

# Post Covid-19 Educational Crisis at Grade VI in Nine Schools of Dhaka City: Challenges and Consequences

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the consequences of the post-Covid-19 educational crisis for Grade VI students and explores ways to overcome the associated challenges. It adopts a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and focus-group discussions as data-collection tools. The findings reveal that many students experienced significant learning gaps: they failed to reach expected learning goals because they were uncomfortable with online teaching-learning methods and lacked adequate digital equipment, among other factors. To address these challenges, the study recommends supplying appropriate devices to both teachers and students for online classes and providing rigorous training to strengthen teachers' technology-based skills and capacities. The paper closes with concluding remarks and suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Pandemic Crisis, Pandemic Education, Learning gap

## INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted education systems worldwide, including in Bangladesh, leading to significant learning interruptions. In response, educators introduced several innovations such as online classes, digital teaching-learning platforms, virtual assessments, home-based learning, distance learning, and blended learning—many of which continue in some form today. In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, the Ministry of Education and other authorities were compelled to close schools, pushing millions of children temporarily out of the formal education system. Schools remained closed for at least two months, during which time policymakers focused on safeguarding children's learning time and well-being despite the physical absence from school.

The pandemic severely affected learning outcomes across the country, interrupting the regular flow of teaching-learning activities. The post-secondary school dropout rate reached 19.6%, while the broader impact of Covid-19 was particularly devastating for low-income countries like Bangladesh (BANBEIS, 2020). Nearly 40% of students reportedly received no communication from their educational institutions regarding the continuation of learning activities (USAID, 2020). Teachers and students had to adapt to home-based teaching-learning activities, as per directives from the authorities.

This disruption created widespread challenges for both students and teachers across all socioeconomic groups. In particular, the effects of school closures varied based on socioeconomic status, access to technology, parental involvement, and geographical location (urban vs. rural). The sudden shutdown also threatened to reverse previous educational gains, such as near-universal primary enrollment and gender parity in secondary education (BRAC, 2020).

This study focuses on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for Grade VI students and identifies ways to overcome the associated challenges. It employs qualitative research methods, including interviews with open-ended questions and focus group discussions. Data were collected from students, teachers, and parents.

The study highlights the urgent need for proper preparation, training, and readiness for remote teaching, along with technical and technological support and IT skill development.

The closure of educational institutions affected nearly 40 million students in Bangladesh (The Daily Star, 2020). The impact extended beyond education, slowing the global economy and affecting learners and their families. These education shocks impacted both the demand and supply sides: many private schools faced financial crises as parents were unable to pay tuition fees, and government education spending declined. For instance, the share of education in the national budget for FY2020–21 was lower than the revised budget for FY2019–20 (National Budget 2020–21 and 2021–22). So far, no comprehensive recovery plan has been adopted to tackle the crisis, especially at the secondary level. The situation is even worse in rural areas, and long-term consequences may include negative effects on human capital development and national welfare.

The disruption of regular schooling continues to this day. Loss of instructional hours is not the only concern—schools also provide essential social services, including nutrition, healthcare, psychological support, and social protection (Financial Express, 2020). Parents have become increasingly anxious about their children's future, particularly due to the ineffectiveness of online teaching compared to face-to-face learning, private tuition, or coaching.

This study examines the educational challenges faced by teachers, students, and parents in selected schools in Dhaka city during the pandemic. It aims to explore their experiences, coping mechanisms, and suggestions for overcoming the challenges. The findings are intended to contribute to policy formulation and the design of future emergency responses.

The Government of Bangladesh took initiatives to mitigate the learning crisis, such as broadcasting live and recorded lectures through state-run radio and television. Teachers also provided course-related support via mobile phones. The study's specific objectives are as follows:

- i. To explore the consequences of the Post-Covid-19 educational crisis for Grade VI students in Bangladesh
- ii. To investigate the specific challenges faced by students during this period
- iii. To identify strategies and policy options to minimize the impact of such crises in the future

This paper seeks to provide insights into the ongoing challenges in junior-level education in Dhaka and broader nationwide implications. It also aims to inform future preparedness for similar outbreaks or disruptions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted educational activities across Bangladesh, severely affecting regular learning processes. Primary and secondary school students were promoted automatically to the next grade under minimal academic formalities, as the pandemic continued for an extended period. A poignant photograph published by *The Daily Star* (2020) depicted a child dressed in a school uniform, standing on her balcony in Barisal city, longingly waiting for the day she could return to school and see her friends and teachers. Many students remain excluded from e-learning due to limited access.

Inequities in access to the internet and digital devices have had a devastating impact on students, exacerbating preexisting disparities. A growing concern during the pandemic has been the increased risk of school dropouts, which is no longer a fear but a reality for many children.

Numerous students faced severe financial and emotional stress within their families. Students awaiting admission to higher secondary institutions, especially those who passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations in 2020, experienced anxiety due to delayed admission procedures. The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) cohort of 2020 became popularly known as the “Auto-pass batch,” a term reflecting a unique and controversial academic experience devoid of formal examinations.

The economic strain also led to many adolescents, especially boys, being forced into risky and informal jobs, such as in construction, the garments sector, and transportation services (e.g., bus and auto-rickshaw driving).

In some cases, parents pressured daughters into early marriages. Disturbingly, some female students, particularly from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, were unable to maintain personal hygiene due to a lack of sanitary products and financial hardship. Reports suggest that, under extreme economic pressure, a few female students were even coerced into sex work to support their families (Mahtab & Fariha, 2022).

According to UNICEF (2021), countries that had a high number of out-of-school children prior to the pandemic and that faced significant economic downturns are at greater risk of further learning loss and inequality. Bangladesh is no exception. Learning gaps have widened, and the situation has disproportionately affected students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This study specifically focuses on learning loss and the implementation of educational programs in Grade VI in selected schools in Dhaka city. It highlights the importance of community participation and robust communication with students and parents as critical components in mitigating the crisis.

The national lockdown also disrupted internal assessments and canceled public examinations, with some being replaced by less reliable alternatives. These interruptions have had lasting effects on students' academic progression and overall motivation. Jyoti F. Gomes, Secretary of the Bangladesh Catholic Education Board (BCEB), noted: "The pandemic danger is too high in the country to be able to reopen the schools. It is too risky for students to go back to school at this time." This sentiment reflected the general hesitation toward resuming in-person classes, especially in densely populated areas.

This study draws on local experiences, financial conditions of families, and the ground realities faced by students and teachers in Dhaka city. Despite sincere efforts by the government and other stakeholders, the Covid-19 crisis has significantly impacted education in Bangladesh. Challenges remain unresolved even in urban centers like Dhaka, where access to resources is assumed to be better. While capital cities are often seen as symbols of progress and opportunity, this research reveals that educational disruptions and inequalities exist there as well. The literature underscores the urgent need for strategic planning, technological support, inclusive education policies, and targeted interventions to recover learning losses and build resilience in the education system.

## METHOD AND METHODOLOGICAL MATRIX

This study is an action research project employing a qualitative approach. It aims to address two specific research gaps:

- (a) What learning losses have emerged in the post-pandemic context among Grade VI students in secondary schools in Dhaka city?
- (b) What targeted measures can be taken to overcome these learning losses?

In line with these research questions, the study adopts qualitative methods, focusing on descriptive and interpretive insights rather than statistical data. Data were collected through a combination of face-to-face interviews, telephone conversations, and virtual discussions (See Appendix-1). The sampling strategy followed a non-probability approach, using convenient, chain, and snowball sampling techniques appropriate for qualitative, exploratory research with a limited sample size. The following table summarizes the data sources, tools, methods, and analysis techniques:

Data Sources	Tools	Methods	Analysis Techniques
45 students (5 from each of 9 schools), 27 teachers (3 per school), and 27 parents (3 per school)	Open-ended questions	Narrative	Phenomenological analysis
45 students	Interview questions	Case study	Thematic analysis

45 students, 27 teachers, and 27 parents	Focus group discussions	Narrative	Thematic analysis
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The study included participants from nine secondary schools in Dhaka city are Holy Cross School, Tejgaon Government High School, Tejgaon Government Girls' High School, Mirpur Cantonment Public School & College, Rajuk Uttara Model School & College, Civil Aviation School & College, Kurmitola High School & College, University Laboratory School & College.

Notably, this study places particular emphasis on two key educational institutions are- Holy Cross School and Tejgaon Government School, both located in areas influenced by Christian community culture. As such, the findings also reflect sociolect-cultural dynamics, including the role of the Bangladesh Catholic Education Board (BCEB) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference, which are relevant to the context. While the scope of the study is limited due to sample size and location, the results offer valuable insights into the challenges and possible solutions for mitigating learning loss in the post-Covid-19 educational landscape of Dhaka.

## DISCUSSION

The most critical educational crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic became apparent after the immediate health emergency had subsided. Both the government and citizens of Bangladesh faced, managed, and in many cases, overcame substantial challenges. This section focuses specifically on issues related to teaching and learning at the junior secondary level in Bangladesh:

### 1. Difficulties in Adapting to Distance Learning

The shift to distance learning was abrupt and, for many, ineffective. Progress in formal curricula slowed significantly as students and teachers had limited preparation time for this transition. The traditional exam-oriented syllabuses no longer aligned with new learning contexts, as assessments were postponed or canceled. Students experienced anxiety regarding academic progression. Although radio and television offered some support, accessibility remained a barrier. Social media platforms, WhatsApp, and SMS were utilized by the Ministry of Education to provide learning instructions and maintain communication with students and parents. However, remote learning must be understood as mixed-media learning rather than just online education, aiming to reach as many students as possible.

### 2. Introduction of a New Assessment System

For Grade VI students, the Ministry of Education introduced assignment-based assessments in place of conventional examinations. While innovative, some students found these assignments burdensome. According to the reformed curriculum, these tasks were intended to promote critical thinking and engagement. To be effective, assignments must be designed to be both enjoyable and academically meaningful. Teachers must adopt multi-faceted classroom practices that reflect diverse learning needs.

### 3. Financial Constraints

Many students faced challenges accessing mobile data, internet connectivity, and appropriate digital devices. Although television-based classes were provided, they often did not meet learners' needs. The lack of a conducive home learning environment further exacerbated inequalities. These financial limitations created barriers to full participation in digital education.

### 4. Teacher Adaptation Difficulties

Teachers struggled to adjust to new methods of instruction and assessment. While some adapted quickly to video conferencing tools and digital communication, others felt overwhelmed. Many lacked sufficient training or digital literacy. Educational administrators must recognize these disparities and support teachers through targeted training and realistic expectations. In addition, enjoyable educational programs should be broadcast,

and teachers should share reading materials (such as PDFs) via social media to reduce boredom among students.

## 5. Learning Inequality and Institutional Gaps

Inequality in adaptation was not limited to rural-urban divides but was also evident among schools within the same locality. This created substantial disparities in educational delivery and outcomes. School authorities and individual teachers, often unintentionally, contributed to these gaps.

## 6. Engagement and Mainstreaming Challenges

Sustaining student engagement remains one of the biggest challenges. Many students face financial difficulties and family pressures that disrupt learning. Teachers must take on sociolect-emotional roles, providing moral support and guidance. Schools should conduct micro-level surveys to identify students at risk of dropout and to implement learning recovery plans (Sethi, 2022). Rebuilding these relationships is crucial to a student's mental health and academic success.

## 7. Communication Gaps Among the Stakeholders

Teachers had limited opportunities to voice their challenges to school authorities and policymakers. Similarly, authorities often lacked awareness of teachers' needs, particularly in digital skills and remote teaching. Strengthening communication among teachers, administrators, and policymakers is essential for long-term improvement. A collaborative approach will help build a resilient education system, both in times of crisis and beyond.

The pandemic should serve as a wake-up call for deep educational reform. It is an opportunity to recover stronger, with renewed commitment to educational equity and quality. All stakeholders teachers, students, and parents must work together to bridge gaps in opportunity and ensure that every child receives the quality education they deserve.

## KEY FINDINGS

Education remains a cornerstone for national development and skill enhancement. The school environment is fundamental for fostering social awareness, emotional intelligence, and lifelong learning. However, prolonged school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this developmental process significantly, including Impact on Student Learning and Engagement. Few key findings are as-

**1. School Closures:** Approximately 37 million children in Bangladesh experienced disruptions to their education due to school closures since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 . (The Daily Star, 2020)

**2. Digital Divide:** A significant digital divide hindered access to remote learning. Fewer than one in five children (18.7%) had access to the internet and television for remote learning, with rural students facing even greater challenges. Only 15.9% of rural students participated in remote learning compared to 28.7% in urban areas.

**3. Learning Loss:** The prolonged school closures led to substantial learning losses. Students were unable to engage in regular assessments, and many faced anxiety regarding their academic progression.

**4. Impact on Nutrition and Health:** *Panoramic* creates a huge malnutrition among the students. Despite achievements in economy, food security, health, and nutrition over the past decades, the nutrition situation remains a serious concern in Bangladesh. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 reported a national prevalence of stunting at 28% and wasting at 9.8% among school-age children(Education Commission, 2022).



**5. Access to School Meals:** The closure of schools disrupted access to regular school meals, which are vital for the physical and cognitive development of children. This disruption disproportionately affected children from lower-income families.

**6. Socioeconomic Challenges and Financial Constraints:** Many families faced economic hardships due to job losses and declining incomes. This financial strain made it difficult for parents to support their children's education, leading to increased dropout rates and reduced educational engagement.

**7. Increased Child Labor:** In response to economic pressures, some children were compelled to enter the workforce. Reports indicate that tens of thousands of boys in Bangladesh were forced into labor during the pandemic, with many not returning to school even after institutions reopened.

**8. Psychological and Emotional Impact:** The uncertainty and fear associated with the pandemic contributed to psychological distress among students, parents, and teachers. Issues such as anxiety and depression were prevalent, particularly among adolescents and those in rural areas. Maintaining engagement with students became increasingly challenging. Many students faced personal and family issues, and without adequate support, their connection to the educational system weakened.

**9. Long-Term Educational Implications:** The cancellation of examinations and the adoption of alternative assessment methods, such as assignment submissions, led to concerns about the effectiveness and fairness of academic evaluations.

**10. Quality of Education:** Parents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of education during the pandemic, citing a lack of practical and engaging instruction. The reliance on digital platforms further exacerbated disparities in educational access and quality.

## PROPOSED SUGGESTIONS

The post-COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh was not conducive to the immediate reopening of schools, colleges, and other educational institutions nationwide. Auto-promotion was a temporary emergency solution; however, ensuring the achievement of meaningful learning outcomes remains essential. It is unwise to succumb to fear or inaction in the face of such a crisis, especially when it concerns education. Instead, it is crucial to confront the challenges proactively, conduct research, and devise practical solutions in response to the evolving situation. Every challenge also brings new opportunities for growth and innovation. Based on observations, academic knowledge, and experience, the following recommendations are proposed:

### 1. Comprehensive ICT Training for Teachers

Teachers require proper training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to effectively conduct online classes. These training programs should be accessible in both rural and urban areas via platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, or other accessible media. Promoting enthusiasm for diverse learning and online teaching methods among students is equally important. Measures should be taken to reduce digital divides across income groups, regions, and student populations, aiming for equitable access to technology.

### 2. Collaborative Support Networks to Overcome Challenges

Addressing the educational challenges requires strong collaboration among the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and development partners. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in networking and resource-sharing platforms like “Shikkhok Batayon.” Strengthening teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-administrator networks will foster mutual support and knowledge sharing.

### 3. Affordable Education Loans and Financial Support

The government should implement education loan programs with low interest rates and flexible conditions to help students and teachers acquire necessary digital devices. Additionally, educational institutions should consider waiving or reducing tuition fees partially or fully and provide financial support to students in need.+

#### **4. Cluster-Based Field Research on Post-Pandemic Education**

Conducting localized, field-based research on educational decision-making post-COVID-19 is essential. Such research will help identify problems clearly and develop context-specific solutions to address educational challenges effectively.

#### **5. Provision of Free Nutritional Support and Counseling**

Cost-free nutritional food and safe drinking water should be provided to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools, colleges, and universities must also offer psychological counseling services to support students' mental health during and after the pandemic.

The global lockdown of educational institutions caused significant and unequal disruptions in students' learning, assessments, and qualifications. While COVID-19 is primarily a medical emergency, its impact on education highlighted the complex dilemma faced by policymakers balancing health risks against the need for learning continuity. The shift to online education, including examinations, presented new challenges and inequalities, potentially exacerbating existing disparities. Post-pandemic learning losses represent a critical warning for Bangladesh's education sector. Without timely and effective interventions, the nation risks turning its demographic dividend into a demographic burden. Since education underpins all sectors of society and the economy, the government must take a leadership role in guiding recovery efforts. Furthermore, to mitigate students' anxiety and depression during this time, families and society must actively participate in providing emotional and social support. Only through coordinated efforts among government bodies, educational institutions, communities, and families can Bangladesh ensure that its education system not only recovers but emerges stronger and more inclusive.

### **CONCLUSION AND DECLARATION**

The covid-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted student learning and well-being globally, with far-reaching consequences beyond the classroom. This crisis has exacerbated social and emotional challenges among children, including increased concerns about mental health, rising incidents of child abuse, obesity, teenage pregnancies, chronic absenteeism, and dropout rates (unicef, 2021). Although this study focused on a prime location within Dhaka city, similar complexities exist throughout Bangladesh, underscoring the sensitive and multifaceted nature of managing education during such unprecedented times. Students aspiring to pursue higher education abroad were particularly affected, with international travel restrictions and border closures halting their plans. According to the world bank (2020), many Bangladeshi students experienced frustration and uncertainty due to their inability to pursue academic goals internationally.

Within Dhaka, access to online education remained largely limited to students from upper-income families. Middle-income families struggled to bear the high costs of internet services required for remote learning, while students in more local or underserved areas remained largely disconnected from formal education (brac, 2020). Nevertheless, many students displayed resilience, energy, and eagerness to learn, highlighting the critical importance of appropriate guidance and quality education in nurturing their creativity and talent. Teachers emphasized the urgent need for constructive policies supported by adequate resources.

The suspension of major national examinations such as PSC, JSC, and HSC, alongside the closure of educational institutions, compounded the challenges faced by students and educators alike. Despite auto-promotion policies, concerns remain regarding students' preparedness for subsequent academic and competitive examinations, particularly among hsc candidates aspiring for public university admissions. Private tutors reported significant loss of income, and parents expressed concerns about the overall disruption to their children's education, including higher education prospects (Kamal, 2020). This study examined the pandemic's impact on secondary-level education (specifically grade vi), analyzing challenges and proposing sustainable solutions to navigate the evolving educational landscape. In line with 21st-century skill requirements and the sustainable development goals (sdgs), it is imperative that decisions and interventions are inclusive and consider disparities across urban, rural, and marginalized communities. Educational policies designed around the resource availability of Dhaka's urban students risk marginalizing those in rural, remote,

and disadvantaged areas, where access to devices, internet connectivity, and ict expertise is severely limited (unesco, 2020).

Teachers reported inadequacies in training, insufficient access to technological devices, and financial constraints affecting the delivery of online education. Resistance to alternative modes of teaching, such as television broadcasts and facebook live sessions, was also noted. Effective pedagogy requires thorough preparation, which many educators found challenging under the circumstances. Both teachers and students identified institutional and governmental support as critical for overcoming these barriers and ensuring the quality of education comparable to pre-pandemic face-to-face instruction (sethi, 2022).

Given the critical role of secondary education in preparing students for future academic and professional challenges, parents expressed concern over the potential long-term effects of the pandemic on their children's educational trajectories. However, the situation remains hopeful, with teachers and students across Bangladesh demonstrating adaptability in transitioning to new teaching and learning platforms. Recent research from national and international education experts supports the growing demand for e-learning and online education services, positioning this moment as an opportune time to invest in education technology (edtech) nationwide (world bank, 2021). While the current educational challenges and strategies to address them have yet to fully meet expectations, the observed gaps highlight areas requiring immediate attention. Enhanced social awareness and targeted financial support from relevant authorities are essential to safeguard students' educational prospects during and beyond the pandemic. If ongoing policies and interventions are refined through collaboration with national and international specialists, these measures can transcend temporary solutions and form the foundation of a resilient "new normal" Education system for Bangladesh's 21st-century school sector.

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## APPENDIX -1

Name	:		Address	:	
Gender	:		Profession	:	
Age	:		Status	:	
Email	:		Phone	:	

Open- ended question for the students, teachers and parents:

1. What are the crises, challenges and mismanagement found by students, teachers and parents on education perspectives in Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown in their locality?
2. How students and teachers passed the lockdown in pandemic?
3. Have teachers tried to find out any ways to continue the teaching process or for unstoppable learning in that type of stuck times?
4. As the perspective of parents, how they mentally motivated their children to remain pacify or to continue learning process or to gain new knowledge?
5. What were the initiatives taken by you as students to continue your knowledge gaining process?

Interview question for the students:

1. What were the main crises which you were passed through in Covid-19 pandemic which are directly hampered your study?
2. Share some experiences of crises where you felt like your study would become a burden.
3. How did you and family fought for survival in the case of exist your whole learning processes?

Any suggestion/s (regarding this issue)

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Topic for focused- group discussion:

“Educational Crisis and Challenges at Grade VI in Dhaka City Challenges and Way Forwards”