family have had to drop out of school to search for possible means of income to support the family. The government and nongovernment organizations of the country have made commendable efforts to steadily raise the number of school-going children in the country and retain them within

the educational system. During the pandemic, rural areas have been especially hit hard in terms of school dropout numbers. Without access to a stable online education system or the means to sustain that education in the midst of already challenging financial times has been an uphill battle for most young learners.

Before the pandemic, many incentives, such as free education in public schools, a midday meal for children, free books for children for academic study, etc. led to considerable strides in advancing the educational progress of these financially disadvantaged children. The parents of these children opt for the easier and financially beneficial option of sending their children off for a possible source of income rather than the long-term goal of an academic education that comes with the possibility of a more reliable professional life. The unforeseen duration of the pandemic has made it highly unlikely that many of these children will ever return to their formal education. The futures of these out-of-school children has drastically changed for the worse during this pandemic

Changes in the social dynamic

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In summary, the different effects due to the COVID-19 outbreak can be discussed not only in terms of students losing their motivation for learning, their various psychosocial issues, digital orientation, increasing rate of early marriage and drop-out of female students, but also in terms of the adverse situations faced by teachers losing jobs, reducing salaries, increasing workloads for online classes, as the majority do not know how to use virtual platforms for conducting teaching-learning and lacking smartphones or laptops and uninterrupted internet services. On the other hand, economically disadvantaged people have also struggled to meet children's requirements for attending online classes. In fact, all concerned stakeholders have had a serious crisis in combatting coronavirus for the last few months.

5. Government responses and interventions for education during the pandemic

Although initially there was public debate about prior preparedness to efficiently combat the COVID pandemic, the government pragmatically handled the COVID-19 situation within the constitutional scheme of normal times and limited resources. The government, development partners and NGO entities worked together in response to

the crisis, including addressing food security, health and safety, medical services and educational intervention. In particular, from the beginning, the government's Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education has played a key role in minimizing the learning losses of young students from 6th to 10th grade. Some salient initiatives and strategies at the state level are described along with future directions.

Policy reformation

The government of Bangladesh published the Gazette of Intermediate and Secondary Education (Amendment) Act, 2021, which is the amendment of ordinance no. XXXIII of 1961. In there, subsection 2A will be added as per below-

(2A) Notwithstanding anything contained in clauses (vi), (vii) and (viii) of subsection (2), if it is not possible to hold and conduct examinations at the end of the intermediate and secondary stage or any other stage thereof due to pandemic, epidemic, Act of God or any other inevitable circumstances as determined by the government from time to time, the government may, by an order of the official Gazette, issue instruction for assessment and grant of certificates without holding and conducting examination or holding and conducting examination with short syllabus, in the manner prescribed in that Gazette, for the students in a particular year.

Online education

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the opportunity for online education in Bangladesh. In collaboration with the Directorate of Secondary & Higher Education (DHSE) and with financial support from UNICEF, a2i (Access to Information) has been broadcasting a total of 640 courses for secondary level students (grades 6-10) through *Amar Ghore Amar School (My School is at My Home)*. They are broadcast on Sangsad TV (a state-owned television channel) and uploaded to various social media platforms, such as the Facebook pages of a2i, ICT Division, and Amar Ghore Amar School, Konnect, as well as the YouTube channels of Ghore Boshe Shikhi, Konnect, and Konnect Portal. The government, in support of 32 national and international organizations, also shared all the classes and subjects from class 1 to class 12 on a dedicated website named eduhub (eduhub.gov.bd).

Distance education

Through the mode of TV, radio and mobile, secondary students had the opportunity to learn from the comfort of home. Two national television channels, BTV and Sangsad TV, have been telecasting pre-recorded classes for secondary students. According to the schedule, every day, two 20-minute classes of each grade were aired on television between 9.05 am and 12 noon. The classes were repeated in the afternoon. In many areas of the country, local cable TV channels telecasted the same programme in the evening again. The government also introduced a hotline number for the students to obtain support related to

their learning at any time.

Home assignment

Since there was no scope of any traditional paper pencil assessment system, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) introduced a 30-day syllabus for all secondary classes. After that, 18 assignments over a period of six weeks were collected. The DSHE provided assignment topics for each of the subjects and pointed out the weeks when they had to be submitted. Students were made aware of the assignments on 31st October. For classes VI to VIII, English, math and science were given priority, as each of them had three assignments, and for classes IX, English, math and their individual stream subjects (three subjects) had three assignments each. Parents were encouraged to collect and submit the assignments with proper protection.

Auto grade promotion

Due to the prevailing circumstances of the pandemic, the government acting with the advice and suggestions of educational policy makers has had to make tough decisions regarding secondary school education and the associated national board exams. Bureaucrats and educational experts were reluctant to make comments about whether the autopromotion of students, especially those of secondary and higher secondary levels, was feasible as late as September of the previous year. However, announcements had to be made in the face of coming exams with students awaiting verdicts related to their academic lives. Moreover, these students were out of touch with their regular study for almost the entirety of the countrywide lockdown.

As such, these students would gradually fail to recall their previous subject matter and would not be able to proceed to the next phase of academic lessons either. In the midst of this confusion and uncertainty, the decision to move forward with the autopromotion of students of the four main national board exams, Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) for 5th graders, Junior Secondary School Certificate Exam (JSC) for 8th graders, Secondary School Certificate Exam (SSC) for 10th graders and finally Higher Secondary Certificate Exam (HSC) for high school students was confirmed. A special bill regarding this consideration was presented and subsequently passed in the National Parliament of Bangladesh. The decision was controversial, to say the least, and many opposing arguments were raised across the country. Some experts suggested that a flexible exam schedule could be arranged as a much more acceptable alternative to the one that had been materialized. This would ensure that an evaluation system, even if less than the usual standard, would be in place. There is also criticism on the perception of merit or motivation of the students automatically promoted and how this may have long-lasting implications in the future academic pursuits of their life.

Lottery for admission

Ministry of Education of Bangladesh has decided to enrol new students in secondary

schools by lottery instead of admission tests to avoid mass gatherings on school premises. The prospective students were instructed to apply online to the target schools. The digital lottery system for the admission of the secondary schools held on January 11, 2021. The function was telecasted live on the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education Facebook page, YouTube and in different TV channels. The students were then asked to complete their admission procedure by the 25th of January. Due to the pandemic, only government schools were enlisted in this lottery system.

Textbook distribution

The National Textbook Festival, like the previous ten years, did not take place this year, keeping in line with the national health safety guidelines because of COVID-19. Students donning masks entered their school grounds while maintaining proper health rules and stood in queues at a distance of three feet so that they could receive their books safely. Teachers sanitized the hands of the students prior to letting them enter their classrooms. The textbook distribution process took approximately 12 days, as many students moved to village homes due to the pandemic, where one or two days were dedicated to this festival. According to the Ministry of Education, in 2021, 24 crore 33 lakh 34 thousand copies of books were printed for secondary-level students and distributed at no cost.

School reopening

The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education has issued guidelines to ensure the safety of students, teachers and staff of educational institutions by 04 February in preparation for these establishments to reopen after a long closure due to coronavirus. Health rules will be followed in accordance with these guidelines. Educational institutions use their own funds for reopening expenditures. The educational institutions have been told to be ready to reopen as soon as directives are issued by the higher authorities. Student health has been given priority in the guidelines pertaining to the reopening of institutions. There must be a three foot distance between classroom benches. Students will have to sit at a specific distance from each other, depending on the size of the bench. It has also been said that the temperature of students must be taken as they enter school. Benches less than five feet in length will seat one student. Benches of five to seven feet will seat two students, according to the guidelines. If 2 students sit per bench, then a classroom can have 6 benches with 12 students.

The secondary and higher education directorate has highlighted certain phases in the reopening of educational institutions: i) planning to run a safe educational institution; ii) preparing the institution; iii) running the educational institution in a safe manner; and iv) taking measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus during classes.

Responsibilities must be assigned for cleaning with sanitizers, for 20 second hand washing at specific times, and for posters in this regarding put up on display. Moreover, contactless thermometers must be set up, and if anyone's temperature is above normal,

they must be sent home or to the health centre. There must be three-foot distance markings at the entrance of the institution and where the guardians sit. There must be arrangements for masks for all so that no student misses any class. In consultation with the local administration and health department, a hotline number must be kept on prominent display.

In summary, regarding responses and interventions towards education recovery, it can be noted that the Bangladesh government, along with private agencies, has been trying hard to recover from the crisis from different aspects with limited resources. Due to a lack of sufficient health education and ignorance of health safety, many people, including secondary students, are reluctant to follow the guidelines. That is why the authority has no other option but to continue school closure. However, students are engaged in other activities instructed by teachers, including assignments and online tutorials. The government has also taken some efficient initiatives so that schools can recover the academic losses of students and students can return to their education with enthusiasm.

6. Implications and recommendations

Prolonged school closure can be viewed through different lenses, and the growth and development of school students have been significantly hindered. The pandemic has resulted in schools closed all over the world where over 1.2 billion children and young are out of the classroom. As a result, the global education process has changed drastically, with the distinctive rise of e-learning, whereby teaching is undertaken remotely and on digital platforms. Recent studies suggest that learning on virtual platforms has become popular among students and teachers with increasing interest in continuing such modalities of pedagogical practices even after the pandemic ends. However, long-term closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the overall learning capacity of students. When schools are reopened, students can learn interactively in a joyful learning environment and show enthusiasm for different kinds of activities, such as co-curricular tasks. However, in this long closure of schools in Bangladesh and accepting the uncertainty, some measures can be considered in accordance with national development agendas for Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan, formulated by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and Ministry of Education (MoE) and the government of Bangladesh, the following steps need to be considered for future courses of action to reduce the risks and challenges posed by the COVID pandemic in the Bangladesh context.

In these guidelines, a three-phase (short-, medium- and long-term) plan to address the challenges was conceptualized, focusing on a) children's safety and learning continuity; b) readiness and support for recovery and reopening in the post-emergence period; and c) building system resilience through learning from the COVID-19 response and sustaining good practices. This framework suggested that for an effective

coordinated response, different levels of government need to move in a synchronized and complementary way. All three phases will start simultaneously, and based on impact, they will continue from starting to the 24th month.

Short Term (Immediate to 6 months) Output 1: Children remain safe and continue to learn, and the education system is ready to support the safe reopening of schools. In the Bangladesh context, significant focus will be placed on needs and interests of the most marginalized, especially girls, out-of-school children, and students with disabilities.

Medium Term (Immediate –12 months) Output 2: All girls and boys, especially the most marginalized, return to institution-based learning as soon as possible once schools reopen. The return to institutional learning will reflect the core principles set out in the joint global framework by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and WFP for reopening schools. Teachers, head teachers and education officials will need to be trained in the ways and methods of the new “blended-learning” approach (combining face-to-face with technology-based learning modalities by introducing an "online learning assessment" tool) with different outreach modalities with continuous monitoring and mentoring.

Long Term (Immediate-24 months) Output 3: The education system develops sustainable systems for risk-informed planning and supporting learning. This phase will focus on building system resilience and readiness for future recurrence of the outbreak of similar situations and natural calamities, as well as building on technology-supported learning modalities. These directions at the government level for immediate actions as well as future courses in combating such outbreaks can be practical and resourceful from the socioeconomic perspective of the Bangladesh education system.

7. Conclusion

The government of Bangladesh, with its different development partners and stakeholders, is trying hard to overcome the challenges and to regain the educational loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Substantial attention has been paid in particular to young girls in secondary schools, students with sensory and physical disabilities and other underprivileged groups in the community. Considering the situation, responsible ministries and other development agencies are taking essential measures to minimize learning loss and ensure that the education system recovers as soon as possible. The initiatives and interventions in this regard should be integrated in line with the set strategies of the Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP). Since the overall situation is still evolving and uncertain, the future course of this COVID outbreak cannot be predicted accurately. Hence, we must understand the socio-economic context of Bangladesh and recognize the facts of the current pandemic consequences. There are no alternatives for schooling, pedagogical practices and educational institutions, particularly for growing young learners at the secondary education level; thus, there should be readily accessible modes and means to pragmatically deal with this uncertain crisis so that students at all levels benefit from schooling along with addressing health, safety and hygiene issues.

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