

Bangladeshi Non-Government College Teachers under Threat of Maintaining Sustainable Livelihood in the Crisis of Pandemic: A Phenomenological Case Study

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ABSTRACT

In this time of pandemic, the teaching community is admirably and desperately trying to avoid the crisis 'tragedy of not earning' in order to preserve their livelihood. This article explored the non-government honours and master's college teachers' livelihoods from different perspectives during the COVID-19 to answer the four research questions. Some reports published in the mass media were influenced by the background of the study. Newspapers and TV channel reports mention that teachers, especially non-government college teachers, in Bangladesh struggled a lot in the COVID-19 pandemic due to their salary irregularities and termination. These reports inspired researchers to conduct this study to explore the authentic condition of their livelihood. This study employs a theoretical framework from the DFID's Sustainable Livelihood Approach in order to illustrate the livelihood condition of teachers. This study employs a qualitative research paradigm based on phenomenological case study methodology, with the theoretical framework providing guidelines for in-depth interviews. Eight teachers from the eight-division of Bangladesh were interviewed. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, interviews were conducted through mobile phones. An interpretative thematic analysis was applied in this study. The study results show that teachers are in poor financial, physical, social, natural, and human conditions, and COVID-19 has destroyed their normalcy of life by causing insecurity, instability, and precarity. They are compelled to struggle to meet their basic demands, concentrating on different income-generating tasks rather than conducting classes. The government should take the initiative to provide soft loans to teachers as an incentive to survive in these emergencies. But the government should find sustainable solutions for the betterment of these college teachers, such as nationalisation of the college teachers or including them in the Monthly Payment Order (MPO) list.

Keywords: Livelihood, COVID-19, SLA, Assets, Non-MPO

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Introduction

The novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, has been destroying every sector of human beings in the world. There has been a devastating effect on physical and psychological health, social security and stability, income, and normalcy of life (Bong et al., 2020). It has triggered the worst economic crisis since the Second World War (Kim & Loayza, 2021). In the economic downturn, approximately 81 million people suffer profoundly from job losses and are compelled to live under the poverty line (ILO, n.d). It impacts the lives and livelihoods of different professionals (Rehman et al., 2021). It ruins the normalcy of teachers' lives. They pass through uncertainty about their personal and social lives, work, and workplace (Allen et al., 2020). Long-term education institution closures increase their anxiety level because they are far away from face-to-face teaching and direct interaction with students and colleagues (Kaden, 2020). In this pandemic, teachers struggle to adapt to the new era of online education for lack of technical knowledge, device problems, network problems, and so on (Arora & Srinivason, 2020). But the most dreadful thing about teachers in this pandemic is termination from the job, salary unpaid or reduction (Bhat et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, all educational institutions have closed since March 18, 2020, and it has badly impacted teachers in every sector. Although teachers in government-funded educational institutions such as public universities, government schools, colleges, madrasas, and vocational institutions are paid during the pandemic, they are suffering from physical and psychological problems due to prolonged stays at home (Ela et al., 2021). On the other hand, many non-government education institute teachers are not getting a salary or facing salary reductions that make their lives miserable in every sphere (Dash & Hossain, 2020).

In Bangladesh, most of the secondary, higher secondary, degree (pass) and national university-affiliated honors and masters colleges are non-government. There are 4,091 non-government colleges where 24,36,242 students take their college education. Among 4,091 colleges, 1,215 schools and colleges, 1,297 higher secondary colleges, 1,058 degree (pass) colleges, 460 Hon's colleges, and 61 master's colleges, where 1,06,467 teachers teach students (BANBEIS, 2018). Considering these institutions' contributions, the government assists teachers and employees in some of these institutions through the Monthly Payment Order (MPO). MPO listed teachers get a basic salary according to the 8th payscale and their grade, along with a lump-sum house rent and medical allowance. But Honor's and Masters college teachers have not been allowed for MPO since 1993, when the college got permission to start Honor's and Masters. In total, 26,315 teachers in these colleges do not get any assistance from the government. They get salaries from tuition fees from students. Eventually, they used to get meagre wages (Pronay, 2011). They stage many demonstrations and human chains all around Bangladesh, demanding to be enlisted in the MPO list. They are ignored in the School-College Manpower Policy and MPO Policy-2021 (Ministry of Education, 2021). Conversely, the government is thinking of taking the initiative to close Hon's and Master's programs from these colleges but does not

provide any solution or strategies for college teachers' future (Moni, 2021, May, 26). For this reason, teachers at these colleges pass their time with apprehension about job loss. Amid this situation, COVID-19 has emerged as a catalyst for taking their lives in the destruction.

Most of the college teachers of Hon's and Master's colleges do not get any salaries from college for long-time college closure due to COVID-19. Some teachers lose their job or face salary reductions that force them to go through severe hardship because the lengthen COVID-19 worse situation reduces guardian's income to pay tuition fees. This situation creates dramatic change in non-government college teachers life and livelihood. There is little research in Bangladesh about the COVID-19 impact on different professionals life such as rickshaw-pullers (Ahmed & Sifat, 2020), migrant workers (Karim et al., 2020) and garments workers (Sen et al., 2020). Researchers find very little research on non-government college teachers, such as job satisfaction (Pronay, 2011) and socio-economic status (Azad et al., 2014). Still, there is no research about their livelihood situation during COVID-19 except few newspaper articles, reports and television broadcasts. As MPO deprived non-government Hon's and Masters college teachers play a vital role in higher education of Bangladesh, it is essential for the decision-making authority to perceive their livelihood condition to make the proper decision about themselves. So, this study aims to find out their livelihood condition during COVID-19. It is hoped that this research will help the government reform the MPO policy to include these teachers in the MPO list for the betterment of their life and livelihood.

Research Questions:

1. How does COVID-19 affect the livelihood of non-government college teachers?
2. In what ways do teachers alter their lifestyles in the face of the pandemic?
3. In what ways are teachers facing insecurity, instability, and precarity as a result of the pandemic?

Background and rationality of the study

It is admitted in a joint statement by Educational International, ILO, UNESCO and UNICEF on World Teachers' Day-2020 that teachers are the key stakeholders who can rebuild the future by leading the young soul in crisis. Teachers play a pivotal role in achieving inclusive and quality education for all, but in this COVID-19 crisis, nearly 63 million teachers are affected in diverse ways, and the marginalized teachers' lives are at the door of ruin. Amid this situation, in this joint statement, the organizations urge governments, social partners, and other key actors to take responsibility for the wellbeing of teachers' lives and livelihoods (UNESCO, 2020). This statement inspired researchers to investigate the livelihood situation of teachers in Bangladesh. According to several newspaper and television channel reports, non-MPO college teachers face significant difficulties as a result of irregular pay and job termination (Alamgir, 2020). So, researchers determined to conduct their study about the livelihood of non-mpo college teachers in Bangladesh during COVID-19. This research is significant to explore

the real scenario of non-MPO college teachers' lives and livelihoods, show the prevailing discrimination among teachers that is the barrier to ensuring the quality of education, and suggest the government, social partners, and other actors take proper initiative to improve the life and livelihood of teachers.

Conceptual Framework

Livelihood generally refers to a way or path to make a living. Frankenberger et al. (2000) defined livelihood as the human access to adequate food, health, shelter, primary education, income, and security of location and protection. Khan et al. (2020) defined livelihood as the means of securing the basic needs of someone's life. A set of activities is needed to fulfill the necessities like obtaining food and water, medicine, shelter, and clothing. An individual's livelihood is a repetitive process that aims to achieve these needs for themselves and their household. Long (1997) indicated that livelihood building needs the ability of an individual to adapt to economic uncertainties and respond to new opportunities. Livelihood is now measured through the lens of sustainable livelihood. In the Brundtland commission report in 1987, sustainable livelihoods first emerged, focusing on environmental issues. This idea was expanded at the

Earth Summit in 1992 with socio-economic considerations and emphasised sustainable resource management and poverty reduction as the means of sustainable development (Krantz, 2001). The sustainable livelihood definition by Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway is the most acceptable for household livelihood definitions. Though they defined sustainable rural livelihood, this is the basis of the sustainable livelihood concept and illustration (Carney, 1999). Chambers & Conway (1991) described livelihood as the combination of capabilities, activities, and assets (stores, resources, claims, and access) essential for living. A livelihood becomes sustainable when a human can cope with the situation and convalesce from stress and shocks, increase its capabilities and assets, and is able to provide opportunities for sustainable livelihood for the next generation and come up with net benefits for other people's livelihoods from the local level to global levels and for the short-term to long-term. Solesbury (2003) analysed the Chambers and Conway definition and identified three dimensions of sustainable livelihood: enhancing capabilities, improving equity, and increasing social sustainability. This three-dimension provides insights into poverty reduction: economic growth; the realisation of poverty (low income, poor health, illiteracy, lack of social services, vulnerability and feelings of powerlessness); and poor people's engagement in poverty reduction policies (Krantz, 2001).

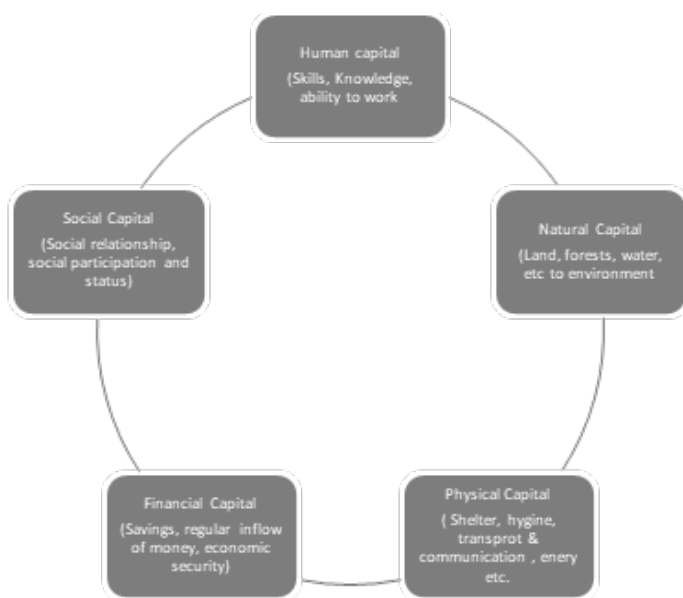
Different agencies provided a sustainable livelihood approach (SLA). In 1993, Oxfam provided SLA; then CARE in 1994 and UNDP in 1995 provided their SLA. These agencies provided an SLA framework to implement their project and program according to their organization's goals and objectives (Lewins, 2004). But there is a slight difference among these agencies' approaches (Carney, 1999). Finally, DFID adopted SLA based on its acquired

practical experience from the project management of three agencies. It was prepared based on the previous three agencies' weaknesses. As a result, it is the most accepted and followed livelihood framework (Solesbury, 2003). Its SLA indicates that people's livelihoods are five assets or capital: financial, human, social, physical, and natural capital or assets (Lax & Krug, 2013). This approach assists in understanding the current condition of an individual's livelihood and makes suggestions to improve the situation (Morse & McNamara, 2013).

This study follows the DFID's five assets to measure the non-government college teachers' livelihood during the COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 1:

Five Capital or assets of SLA by DFID



We chose to do a phenomenological case study because the methods used fit my theoretical framework of constructivist assumptions about learning, teaching, and research. Because we believe that learning is situated, phenomenology, with its sustained engagement in the field and its reliance on ethnographic methods (van Manen, 1990), supported a thorough examination of the case in context, which allowed me to ethically engage with the learner as facilitator of professional development. Through my twelve-month role as professional development provider, we were given extended access to the participant's perspective (Purcell-Gates, 2004) of professional learning. Through interviews (more conversational than formal), emails, and telephone conversations, the participant and we were aptly positioned as co-constructors of

description and interpretation (Hatch, 2002).

Research Methodology

This study incorporates a qualitative research paradigm focusing on phenomenological case study methodology because a theoretic framework of constructive assumption provides guidelines for in-depth interviews (Roberts, 2009) of non-mpo college teachers about their livelihood during the COVID-19 situation. This research demands to explore teachers' views, perspectives, and experiences about their life and livelihood based on the COVID-19 condition that fits with the qualitative research paradigm (Taylor et al., 2015). A purposive sampling method was followed to get in-depth data from the participants (Patton, 2015). Eight teachers of Hon's and Masters Non-government teachers from eight divisions of Bangladesh were selected for data collection. The semi-structured interview was taken from the participants, and an interview questionnaire was prepared based on DFID's five assets. All the interviews were taken through mobile phones due to the COVID-19 situation and we took permission from the interviewee for recording. Each interview lasted for 30–35 minutes. After collecting the data, it was transcribed and translated into English. Then thematic data analysis was followed in this study.

Table-1:

Participants Profile

Code-Sl	Name*	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Qualification	Teaching Experience	Monthly income**	Division
SL-1	Shamim Hossain	Male	34	Married	Post graduation from a Public University	7 years	17000	Dhaka
SL-2	Sharin Tanni	Female	53	Married	Post graduation from Public University	24 years	15000	Rajshahi
SL-3	Nusrat Jahan	Female	37	Married	Post graduation from Public University	9 years	10000	Chittagong

Code-Sl	Name*	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education Qualification	Teaching Experience	Monthly income**	Division
SL-4	Goutam Ghosh	Male	56	Married	Post graduation from a College	25 years	20000	Rangpur
SL-5	Nazrul Islam	Male	29	Married	Post graduation from Public University	3 years	8000	Sylet
SL-6	Susmita Dutta	Female	46	Married	Post graduation from a College	16 years	13000	Barishal
SL-7	Amin Hossain	Male	40	Married	Post graduation from Public University	11 years	14000	Mymensingh
SL-8	Lipi Akter	Female	26	Unmarried	Post graduation from Public University	1 years	6000	Khulna

n.b.

* Pseudonyms for Participants were used to protect identity for ensuring confidentiality.

** All amount in BDT

The Results

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted, and the results concentrated around the five major themes of the sustainable livelihood approach, namely

1. financial assets;
2. physical assets;
3. social assets;
4. natural assets; and
5. human assets.

Along with doing so, the findings amply demonstrate the teachers' financial situation, and significantly illustrate the livelihood condition of teachers.

Financial Assets

Government college teachers get salaries based on government pay scale and grade, including basic salary, house rent, medical and festival allowance. Basic pay on the scale according to grade, and a lump-sum house rent and medical allowance. But non-government honors and master's college teachers do not get salaries according to any pay scale policy. All of the interviewees acknowledged that they get salaries based on college internal pay rules, and they get meagre salaries compared to government and MPO listed college teachers. One of the college teachers, Nazrul Islam, opined

‘ I get only 8000 taka, which is nearly half of what a government 4th class employee like an office assistant gets. I usually go through financial hardship and have tried to earn extra money by doing private tuition. But in this pandemic, I have just got six months' salary in this whole one and a half year. because college authorities could not manage tuition fees from students. I am going through a severe hardship in my family life. I am doing an online business now.- SL-5

All of the interviewees opined that they did not enjoy economic security. All of them, except one, admitted that they did not get their salary on time. They struggle to meet their basic needs with a low salary, so it is impossible to save money. In this pandemic, most of them took out loans to survive. During the whole period, they only received 5000 BDT from the government as insufficient assistance. Most of the participants raised the issue of their job security. All of the participants showed their worry about the government's plan to shut down honours and masters courses from the college and start a vocational course. One of them told-

‘ In this COVID-19, I am anxious about my job and financial crisis. Amid this situation, I heard the news of shutting down honors and masters programs. That makes me more anxious about losing my job. I heard that the government would start short vocational courses and train us. But in this old age, it is very difficult to learn anything that is related to psychomotor skills. As a result, I am getting worried about my job. ’- SL-2

Physical Assets

Two interviewees lived in rented houses in the district town and were compelled to start living in a village home because they could not pay house rent and were insulted by the house owner for their inability to pay rent on time. One of them took a loan from friends to pay off the house rent. All of the participants, except two, live in their own house in the urban area, which they have achieved as family property, and all of them considered their place sub-standard. When compared to family members, the majority of them reported that their housing is crowded. As a result, they huddled and could not correctly maintain hygiene for themselves and their family. One participant expressed a horrible experience in a heartening tone:

I am living in a two-room tin-sheet house. My elder son was Corona positive two months ago. It was very tough to maintain isolation in this tiny house. He started to live in one room, and the rest of the five family members struggled to live in another

room. But we were compelled to use the same bathroom and other shared things. For this reason, all of my family members were attacked by Corona. ' -4 SL

All of the respondents except one admitted that they do not suffer too much from transport, communication, and energy issues. Most of the citizens of Bangladesh enjoy and suffer similarly in terms of transportation, communication, and energy matters. But one disagreed with the other opinions.

I live in the city of Dhaka. It is the most crowded city, and in proportion, there is a lack of transportation. During COVID-19, I must rely on public transportation, where social distance is maintained in unimaginable ways. Loadshedding is a common phenomenon in this metropolitan city.. ' - SL-1.

Social Assets

All of the respondents reported that this pandemic situation loosens their social relationships with others. Most teachers choose the teaching profession considering this profession's social dignity. But their social status declined due to the financial crisis. Some teachers took loans from relatives and others and borrowed groceries from the shop but could not repay, which worsened their relationship. Some teachers engaged in other income-generating activities that declined their social status. Community people and neighbours neglect them now. Most of the teachers acknowledged that they were dignified in their community before the pandemic and had good relations with community people, but now the situation is different. One of the respondents opined:

I had a good bond with my relatives and neighbors, but they avoided me in this pandemic situation. Maybe they think I will seek a loan or assistance from them. Now, I know the reality of life. ' SL-7

Two-thirds of the participants reported that they were avoiding all types of social function in this COVID-19 situation. Social distancing and safety concerns are some of the main reasons for not participating in social processes. There are also some reasons behind this, like community negligence, losing social status, and a lack of willingness. One of the interviewees explained:

Last year, I ignored all types of social activities and festivals. I did not participate in my one-relative's son's wedding ceremony because I did not have enough money to buy the gift. I feel shy about participating in any social function amid this financial crisis and humiliation situation. -SL- 6

Natural Assets

Two of the respondents opined that they have opportunities to use natural resources (land, forests, water, etc.) properly in this pandemic situation. Natural resources are the primary source of their present livelihood. They are now engaged in farming. They plant seasonal vegetables and sell them to the local wholesale market. In this pandemic situation, this farming is a blessing for them. Between them, one said:

I was always connected to farming besides my teaching profession. When I did not get a salary for COVID-19, I focused more on farming. I used my family lands to cultivate different types of crops and fruit trees. Now, I am able to fill my family's basic needs.
 '-SL-4

Most of the interviewees, except three, said that they could get clean water. Three interviewees did not take pure water because of arsenic pollution and contamination by excessive iron. Most of the interviewees admitted that they could not utilise natural resources, because they do not have sufficient land for farming. Even if a teacher was compelled to sell his land. He explained

My husband was affected by the coronavirus in this pandemic. His situation was too bad and the treatment was costly. I could not afford his treatment. For this reason, I will sell my land to continue to defray hospital costs. This pandemic situation is making my life insecure and uncertain - SL-2

Human Assets

All of the interviewees acknowledged that they were taking the online class during this period. College authorities instructed them to conduct online courses but did not provide any technical support to teach an online lesson. They are taking courses via Zoom Apps, IMO, Google Meets, etc. When they started to take online courses, all of them except one did not know how to install and operate these. They took help from others and YouTube to handle online classes but faced technical problems. It was embarrassing for them in front of the students. They also face network problems, internet speed problems, and financial problems with buying data. One of the teachers expressed her views about anger:

I didn't have a smartphone. The college authorities gave the notice to conduct online classes. But they did not consider the teachers' problems. I was not getting a salary for a few months; imagine having to buy a smartphone to keep my job. They just ordered but did not take the initiative to train us. I am struggling to conduct an online class. ' --SL-5

All respondents reported that they were confused about whether they would perform well in a face-to-face class like before. For long-time colleges, closures created confusion among them about their ability to conduct classes ideally in the future. One of them said:

For nearly a year and a half, I have not stood in dice to deliver my lectures. This long gap reduces my ability and performance. I have to practice a lot before going back to face-to-face class again '-SL-8

Discussion and Conclusion

The study findings disclose the actual situation of Non-government Honors and Masters College teachers' livelihoods during the COVID-19 in the lens of financial, physical, social, natural, and human assets based on DFID's SL approach. In terms of every asset, non-government college teachers

face a depressing situation that findings align with Zimbabwe urban teachers' livelihoods during a post-economic crisis from 2009 to 2015 (Bakasa, 2016). Non-government teachers go through financial hardship due to long-term college closures that are dismantling their normalcy of life. They are living under the poverty line and have started to find alternative income-generating tasks to survive. These findings are similar to those of Zimbaian teachers (Cliggett & Wyssmann, 2009). Teachers have no economic security and are unable to save for future emergencies. They also fear losing their jobs at any time. Because of long-term college closure and a lack of good initiative by the government to ensure economic and employment security, they are dissatisfied with their profession. Their life is unstable, insecure, and precarious, and that dissatisfies them. Pronoy (2010) as well as Zahan and Das (2020) also found these reasons for the job dissatisfaction of college teachers. In terms of physical assets, teachers face transport, communication, and electricity supply like other Bangladeshis. But considering proper housing, the study revealed that college teachers do not have an appropriate abode to live in. It is in line with the study of young teachers' housing by Deng et al. (2007). All college teachers live in poor housing conditions, and some of them cannot pay rent, which forced them to switch to the village home. Teachers could not maintain hygiene and sanitation, which increases their health risk. Crocker et al. (2016) also explored the health risk of teachers in Ethiopia due to the lack of hygiene and sanitation.

The study illustrated the loosening of social relationships and the bonding of college teachers in the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers suffer from the financial crisis that forces them to take loans from others. This situation lessens their social dignity. They also try to avoid social functions not only for social distancing reasons, as in COVID, but also out of shame for declining their social status for financial weakness. These findings are different from Alizadeh & Rezaei (2009) results, where they showed that economic conditions did not influence teachers' social status and relationships. The study findings indicated that most college teachers consume insufficient natural assets or resources. Some teachers use the land for farming to earn money, while most teachers do not seem to use land and trees due to a lack of these natural resources. Some teachers do not get clean water and are compelled to drink arsenic-contaminated water. These findings are similar to Bakasa's (2016) findings. The study also revealed that non-government college teachers have a lack of knowledge and skills to operate online classes. They did not get any training or technical support for the online classes. Moreover, they face network problems, high data prices, and internet speed problems. These findings are in alignment with the results of Jain et al. (2021).

Despite the limitations in regards to its inability to generalize, this qualitative study explores the rich lived experiences of teachers. It is considered that teachers are the backbone of the nation. But in this COVID-19, non-government Honours and Masters College teachers' present livelihood situation reveals the negligence of college authorities and government. The government should take the initiative to provide soft loans to teachers as an incentive to survive

in these emergencies. But the government should find sustainable solutions for the betterment of these college teachers, such as nationalisation of the college teachers or including them in the MPO list. The government should control the mushrooming of colleges here and there and increase monitoring of mismanagement of college authority.

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