

Challenges of Kids' Distance Learning in Rural/Urban Area in Bangladesh: An Evaluation for Better Online Education System

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Abstract:

Since the eruption of Covid-19 in Bangladesh, all educational institutions have been shut down for an unlimited period. Primary schools, the basic level of learning in the country, face several challenges in providing lessons to the students. In this backdrop, distance-learning or online class system has become the alternative way of learning and providing lessons both for students and teachers. This paper, based on both primary and secondary data sources, evaluates the challenges of distance learning or online classes at the primary and pre-secondary school level in the country. The central argument of this article is that certain obstacles have become a barrier to delivering remote learning education in the country. Unless some wise and practical measures are taken, the situation will deteriorate further.

Keywords: Covid-19, Distance Learning, Kids, Challenges, Online Education

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I. INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 is one of the world's most deadly epidemics, having killed millions of people worldwide. Bangladesh's educational institutions have been closed for an indefinite duration after the first incidence of Covid-19 was discovered in March of 2020. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in Bangladesh, pre-primary schools, which are the country's most fundamental educational institutions, have been shuttered for over a year. Since the emergence of Covid-19, Government has taken initiative to reopen educational institutes several times but due to raising of Covid-19 cases could not take a concrete decision for opening the primary schools for maintaining normal educational activities. However, online classes have been taken on Samsad TV and educational institutes have adopted the online education system to expand their helping hands providing mental, academic and mental supports for the kids. Though, online education system is very new to the nation and it took time for adaptation that's why off-line processes created an academic gridlock that makes students and their guardians worried. Consequently, kid students are fearing about their future career prospects due to the time-lapse of finishing their academic life. In this perspective, on the basis of primary and secondary sources, this study evaluates the distance learning or online class system in the country. The importance and originality of this study are that it explores new findings which are very much necessary for the policymakers and implementers of the country and the university authority.

This paper is divided into six major parts and their subdivisions. The first part deals with the introduction, research purposes, significance of the study. The second part evaluates the existing literature about the education, distance learning education system in Bangladesh. The third part confers the research methodology of the study. The fourth part of the paper discusses the findings and the results of this study from a critical perspective. The final section of this paper concludes the study with a few recommendations for improving the situation of distance learning in Bangladesh.

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges of distance learning or online classes are facing by primary and pre-secondary school students. The area of investigation was to identify the personal, social, academic, mental impacts of the distance learning process on the students since it has emerged in the country. In short, the purposes of this study are following:

- Identifying the challenges of distance learning at the primary and pre-secondary school level
- Problems and prospects of online classes
- The mental and physical impact of distance learning among the kid students.
- Finding the possible solution of distance learning

1.3 Research Problem and Significance of the Study:

The profound impact of Covid-19 can be seen on the education sector of Bangladesh, particularly among the primary students of the country. This study provides an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge about the various dimensions of distance learning, particularly among the kid students in Bangladesh. Therefore, this study makes a major contribution to research on distance learning by demonstrating the problems and prospects faced by the primary students and the kids. This study would help the concerned authorities and the government to go forward for greater policy implications.

1.4 Limitation of the Study:

The major limitation of this study is the Covid-19 itself. Covid-19 incarcerated people, students, teachers into a small place. In Addition, due to the unprecedented spread of Covid-19 and the government's lockdown policy as a byproduct, all the primary and other pre-secondary schools have decided not to open the schools, classrooms and libraries. Consequently, this paper highly depends on online materials for conducting the study. Moreover, other problems also create a barrier to conducting a smooth study on the topic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Importance of Education:

Why do we fight so hard to get an education? Is it only for the purpose of passing certain exams and getting a job? Is it the role of school to educate us to understand the entire process of life while we are still young? It is vital to have a job and earn a living, but is that all? Are we solely being educated for that purpose? Life is unquestionably more than a job or a profession; it is a huge and profound mystery, a vast world in which we act like human beings. If we only prepare ourselves to make a living, we will miss the entire meaning of life; because understanding life is far more essential than simply studying for exams and being extremely good in mathematics, physics, or whatever subject you choose. It means, 'surely, life is not merely a job' rather more than that (Belmont, Calif.; Wadsworth, 1990).

In this view, education is the most important asset for human growth and development. Education not only contributes to economic progress but also creates a conducive atmosphere for human thinking, which is a requirement for other well-being. Socrates, the greatest philosopher of all time, recognized the importance of education in fostering societal cohesiveness and growth. He began teaching the citizens of Athens how to enlighten both outward and eternal ideas. However, the ruling elites did not tolerate Socrates' teaching and influence among the young generations. Finally, Socrates was poisoned to death (Velasquez, 2017:31-34). Socrates is no more in the world but his idea, education and its importance shall prevail all time.

According to the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE, 2009), it is widely accepted that education is critical to the development of a nation and the achievement of human potential, with basic education serving as the cornerstone. In his book 'An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions (2013) Nobel Laureate Indian Economist and Philosopher Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze emphasized education, particularly child education for economic development and social justice. After robust analysis of Japan's experience Sen argued:

The focus on education was intense in the early period of Japanese development, during the Meiji era (1868–1912). For example, between 1906 and 1911, education consumed as much as 43 percent of the budgets of the towns and villages, for Japan as a whole. ⁹ In this period, the progress of elementary education was particularly rapid, and the recruiting army officers were impressed by the fact that whereas in 1893 one third of the army recruits were illiterate, already by 1906 there was hardly anyone in that condition. By 1910 Japan was almost fully literate, at least for the young, and by 1913, though still very much poorer than Britain or America, Japan was publishing more books than Britain and more than twice as many as the United States. The concentration on education determined, to a large extent, the nature and speed of Japan's economic and social progress (Sen and Dreze, 2013: 86).

Later, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and of course China followed similar routes and firmly focused on basic education, largely delivered by the state. In explaining the rapid economic progress of East Asia, its willingness to make good use of the global market economy is often and rightly emphasized. But that process was greatly helped by the achievements of these countries in public education. Widespread participation in a global economy would have been hard to accomplish if people could not read or write. According to Sen, the main reason for India's backsliding of economic development is that the lack of proper child education. Kids' education, therefore, is essential for a country's any type of progress and development (Sen and Dreze, 2013).

2.2 Education System in Bangladesh:

Bangladesh's education system includes 150,000 institutions, 40 million students, and almost a million teachers. In 2012, there were roughly 19 million students in elementary education, including madrasas and non-formal programs, and 12 million students in secondary school, including recognized madrasas (BANBEIS, 2013).

	Education	School/Level	Grades	Age	Year
	Primary	Primary Education	1-5	6-10	5
	Secondary	Junior Secondary Education	6-8	11-13	3
	Secondary	Secondary Education	9-10	14-15	2
	Secondary	Higher Secondary	11-12	16-17	2
	Vocational	Diploma in Engineering			4
	Tertiary	Fazil	13-14		2
	Tertiary	Bachelor's			3-5
	Tertiary	Kamil	15-16		2
	Tertiary	Bachelor (Engineering & Technology)	15-16		3
	Tertiary	Master's			1-2
	Tertiary	Master of Philosophy			2
	Tertiary	Doctorate			3-5

Table 01: Level of the education system in Bangladesh. Source: Scholaro Pro,

According to the Annual Primary School Census (APSC) report published in 2016, there are about 19 million (19,067,761) students enrolled in all primary level schools in the nation (including non-government schools, community schools, and non-governmental organizations, among others), and 527,798 instructors are employed to educate them (Annual Primary School Census, APSC, Bangladesh 2016). Besides this, 18602,988 students are taught by 343,349 full-time government teachers in 64,177 government primary schools (APSC, 2016). **In 2021**, according to the DPE, there are around 30 million students at primary schools across the country. In the four years between 2016 and 2021, almost 10 million additional pupils were enrolled in Bangladesh's primary education system (Dhaka Tribune, 2021).

Since the 1990s, educational participation has increased dramatically. Nearly universal initial enrolment has been accomplished at the primary level, however around a third of those enrolled leave out before finishing the primary stage. Gender equality in elementary and secondary school enrollment is another achievement of the previous two decades. Despite the expansion, total enrolment ratios in secondary (about 50% of the relevant age group) and higher education remain low (under 10 percent). Effective participation, as judged by successful completion of a stage of education and acceptable student learning outcomes, is significantly lower than enrolment statistics might imply (Bangladesh. MoPME, 2014).

2.3 Understanding Distance Learning:

Distant learning, also known as distance education, e-learning, and online learning, is a type of education in which teachers and students are physically separated during teaching and various technologies are used to encourage dialogue between students and teachers, as well as between students and other students. Nontraditional students, such as full-time employees, military personnel, and nonresidents or persons in remote areas who are unable to attend classroom lectures, have typically benefited from distance learning. Distance learning, on the other hand, has become a well-established element of the educational landscape, with trends indicating that it will continue to develop. In the fall of 2009, more than 5.6 million university students in the

United States were enrolled in at least one online course, up from 1.6 million in 2002 (Berg, G. A. and Simonson, Michael (2016)

Distance learning is popular among students and institutions for good reason. Universities gain from the ability to enroll students without having to build classrooms and accommodation, while students benefit from the flexibility of working where and when they choose. Specialty courses, such as small-enrollment languages and Advanced Placement classes, are available in public schools without the need for numerous classrooms. Students who are homeschooled also have access to centralized instruction (Berg, G. A. and Simonson, Michael (2016).

(Berg, G. A. and Simonson, Michael (2016) also provide four special features of distance learning. First, according to their definition, remote learning takes place in a classroom setting. Second, Distance learning necessitates geographic separation, and time may also divide students and tutors. Third, Individuals in a learning group and the teacher are connected through interactive telecommunication methods. Finally, distance education, like any other type of education, provides a learning community comprised of students, a teacher, and instructional resources—books, audio, video, and graphic displays that allow students to access educational information.

2.4 Distance Learning Online class in Bangladesh:

Since the emergence of Covid-19 in the country, all the educational institutions have been padlocked. It's been over a year and a half since educational institutions across the country were closed as part of attempts to stop Covid-19 from spreading. Many children, especially young ones, have struggled with the transition to online classrooms from charming, engaged in-person sessions. Only the tip of the iceberg includes the loss of vibrant contact with peers, aversion to sitting in the same location for an extended period of time, a lack of comprehensive grasp of the courses being taught, and health concerns resulting from hours of online sessions. Despite the numerous issues involved, online classes are the only way to continue studying throughout the epidemic, which is a severe situation not only for the kids and their education but also for graduates students (Khan, 2020).

After conducting a focus group discussion across the country UNICEF mentioned that Students from Bangladesh's eight divisions unanimously agreed that while remote learning helps them stay on top of their academic pursuits, it comes with a slew of drawbacks (UNICEF, 2020). UNICEF mentioned a student's voice about distance learning rightly:

“Remote education cannot be a long-term solution for continuous learning. School is not only a place for academic activity, it is a hub for many co-curricular activities. We are fast losing our social skills and talents due to excessive dependence on technology,”

The same report also mentions some problems of online and distance learning systems in the country. Unequal access to the internet and other digital devices are two of them. Because many kids in rural regions and from low-income families do not have access to television, radio, the internet, or cellphones, they are unable to take advantage of ministry of education's remote learning possibilities. According to a study, 63% of Bangladeshi school-age children do not have access to the internet at home. The findings emphasize the need of closing the digital divide and addressing the underlying inequities that disenfranchise disadvantaged groups and prolong poverty cycles (UNICEF, 2020).

2.5 Who Are the Kids?

There is no universally accepted definition of the term 'Kid or Kids'. In most cases, the word children are used to understand the 'kids'. Bangladesh Development Research Center Inc. stated that there are 1.3 million children (ages 0-14 years) in Bangladesh, with 24.9 million females and 26.4 million boys, according to World Bank data. Therefore, this paper draws a new line defining the term 'kids' or children for an operating definition which is necessary for the study. The term "kids" is used in this research to refer to students in pre-secondary schools (Nursery to class 8) who are under the age of 14. From this sense, this article upholds all boys and girls under the age of fourteen are referred to as "children" or "kids." This report assesses the country's distant learning process based on this age group.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

This study has been conducted based on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary source of this study is that surveying the students of different primary and pre-secondary schools. To collect data, this paper uses both open and close-ended questions distributing online google survey forms among students who are studying at the pre-secondary level in different schools. The total number of survey respondents was 140. Both boys and girls students have participated in the survey.

Data Analysis Process To complete the study this paper uses both qualitative and quantitative data. After collecting both types of data, the data has been analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Statistical Packages of

Social Sciences (SPSS, VERSION-23; 2015). After analyzing data, this paper uses necessary figures and tables and avoids unnecessary ones.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Concept of Distance Learning:

The pie chart depicts the condition of Kids about distance learning. As shown in the pie chart, most of the kids and students who study in primary schools know about distance learning. Among the respondents who took part in the survey, more than three-quarters of participants (80%) said they are familiar with distance learning or e-learning process. However, a tiny portion, less than a decile, said they are unfamiliar with this type of e-learning education system and 11.54 percent were reluctant to give their responses (see figure). Overall, the majority of kids or the students of primary schools have an idea about online or distance learning methods. Obviously, it is a significant development that makes sense that kids of our country keep news about modern teaching and learning methods.

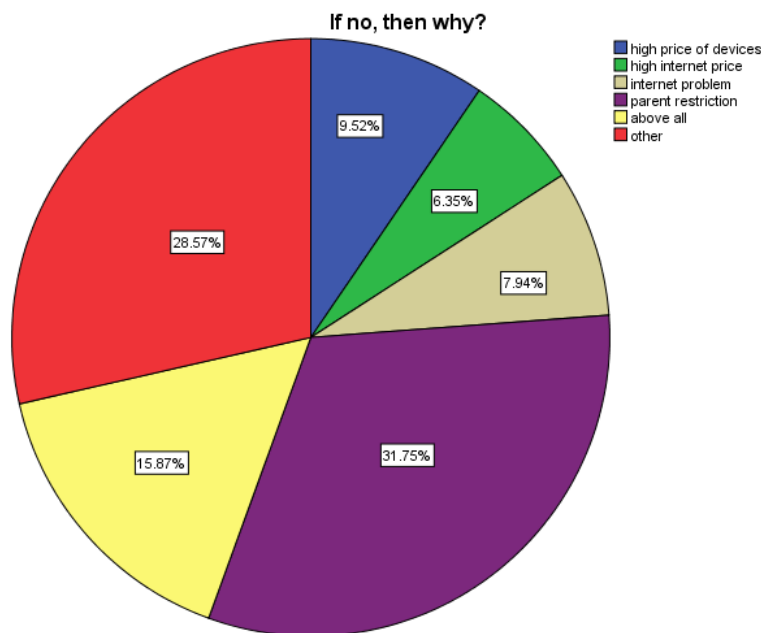


Figure 01: Challenges of Distance Learning

4.2 About Digital Devices and Using Manual:

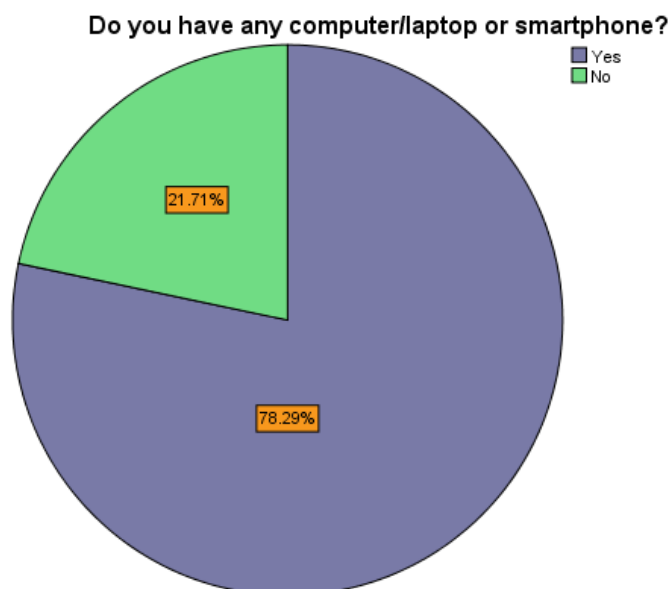


Figure 02: Having digital devices

Respondents were asked to know to have their smart or digital devices such as laptops, smartphones, or tabs which are necessary for participating in the distance learning process. The response to the question was positive. As shown in the graph, 78.29 percent of the respondents said they have digital devices such as mobile phones or laptops, or tabs. Less than a quarter of the survey participants said they have no such smart devices. It indicates that the majority of the kids have opportunities to take part in the distance learning process or online classes.

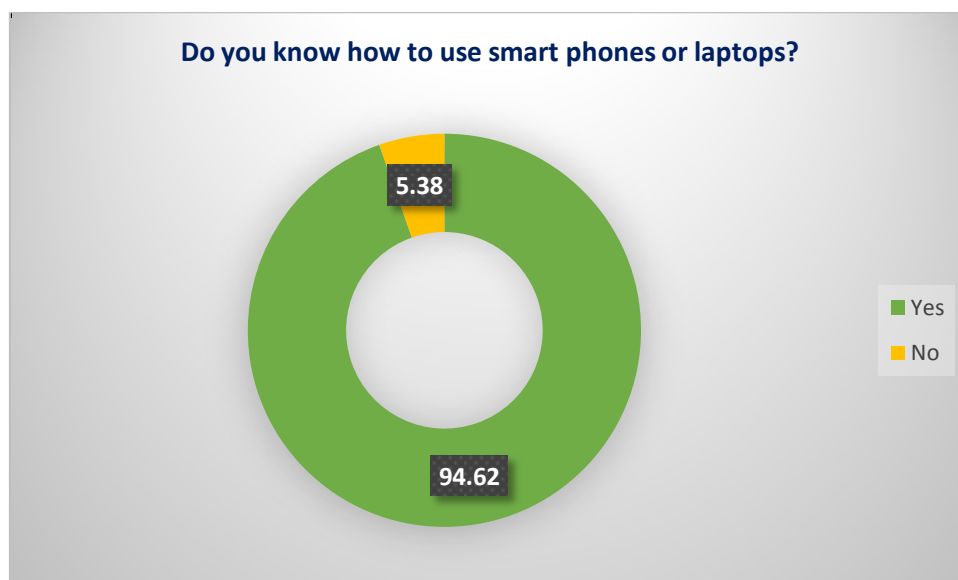


Figure 03: Capacity of handling smartphone and digital devices

In addition, according to the pie chart given above, almost all the kid respondents do know using the manual of smartphones and laptops. That means, they have a close relationship with smart devices. It also represents the possibility of 'digital device addiction' among the kids and primary school students in the country. If it becomes true, there may have some future difficulties from mental to reading attention among the kids.

4.3 Kids Are Interested in Distance Learning:

More than ninety percent of kids students have an interest in the distance learning process. The survey reveals that if guardians or authorities can provide the opportunities, then the kids will attend online classes. It is enthusiastic the kids are keen to adherent in classes in the period of Covid-19. Proper guidelines, supportive parenting can bring the kids in the learning process with more interest.

The reasons for participating in distance learning or online classes are not linear as shown in the table. According to the survey, most of the students (41%) participate in online classes due to meeting teachers and classmates which makes the kids feeling good

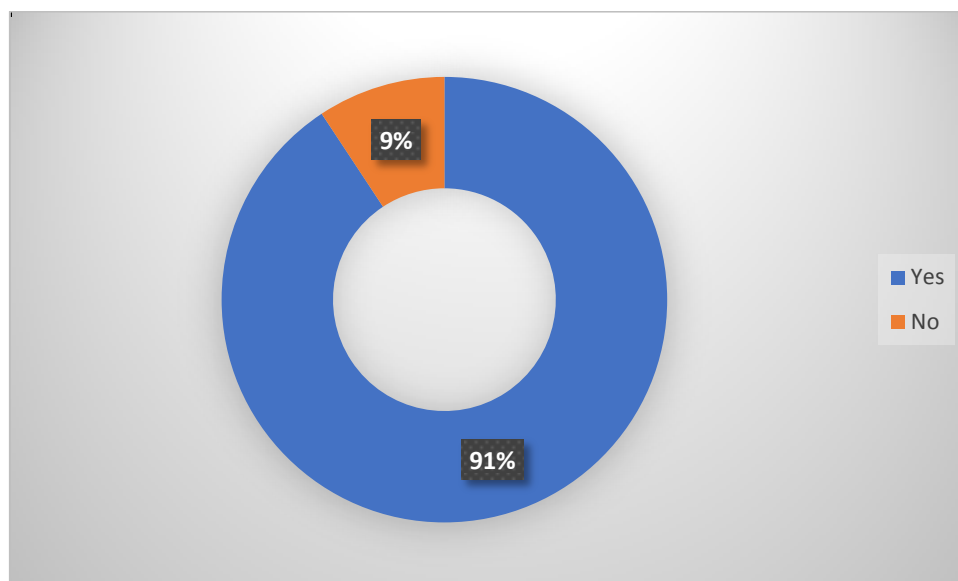


Figure 04: Familiarity to distance learning

Other relevant factors including parent pressure and unmentioned reasons affected the possibility and interest of the kids in distance learning and online classes. In most cases, kids have supportive family members to help to participate in online classes through opening devices, inserting headphones, switching audio and video on and off. Besides this, the majority of respondents said they have a suitable environment such as a noise-free place, disturbing elements for attending distance classes and learning process. A negligible respondent said they have suffered from a lack of supportive family members.

If your answer is yes, then which factors do influence you?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Parent's pressure	11	7.9	9.1	9.1
	Meeting teachers and classmates	41	29.3	33.9	43.0
	Both 1 & 2	44	31.4	36.4	79.3
	other	25	17.9	20.7	100.0
	Total	121	86.4	100.0	
Missing	System	19	13.6		
Total		140	100.0		

Table 02: Factors influencing Kids to participate in distance learning

However, a significant number of students said if they do not like to participate in the e-learning process, the reasons are including the online class is boring, it does not look like real classroom teaching and learning system. According to them, other unmentioned issues are also responsible for disinterest in the distance learning process.

If you do not like distance learning or online class then why?				
Variables	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Boring	9	6.4	12.5	12.5
Do not feel like classroom	43	30.7	59.7	72.2
Other	8	5.7	11.1	83.3
Above all	12	8.6	16.7	100.0
Total	72	51.4	100.0	
Total		140	100.0	

Table 03: Reasons for disliking the online classes

4.4 Other Findings:

As represented in the table, the data show the situation of computer laboratories, using them for presentation lectures in classes and the comfortability of students during the delivery lectures of their teachers. The data shows that most primary and other kid schools have computer facilities (85.4%) for teaching the students and kids using distance and e-learning methods. This is to mention that the Govt. have already established 4,161 computer labs in different educational institutes across the country known as "Sheikh Rasel

Digital Lab” with modern facilities. The data indicates the tendency of using modern technologies and tools in primary schools in the country.

Variables	Findings (%)			Total (%0)
	Yes	No	Maybe	
Is there any computer lab in your school?	85.4	1.5	13.1	100
Does your teacher teach you in the classroom using a computer lab?	62.6	22.9	14.5	100
Do you feel comfortable in a distance learning system?	52.7	22.1	25.2	100

Table 04: Availability and use of computer in schools' labs

The table also shows that around two-thirds of the teachers who work in kids and primary schools use computer labs to teach the students. Against this situation, almost a quarter of teachers do not use computers or other smart devices in their teaching methods in primary and kid schools. In summary, both teachers and kid students are habitual to use the computer and modern technologies in their teaching and learning methods respectively.

In addition to the previous findings, the survey shows that slightly more than half of the primary and kid students (52.7%) feel comfortable in a distance learning system or online classes. However, 22.1 percent of kids do not feel good during distance learning classes. Overall, although the rate of comfortability is higher than the dissatisfaction with the online classes, it indicates the necessities of development in the distance learning system in the country.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The present study was designed to determine the situation of distance learning in Bangladesh primary schools and special attention was given to evaluate the problems and the prospects of online classes in the country. The covered areas of this study include having digital devices and instruments such as smartphones or laptops, accessibility of the internet, operating capacity, supportive members participating in the classes. Moreover, other issues like positive and negative sides of distance learning are also covered in this study. All these areas, covered in this study, are significant parts of the life of students who study in different classes at primary and pre-secondary schools in the country. These variables unfold the situations going on with children in the name of distance learning or online classes during severe transmission of Covid-19 in Bangladesh.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that the challenges of distance learning are massive. Most of the children face mental challenges to be strong be that as it may. This study reveals the both problems and prospects of the e-learning system in the country. Consequently, almost all the students are currently live with their family members. This situation resists the normal mobility of life. In this critical moment of kids' distance learning, this paper recommends the following issues:

- **Reopening Schools Soon:** It has been 18 months since the COVID-19 pandemic began, and millions of children's schooling have been interrupted. Primary and secondary schools have been closed in 19 nations as of today, affecting approximately 156 million children. Governments have taken many initiatives to continue online education and decided to resume physical classes, however, reopening decisions could not implemented due to high rate of transmission. That is why it is imperative to reestablish schools for in-person learning. It cannot wait for the number of cases to drop to zero.
- **Ensuring Internet Access:** Providing distance learning is not enough without ensuring the facilities of internet access. In the rural and semi-urban areas, internet speed is lower than that of urban areas which creates problems in connecting online classes. Necessary steps may be taken to increase the speed of internet.
- **High Internet Price:** The high internet price is another problem of proceeding distance learning in the country. Though Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) set the broadband internet price all over the country, yet it require strict monitoring to prevent wicked businessman. (Bangla Tribune, 6 June 2021) On the other hand children from poor families are unable to bear the cost of internet bills. Therefore, the Government may ensure the free internet for poor students to remove barriers to the e-learning methods. List of poor students may be prepared by the educational institutes itself.
- **Providing Digital Devices:** Authorities have responsibilities ensuring the connectivity of all the students in a class, otherwise, a digital divide and discrimination will create from a very early age. They will suffer in the late-life. If necessary, the government and other responsive authorities must provide smartphones so that all the students from both rural and urban areas can participate in the distance learning process.
- **Providing Training:** all the list of recommendations will not work if the children do not know how to operate smartphones and participate in distance learning or online classes. Therefore, training facilities must be provided for the children so that can handle the devices during the online classes.

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