

Administration of Government Primary Schools in Dhaka District during the Pandemic: Strategies, Challenges, and Scopes of Improvement

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Abstract

The study explores how school administrators adjusted to the sudden disruptions in education, oversaw remote learning initiatives, and extended support to teachers and students during this difficult time. The qualitative data collection and analysis involved 19 respondents as primary informants. Utilizing a basic interpretive qualitative research design and purposive sampling with semi-structured interviews, the research emphasizes the qualitative nature of the findings. The researcher has chosen purposive sampling in accordance with the non-probability sampling process. Semi-structured interview tools were used in data collection. Teachers began delivering instruction from their homes using apps like IMO, WhatsApp, and Zoom, but student involvement was low owing to a lack of resources, financial constraints, technological illiteracy, migration, and motivation. Despite the challenges, teachers and students agreed that contemporary digital literacy instruction, focused on regular communication and individualized feedback from teachers, can enable a school to function even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords : Pandemic, Administration, Digital Literacy, Online Communication Technology, Learning Trajectories.

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Introduction

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, people are confronted with a slew of shared issues. All educational institutions in 185 nations stopped on April 1, 2020, affecting 1 542 412 000 students, or 89.4% of total registered students (UNESCO, 2020). On the other hand, the government has taken a variety of initiatives to ensure that education is maintained through television, the internet, radio, and mobile phones (UNICEF, 2020). From primary through higher education, there is a major dilemma in which students waste their time by engaging in frustrating activities.

Students are unable to participate in online education due to a lack of online gadgets, despite the fact that the primary school administration has implemented online education for primary students. A total of 39,936,843 students have been affected, including 3,578,384 students in pre-primary and 17,338,100 students in primary school (Begum et al., 2020) with the help of the a2i program, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) began broadcasting digital content for primary school students on Sang sad TV and various social media platforms (UNDP Bangladesh, 2020). Many governments and private education establishments have implemented online classes like JAAGO's Ghore Bose Shikha and ROBI 10 Minute School's Facebook Lives (Sania, 2020).

As a critical institutional response, educational institutions at all levels must address this problem by ensuring students and parents (Daniel, 2020). Alternative measures to replace the discontinuance of the regular curriculum in government primary schools across the country must be implemented to continue schooling, especially in a country with a higher proximity of infections due to its demographic concentration.

Many other studies have highlighted the advantages of online learning, such as convenience, simplicity of participation, and the availability of blended courses (Fedynich, 2013). Kumar (2010) identified some disadvantages of distance learning, including a lack of social interaction, unequal technology costs, questionable assessment effectiveness, and difficulties for instructors. Due to reduced contact hours for learners and a lack of communication with teachers when learning or understanding challenges, students' academic performance is likely to suffer in classes held for both year-end and internal examinations (Sintema, 2020). It's challenging to create a system that meets all students' learning demands while also being convenient.

Rationale of the study

Education is the backbone of a nation, and primary education is one of the most fundamental human necessities. The successful implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 for primary education is possible through a good administrative system. The adoption and implementation of strategies related to distance learning mechanisms during any pandemic time requires substantial research on the initial administration of the practice to establish and collaborate between superiors and subordinates. In light of this circumstance, new laws and regulations for primary educational administration must be formulated.

It is anticipated that these findings will aid in the creation of crisis-preparedness frameworks, school administrator capacity-building initiatives, and policy guidelines that empower Dhaka district primary schools to effectively respond to future crises, guaranteeing continuity, equity, and high-quality instruction in any emergency.

Importance of the study

Adequate research is needed to make primary administration more effective in ensuring free and compulsory primary education. The findings of this study can be used to better understand the viewpoints of primary school policymakers and administrators during the further pandemic. The study will also help the civil society and local communities to understand the scenario of the pandemic preparedness strategies and challenges of the Primary Educational Administration. Emergency education should be incorporated within the curriculum in a broader way. Virtual education should be linked up with the national curriculum and reflected in education policy. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study can assist policymakers in developing adaptable guidelines for a post-pandemic situation or any crisis of this magnitude.

Objectives

Indeed, this study aims to explore an academic picture of the administration system of government primary schools in Dhaka District. It also attempts to ascertain some specific objectives. The objectives are:

1. To explore the strategies that are taken to better administrate and overcome the challenges in the primary schools of Dhaka District.
2. To find out the challenges the administrators face in administering primary schools in Dhaka District during the Pandemic.
3. To recommend the scopes of improvement in the taken strategies considering the pandemic situation.

Methodology

Design

The study used a basic interpretative research approach, and the data were qualitative. The primary goal of employing a qualitative research approach was to elicit more detailed information from the key informants. A basic qualitative study has a trustworthy research method, and the study derives theoretically from constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction (Merriam, 2009). However, in qualitative research, the researcher is seen as the primary research instrument (Stake, 2010).

Sample

The study was attempted to find out strategies, challenges, and recommended the scopes of improvement regarding primary school administration in Dhaka District. Sample was selected from 05 government primary schools in Dhaka District based on the judgment of the researcher. 05 head teachers, 05 assistant teachers, 05 SMCs,

01 TEO, ATEO, DPEO, and ADPEO each – thus a total of 19 respondents provided crucial information for the study. The researcher selected purposive sampling technique in line with the non-probability sampling procedure for data collection. The judgment of the researcher was given priority in this sampling procedure. This study was conducted using primary sources of data.

Measurement used

Semi-structured interview tools were used in data collection. Three (3) experts assessed the reliability of the questionnaire tools used in the research. Content validity, assessed by the three (3) experts, was very high. Prior consents were taken from the respondents to use the data provided by them. Out of the questionnaire, three (3) questions were mentioned in this study.

Such as:

1. What strategies have you used to communicate with primary school teachers and students during the pandemic?
2. What communication problems have you faced in managing primary schools during the pandemic?
3. What more steps can be taken to ensure quality education for students during the pandemic?

Procedure

This study included head teachers, assistant teachers, SMC members, TEO, ATEO, DPEO, and ADPEO as primary respondents to examine administrative practices in primary schools. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, and data were collected using in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative analysis uncovers the current state of school administration, highlights existing challenges, and identifies areas requiring improvement. The findings aim to offer valuable insights for enhancing administrative strategies and guiding policy development of primary education sector in Bangladesh.

The main method, used to collect primary sources of data, is interview. Each interview was conducted in the Bangla, and later on it was translated by the researcher. Different interview methods or techniques were used to collect the primary sources of data so as to come up with adequate data for the study. The in-depth interview (IDI) tool for 05 respondents, Key Informant Interviews (KII) tool, and Semi-Structured Interviews tool for 14 general respondents were selected to conduct the study.

Results

Thematic analysis is one of the most popular types of qualitative research analysis. It is used to uncover common patterns, identify existing gaps, and highlight areas requiring improvement. "It focuses on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting meaning dynamics in qualitative data" (Clarke, 2016). In this part, key findings from

data collection are organized and presented based on identified themes. Over the course of a month, interviews have been used to collect data from 19 participants.

1. Strategies that are taken to better administrate and overcome the challenges

1.1 Strategies for conducting teaching-learning activities

Schools have been adapted new alternative approaches to teaching-learning practices while also taking steps to inform, reassure, and maintain contact with students and parents. However, teachers have adapted new methods to teach and some teachers continue to rely on the traditional method. The school's initial instruction was that teachers must be present in regular classes with the students, either through phone calls or through various apps such as IMO, Google Meet, Zoom Meeting, or WhatsApp. Instead of teaching in the classroom, online learning, the use of a display method in class, and the use of online softcopy and slides instead of books as materials are becoming more popular. A variety of techniques have been used to monitor students' online classes. Such as: class link of Google meet, accessing online class, online class routine etc. have been used to observe the online class process. Thus, the teachers had the students' contact information, which enabled them to bridge the educational communication gap and reach out to more students for assistance.

1.2 Budgeting & Strategies for ICT in Education

In the current situation, there is a lot of laxity in assigning homework to students. It has been observed that, in some cases, teachers encourage students to do social development work as homework. As soon as the class begins, the visiting teacher asks the students questions about the topic of the lesson through the internet. As a result, it is critical to provide the necessary budget for ensuring educational materials in order to eliminate all problems in teaching and learning for both teachers and students. The strategies for providing educational materials are to transfer the necessary funds to the school's online account, save all vouchers for educational materials budget expenditure; and preservation of all information regarding the provision of government education materials.

1.3 School administration and Communication strategies

An online education system was introduced to ensure everyone's health and safety, which is a unique way of compensating students for their education. To manage the school, there must be constant communication between the higher and lower authorities. Furthermore, education officers and staffs are encouraged to keep any government connections they may have in any situation. An integrated discussion system has been set up via the online app to decide on school management issues in the pandemic. All the virtual strategies that have been adopted to maintain basic communication. If communication via mobile phone is not possible, out-of-reach students have been contacted through home visits. It is extremely difficult to communicate with students' parents in order to compensate for the loss of education caused by this pandemic. Children from low-income families in Dhaka, in particular,

attend government primary schools. In that case, various techniques have been used to communicate with the parents of the students. Home visits, on the other hand, have been made to contact those who could not be reached via mobile phones.

Above all, all of the strategies and methods used during the pandemic played an important role in ensuring the continuity of primary education and compensating students for educational disadvantages.

2. Challenges the administrators face to administrate Primary Schools in Dhaka District

2.1 Challenges managing online teaching learning activities

Many governments have directed institutions to discontinue face-to-face instruction for the majority of their teachers and students, instead directing them to transition to online teaching and virtual education, which has its own set of challenges. Overall, conducting online classes was a very challenging issue for the students. Many students and parents cannot use online apps properly in the field of online education. When they are disconnected due to load shedding, they do not join again. Again, many could not access online education due to network problems due to their location in the village. The handwriting ambiguity of those who submitted H.W (Home Work) and C.W (Class Work) through an online app has made it difficult for teachers to understand. Many homes do not have Wi-Fi. Although there is Wi-Fi, its connection has been disconnected due to financial problems. Again, it costs a lot to buy MB for Students who do not have a mobile phone use their father's mobile phone. But when the class is over, their father stays out of the house. One more thing to note is that while the students are interested at the beginning of the online class, their access and interest gradually decrease towards the end.

2.2 Obstacles to student assessment

Students are being assessed online to minimize their health risk. In this case, the authorities have imposed some restrictions, such as the requirement that certain procedures be followed in order to take the test online. These include doing creative work, answering multiple-choice questions, taking scheduled class tests, and taking oral exams. While taking these tests, students must have cameras and microphones on their devices (laptops, computers, and mobile phones). In addition, the video of the practical class must be uploaded to the department's website and e-mailed to the students. It is very difficult for students to conduct mute or unmute when taking oral exams, and it is not conducive to assessing the home environment. Sometimes there is a lot of noise, which greatly disrupts the online evaluation process. Due to their evaluation through the checklist, the class roll number has remained the same as before. Moreover, class-based teachers have been selected to control the students so that the teacher can control all the students in that class together.

2.3 Communication challenges

The pandemic had to face many problems in maintaining contact with everyone. In that case, immediate communication was not possible. Again, many parents did not pick up the phone even after promising to call back later. Many parents could not be

reached due to a lack of communication devices and network problems with their families in the village. In some cases, most parents have not been able to achieve effective communication due to a lack of device management knowledge. When contacting parents, it has been observed that many people turn off their phone numbers, and most of them do not receive calls. They have cut off all communication with the school for failing to provide school salaries for their children. Parents are reluctant to engage in any educational communication.

3. Recommend action of the scopes of improvement in the taken strategies

3.1 Recommendations for the administrative and policy-making level

Direct interviewers have made some recommendations for the development of communication systems and the successful implementation of government directives. To do this, all the students have to be brought under the online device to compensate for the educational loss of the students. In addition, teachers need to be trained in modern technology-based skills, such as Gmail, power point slide. Online communication tools should be available at reasonable prices, taking into account everyone's financial concerns. Awareness raising seminars on the improvement of students and parents should be organized to provide satisfactory stipends for the students.

3.2 Recommendations for school level

Inspire everyone to participate in activities spontaneously through inspirational programs. In addition, regular students should be encouraged to attend government-provided radio and television classes. Direct interviewers have made some recommendations for the development of communication systems and the successful implementation of government directives. To do this, all the students have to be brought under the online device to compensate for the educational loss of the students. In addition, teachers need to be trained in modern technology-based skills, such as: Gmail. Online communication tools should be available at reasonable prices, taking into account everyone's financial concerns. Establish a reliable means of communication with the student and his or her parents. In particular, mothers need to have a mobile phone contract at any time.

Moreover, educational institutions should pay special attention to the rules of hygiene by conducting health awareness campaigns. The awareness of parents is very important in this case.

3.3 Recommendations for the development of teaching-learning functions

Despite the government's multifaceted efforts to expand primary education, there are still complex issues in primary education administration and management in the field of teaching and learning.

To manage teaching and learning activities during the pandemic, all students must be covered by an online device and be able to afford Wi-Fi and pay bills. Those who are financially weak need to have money allocated according to their needs, and other wealthy people have to come forward for the betterment of education. In addition,

the school will need to manage the necessary equipment and personnel for administrative duties. Furthermore, for online class supervision, training and written policies must be developed.

The real truth is that a person's morpheme of developing as a good citizen is formed at the primary level. That is why primary education is referred to as a country's educational foundation. So, the country needs a beautiful and transparent primary education system. By properly planning and implementing the recommendations made during face-to-face interviews, the problems of the primary education system can be greatly reduced, and the administrative foundation of primary education can be greatly strengthened.

Discussions

Strategies that are taken to better administrate and overcome the challenges

During the pandemic, schooling activities have to be continued. In most cases, teachers and students have devised creative ways to continue their education from home. Teachers have asked to maintain regular contact with their students and teach remotely using digital tools or software such as IMO, ZOOM, Google Meet, SMS, and WhatsApp, according to school administrators. As previously stated, the majority of students enrolled in this area's free government primary schools come from low-income families.

Based on the information obtained, the findings indicate that the procedure of online education for primary school students in Dhaka district has failed to provide equitable chances and participation for all students in the online learning process, as per primary education administrators. Even though all of these students eventually elected to participate in the Accelerated Remedial Learning Program (ARLP), combining the previous reading with the present class reading remains a struggle for both the teacher and the student. In this scenario, the government could have taken the approach of including primary students in education by ensuring that all students have access to online teaching and learning equipment and special facilities.

The researcher seems to recommended, moreover, creating a conducive environment for conducting online learning is one of the important responsibilities of the government, which most teachers and students have failed to ensure. Furthermore, the implementation of worksheets in education has elicited a strong reaction from both students and parents.

Challenges the administrators face to administrate the Primary Schools

Many new chances to better serve traditionally underprivileged students have arisen as a result of technological advancements (Jacob, 2016). Smartphones and the internet have made the transition to remote learning much easier. Touch-screen technology has made it easier for learners, especially those who are young, to learn (Holland & Kellogg, 2020). However, in most government primary schools in Dhaka, children and parents have difficulty transitioning since they are unfamiliar with the wide variety of functionalities of a smartphone. Teachers attempted to reach all of their pupils online, but they were unsuccessful because parents and children

did not completely understand how technology could replace schools. The researcher seems to suggest that the problem of virtual education can be alleviated to some extent if teachers, students, and parents are given a basic idea about the rules and regulations of virtual education before conducting the process of virtual education.

On the other hand, family migration is one of the key causes of the significant dropout rates. Schooling can continue if content is delivered digitally and learners have access to all the necessary knowledge and training regardless of where they live in the country (Nagrале, 2013).

Recommend the scopes of improvement in the taken strategies

Apart from the difficulties they experience, instructors and students can seek out alternate solutions in challenging circumstances (Pontis & Waarde, 2020). Students and parents must take pioneering measures in creating online awareness seminars and meetings through which they are encouraged in order to strengthen the communication system. To ensure that students receive a high-quality education, qualified teachers must be appointed, and opportunities for teacher professional development must be developed. The researcher seems to support the National Education Policy 2010's goals and objectives, as well as the necessity to improve teacher capacity through training in order to generate competent teachers who can apply the curriculum. The teacher education curriculum should be updated, and training materials should be made available. To provide stipends to students and to establish a qualified management staff, trustworthy online software is required. The researcher seems to suggest that government of Bangladesh should examine the approach used by other developing nations to handle the education of students affected by the pandemic and make plans for its successful implementation in the primary school system.

Based on the information obtained, it can be considered that it is vital to attract skilled manpower required for primary education in order to streamline the primary school administration in a more streamlined manner. And the government must make a variety of efforts to limit the number of irregularities and corruption in primary education by carrying out its responsibilities on time and in a professional manner.

Conclusion

The continuation of academic learning is required to cover up the loss of students and keep them spontaneous. The biggest problems in implementing online lessons for all in impoverished countries like Bangladesh include a lack of adequate internet connection, gadgets, and mobile data, the family's financial situation, and the students' cognitive functioning. Governmental and primary administration collaboration could help to alleviate the limits and integrate a bigger group of students into online learning. Due to the aforementioned limitations, it is expected that a considerable proportion of students will be denied access to education. On the other hand, alternative and flexible strategies to minimize the damage and continue education have been sought by educational institutions. Teachers feel they are learning a new set of abilities that will aid them in efficiently delivering content in the future. Students are eager to learn more about online education in order to

establish a long-term support system for themselves and their studies. To achieve this, primary school administrators are always working to improve the overall and qualitative development of the profession.

However, this study attempted to collect as much information as possible, despite the researcher's inability to obtain a huge amount of data during the pandemic.

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