



Primary & Secondary Schooling in Bangladesh

A Framework to Assess the Impact of COVID-19

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Motivation

- References to schooling and making education inclusive are normally perceived with reference to a school tied to a fixed location, buildings with classrooms where teachers and students get together.
- Schooling thus means, going to a formal institute authorized by an education board, following a specific curriculum. Moreover, completion of schooling is tied to earning a certificate through an assessment exam and sitting for the exam is contingent upon registration in one of the authorized schools.
- Other than several foreign programs, (government) education boards in Bangladesh run three Streams at primary & secondary levels; I) General Education; II) Madrasah Education (Aliya); III) TVET Education. Qawmi madrassah education is separately administered.

What's wrong with such perspectives?

- Once education was equated with schooling, all targets set for child education were set in terms of enrolments in those schools.
- Other than literacy, Net Enrolment Rate and the Primary Completion Rates were the two major indicators to measure progress under MDG2 (achieving universal education).
- Similarly, SDG 4.1 mentions of ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education; SDG 4.2 mentions of pre-primary schooling in the guise of ECD; and SDG 4.3 mentions of ensuring equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university. While SDG 4.4 mentions of relevant skills and employability, target to eliminate discrimination in education under SDG 4.5 primarily refers to schooling.



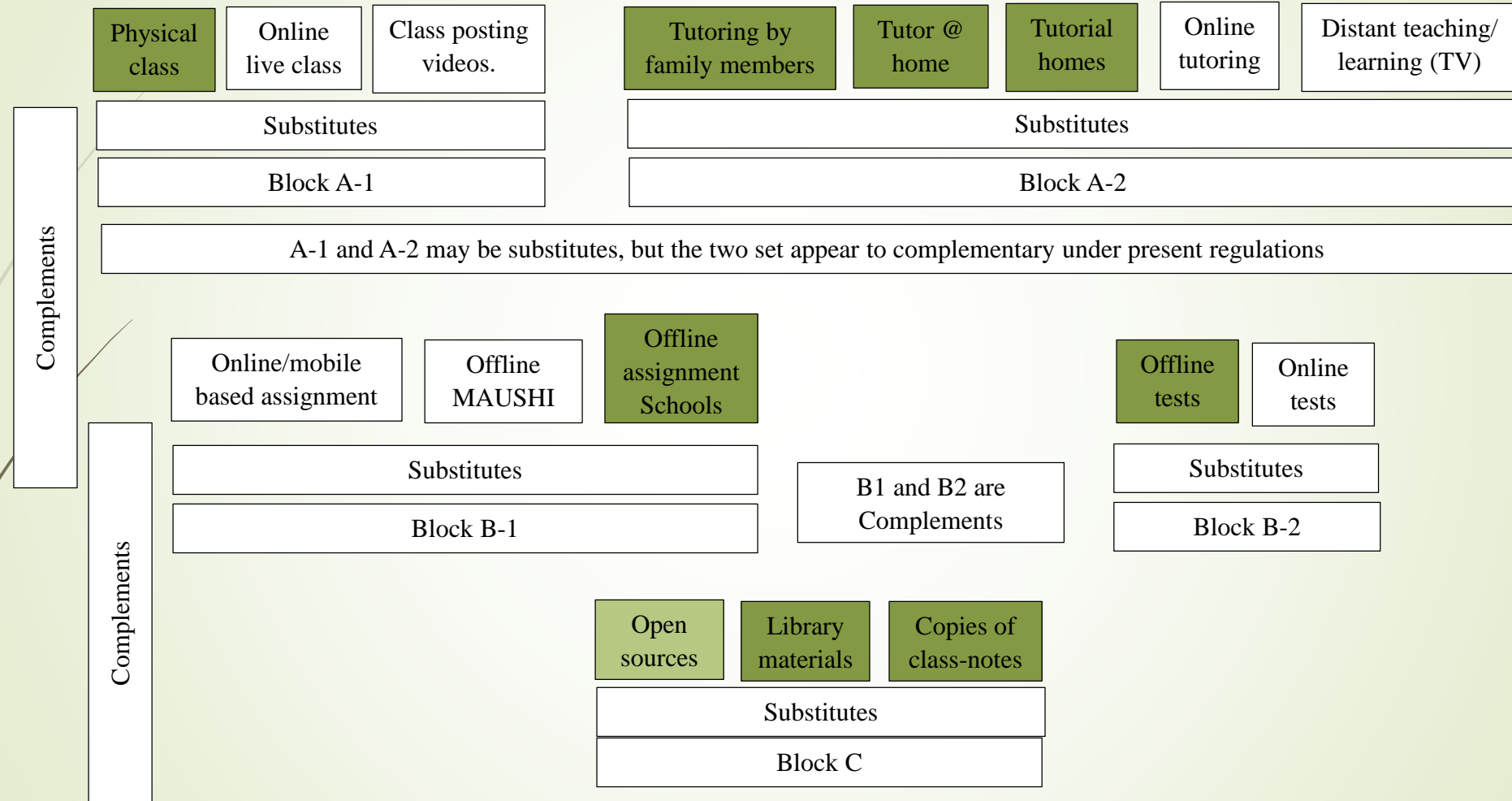
Further shaping policy/research perspectives

- For obvious reasons, SDG 4A talks of building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive, and SDG 4C talks of increasing the supply of qualified teachers.
- Policies remain supply-driven, which appears to suit everyone.
- The empirical economists largely confine to quantitative analyses and ex-post evaluation. Research questions posed are constrained as well.
- With current perception of schooling, all other related educational activities, such as, Tutoring (Private Tutors/Tutorial homes) are perceived 'bad', and often, public pronouncements are made to ban those. Yet, those continue to survive.
- Initial probing into possible effects of Covid-19 made us realize that the lockdowns had serious consequences for the regular schooling system. Our search for the alternatives that the students and grassroot service providers may have sought led us to reconstruct the canvas of schooling.

Suggested Approach

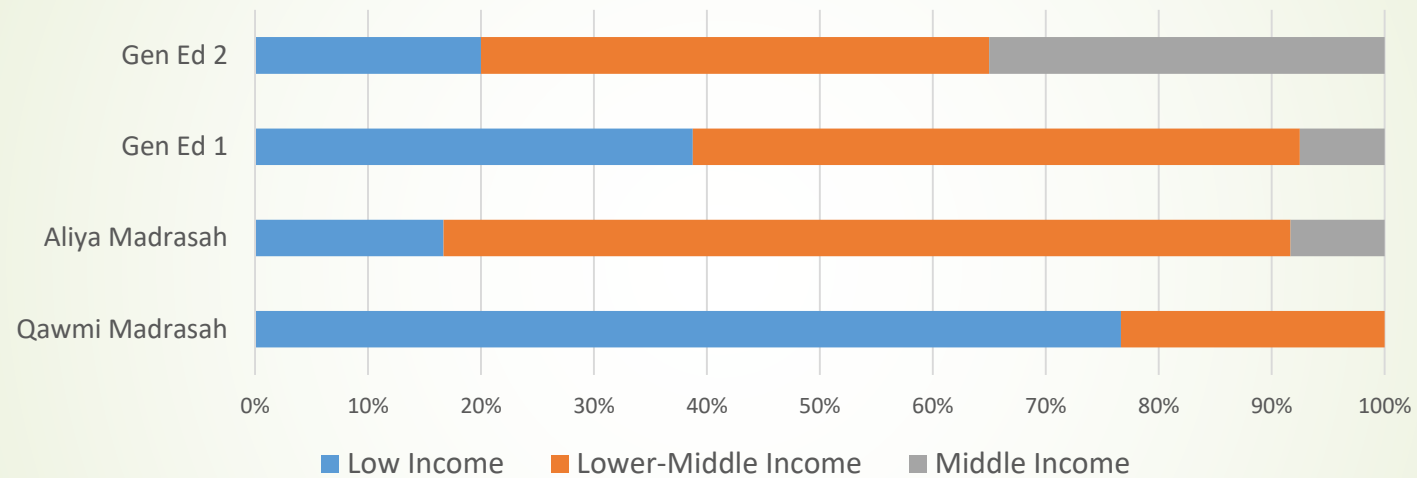
- 'Schooling' is considered a service and markets for differentiated manifestation of the service exist that are interlinked (within competitive or non-competitive environment). We do not discuss how preferences for those services got socio-politically or ideologically shaped.
- All activities and stakeholders (other than the regulators) have been included in the canvas.
- Using the basic concepts of substitutes and complements in economics, these activities are grouped horizontally as well as vertically. We presume that the various streams are substitutes and accordingly propose one generic structure that applies to all streams.
- Consider the closure of schools (other than the Qawmi madrassah) due to the pandemic as the shock whose impacts are traced by generating a consistent set of stock-flow data from 16 institutions in areas with relatively low-income population.

Sketch of the Framework



Findings: educational institutions covered

Table: Distribution of Students Based on Notional Income Categories*



Note: * During the consultation process we found the (notional) income categories had strong association with access to the internet. Almost none in the “Low Income ” group had a smartphone at home and no access to the internet; those in LMI had limited access via the main income earner’s smart phone; and the middle-income students have continuous access to smartphones and the internet

Findings

Table: Aliya Madrasah

	Before March 2020	March-August 2020	August-December 2020	January - Present
Enrollment	100 (383)	90	66.96	84.35
Work		-6.09	-13.04	
Married		0	0	
Moved out		-2.17	-4.35	
Switched school		-1.74	-5.65	
New Admission		0		17.39
Tutors-away	70.43	40.43	41.74	47.83
Online Tutoring	0	0	0	0
Tutors at Home	10.43	5.43	5.43	6.0
Tutoring by family	NK	13.26	15	NK
Distant Teaching	0	14.78	10.43	NK

Note: Figures in parentheses are enrolment per institution

Table: Qawmi Madrasah

	Before March 2020	March-August 2020	August-December 2020	January - Present
Enrollment	100 (267)	76.62	66.25	92
Work		-10	-10	
Married		0	0	
Moved out		-5.63	-4.38	
Switched school		-7.75	-1	
New Admission			5	25.75
Tutors-away	0	0	0	0
Online Tutoring	0	0	0	0
Group Study with Tutors	98.5	3.13	63.88	90
Tutors at Home	0	0	0	0
Tutoring by family	0	NK	3.13	3.75
Distant Teaching	0	0	0	0

Findings

Table: General Education 1 (relatively low)

	Before March 2020	March-August 2020	August-December 2020	January-Present
Enrollment	100 (969)	90.19	70.84	86.63
Work		-0.65	-2.71	
Married		0	-0.19	-0.01
Moved out		-5.94	-9.94	
Switched school		-3.23	-6.52	
New Admission				15.81
Tutors-away	62.58	6.01	12.21	23.15
Online Tutoring	0	18.97	33.32	38.72
Tutors at Home	27.27	5.38	18.68	23.48
Tutoring by family	NK	4.97	5.42	NK
Distant Teaching	0	6.33	5.55	5.00

Note: Figures in parentheses are enrolment figures per institution.

Table: General Education 2

	Before March 2020	March-August 2020	August-December 2020	January-Present
Enrollment	100 (1150)	86.96	71.7	91.3
Work		0	-1.3	
Married		0	0	
Moved out		-8.7	-6.5	
Switched school		-4.4	-7.4	
New Admission		0	0	19.6
Tutors-away	82.4	6.2	12.0	34.2
Online Tutoring	NK	18.6	41.9	28.5
Tutors at Home	41.7	1.8	19.9	45.7
Tutoring by family	NK	NK	NK	NK
Distant Teaching	0	0.33	0.3	0.3

Summary Findings – on the sample

- ▶ We consider four groups and present the findings accordingly.
- ▶ There is large group of educational institutions under general education which target the very poor in the fringes of urban areas. Many of those are not receiving government supports, some may be run by people in power, a few with outside assistance. One common characteristic: for many teachers, it's a collective effort towards self-employment.
- ▶ Having no access to smart phone (to access net or use SNW apps), limited access when parents leave those behind for school-going children and unlimited access to net (via ISP or via telecom using smart phone) are good proxies to indicate how well a school may function when they are forced to close.

Summary Findings – on outflows

- ▶ All streams had net drop-outs. However, since Qawmi madrassahs were open (only the residential part that allowed strict supervision), they registered new admission early on (some of the drop-outs from general education-1 were reported to have joined Qawmi madrassah).
- ▶ Beyond the issue of close-open, inter-streams and inter-institution within same streams movements (flow of students) were influenced by 'prices'. Education survey 2014 had info on household education expenses on various sub-items i) Admission/Readmission/Registration (16.8%); ii) Monthly tuition fees (9.7%); and iii) Coaching and Home Tutor Fees (29.1). (iv) Uniform & conveyance (24.1%), (v) books & stationaries (18.0%). Some of the institutes in the General Education stream, waived their admission fees/registration fees (almost 50%-70%) and some (not GoB supported) even went as far as to waive 100%, in order to increase their admission rate. Furthermore, monthly tuition fees (40%-100%) were also waived in the General Education institutes at the huge request of the guardians. We were unable to get insights into Madrassah fees.
- ▶ Information regarding the coaching fees and home tutor fees was unclear from the interviews. However, demand for English, Mathematics and Science reportedly increased, whereas demand for tutoring in such subjects as Bangla, Social Studies and Religion had declined.

Summary Findings – destination of outflows

- ▶ One out of five (20%) of madrassah students reportedly went out of schools to work. It is 3.4% of GE1 students and 1.4% in GE2. Work in case of madrassah, in many instances, meant tutoring students of lower classes. It is possible that this could have been facilitated by the fraternity.
- ▶ Reports on marriage is only one case in GE lower income.
- ▶ Almost 15% of students in GE of both types reported of moving out, while it is less than 10% for madrassah students.
- ▶ Switching schools has been reported in all streams and the flow to Qawmi was mentioned.

Quick remark on readmission

- ▶ Of the new admission, 15 to 25% were re-admission of old students. With the new wave in pandemic, the next data point may not provide such optimism – returnees may be lot less.



Few suggestions

- ▶ A shift in the frame we use to view schooling allows one to gain deeper insights without necessarily overlooking the traditional statistics we are used to deal with
- ▶ While other streams had net dropouts, many of them got into Qawmi Madrasahs since they were open till the last lockdown announcement.
- ▶ Without having continuous access to smartphones or the internet, students from low income and lower-middle income backgrounds did not have enough accessibility to attend online classes and as a result we see a revival of tutoring away from home. Detailed information on size and Covid-related practices maintained in these tutorials may come of help to policymaker.
- ▶ Since substitution away from schools to 'tutorials away from home' is on rise, the school authorities and the education boards and ministry need to seriously revisit their decisions on complete closure of schools. The unused space in the schools may be better utilized if a blending is allowed by opening up decision space for local administration, parents' representatives and the school authorities. A political economy analyses may be necessary to understand the grassroot level stakeholders, including those who need to monitor and guide.