

# Strategies for Narrowing Down The Dropout Rate and Fostering Digital Learning

A. B. M. Jonayed Hossain

## Abstract

COVID-19 outbreak has already destabilized our education sector with serious consequences. Particularly for primary and secondary education, these consequences have significant impacts on: (1) dropout issue (2) learning issue. This article highlights these two major issues and addresses them with proposed solutions.

## Dropout Issue: Proposal on Dropout Rate Reduction

In the view of education system, one of the most threatening concerns of Covid-19 crisis is the probable dropout of a significant number of students from the primary and secondary schools with no hope of return. As a result, this may lead to early marriages that can cause premature pregnancies; such cases can end up with malnutrition problems. Therefore, dropout issue is a silent but a potential threat of the Covid-19 crisis. There are different reasons behind the dropout of a student; for example, behavioral shortcomings, poor academic performance, disciplinary violation, academic demotivation, low socio-economic status, absence of parental support, family mobility, insincere teachers, ill policies and practices in schools etc. However, by the end of this pandemic period, economic deprivation can be predicted as the most intimidating reason of school dropout cases amongst all.

## Policy Recommendation

A national policy needs to be developed by involving each school system to establish a management information system that provides necessary and common data on all students. Further, a nationwide consistent record keeping system is required to be executed that will permit school enrollment and dropout data being reported on a regular basis. To avoid centralization problems, management system can be site-based.

## Rationale

Established nationwide systems will ensure that dropout reduction programs are effectively connected to the dropout reduction goals. The ministry of education will be clearly informed and updated with the relevant gaps and challenges to assess the programs that are effective for the dropout reduction. Hence, this will help to primarily identify, target and monitor the potential dropouts, and continuously observe the student status until the high school level.

## Policy Recommendation

Throughout the country, advisories need to be appointed by schools to make close interactions with students by building a community through involving their parents. In that case, advisory teachers need to go for home visits of their students to meet parents.

### **Rationale**

Schools can keep the student status running by implementing advisories. Teachers can observe the practical scenario to assess the context whether a student is staying in school or dropping out. Advisory teachers meet students on a regular basis and engage with them to support their academic, social, and emotional needs. Also, advisory teachers can provide a structured way to identify potential students who are at risk and connect them with the program that can bring them back on the track of education.

Since there are multiple reasons of dropout from school, various types of programs are required which can deal with the individual circumstances and needs of students. Although stipends and school-meals still exist, they do not seem to be adequate for reducing the dropout rate after the pandemic. Evidence showed that dropout rate rises after various disasters in Bangladesh which in turn indicates that dropout rates can rise after the Covid-19. Combinations of aforementioned policy recommendations can be used to address the needs and factors of the entire range of students which alienate them from school and connect them to the programs effectively to reduce the dropout rate.

### **Learning Issue: Proposal on Equity and Access in Digital Learning**

Two of the most important issues in education are equity and access, especially in digital learning. On account of COVID-19 outbreak, educational institutions plan to use ICT to provide their programs online from a distance to their students. However, questions emerge about digital equity and access, mostly for students with challenges, children living in poverty and those who are homeless. Digital learning is still a new progressive system both for the student and teacher communities in Bangladesh. By the following policy recommendations, online education programs can be dynamic on equity and access concerns.

### **Policy Recommendation**

Collecting and evaluating demographic data of students, then using the data to design or redesign the digital learning program where necessary.

### **Rationale**

This policy will help us to analyze the context of online education of student population, the ability to consume online education and the perception about online education culture and accessibility.

### **Policy Recommendation**

Establishing a national digital learning center in advance by emphasizing on some fundamental topics: quality of ICT infrastructure, country's capability to utilize online

education, the standard of online documents and details, public support, and faith for digital education within the country.

### **Rationale**

Digital learning does not only emphasis on a good high-speed internet connection with innovatory electronic devices, it must prioritize on digitalizing education sector by establishing merged national digital education strategy and include all levels of education in one platform to assure equity and accessibility.

### **Policy Recommendation**

Associating with various partners including government, ICT service, private fields, innovation suppliers, telecom, internet service providers and education professionals to use the digital platform with expanding public-private partnerships.

### **Rationale**

Successful digital learning depends on successful delivery of contents, curriculum, and instruction through electronic medias i.e. internet, satellite broadcast, live or recorded audio/video clips, radio, interactive television, and multimedia CD-ROMS. Coalition will help to develop an effective delivery as well as to ensure non-discriminatory access of student.

### **Policy Recommendation**

Developing interactive TV education by especially making contents of renowned teachers to distribute among students through digital tools.

### **Rationale**

Groups of students can come to a location where a TV or computer can be arranged, to participate in learning this way. Remarkable number of students will be able to get hold of such a learning platform through this strategy in the context of Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, digital learning is still a new progressive system. To ensure equity and access, it is mandatory that every student get the access of technology with the required time and support to participate in the digital learning successfully.