

A Study of the Impact of Long-Term School Closures Due to Covid on Students of Classes 3-5 of English Medium Schools

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Abstract

The topic of concern of the research was to determine the effects on students' performances before and after school closures due to Covid. The focus group of this study was the middle school level students of Bangladesh. The topic covered a significant area of our education. It focused on the middle school level students of Bangladesh and explored the learning that took place during the school closures. Not only that it explored the students who were out of reach of learning and but also the impact it had on the lives of these students. Additionally, the goal of the research was also to investigate the effects of school closures on the learners' social and communication skills. In addition, the current study, examined the nature of interaction between teachers and students before and after online classes. It also examined the students' academic performances and the impact it had put on their emotional or psychological well-being.

Introduction

1.1. Background of the Problem

The problem identified in my research project is to find out the impact of the closure of schools on the performances of the students of Bangladesh due to Covid 19. It is a case study of the learners at the primary level (Grade I to Grade V) of Bangladesh. The students and their education have undergone a series of changes throughout the pandemic. At the very beginning of the outbreak of Corona patients in Bangladesh, the government shut down all the educational institutions from March the 17th, 2021. The closure was later extended periodically according to the situation of the Corona Virus.

Bangladesh government declared reopening of the schools from September 18, 2021, after 18 months of the nationwide shutdown of the schools. At that time, students attending public examinations were only allowed to attend classes after the 1st reopening of the schools. Students of other grades were advised to attend classes only once or twice in a week. Finally, after almost two years (from March 17th, 2020, to 20th March 2022) the schools were reopened for the students.

By this time, the government started the vaccination programme of the children aged above 12 years old. During the shutdown phase, most of the children of the primary level were out of the reach of learning and practising. According to a newspaper report (Mahmud, 2021), Bangladeshi NGO BRAC conducted a study which found that at least half (56%) of the country's students were not connected with online or recorded classes during the pandemic. In addition, very few number of schools only in the main cities in Bangladesh could provide online teaching via zoom, google meet, google classroom and WhatsApp. Considering the importance of the issue and to find out the learning gaps of the children in these (from March 17th, 2020, to 20th March 2022) 18 months, the research will provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of the closure of the schools on students' performances due to Covid 19.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The importance of the study lies in discovering and mitigating the learning gaps in these (from 17th March 2020-September 2021) 18 months. As learning did not happen as it is supposed to happen, this group of children have gone through various kinds of losses which will impact them later in life. It is evident to us, after the reopening of the schools. It was found that many of our grade III students struggling to read according to their level. It is just an example of one of the areas of their subjects. As these groups of children start to learn the basics of all the subjects, and when they are out of learning for a longer period, they are likely to forget what they have learned. Therefore, it is important to know the impact of the school closures have had on the performances of students due to Covid. Only by exploring and understanding the impact it had on the learners, we then only we can work towards lessening the learning gaps of these two years.

1.1. Objective of the Study: The Study Aims

- i. to find out the differences between student performance before and after long term school closure due to Covid.
- ii. to explore the effect of long-term school closure on learners' social or communication skills
- iii. to evaluate learners' participation and interaction both before and after online and offline classes
- iv. to evaluate the nature of interaction between teachers and students during online and offline classes

- v. to compare learners' performances on exams or assignments both before and after online classes

1.3. Research Questions

General Question: What was the impact of long-term school closure on the learners from classes 3-5?

Specific Questions

- i. What kind of academic activities did the learners engage in during school closure?
- ii. Is there a visible gap in the academic performance of the learner?
- iii. What are the possible causes of the gaps?

1.5. Literature Review

During this period (from 17th March 2020-September 2021), mostly the schools in the cities started classes their online. (Khan, Rahman, & Islam, 2021) identified that at the beginning teachers have just started using a combination of real-time interactive courses and classes, along with pre-recorded materials and a mix of content, with some instructors choosing to use both methods separately. However, this isn't the scenario for the whole country. In the beginning, a state-run television station transmitted pre-recorded classes to primary school students across the country. As the classes were pre-recorded, these classes were non-interactive. Moreover, (Khan, Rahman, & Islam, 2021) stated that the 50% figure for households without a television set means that a good amount of people have been kept outside the ambit of a tv set. Therefore, when we think of students' performance during the Covid 19 situation, we have to take into consideration different aspects of it.

A study conducted by the World Bank found that a full 50% of respondents from this study reported that they spend less time on education than before the lockdown began. 94 per cent of the respondents reported that they spend more time on household chores or childcare. According to the World Bank report, girls are three percentage points more likely to spend more time on household chores and childcare since COVID-19 regulations in January. Ramji & Sultana, (2020) stated that students are disconnected during the virtual class with students stuck for minutes at a time trying to figure out how to log back into the classroom with connectivity issues. Most online classes are conducted through video conference style, which normally consumes heavy data and needs high-speed internet to function. Due to the lack of speed or unavailability of the internet, many students were out of the online class.

A school provides essential learning to the children. Children learn better from repetitions, drills and practice and they need repetition or drills on the learned topics. They also learn from

observing, listening, exploring and asking questions. Learning occurs while children attend classes and learn together with other children. Burgess & Sievertsen, (2020) specified that going to school, whether at a public or private institution, is the best public policy option to improve skills. They further indicated that school time is a great way for students to develop social skills and social awareness. Moreover, according to them from a cognitive point of view, being in school is the best way to increase a child's ability to gain intelligence and potential.

According to UNESCO (2020b) some of the harmful effects of school closures are as follows:

- **Interrupted learning:** When schools close, children and youth are deprived of opportunities to grow, as well as suffer from threats to their cognitive development. The disadvantage of being an underprivileged learner is that the number of opportunities outside of school is disproportionately low.
- **Poor nutrition:** Many children and youth rely on school meals because they often provide food and healthy nutrition for free or a discounted price. When schools close, the nutritional needs of students are compromised.
- **Rise in dropout rates:** It is difficult to ensure that children and youth who have been absent because of school closures return to school and stay enrolled in subsequent terms.
- **Increased exposure to violence and exploitation:** When schools shut down, so do early marriages, teen pregnancies become more common, and child labor becomes more prevalent.
- **Social isolation:** Schools, for the most part, embody social activity and human interaction. When school closures occur, children and youth miss out on essential social contact that is needed for learning and development.

1.6. Methodology

We have used a mixed-method with a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies in our research. As a qualitative research methodology, we have explored the impact of school closures on students' performance due to Covid 19 by analyzing their performances and results both before and after school closure due to Covid. We have recorded the students' performance both before and after school closures. Moreover, one to one communication with the students helped us to determine the impact of the school closures due to Covid 19.

1.7 Results

The closing of schools due to Covid provided the decision- making bodies to determine plans which were necessary to recover the learning gaps among students. Thus, it helped to

mitigate the learning gaps in the school going children. Therefore, the research paper benefitted not only the policy makers, but also teachers in dealing with learning and learning gaps of the students.

After conducting the research, we did find out that, long term school closures have had effects on students' results. Moreover, the overall learning of the students was affected by the closures. The students who have had extraordinary performances in online, could not perform likewise after the reopening of the schools. Additionally, in the online assessments, most of the students performed extraordinarily. However, they could not show the same in the offline assessments. The exam scripts of the students varied a lot in this regard. While matching the scripts of the students of online and of online, it is understood that in online classes, the students could get the access of the books and other caregivers to help them with answers. But, in offline classes, those options were unavailable.

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