



**Current Situation of School Dropout and Learning Loss
among Children in Selected Districts of Bangladesh
amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Summary Report of
Four Baseline Studies**

Current Situation of School Dropout and Learning Loss among Children in Selected Districts of Bangladesh amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Summary Report of Four Baselines Studies

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Current Situation of School Dropout and Learning Loss among Children in Selected Districts of Bangladesh amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Summary Report of Four Baselines Studies

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DISCLAIMER

This study was conducted at the request of the BRAC Education Programme.

Any opinions, findings, conclusion or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the view of the BRAC Education Programme.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The emergence of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has caused havoc on a global level and disrupted the way of life for countless people. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared this pandemic a global public health emergency in early 2020. The disease outbreak has put a significant burden on the medical workforce and healthcare systems in most countries. According to WHO, there have been 753,001,888 reported cases and 6,807,572 fatalities worldwide as of January 17, 2023 (WHO, 2023). The pandemic not only caused a major global health catastrophe, but it also had a substantial, all-encompassing influence on the educational sector. Education is recognized as a crucial element of overall human development due to its impact on an individual's intellectual, socio-emotional, physiological, productive, and interactive abilities (Hahn & Truman, 2015). The right to education for all people, regardless of their gender, ethnic background, heritage, or other social characteristics, is also emphasised by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which mandates that all nations “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.”

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, temporary school closures in more than 180 nations kept approximately 1.6 billion students out of the classroom; for about 50 percent of those children, school closures lasted more than seven months (Azevedo, 2020). In low- and middle-income countries, 70% of 10-year-old children either had not learned to read with proficiency or were not in school at all (Azevedo, 2020). The schooling of about 760 million children in Asia has been interrupted by school closure since the pandemic hit in early 2020, based on the findings of the

report “Situation Analysis on the Effects and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia” (SitAn Report), published by UNICEF and UNESCO (UNICEF, 2021).

The hard-to-reach (HtR) communities of Bangladesh encountered the greatest challenges as a consequence of the pandemic since they were already at risk in terms of their access to educational institutions (Ahmed, R., & Hassan, S., 2012). The northern regions of Bangladesh are highly prone to natural disasters, which occur more frequently and intensely than in other parts of the country due to the floodplain terrain and tropical monsoon climate (Paul, 2014). According to a survey by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), these severely adverse conditions resulted in the detection of 64.3% of the Dinajpur district population living below the poverty line (Ali and Murshid, 2019). The rate of primary school dropouts has increased in these areas due to poverty as well (Miah & Reza, 2014). According to district level data from the 2011 census, 52.4% of population (age 7 and older) in the Dinajpur district were literate, with males and females having literacy rates of 55.7 percent and 49.1 percent, respectively (BBS, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic further aggravated the financial and primary school dropout problem in these disadvantaged areas of Bangladesh. Harmful social standards started to spread more often across the country due to the disease outbreak. Child marriage, childhood violence, and child labour have become more common as a result of a lack of interaction with schools and teachers, which may deter students from returning to their educational institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Manusher Jonno Foundation, a non-governmental organisation in Dhaka, documented 13,886 child marriages in

21 districts of Bangladesh between March and September 2020 (Pinaki Roy, 2021).

Despite valiant attempts by most countries to implement remote and alternative learning systems, learning losses are inevitable. Bangladesh also adopted remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as a coping strategy to maintain regular educational activities, however, the approach was not effective owing to a range of issues. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) implemented a number of initiatives, such as “Ghore Bose Shikhi” (Learning from House) and “Amar Ghor Amar School” (My house, my school), which were aired via television, mobile phones, radio, and the internet, to aid students in coping with the loss of learning (Rahman & Ahmed, 2021). Sangsad TV, a government-run public broadcasting station, started playing recorded lectures for students in primary and secondary schools (Financial Express, 2020). However, the move from in-person classrooms to virtual classrooms was extremely challenging for children who lived in remote locations since the effectiveness of alternative education was constrained by factors such as a lack of technical

infrastructure, expensive internet-based teaching methods, poor internet connections, a lack of digital literacy and the availability of mobile networks. According to a BRAC survey, 59% of rural Bangladeshi families lacked access to smartphones (BIGD, 2020). Some children’s lack of education is likely to cause a significant learning gap that will impede their future academic progress (Hoque, 2020). Most learners were unable to learn remotely due to a lack of student’s familiarity with the online platform and instructors to guide them using such devices. Despite the difficulties these underprivileged children experienced with technology, teachers often had difficulties conducting such remote classes. For most of them, teaching online was challenging. Lack of digital literacy and inadequate training on how to run sessions on a digital platform, among other limitations, made it difficult for teachers to meet the needs of the students and made it time-consuming to hold even one lesson. The COVID-19 pandemic increased the possibility of dropping out of primary school students, which threatened to undo decades of progress Bangladesh had made in increasing the country’s national enrollment rate in primary schools.

1.2 ACCELERATED MODEL BY BRAC EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has been providing quality, non-formal primary education to underprivileged children for over 35 years. Since its establishment in 1985, BEP has graduated over 8 million preschoolers and 6 million primary school students, including over 50% females, 215,321 children with disabilities, and 88,956 children of underrepresented ethnic groups. BRAC has collaborated and supported several ministries and departments of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) over the years. In order to give students with disabilities greater access to school and learning outcomes, BEP

assisted the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) in developing and implementing their inclusive education policy guidelines. Additionally, BEP has recently collaborated with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) on social-emotional education and the two-year pre-primary curriculum, the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) on early grade reading and the school feeding programme, and the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) on competency-based evaluation.

With support from the HEMPEL Foundation, LEGO Foundation, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), UK, and Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade under the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)-III, BEP is currently undertaking projects to address the primary school dropout issue and learning loss of students in selected districts of Bangladesh. For this initiative, BEP has developed an affordable, scalable, accelerated programme, which is a 10-month course for out-of-school children (OOSC) aged 7-14 years, who after completion, will have caught up and be able

to transition into grades 3, 4, and 5 of government schools. To better comprehend the benefits and limitations of the intervention (Accelerated Model) and to strategise quality education, four baseline studies were undertaken by the James P Grant School of Public Health (BRAC JPGSPH), BRAC University in close collaboration with BRAC Education Programme to document the current situation of OOSC in Bhola, Cox's Bazar, Dinajpur, Gaibandha, Habiganj, Jamalpur, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Netrokona and Rangpur districts of Bangladesh. The baseline studies have the following research objectives:

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE BASELINE RESEARCH

Objective 1: To explore the present conditions of targeted beneficiaries (OOSC, their families and the broader communities where they live) in selected study sites where BEP plans to implement the intervention;

Objective 2: To generate evidence on the local factors stopping students from returning to schools in the study districts;

Objective 3: To provide a point of reference against which the achievement of project outputs and outcomes will be assessed, monitored, and evaluated;

Objective 4: To document the challenges of implementing the projects in the study districts and propose recommendations to achieve the project goals;

Objective 5: To assess the literacy and numeracy proficiency as well as social and emotional development of OOSC at the baseline level;

Objective 6: To explore the capacity of the teachers to provide accelerated teaching-learning pedagogy and socio-emotional support to OOSC at the baseline level;

Objective 7: To explore the perception of School Management Committees (SMC) and Para Committees about the proposed initiatives that BEP plans to implement to address the OOSC issue;

Objective 8: To collect data relevant to resources spent by the BRAC Education programme for different projects at the baseline period.



CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 OVERVIEW

The BRAC JPGSPH study team conducted the baseline assessment following a mixed-method research approach. The quantitative component of the studies comprised representative surveys of parents/guardians of school-age children in the study sites, while the qualitative component included in-depth interviews (IDIs) with OOSC and their parents/guardians, focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents/guardians, and community members, and key informant interviews (KIIs) with BEP employees, teachers, government and non-government stakeholders, and community influential persons. The study team also visited BEP schools to conduct aptitude tests and assess the social-emotional conditions of the BEP students. To examine the value-for-money (VFM) indicators during the baseline period, information was also obtained on the resources

used and/or available at each BEP school. Table 1 lists the total number of households that were surveyed for the four projects, as well as the aptitude and social-emotional skills tests that were administered in the study districts.

In the baseline studies, out-of-school children were defined as children in the primary school age range of 7-14 years who were not enrolled in either primary or secondary schools at the time of survey data collection (May-June 2022) (INEE, n.d.). Only for the Hempel funded project, the out-of-school children were 7-10 years of age. A dropout student is one who leaves school completely during a given school year (INEE, n.d.).

Project	Districts	Number of households interviewed	Number of BEP students assessed for social-emotional skills	Number of BEP students assessed for Bangla, English and Mathematics skills
LEGO	Dinajpur	287	306	296
	Habiganj	287	257	257
	Cox's Bazar	665	555	561
HEMPEL	Kurigram	1243	1276	1119
EMDC	Gaibandha	660	487	473
	Bhola	540	451	449
SPA-III	Jamalpur	454	402	410
	Lalmonirhat	156	195	187
	Netrokona	345	277	272
	Rangpur	246	205	192
TOTAL		4883	4411	4216

Table 1: Total number of households interviewed in the baseline surveys and number of BEP students assessed for social-emotional skills and Bangla, English and Mathematics skills

2.2 DESK REVIEW

The research team conducted a comprehensive literature review to find the available evidence and data on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on primary school children in Bangladesh, with a focus on the selected study districts. A precise set of Medical Subject Headings (Mesh) phrases and keywords were used to search the PubMed database. The following relevant keywords (along with their synonyms) were searched for: student dropouts, primary school, COVID-19, Dinajpur, Habiganj, Netrokona, Jamalpur, Gaibandha, Bhola, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur and Cox's

Bazar. Pubmed's Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) were searched for any pertinent phrases that may be used as search items, including all the key search terms, to get the most results possible. To find the most effective search method, different Boolean operator combinations were used. However, despite a thorough search, no relevant journal papers were found. In addition, Google Scholar was also searched for relevant blogs, articles in the media, technical papers, policy/research infographics, and gray literature.

2.3 QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

2.3.1 SAMPLE SIZE ESTIMATION

The minimal sample size for each of the baseline surveys was calculated separately. For sample size calculation, it was assumed that several outcome indicators, such as primary school dropout rate, literacy and numeracy skills of children, and their social-emotional skills would range between 30% and 60% at baseline and there will be a 10-20% change in these indicators at endline. The minimum sample size was estimated to be 1,161 for each of the four

studies considering a two-sided significance test ($\alpha = 0.05$), 80 percent power (denoted as $1-\beta$), and design effect of 1.5. Thus, sample size has been calculated assuming that for each project an endline survey will be conducted to evaluate the impact of the Accelerated model on improving the social-emotional skills, literacy, and numeracy skills of children. Expecting a 10% non-response rate, the research team visited 1,290 eligible households for each baseline survey.

2.3.2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The study team adopted a multi-stage cluster sampling strategy to conduct baseline surveys among eligible households with primary school-

aged children. The sampling technique for each of the project is briefly described below:

EMDC

Under the EMDC project, a multi-stage cluster sampling approach was followed to undertake the baseline survey among households with children aged between 7 and 14 years at the study locations. In the first stage, two districts (Bhola and Gaibandha) were selected randomly from the six districts where the Accelerated model is implemented under the EMDC project. In the second stage, the research team collected the list of unions within the two districts where

BEP is currently implementing the intervention. From all the unions, 20 unions were randomly selected. In the third stage, one village from each union was chosen randomly. Finally, a minimum of 60 households were selected from each village for the survey following a systematic sampling procedure. When the required number of households was not available in a village, the nearest village was considered.

SPA-III

Under the SPA-III project, a multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was followed by the BRAC JPGSPH research team to recruit households of 7-14 years old children for the baseline survey. The Accelerated Model is currently being implemented in 18 districts under the SPA-III project. In the first sampling stage, the research team randomly selected four districts (Jamalpur, Netrokona, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat) out of 18 districts following a simple random sampling

procedure. In the second stage of sampling, 29 unions were randomly selected from the 119 unions under the 4 districts where BRAC is implementing the Accelerated Model intervention. In the third stage sampling, 29 villages were randomly selected from a total of 96 villages within the 29 unions. In the final stage sampling, on average 41 households were selected for the baseline survey from each village following a systematic sampling procedure.

HEMPEL

Under the HEMPEL project, a multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was followed to conduct the baseline survey among households with children aged between 7-10 years in the study site. In the first sampling stage, we randomly selected 1 district, i.e., Kurigram, from 3 districts where BEP is currently implementing the intervention following a simple random sampling procedure. The team was informed by the BEP team that the Hempel Foundation project is currently being implemented in 25 unions of the Kurigram district. A complete list of 158 villages under these 25 unions were developed. In the second sampling stage, 25 villages were randomly selected from

158 villages, and in the final stage of sampling, 48 households were systematically chosen from each village for the survey. The guardians of school-going children were asked to participate in the research. The total number of eligible households (households that have 7-10 years children) and interval were calculated based on the information provided by the key informants of the village, i.e., BEP school teachers, community influencers, and general people. The team moved to the nearby village for survey data collection if and only if there were a fewer number of eligible households (i.e., 48) in a particular village.

LEGO

Under the LEGO project, to conduct the baseline survey among eligible households with children aged 7 to 14, the research team used a multi-stage cluster sampling approach. In the first sampling stage, three districts (Cox's Bazar, Dinajpur and Habiganj) were randomly chosen from the eight districts where the LEGO funded Accelerated model is being implemented. Within the 3 districts, BRAC implemented the

Accelerated Model intervention in 99 unions. Out of these 99 unions, 30 were randomly selected as second stage units. In the third stage sampling, 30 villages were randomly selected from a total of 152 villages within the 30 unions. Finally, 41 households with primary school-going children were selected from each village using a systematic sampling procedure.

2.3.3 ASSESSING LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS OF BEP STUDENTS

The study team utilised grade-specific validated tools to evaluate BEP school students' Bangla, English, and Mathematics proficiency. A group of professionals from BEP and Dhaka University designed the tools. Two cohort-specific aptitude test questions were used to assess the newly recruited students' literacy and numeracy skills.

The cohort 1 aptitude test tool was used to evaluate students who left school in the first or second grade, while the cohort 2 aptitude test tool was used to evaluate students who left school in the third, fourth, or fifth grade.

2.3.4 ASSESSING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL STATUS OF BEP STUDENTS

The social-emotional status of BEP students was assessed using a standardised, validated social-emotional checklist. The study team utilised the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in Bangla to evaluate the social and emotional well-being of BEP students. The SDQ is a research tool used in developmental, genetic, social, therapeutic, and educational studies worldwide. SDQs with "before" and "after" sections can be

utilised to monitor everyday tasks and assess particular remedies. More details about SDQ are available at <https://www.sdqinfo.org>. The 25 components of the SDQ questionnaire are broken down into five measurements: prosocial behaviour (5 items), conduct issues (5 items), hyperactivity/inattention (5 items), and emotional symptoms (5 items).

2.4 QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

2.4.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS (IDIS)

The research team conducted in-depth interviews (IDIs) with parents/guardians and children who had dropped out of primary school to gather

qualitative data for the baseline studies. During the IDIs with parents/guardians, the participants were asked about their health-related issues

and job losses during the nationwide lockdown brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. They were also questioned about their views on school dropouts, difficulties in returning back to school by the students, and how the lockdown affected schooling. The research team also considered the parents' views, including whether they supported the children's return to school and, if not, why. By interviewing the children about the resources and educational quality that BEP offers, the study team also took the time to understand the children's

desire to attend BEP schools. Researchers also looked into incidents of child labour and child marriage that led to primary school dropouts in the neighbourhood. In addition, participants were asked to provide perspectives and suggestions on how to increase community and individual access to alternative learning systems as well as measures to minimise the challenges that lead to student dropout. The number of IDIs conducted for each of the four projects is shown in Table 2.

Project	Districts	Number of IDI
LEGO	Dinajpur	5
	Habiganj	3
	Cox's Bazar	7
HEMPEL	Kurigram	10
EMDC	Gaibandha	12
	Bhola	12
SPA-III	Jamalpur	5
	Lalmonirhat	5
	Netrokona	5
	Rangpur	6
TOTAL		70

Table 2: Total number of IDIs undertaken for the four projects

2.4.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDS)

Parents/guardians of OOSC, members of the school committee, and community members participated in the focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were conducted to obtain data on the community's response to COVID-19, child labour and child marriage during COVID-19, the impact of COVID-19 on the education of school-going children, and the viability of distance learning. Additionally, the FGD participants

were urged to speak about dropout, barriers to re-enrollment of students, including internal (institutional, sociocultural, etc.) and external (behaviour, beliefs, etc.) barriers, learning loss imposed on by the pandemic, and methods for addressing this loss. The number of FGDs undertaken for each of the four projects is shown in Table 3

Project	Districts	Number of FGD
LEGO	Dinajpur	1
	Habiganj	1
	Cox's Bazar	2
HEMPEL	Kurigram	3
EMDC	Gaibandha	3
	Bhola	3
SPA-III	Jamalpur	2
	Lalmonirhat	1
	Rangpur	1
TOTAL		17

Table 3: Total number of FGDs undertaken for the four projects

2.4.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIS)

For the baseline studies, the research team conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with influential members of the community, BEP staff, educators and other representatives from the public and private education sector. Through the KIIs, researchers explored the difficulties that the implementers are encountering to assist children in learning during the pandemic and what their institutions are undertaking to combat the issue of school dropouts in their localities. The literacy and numeracy levels of the primary school students residing in the research sites were inquired about

by the key informants. The research team also explored the capacity of the newly appointed teachers of BRAC schools to support OOSC residing at the research sites social-emotionally and through accelerated teaching-learning pedagogy. Additionally, participants were asked to provide advice or solutions for addressing the present problem at the individual, institutional, community, and national levels. The number of KIIs undertaken for each of the four projects is shown in Table 4.

Project	Districts	Number of KII
LEGO	Dinajpur	2
	Habiganj	2
	Cox's Bazar	6
HEMPEL	Kurigram	10
EMDC	Gaibandha	6
	Bhola	6
SPA-III	Jamalpur	2
	Lalmonirhat	2
	Netrokona	3
	Rangpur	4
TOTAL		43

Table 4: Total number of KIIs undertaken for the four projects

2.5 VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM)

Value for money is seen as a suitable approach for evaluating the effectiveness of development projects. Money spent on intervention is often compared against what has been provided (outputs) or accomplished to determine if the intervention was worthwhile (outcomes and impact). Through all its efforts, BEP aims to offer the highest value for the money invested. BEP intends to make the

best use of its limited resources and finances to enhance the complete outcome in accordance with the four pillars of VfM (i.e., Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity – as described in Figure 1). Thus, the study also aimed to analyse the VfM of the BEP's Accelerated Model for OOSCs in the targeted areas of Bangladesh.

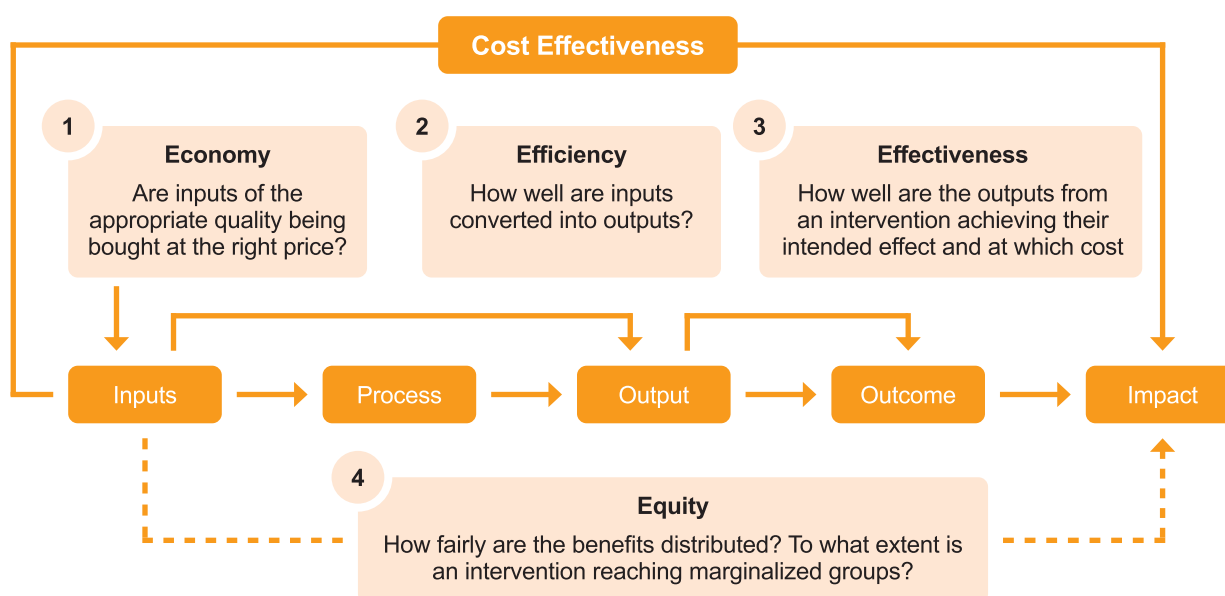


Figure 1: The framework of value for money (DFID, 2011)

2.5.1 VFM ANALYSIS PROCESS

By analysing the Vfm of the Accelerated learning programme, the research team tried to evaluate some of the expenditure records (as available) to comprehend the significant cost drivers, the unit cost of various inputs and resource items, and their allocation in the programme's overall cost. Since this study has only conducted a baseline assessment and has yet to explore the progress in the intended outcomes, the research team could only examine the volume of resources used in the programme. After the end-line assessment, it would be possible to determine the incremental costs of implementing the programme against the incremental effectiveness to estimate the value for money (compared to the costs of any other similar BRAC programmes or the status quo situation). For the analysis, the study team simply looked at the programme's expenditure data with support from the BEP finance team (regularly documented as part of the accounting system). Since the intervention is still running, the research team could only collect accurate expenditure data for the programme's first seven months (January 2022 – July 2022). The research team also gathered the actual budget for the Accelerated programme from January 2022 to June 2023 to gain a general sense of the annual spending. Additionally, programme finance professionals were engaged regarding the expenses linked to the project's activities, the compensation and incentive plan for programme employees, and other relevant expenses.

After the collection of the programme budget and expenditure data, the study team divided the cost elements into two major categories: **(i) Programme design and development costs:** expenditures associated with planning, creating, and launching the programme (e.g., expenditures

associated with infrastructure, such as building schools, purchasing furniture and equipment, developing curricula and materials, and training instructors); **(ii) Programme implementation costs:** expenses associated with running/ implementing the programme in the schools (e.g., cost of human resources, materials, transportation, periodic meetings and advocacy). The above cost categories were further accumulated into five (5) broad key cost items: **(a) Learner cost** including salary and benefits of programme organiser, expenses for student and classroom supplies, for engaging students in CLG, PBL and Remedial support, and for parenting education; **(b) Teachers cost** including salary and benefits of BEP teachers, and expenses for the purchase of teachers' supplies; **(c) Teacher development cost** including expenses for teachers' basic training, subject-based training, para counsellor training, ToT for counsellors, trainers' & staff, orientation and monthly refreshers for teachers; **(d) Infrastructure cost** includes expenses of furniture and fixture, computer and IT equipment, curriculum and materials development, content development for SEL & wellbeing, paying school and office rent, buying other programme supplies and stationery, expenses for Technology Integration in Education (TIE), software Maintenance Expenses, service Integration, other maintenance expenses, internet bill, computer operating cost (as applicable); **(e) Supervision and monitoring cost** includes salary and allowance of programme management staff, local/domestic travel, basic & foundation training of programme staff, research & evaluation activities, survey cost, networking, linkage, advocacy, auditing fees.

The study team examined costs from the programme's standpoint to comprehend the distribution of expenditures across various line items and their financial significance. The expenses were examined using a top-down approach. The actual expenditure for capital items (such as furniture and fixtures, IT equipment like computers and laptops when appropriate) was annuitised. Because instead of attributing such expenses to the year of expenditure, annuitization is a beneficial way to spread the entire cost of any capital purchases across the course of their service life. A discount rate of 5% was considered to calculate the pertinent annualisation factor when estimating capital costs with annuitization. In general, the discount rate reflects the time value of money, which means that a dollar today is worth more than a dollar in the future. The discount represents either the real rate of return in the private sector or some social rate of time preference, usually used as 5% (Drummond et al., 2015).

After that, the programme's overall cost was estimated by adding together all the expenditure.

2.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered from the survey households, as well as from the students and teachers, were analysed using Stata version 13. The study team carried out several descriptive analyses. The results of the descriptive analyses are presented in statistical graphs and tables. Qualitative data

All calculations were done in Bangladeshi currency (Bangladesh Taka). The unit cost of delivering the accelerated learning programme per student was also calculated. To assess the economy, the study team determined the major programme expenses. In addition, several critical expenses were calculated as a percentage of the total programme cost. Programme-based data was obtained from BEP MIS (number of schools, students, distribution of boys and girls, number of kids with disabilities) to evaluate efficiency. The study team intended to look at costs per student, student survival rates, teacher retention rates, the average cost of retention per child, etc. for analysing effectiveness and cost-effectiveness; however, the study team was unable to look at all the indicators due to the unavailability of outcome data in the baseline assessment. Similarly, the percentage of students from hard-to-reach areas and climate-vulnerable regions, the number of students who are girls, and the percentage of students who have impairments were identified for measuring equity.

collected from various research participants were transcribed and categorized. The subject and content were analysed using Atlas Ti. The findings from the desk review, quantitative, and qualitative data analyses were triangulated to develop the final report.

2.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The research got ethical approval from the independent ethical review board of the BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University. The ethics board was founded in 2006 and serves as an independent examining body.

Before conducting any interviews, the study participants were briefed by the researchers on the study's objectives and how they would safeguard their privacy and identity. All adult participants provided their informed consent. Participants under the age of 18 were asked for their consent. The study's objectives were explained to each participant's legal guardian (father or mother) to legally get their approval for the interview.

The research team ensured that all ethical standards were followed. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were respected at all times. Without the participants' approval, no recording equipment was utilised during the interview sessions, and when they objected to the discussion being recorded, researchers only took written notes. The data were all securely stored, and only the authorised members of the study team had access to them. Anonymity was maintained throughout the report-writing process, and no photos were disseminated without the participants' permission.



CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

3.1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

EMDC

In the EMDC project, 1200 participants (guardians of school-going children) participated in the household survey. Of them, 660 were from Gaibandha district, and the rest 540 were from Bhola district. Of the participants, 75.1% were female, and the remaining 24.9% were male. A total of 1142 individuals were married, 24 were unmarried and 32 were separated, divorced, or widowed. About half (49.3%) of the survey participants were between the ages of 30 and 39, followed by 20.4% of participants between the ages of 20 and 29. Among the 1061 participants who had access to education, more than one-fifth of the participants (22.3%) completed their primary education, whereas only 6.4% completed their secondary education.

Out of 1200 participants, 67.7% were homemakers, followed by 29.2% employed during the survey data collection. Less than half (48.3%) of participants revealed their household income to be between BDT 8001 and 16000 (USD 74.7 to 149.4) per month, followed by 19.9% for BDT 16001 to 24000 per month (USD 149.4 to 224.1). Many participants in the study (54.4%) said that their monthly household expenses ranged from BDT 8001 to 16000 (USD 74.7 to 149.4). The average household monthly spending per month was BDT 12,447 (USD 116.2). Regarding the demographic characteristics of the children, out of the 1200 children, 609 were boys, and the rest

591 were girls. Almost three-fourths (73.5%) were between 7-10 years of age. Most of the children (95.6%) attended school at the time of survey data collection, and only 4.4% did not attend any schools. More than half (56.4%) of the children were studying in government schools, followed by 15.7% in BRAC schools at the time of survey data collection.

A total of 12 IDIs were conducted with a selected subset of participants from the quantitative sample from Gaibandha and Bhola districts. Out of 12 IDIs, 6 IDIs were conducted in Bhola and 6 IDIs in Gaibandha district. More than half (n= 9) of the participants were mothers of the dropout students. An equal number of participants were between the age groups 20- 30 years and 31- 40 years (n=4). Five out of 12 participants had no formal education. Three FGDs were conducted in each of the study districts. The majority of the FGD participants were mothers of primary school dropout students, and others were fathers, caregivers, and community people. The age of the FGD participants was between 20 and 60 years. Twelve KIs were conducted with BRAC school teachers and BEP staff from the Bhola and Gaibandha districts. Of these 12 key informants, seven were males, and the rest were females. Seven of them were between 31- 40 years of age. An equal number of interviews (6) were conducted with schoolteachers and BEP staff.

SPA-III

A total of 1201 parents or guardians of the school-going children were questioned in the survey. More than half (59.3%) of the participants were

between 26–35 years, followed by 23.1% between 36–49 years. Female participants made up 91.4% of the total. When survey data were collected,

more than one-fifth (22.5%) of participants had completed their primary education, 80.6% were homemakers, and almost one-fifth (18.9%) were employed. Most of them (70.7%) lived in houses with tin walls, followed by 14.2% with brick walls and 10.4% with cement. The majority (94%) of the households used the tube well as a source of drinking water. Regarding the demographic characteristics of the children, out of the 1201 children, 578 were boys and the rest 623 were girls. Most of the children (1176 out of 1201) were attending school at the time of survey data collection and only 25 were not attending any schools.

A total of 20 IDIs, 4 FGDs, and 11 KIIs were conducted in 4 districts (Jamalpur, Netrokona, Rangpur and Lalmonirhat) for the qualitative study.

HEMPEL

For the quantitative survey, data were collected from a total of 1,243 parents/guardians of school-going children in 25 unions of Kurigram district. A small proportion (7.3%) of the participants were from Rajarhat sub-district whereas 21.7 % from Fulbari sub-district and 5.9 % from Chilmari sub-district. A small percentage (13.7%) of the 1,243 survey responders were men, and 86.3% were women. More than three-fifths (69.4%) of the participants were from the age group 15 to 35 years followed by 30.6% who were above 35 years old. Muslim participants made up 91.0% of the sample, with the remaining participants being of Hinduism faith. The majority (96.0%) of the 1,243 survey participants were married, 1.1% were single, and 2.9% were divorced, separated, or widowed. About three-quarters (75.0%) of them were homemakers whereas the rest were either unemployed or engaged in the informal job sector. More than one-fifth (21%) of the participants had completed their primary education whereas 10.1% completed their

OOSC and their parents or guardians participated in the IDIs as participants. Interviews with the parents/guardians of the dropout children and members of the local community in the research sites were done for the FGDs. Participants in the FGDs ranged in age from 20 to 50 years. The majority of them had finished primary school. Few participants in the FGDs did not attend school. The BRAC school instructors, BEP employees, government school teachers, and government primary education officers participated in a total of 11 KIIs. All of the KII participants had prior experience working in the education sector, and their ages ranged from 20 to 60 years. Four of them completed post-graduation while two of them had graduation degrees.

secondary education and 8.9% completed higher than secondary education. When it comes to the demographic characteristics of the children, out of the 1,243 children, 643 were boys and the rest 600 were girls. Most of the children (1,223 out of 1,243) were attending school at the time of survey data collection and only 20 were not attending any schools.

For the qualitative component of the study, 41 participants were interviewed from Kurigram district. Out of the 41 participants, 10 took part in the IDIs, which consisted of drop-out children as well as their parents or siblings. All the participants belonged to poor or lower middle-class Muslim families. Most of the parents of the drop-out children had completed primary education and some of them had no education at all. A total of 10 KIIs were conducted. Participants for the KIIs included teachers from primary schools, Upazila Education Officer, BEP educators as well as programme organisers from BEP. Among the KII

participants, 5 were males while the rest were females. They belonged to well-educated lower middle-class or middle-class families. All of them were Muslim except one, who followed Hinduism. While five of the participants had completed their university education, the other five had studied until HSC. A total of 3 FGDs were conducted in Kurigram district in Ulipur, Singair and

LEGO

For the LEGO funded study, 1239 households were visited by the research team for quantitative data collection. The team interviewed 1002 female and 237 male participants from the three districts. All of them were guardians of the school-going children. Most participants (70%) were mothers, 21.5% were fathers, and the rest were other legal guardians (including brothers, sisters, grandparents, etc.) of 7-14-year-old children. Close to half (48.3%) of the 1239 participants were between the ages of 26 and 35 years, followed by 30.7% between 36 and 45 years. The study results showed that 97.3% of the participants were Bengalis, with only a tiny minority belonging to Marma (0.4%), Khasia (0.7%), and other ethnic groups. There were 1174 people who were married, 34 who were single, three who were separated, seven who were divorced, and 20 who were widowed. In total, 1093 people said they had the chance to access education. Among those who received education, 80.8% studied in formal mainstream schools, with 3.6% choosing Alia Madrasa as their school of choice. Only 0.2% of those who were interviewed said they had never attended formal education. When queried about their employment status, 60.3% of the participants reported being homemakers, while 37.3% were employed, 1% were students, 1% were unemployed, and only 0.4% were retired. In the survey, 32.6 percent informed of having a monthly household income ranging from 10,001 BDT to 15,000 BDT (approx. 106 USD to 160

Bhurungamari sub-districts. Each FGD included 7 participants. The participants were primary school teachers, parents of out-of-school students, and community members. To maintain homogeneity, it was ensured that participants from the same socio-economic background attended the FGDs.

USD), 24.5 percent responded to having between 5001 BDT to 10000 BDT (approx. 53 USD to 106 USD), 21.2 percent informed to have more than 20,000 BDT (more than 212 USD), and 2.3 percent have an income less than 5,000 BDT (less than 53 USD). Regarding the demographic characteristics of the children, out of the 1239 children, 630 were boys, and the rest 609 were girls. Most of the children (96.8%) attended school at the time of survey data collection, and only 3.1% did not attend any schools.

For the qualitative study, 29 participants were interviewed from the three districts (Cox's Bazar, Dinajpur, Habiganj), among which the majority of the participants were females. A total of 15 IDIs were conducted, with five from Dinajpur, three from Habiganj, and the remaining seven from Cox's Bazar district. The interviewees, ages 10 to 40 years. Among the participants, more than half identified themselves as Muslims. Half of the participants came from lower-middle or low-income households. Two to three participants had at least one child with a disability. About half of the participants claimed to have finished only primary-level education. From the three districts, a total of 10 KIIs were performed, with 3 of the participants being men and the remaining 7 being women. Two key informants were from Habiganj and Dinajpur districts, while the remaining participants were from Cox's Bazar district. Participants in the KIIs ranged in age from 20 to

40 years, with one person being Hindu and the rest being Muslim. The KIIs comprised Upazila Managers, programme coordinators, and BRAC instructors who were also from lower-middle-class or impoverished backgrounds. Three of the participants had earned their honours degrees, while the remaining participants had

at least completed their secondary education. Out of four FGDs, two FGDs were held in Cox's Bazar and one in Habiganj and one in Dinajpur district. Homogeneity was ensured based on socioeconomic and educational background while choosing the FGD participants.

3.2 SITUATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL DROPOUT AND LEARNING LOSS OF CHILDREN

EMDC

The survey participants or the parents/guardians of the school-going children (7-14 years) were asked if their child was attending any school at the time of survey data collection in both Bhola and Gaibandha districts. Out of 1200 responses obtained from the participants, it was found that 42 children were not attending any school at the time of the survey, or it can be said that they were primary school dropout children. Of 42 primary school dropout students, 36 were boys, and only 6 were girls. The survey also documented the dropout age and dropout year of the children. The age of the children was classified into two categories, between 7- 10 years and 11- 14 years. More than half (23 out of 42) of primary school dropout children were between 11- 14 years of age or from cohort 2; the rest (19 out of 42) were from cohort 1. The guardians were also asked why their child dropped out of school. More than two-thirds (69.1%) responded having financial struggles to continue their children's education. A good percentage (42.9%) reported reluctance of the child towards schooling as one of the main reasons for dropping out followed by (28.6%) who said school closure as a reason for dropping out of their children. None of the survey participants reported that their child was married and discontinued school. The guardians of the OOSC

were asked if they would be interested in enrolling their children in school again if the opportunity is provided. Among the 42 guardians of OOSC, 37 responded positively. When asked why they wanted to enrol their children in school again, almost one-fourth (27%) mentioned wanting their child to become self-dependent, followed by 20.2% who said attending school would increase the chance of livelihood opportunities.

More than half of the qualitative participants from the study sites (Bhola and Gaibandha districts) shared that the education of children was greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Children were bound to be at home for more than two years when all educational institutions were closed to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. This prolonged school closure has altered their lifestyle and jeopardised their habits. Many of these children are not interested in attending school anymore, and, in some cases, parents are not eager to send them to school anymore. Only a few of the qualitative participants mentioned child marriage as one of the factors for school dropout. However, some of them said that child marriage is linked to financial constraints of poorer families. Parents of these families consider girls a significant liability and marrying them off at an

early age is considered both financially profitable (as this reduces a mouth to feed and investing money for her education) and secured (less chance of sexual abuse).

Many of the qualitative participants also shared their views on the engagement of some of these students in income-generating activities. They shared that the primary motive for parents to educate their children is to help them get a good job after completing their education. However, as soon as the children start earning money doing different odd jobs, parents perceive that the children no longer need to complete their education as they have already started earning. This, in turn, affected the mindset of the students, and they are assuming school-based education and grade-specific knowledge is no longer required for them.

SPA-III

In SPA-III, analysis revealed that 25 of the 1,201 children were not in school at the time of the survey data collection. Five of these 25 children dropped out of school at age 9, while 4 dropped out at ages 7, 8, 10, and 11. About half (12 out of the 25 OOSC) left in 2020, with 10 leaving in 2021 and 3 leaving in 2022. Class 3 had seven dropouts, compared to classes 4 and 5, which each had five, and classes 1 and 2, which each had four. A variety of reasons caused the dropout of students. School shutdown due to COVID-19 and children's reluctance to education were the two most often cited reasons by the guardians for the 2.08% of students (25 out of 1,201) who did not attend school at the time of survey data collection. Since the dropout number was too low (only 25 children out of 1,201), no further statistical analyses were performed.

Qualitative findings showed that most of the students who dropped out of school did so due

On a positive note, findings from qualitative interviews suggest that many guardians are aware of the benefits and necessity of education in a child's life. Awareness-raising activities from different NGOs, mass media, and newspapers might have played a positive role in the mindset of the parents. Besides, the BEP team organises parent meetings on a regular basis to motivate them. All these activities encourage the parents, and they are motivated to send their children to school. The reputation of BRAC (as an international NGO) has drawn some attention from the residents of the study areas and many of them are eager to send their children to BRAC School, assuming that the quality will be better than the government run primary schools.

to the financial turmoil the parents went through during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, many parents cannot support their children's education because of poverty. It was also revealed that people who live on the riverside or the other side of the river of Islampur area in Jamalpur are very poor and struggle to earn their living. As a result, affording education seemed like a luxury. Similarly, Lalmonirhat too is an area surrounded by rivers with not much cultivable lands to support the families to overcome the economic hardships.

Data from the qualitative interviews also revealed that, during COVID-19 pandemic the children from lesser solvent families lost their touch in studies and lagged behind. Relatively well-off families hired private tutors who came to their residence to teach children, but not all families could afford this. Some families who could have afforded a home tutor prior to the pandemic lost the ability to do so due to financial constraints

experienced during the pandemic. Parents also reported that the children who owned cell phones became more addicted to it during this period which also affected their studies. Parents also shared their concerns about their children having difficulties memorising or remembering study materials. Even though they try to pass exams

HEMPEL

According to survey data collected for Hempel, out of 1,243 children, 20 were not going to school at the time of survey data collection. Data from the blanket survey revealed there was a 25% dropout rate in the Bamandanga union and 8.8% drop out in Durgapur union, the two unions of Kurigram district selected for the situational analysis. Comparatively, in the current study the dropout rate was found to be 1.6%. This is perhaps because of the opening of educational institutions in the study sites and for interventions such as the Accelerated Model of BEP.

Results show that out of the 20 drop out children, 12 dropped out of school at the age of 7 whereas 4 dropped out at the age of 8 and the rest 4 dropped out at the age of 9. Among the 20 OOSC, 9 dropped out in 2020 whereas 5 dropped out in 2021 and 6 dropped out in 2022. Most students (11 out of 20) dropped out in Class 1 compared to Class 2 where only 4 students dropped out and 5 children dropped out from Class 3-Class 5. The guardians reported that there are multiple factors that contributed to the dropout of students. The most frequent reasons mentioned by them are school closure for COVID-19 followed by lack of interest of the students in learning. Since the drop out number was too low (only 20 children out of 1,243), no further statistical analyses were performed.

The qualitative component of the study revealed that with schools being closed for almost two

by memorising the materials, it becomes very difficult for them and hence they end up scoring badly in the exams. On top of that, with the auto pass system being implemented, children have experienced gaps in knowledge as basic subjects were not properly covered in the class.

years, children went through a huge educational hurdle. Even though the government tried to minimise the gap by introducing online learning methods, it was not as fruitful, especially in areas like Kurigram district. As a result, since children lost touch with studies for a very long time, parents shared that their children are having a hard time remembering things, especially the study materials. Since their attention had been diverted for so long, children are finding it difficult to start from where they left off. During the lockdown period, many of the children spent their time playing or roaming around instead of studying. This became a habit for them and even after schools reopened, children could not regain their interest in studies. Parents further reported that before the COVID-19 pandemic, prevalence of dropout was quite low. Even if students were not as serious in their studies or would not get good grades, they still would attend classes. As COVID-19 struck, the lesser enthusiastic students as well as the studious ones both suffered greatly. However, participants shared that slowly the children have been trying to overcome the learning loss. Even though the education status of people is poor in the area, parents are aware of the importance of education and enrolling their children in schools.

LEGO

Out of the 1239 survey participants, 27 stated that their primary-age children were not enrolled in any government primary schools, BRAC schools, or other kinds of schools at the time of survey data collection. The majority of the OOSC (24 out of 27 children) were male, with the remaining 3 being female. Results showed that children between the ages of 7 and 11 had a higher rate of school dropout (16 out of 27) than those between the ages of 12 and 14 (11 out of 27). Most students (14 out of 27) dropped out in Class 4-5 compared to Class 3 where 6 students dropped out and 4 children dropped out from Class 2, and 3 from Class 1. Most of the students (15 out of 27) dropped out in 2020, 10 dropped out in 2021 and the rest 2 in 2022.

The qualitative findings also explored the reasons for primary school dropout of children. Many of the parents/guardians from Habiganj district commented that the schools are far away for their young children to commute to every day. Parents from the char regions (a piece of land surrounded by water bodies), informed the research team that they often had to use temporarily built bamboo bridges or small boats to reach the mainland. Moreover, these routes become incredibly challenging during the monsoon and flood seasons to use. In severe circumstances, residents become trapped within

their homes when the char lands get completely or partially inundated by rainwater. Consequently, children are unable to attend school due to health and safety concerns. Additionally, a lot of families are still struggling to recover from the financial setback brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, making it hard for them to continue their children's education. One of the BRAC teachers from the Habiganj district also pointed out that natural disasters and poor transportation systems restrict many young learners from accessing quality education.

The majority (24 out of 27) of the OOSC parents/guardians stated that they would be willing to send their children back to school if the circumstances were favourable. A good number of the qualitative participants also showed a strong desire to educate their children in order for them to find better employment and support their families, but most of the families lacked the financial means to do so. Even so, many parents have made every effort to ensure that their children receive an education. Nearly half of the qualitative participants expressed a strong desire to send their children to school so they may get better jobs and support their families.

3.3 LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS OF COHORT 1 AND COHORT 2 STUDENTS

EMDC

Under the EMDC project, aptitude tests were administered among a total of 922 students across the Bhola and Gaibandha districts. Among these 922 students, 447 were cohort 1 students and 475 were cohort 2 students. The student selection

procedure has been described in the methodology section.

For the aptitude test, the total score for Bangla was 40 (written: 35; oral: 5); for English 30 (written: 25;

oral: 5); and for Mathematics 30 (only written). The cumulative aptitude test score was 100 (Bangla – 40, English – 30 and Mathematics – 30). The

aptitude test data of students by their gender and area of residence is presented in Table 5.

		Cohort -1	Cohort -2	Overall
District	Bhola	48% (216)	49% (233)	49% (449)
	Gaibandha	52% (231)	51% (242)	51% (473)
Gender	Boy	43% (191)	49% (183)	41% (374)
	Girl	57% (256)	61% (292)	59% (548)
TOTAL		100% (447)	100% (475)	100% (922)
Note: column percentage reported				

Table 5: Aptitude test data of students (EMDC project)

SUBJECT-WISE SCORES AMONG COHORT 1 AND COHORT 2 STUDENTS

Mean Bangla score of the students was found to be 17.4 while median score was found to be 15 for cohort 1 students. Mean English and Mathematics exam scores for cohort 1 students were found to be 7.0 and 7.23 respectively. The mean Bangla score for cohort2 students was 18.9 while the median score was 20. Mean English and Mathematics exam scores were 12.02 and 10.08 respectively for cohort 2 students.

According to the national standard set by the Government of Bangladesh Education Board, 33 out of 100 marks is considered as a minimum

mark required for promotion to a higher grade among the students. Analyses were performed considering this cut-off to examine what percentage of BEP students receive 33% marks in each of the three subjects – Bangla, English and Mathematics. It was found that 41.6% of the students from cohort 1 could not achieve 33% in Bangla (13.2 out of 40), 66% in English (9.9 out of 30), and 67.7% in Mathematics (9.9 out of 30). On the other hand, less than one-third (29.5%) of the students from cohort2 could not achieve 33% in Bangla, 44% in English and 55.4% in Mathematics.

SPA-III

Under the SPA-III project, the research team administered aptitude tests among 1,061 students in 49 schools. Among the 1,061 students, 620 were cohort1 students and 441 were cohort 2 students. The aptitude test procedure has been

described in the methods section. Table 6 shows the distribution of cohort 1 and cohort 2 students who participated in the aptitude test based on their area of residence and gender.

		Cohort -1	Cohort -2	Total
District	Jamalpur	39% (242)	38% (168)	39% (410)
	Lalmonirhat	15% (92)	22% (95)	18% (187)
	Netrokona	26% (164)	24% (108)	26% (272)
	Rangpur	20% (122)	16% (70)	18% (192)
Gender	Boy	45% (278)	39% (170)	42% (448)
	Girl	55% (342)	61% (271)	58% (613)
TOTAL		100% (620)	100% (441)	100% (1061)
Note: column percentage reported				

Table 6: Aptitude test data of students (SPA-III project)

SUBJECT-WISE SCORES AMONG COHORT 1 AND COHORT 2 STUDENTS

Analysis of subject-wise scores revealed that 13.7% cohort1 students did not receive 33% marks in Bangla as they got less than 13.2 out of 40. Similarly, 20.6% of cohort2 students did not receive 33% marks in Bangla. About three-fifths (39.4%) of the cohort1 students did not receive 33% marks in English, this figure was

32.2% for the cohort2 students. Lastly, 40.3% of cohort1 students did not receive 33% marks in Mathematics, this figure was 37.6% for cohort2 students. Overall, 50.8% of students did not receive 33% marks in any of the three subjects in cohort1 and in cohort 2, 42.4% of students did not receive 33% marks in any of the three subjects.

HEMPEL

Under the HEMPEL project, the research team administered aptitude tests among 1,119 students in 54 schools across the Kurigram district. The aptitude test procedure has been described in the

methods section. Table 7 shows the distribution of cohort 1 students who participated in the aptitude test based on their area of residence and gender.

		Cohort -1
District	Bhurungamari	11% (118)
	Chilmari	13% (141)
	Fulbari	11% (122)
	Kurigram-Sadar	14% (155)
	Nageswari	9% (103)
	Rajarhat	21% (235)
	Rajibpur	5% (61)
	Rowmari	8% (95)
	Ulipur	8% (89)
Subtotal		100% (1119)
Child Gender	Boy	40% (446)
	Girl	60% (673)
TOTAL		100% (1119)

Table 7: Aptitude test data of students (Hempel project)

SUBJECT-WISE SCORES AMONG COHORT 1 STUDENTS

The aptitude test results indicated that 18.1% of the 1119 students received less than 33% marks in Bangla. The analysis also showed that 39.2% of students did not receive 33% marks in

English, whereas about 37.4% of the students did not receive 33% marks in Mathematics. Overall, 49.42 % did not receive 33% marks in any subject in cohort 1.

LEGO

Under the LEGO project, the research team conducted aptitude tests among 561 BEP students in Cox's Bazar district, 296 BEP students in Dinajpur district, and 257 BEP students in

Habiganj district. Table 8 shows the distribution of cohort1 and cohort2 students based on area of residence and gender.

		Cohort -1	Cohort -2	Overall
District	Cox's Bazar	57% (377)	41% (184)	50% (561)
	Dinajpur	25% (164)	29% (132)	27% (296)
	Habiganj	18% (122)	30% (135)	23% (257)
Gender	Boy	45% (302)	40% (179)	43% (481)
	Girl	55% (361)	60% (272)	57% (633)
TOTAL		100% (663)	100% (451)	100% (1114)
Note: column percentage reported				

Table 8: Aptitude test data of students (LEGO project)

SUBJECT-WISE SCORES AMONG COHORT-1 AND COHORT-2 STUDENTS

The aptitude test results revealed that 22.8% of the 663 cohort1 students did not achieve 33% marks in Bangla, whereas 36.8% of the 451 cohort2 students did not achieve 33% marks in Bangla. The analysis also showed that 42.8% of cohort 1 students were not able to achieve 33% marks in English, whereas this percentage was 33.9% among cohort 2 students. About 44% of

cohort1 students did not achieve 33% marks in Mathematics, while 47.9% among cohort 2 students did. Overall, 57.5% of the cohort1 students did not achieve 33% marks in any of the three subjects and 58.5% of the cohort 2 students did not achieve 33% marks in any of the subjects in the study districts.

3.4 SUBJECT-WISE SCORES OF STUDENTS BASED IN THE STUDY DISTRICTS OF THE 4 PROJECTS

Table 9 shows Bangla scores of BEP students for all the 4 projects. According to Table 9, in Bangla subject, Gaibandha (52%) has the highest number of cohort1 children who did not receive 33% scores, followed by Habiganj (43%) and Bhola (31%) districts. On the other hand, when it comes

to cohort2 students, Habiganj ranks the highest (56%) in having children who did not receive the 33% marks in Bangla followed by Lalmonirhat (40%) and Gaibandha (39%) districts.

Name of district	Bangla Score			
	Cohort -2		Cohort -2	
	<33% (below 13.2 out of 40)	>33%	<33% (below 13.2 out of 40)	>33%
Jamalpur	14% (35)	86% (207)	21% (36)	79% (132)
Lalmonirhat	23% (21)	77% (71)	40% (39)	60% (56)
Netrokona	5% (8)	95% (156)	16% (17)	84% (91)
Rangpur	17% (21)	83% (101)	0% (0)	100% (70)
Bhola	31% (67)	69% (149)	19% (45)	81% (188)
Gaibandha	52% (119)	48% (112)	39% (95)	61% (147)
Kurigram	18% (203)	82% (916)	**	**
Cox's Bazar	24% (89)	76% (288)	35% (65)	65% (119)
Dinajpur	5% (9)	95% (155)	19% (25)	81% (107)
Habiganj	43% (53)	57% (69)	56% (76)	44% (59)
Note: Column percentage reported **Kurigram did not host cohort2 students				

Table 9: Bangla scores of students according to study districts

As Table 10 portrays, in the English subject, Gaibandha (73%) has the highest number of children who did not receive 33% scores in cohort1, followed by Habiganj (66%) and Bhola (59%) districts. On the other hand, when it comes

to cohort2, both Gaibandha and Habiganj rank the highest (54%) in having children who did not receive the 33% marks in English followed by Lalmonirhat (47%) and Jamalpur (36%) districts.

Name of district	Total English Score			
	Cohort -2		Cohort -2	
	<33% (below 9.9 out of 30)	>33%	<33% (below 9.9 out of 30)	>33%
Jamalpur	44% (106)	56% (136)	36% (60)	64% (108)
Lalmonirhat	57% (52)	43% (40)	47% (45)	53% (50)
Netrokona	16% (27)	84% (137)	33% (36)	67% (72)
Rangpur	48% (59)	52% (63)	1% (1)	99% (69)
Bhola	59% (127)	41% (89)	34% (79)	66% (154)
Gaibandha	73% (168)	27% (63)	54% (130)	46% (112)
Kurigram	39% (439)	61% (680)	**	**
Cox's Bazar	47% (177)	53% (200)	33% (60)	67% (124)
Dinajpur	16% (26)	84% (138)	15% (20)	85% (112)
Habiganj	66% (81)	34% (41)	54% (73)	46% (62)
*Column percentage reported **Kurigram did not host Cohort 2				

Table 10: English score of students according to study districts

As Table 11 reflects, in Mathematics, Gaibandha (77%) has the highest number of cohort1 students who did not receive 33% scores, followed by Habiganj (74%) and Lalmonirhat (59%) districts. On the other hand, when it comes to cohort 2

students, Habiganj ranks the highest (73%) in having children who did not receive 33% marks in Mathematics followed by Gaibandha (64%) and Lalmonirhat (48%) districts.

Name of district	Total Mathematics Score			
	Cohort -2		Cohort -2	
	<33% (below 9.9 out of 30)	>33%	<33% (below 9.9 out of 30)	>33%
Jamalpur	49% (118)	51% (124)	43% (73)	57% (95)
Lalmonirhat	59% (54)	41% (38)	48% (46)	52% (49)
Netrokona	21% (34)	79% (130)	43% (46)	57% (62)
Rangpur	36% (44)	64% (78)	1% (1)	99% (69)
Bhola	58% (126)	42% (90)	46% (107)	54% (126)
Gaibandha	77% (176)	23% (54)	64% (156)	36% (86)
Kurigram	37% (418)	63% (700)	**	**
Cox's Bazar	44% (167)	56% (210)	39% (71)	61% (113)
Dinajpur	21% (34)	79% (130)	36% (47)	64% (85)
Habiganj	74% (90)	26% (32)	73% (98)	27% (37)
*Column percentage reported **Kurigram did not host Cohort 2				

Table 11: Mathematics score of students according to study districts

3.5 SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL STATUS OF COHORT 1 AND COHORT 2 STUDENTS

We employed a behavioural screening questionnaire called the “Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)” to evaluate the social-emotional well-being of students. The teacher version of the SDQ was used. More details are available here <https://www.sdqinfo.org/a0.html>.

The SDQ is especially suitable for community samples since it places attention on both strengths and challenges (abstract). Numerous sizable epidemiological investigations have utilised it. Since the SDQ is a dimensional measure

over its whole range and each additional point corresponds to a higher rate of disorder, it is well suited for research of the general population.

The 25 items in the SDQ have five scales: prosocial behaviour (5 items), conduct issues (5 items), hyperactivity/inattention (5 items), peer interaction issues (5 items), and emotional symptoms (5 items).

EMDC

Three groups of normal, borderline, and abnormal SDQ scores were created. Observing that 80% of the children scored “normal,” 10% scored borderline, and 10% scored abnormally allowed researchers to establish the cut limits for these categories. In the two study locations, the Bhola and Gaibandha districts, a total of 938 data on the children’s social-emotional skills were gathered from the teachers of BRAC schools. It was revealed that the majority of the students have the necessary socio-emotional skills. The

majority (98%) of the students are unlikely to have a serious emotional issue. Additionally, it is doubtful that 97% of the students will experience serious social difficulties (Table 12). It is important to remember that there is a risk of bias because teachers gave the SDQ-19 evaluation data. There is a probability that the teachers were not fully aware of the students’ socio-emotional skills because the bulk of the teachers were recently hired (and so had less experience) and had only two months to get to know the students.

Teachers completed SDQ	Cohort -2			Cohort -2		
	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)
Total difficulties score	431 (93.49)	21 (4.56)	9 (1.95)	447 (93.71)	22 (4.61)	8 (1.68)
Emotional problems score	451 (97.83)	2 (0.43)	8 (1.74)	469 (98.32)	4 (0.84)	4 (0.84)
Conduct problems score	413 (89.59)	20 (4.34)	28 (6.07)	423 (88.68)	19 (3.98)	35 (7.34)
Hyperactivity score	427 (92.62)	7 (1.52)	27 (5.86)	453 (94.97)	10 (2.1)	14 (2.94)
Peer problems score	417 (90.46)	36 (7.81)	8 (1.74)	446 (93.50)	23 (4.82)	8 (1.68)
Prosocial score	447 (96.96)	7 (1.52)	7 (1.52)	469 (98.32)	4 (0.84)	4 (0.84)

Table 12: Social-emotional skills of cohort1 and cohort2 students for EMDC project

SPA-III

When it comes to socio-emotional attributes of students involved in SPA-III project, Table 13 shows that most of the students are unlikely to have emotional and social conduct problems (93.2% and 81.65% respectively). On the other hand, 30.06% of students are likely to be hyperactive. Besides, most children are unlikely

to have significant problems in mixing with their peers (11.23%) whereas only 18.35% are at risk of significant problems in social behaviour.

Teachers completed SDQ	Cohort -2			Cohort -2		
	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)
Total difficulties score	454 (71.84)	112 (17.72)	66 (10.44)	355 (79.42)	61 (13.65)	31 (6.94)
Emotional problems score	589 (93.2)	32 (5.06)	11 (1.74)	424 (94.85)	14 (3.13)	9 (2.01)
Conduct problems score	516 (81.65)	53 (8.39)	63 (9.97)	363 (81.21)	38 (8.5)	46 (10.29)
Hyperactivity score	442 (69.94)	77 (12.18)	113 (17.88)	346 (77.4)	42 (9.4)	59 (13.2)
Peer problems score	561 (88.77)	35 (5.54)	36 (5.7)	396 (88.59)	33 (7.38)	18 (4.03)
Prosocial score	516 (81.65)	72 (11.39)	44 (6.96)	412 (92.17)	27 (6.04)	8 (1.79)

Table 13: Social-emotional skills of cohort1 and cohort2 students for SPA-III project

HEMPEL

Table 14 shows that most of the students are in a good state of mental health and psychosocial well-being. Among all the students, 98.6% are unlikely to have a significant emotional problem.

Besides, most children are unlikely to have significant problems in mixing with their peers (10.50%) whereas only 4.55% are at risk of significant problems in social behaviour.

Teachers completed SDQ	Cohort -1		
	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)
Total difficulties score	1177 (92.24)	65 (5.09)	34 (2.66)
Emotional problems score	1258 (98.59)	5 (0.39)	13 (1.02)
Conduct problems score	1135 (88.95)	77 (6.03)	64 (5.02)
Hyperactivity score	1074 (84.17)	83 (6.50)	119 (9.33)
Peer problems score	1142 (89.50)	83 (6.50)	51 (4.00)
Prosocial score	1218 (95.45)	37 (2.90)	21 (1.65)

Table 14: Social-emotional skills of cohort 1 students for Hempel project

LEGO

From Table 15, it can be concluded that most of the cohort1 and cohort2 students are likely to exhibit positive social-emotional wellbeing.

A small proportion of the students (less than 10 percent) from both the cohorts exhibit poor emotional state.

Teachers completed SDQ	Cohort -1			Cohort -2		
	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)	Normal n (%)	Borderline n (%)	Abnormal n (%)
Total difficulties score	541 (80.75)	81 (12.09)	48 (7.16)	387 (86.38)	27 (6.03)	34 (7.59)
Emotional problems score	633 (94.48)	9 (1.34)	28 (4.18)	408 (91.07)	3 (0.67)	37 (8.26)
Conduct problems score	597 (89.10)	26 (3.88)	47 (7.01)	418 (93.30)	14 (3.13)	16 (3.57)
Hyperactivity score	504 (75.22)	55 (8.21)	111 (16.57)	363 (81.03)	45 (10.04)	40 (8.93)
Peer problems score	567 (84.63)	79 (11.79)	24 (3.58)	394 (87.95)	42 (9.38)	12 (2.68)
Prosocial score	612 (91.34)	30 (4.48)	28 (4.18)	413 (92.19)	24 (5.36)	11 (2.46)

Table 15: Social-emotional skills of cohort 1 and cohort 2 students for LEGO project

3.6 VALUE-FOR-MONEY

ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY

EMDC

The estimate showed that among the total cost of the programme (BDT 75.5 million), learner cost accounted for about 26% of the total cost (BDT 19.8 million) followed by supervision and monitoring cost, infrastructure cost, teachers cost and teacher development cost accounting for 20% (BDT 15.2 million), 19% (BDT 14.05 million), 18% (BDT 13.6 million) and 17% (BDT 12.8 million) respectively. Besides, programme development cost accounted for 20% of the

total programme cost (BDT 15.2 million) and programme implementation cost was responsible for 80% of the total programme cost (BDT 60.3 million). In terms of unit costs, it was found that over the period of the initial 7 months of the EMDC programme (December 2021 – July 2022), the average cost per school was BDT 116,103 and per month the cost was about BDT 14,513. Besides, the cost per child per month was found as BDT 581 which can be around BDT 5,573

yearly (forecast based on the programme budget). Since the Accelerated learning programme is ongoing and we could collect expenditure data for only seven months, we looked at the expenditure pattern across those months. Figure 2 shows that over the months, supervision and monitoring costs remained almost the same. In the early

months, there were larger costs for teacher development (arrangement of training, refresher sessions etc.). Since April, teachers' costs have remained almost the same. In addition, most of the infrastructure costs were incurred during the initiation of the programme.

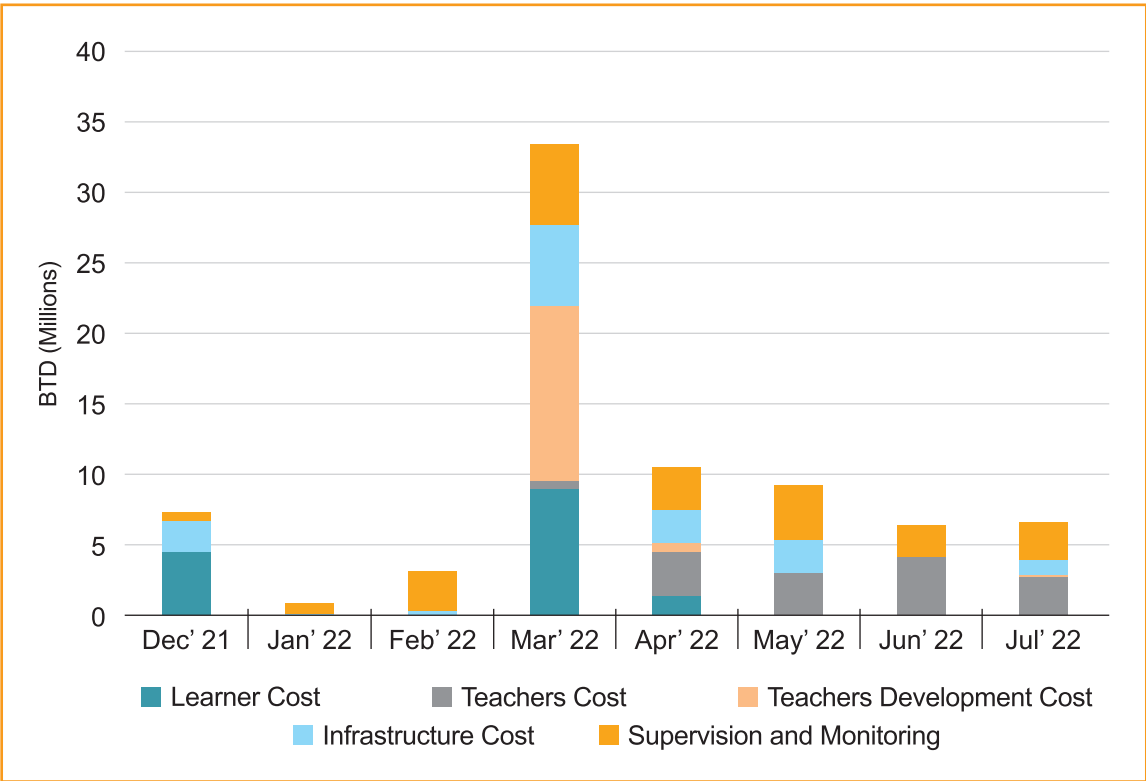


Figure 2: Distribution of different cost items over different months (EMDC)

SPA-III

The estimate showed that among the total cost of the programme (BDT 228.6 million), that teachers costs accounted for about 23% of the total cost (BDT 51.5 million) followed by supervision and monitoring accounting for 21% (BDT 48.8 million), learner cost at 20% (BDT 46.5 million), and teacher development and infrastructure cost each 18% (BDT 41 million each). Besides, programme development cost accounted for 19%

of the total programme cost (BDT 43.2 million) and programme implementation cost was responsible for 81% of the total programme cost (BDT 185.4 million). In terms of unit costs, it was found that over the period of January 2022 – July 2022, the average cost per school was BDT 102,492 and per month the cost was about BDT 14,642. Besides, the cost per child per month was found as BDT 584 which can be around BDT 5,337 yearly

(based on the programme budget). Looking at the expenditure pattern across different months, it was observed that over the months, supervision and monitoring costs remained almost the same. In the early months, there were larger costs for teacher development (arrangement of training,

refresher sessions etc.). Since April, teachers' costs have remained almost the same. In addition, most of the infrastructure costs were incurred during the initiation of the programme.

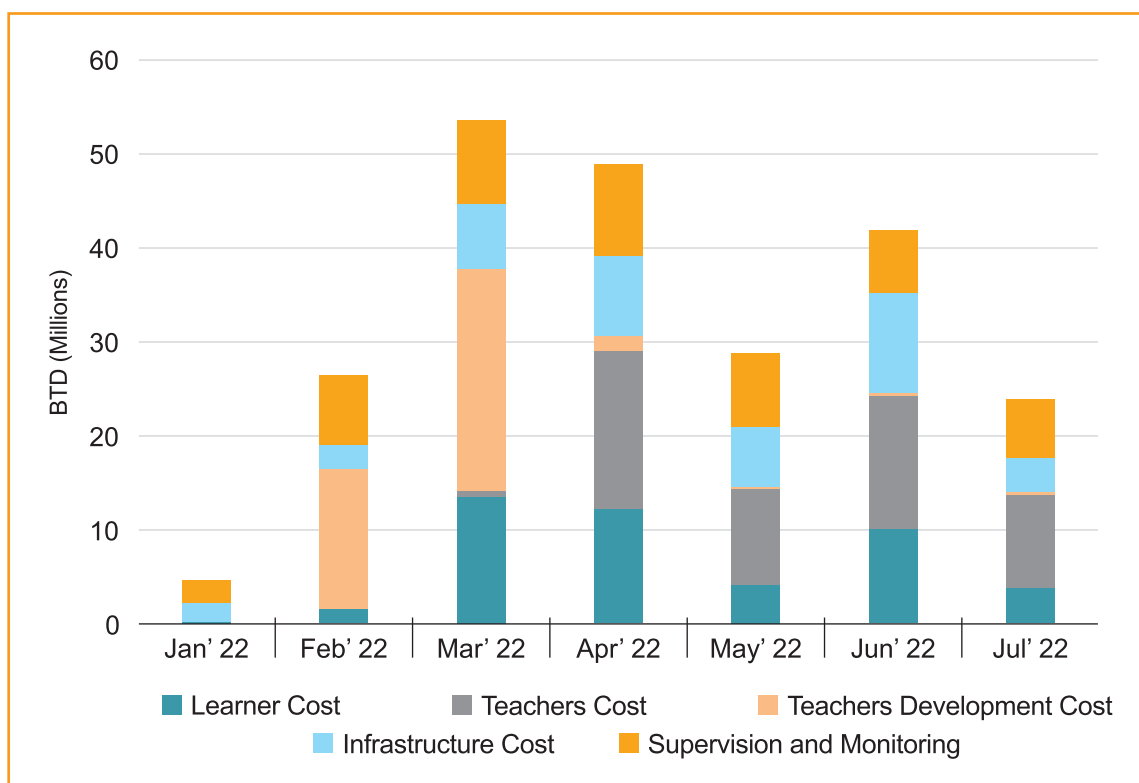


Figure 3: Distribution of different cost items over different months (SPA-III)

HEMPEL

The estimate showed that among the total cost of the programme (BDT 29.1 million), teachers' costs accounted for about 27% of the total cost (BDT 7.9 million) followed by learner cost accounting for 23% (BDT 6.8 million), infrastructure and teacher development costs each 17% (BDT 4.9 million each), and supervision, and monitoring cost 16% (BDT 4.6 million). Besides, programme development cost accounted for 19% of the total programme cost (BDT 4.8 million) and programme

implementation cost was responsible for 81% of the total programme cost (BDT 24.3 million). In terms of unit costs, it was found that over the period of January 2022 – July 2022, the average cost per school was BDT 86,958 and per month the cost was about BDT 12,423. Besides, the cost per child per month was found as BDT 497 which can be around BDT 8,124 yearly (based on the programme budget). Looking at the expenditure pattern across different months, it was observed

that over the months, supervision and monitoring costs remained almost the same. In the early months, there were larger costs for teacher development (arrangement of training, refresher

sessions etc.) (e.g., in March). Since March, learner costs, teachers' costs, and infrastructure costs have remained almost the same.

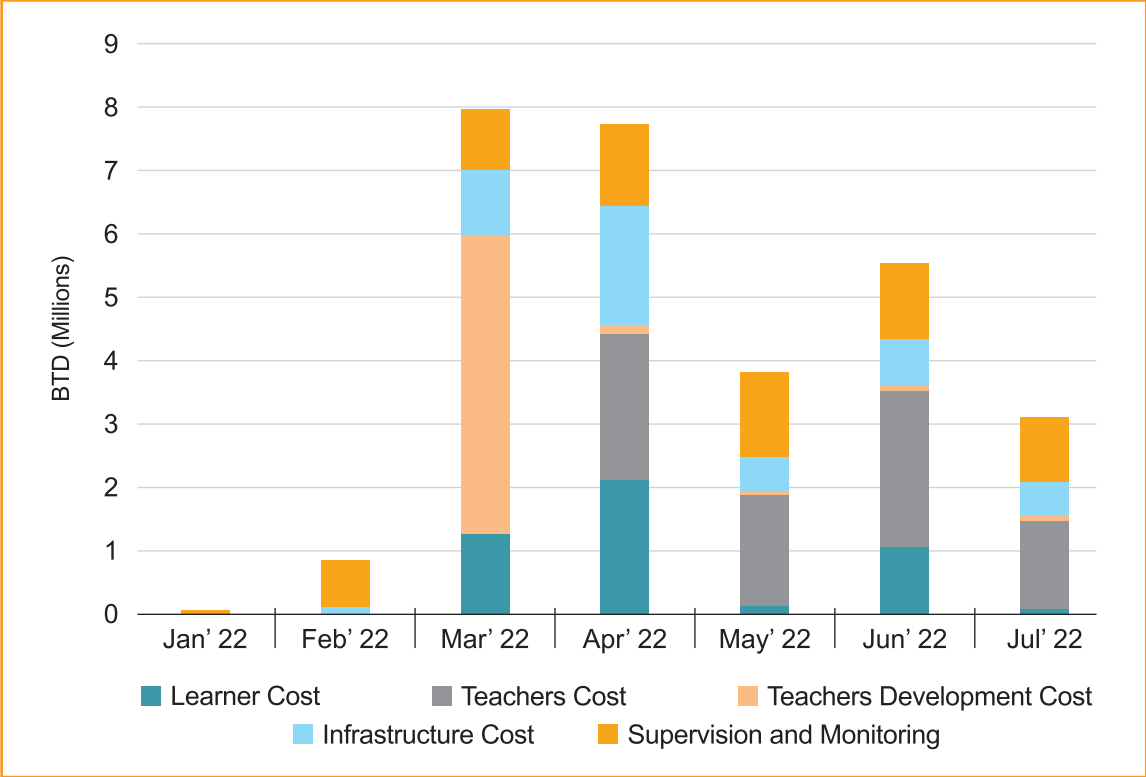


Figure 4: Distribution of different cost items over different months (HEMPEL)

LEGO

The estimate shows that among the total cost of the programme (BDT 117.1 million), teachers' costs accounted for about 27% (BDT 31.5 million) followed by learner cost 25 % (BDT 28.9 million), supervision and monitoring costs accounting for 18% (BDT 21.1 million), teacher development cost 17% (BDT 19.8 million) and infrastructure cost 13 percent (BDT 15.8 million). Besides, programme development cost accounted for 19% of the total programme cost (BDT 22.3 million) and programme implementation cost was responsible for 81% of the total programme cost (BDT 94.8 million). In terms of unit costs, it was found that over the period of January 2022 – July 2022, the

average cost per school was BDT 83,682 and per month the cost was about BDT 11,955. Besides, the cost per child per month was found as BDT 470 which can be around BDT 7,891 yearly (based on the programme budget). Looking at the expenditure pattern across different months, it was observed that over the months, supervision and monitoring costs remained almost the same. In the early months, there were larger costs for teacher development (arrangement of training, refresher sessions etc.). Since April, teachers' costs and infrastructure costs have remained almost the same.

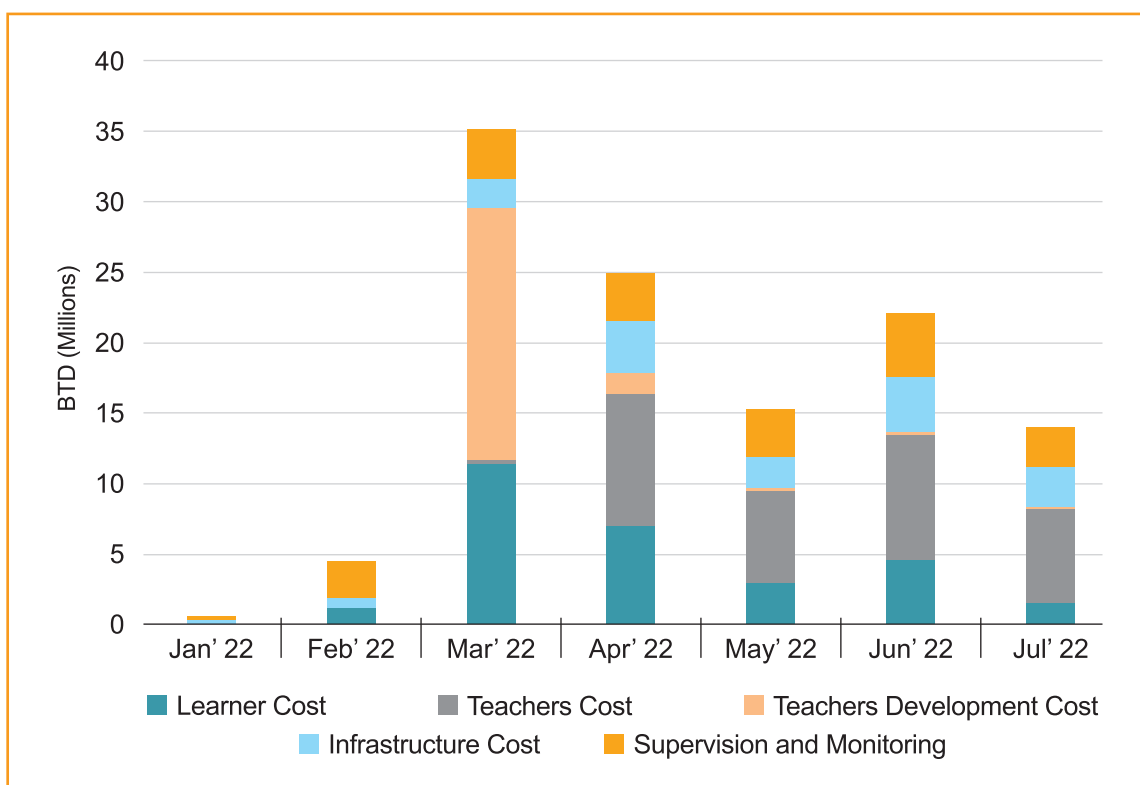


Figure 5: Distribution of different cost items over different months (LEGO)

EFFECTIVENESS, COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND EQUITY

Several indicators were identified to evaluate effectiveness and cost-effectiveness: retention rate as the percentage of graduated students who transitioned to formal primary schools, transition rate as a percentage of graduates, and students result in National exams (PECE/ JSC/ SSC) and/or, achievement results from alternate measurement. Once the programme is completed and the endline evaluation is done, we will be able to understand the improvement in the indicators and then we will be able to analyse the effectiveness as well as cost-effectiveness of the programme following the indicators. Equity can be evaluated by looking at different indicators: percentage of students from hard-to-reach areas, percentage of students in climate vulnerable areas, percentage of students who are girls, percentage of students with disabilities, percentage of students from ethnic populations, and percentage

of recruited teachers who are females. Based on the MIS data we could avail, we found that in the BEP's accelerated learning programme, girls and children with a disability had greater accessibility (EMDC: 57.42 percent girls and 4.41 percent students with disabilities; SPA- III: 56.75 percent girls and 4.81 percent students with disabilities; HEMPEL: 56.19 percent girls and 4.81 percent students with disabilities; LEGO: 55.92 percent girls and 4.43 percent students with disabilities. Though in terms of effectiveness, most of the effectiveness and equity indicators could not be calculated due to the unavailability of relevant data since the current study is basically doing a baseline assessment, nevertheless based on the MIS data we could avail so far, it is worth saying that the programme is ensuring equity by giving an emphasis on enrolling girl children as well as children with disabilities in the schools.

3.7 CHALLENGES BEP ENCOUNTERED WHILE IMPLEMENTING THE INTERVENTION (ACCELERATED MODEL SCHOOLS)

EMDC

Qualitative findings revealed that the BEP team experienced several challenges while implementing the Accelerated model intervention. One of the main challenges mentioned by some of the key informants was the misunderstanding of

the study approach and course content at BRAC schools. The parents were unsure of how BRAC schools would complete two years of study in just ten months.

“The guardians were almost certain that we will compromise with the quality of the education, and we will not cover many areas in this Accelerated model.” [BEP staff, Bhola, KII]

It was not a simple effort to convince parents to bring their children to school, therefore BEP officials and teachers went door to door to explain the course structure and learning approach. During the awareness-raising visits, it was

highlighted how the gaps in their child’s education would be eliminated and how it would be simpler for the dropout children to enrol in government primary schools whenever they were ready. According to one KII participant,

“The programme is good, but the common people are facing difficulties understanding the course structure. A few of the parents also thought this was just a plot to extract money from the donours. It was very hard to collect children from the households at the initial stage. We were in doubt if we would be able to gather enough students to continue the school.” [BEP staff, Gaibandha, KII]

Once the school was set up and running, the teachers recognized it would be very challenging to finish the entire curriculum in 10 months. The ability of each child to learn new things varied, and no two students were of the same calibre. Thus, the amount of time needed for each student to finish a lesson differed. The teachers are doing their utmost to adhere to their promise to the parents that they will finish the entire curriculum in 10 months.

The teachers shared that they enjoy teaching disadvantaged students and doing something for them. That gives them happiness. Proper education will help them get established in life and they will become successful in many aspects of life, which will be a proud moment

for the teachers. However, during the interviews several teachers mentioned that BEP could have provided comprehensive training on the Accelerated model, teaching methods, course structure, and school management.

In order to ensure accountability and the efficient operation of the schools, BEP staff and BEP schoolteachers attempted to establish School Management Committees (SMC) with the participation of local community people, local leaders, and parents/caregivers of the OOSC. However, little data about the establishing process could be gathered during the baseline phase. The key informants were optimistic that the committee would operate at full capacity once the schools resume operations.

SPA-III

One key informant interviewed for the SPA-III project mentioned that it was difficult for them to find suitable teachers for the Accelerated Model school. They were required to adhere to a number of standards while considering the COVID-19 pandemic's effects. Many qualified

and experienced teachers had to be passed over because not all teachers owned digital devices and were comfortable delivering education through online platforms. As a result, before being hired, teachers had to pass a stringent set of hiring requirements. He mentioned that-

“Identifying qualified teachers for school was a major challenge.” (BEP staff, Netrokona, KII)

KII participants also reported facing political influence while recruiting BRAC school teachers for Accelerated Model school. According to a participant,

Once I had to recruit a teacher because the PS of a Minister recommended her. For being a teacher in BRAC school, one needs to qualify in the exam. That time she didn't get the minimum required marks. But I had to select her. As the PS of a Minister called me directly. I made them understand she is not qualified for this post. But then he asked me to select the other teachers fairly but gave a condition that she needs to be recruited. (BEP staff, Jamalpur, KII).

Qualitative findings suggest that Rangpur, Jamalpur and Netrokona are flood prone areas. And Lalmonirhat is surrounded by rivers. As a

result, during floods, commuting is difficult. Mother of a dropout children from Jamalpur shared-

“Several times we faced problems due to flooding. At that time school remained totally off. No one can go outside. Students from UttarPara are unable to come here in times of flood. Sometimes school remains open, our children can go but many students cannot. If the new road can be built from Uttar para, it will be helpful for the students to attend school in the time of any natural calamities.” (Mother of dropout child, Jamalpur, IDI)

KII participants noted that many parents, particularly those who were experiencing financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, opted to send their children out into the fields throughout the season to earn money. Parents who worked in

the fields as farmers during harvest times choose to keep their children at home to help in the fields since making a living becomes their priority. One key informant from Jamalpur shared:

“For surviving people face several problems. As some Unions are already floating in the rain, people shifted to other places. Their houses as well as land are also floated. For survival they've shifted to different places. Here some people are running vans or working on other's land. Hence if anyone has three or four children, they're facing difficulties to continue their education. As their earnings are very low, which is needed for their survival. Sometimes they send their child to work for others.” (BEP staff, Jamalpur, KII)

Qualitative findings also suggest that some of the parents perceived COVID-19 to be a curse from God and as a result, they send their children to

madrasas which they believe, is a good path to save themselves from the curse. They are now reluctant to bring their children back to school.

“Parents enrolled children to madrasas and are now reluctant to bring them back to the mainstream schools. Some parents also thought that the COVID-19 pandemic was a curse from God, and keeping their children in madrasas is better since their children are on a religious path in madrasas.” (BEP staff, Netrokona, KI)

HEMPEL

The qualitative interviews under the HEMPEL funded project revealed that many students had migrated to Dhaka for employment and were not as concerned about education as they previously were. Overcoming the financial burden was more important to some of the families, for which the parents as well as the children resorted to choosing earning mediums instead of spending on education. However, BEP were able to deal with some of those factors through parents’ meetings and raising awareness in the community. A BEP Programme Organiser from Nageswari mentioned that, even though usually community members are sceptical about new programmes being introduced in such places, the community members were relatively very welcoming towards this initiative by BRAC.

Findings from an FGD in Kurigram district revealed that the area is infrastructurally very underdeveloped with very poor road conditions. Going to another union for important work is nearly impossible because the roads are not appropriate for transit. Since they are too far

from homes, schools and madrasa classes are missed by students quite frequently. Besides, the unavailability of electricity at schools at times created operational difficulties for the teachers. And during warmer weather, not having enough fans made attending classes even more difficult for the students and teachers.

Despite a good level of awareness among parents and their willingness to educate their children, people of Kurigram have been struggling to attain education especially since the area is prone to natural disasters, which not only hampers the roads and transportation for the people, but also increases their financial burden. With floods making the road conditions worse, young children find it even more difficult to travel long distances to attend schools. Parents worry about the safety and security of their children when traveling far, for which many children stop going to school. Besides, mothers often favour keeping their daughters at home to take care of younger children rather than enrolling them in schools.

“If I send her to a school, who will take care of my little son? I have no one to take care of him. My house is surrounded by flood water, so I feel so insecure about my little son. Tell me how I can send her to the school in this situation.” (Mother of drop out child, Rowmari Kurigram, IDI)

Qualitative findings further revealed that a good number of parents are enthusiastic about educating their children and also encourage

their community members to do the same. They understand the importance of education and think of it as a mandatory step towards getting a better

life and it cannot be ignored. And if the children are able to get educated and get well paid jobs, they would be able to take care of the parents just like their parents did. And since many of the parents

are uneducated, they realise the sufferings that come with illiteracy and hence, do not want their children to suffer the same way.

“I am illiterate. I cannot feel the touch of education due to poverty. But I want to make my children educated at any cost. So, they can get a secure future. I wish for a better life for them where they do not need to struggle like me.” (Mother of drop out child, Chilmari, Kurigram, IDI)

According to the participants, children in Nageswari have become more regular when it comes to attending schools and the dropout rates have decreased. An Upazila education Officer from Nageshwari informed that around 60% of children are enrolled in schools with very few dropouts. Despite their economic conditions,

parents have been making sure to send their children to schools and finish their education in this area. Even if parents could not admit their children to BRAC schools, they opted for madrasas or primary schools to continue their children's education.

LEGO

For the LEGO funded project, it was found that the BEP schools implemented several alternative learning facilities for the students to learn about both academic and life skills. The community people and parents who were aware of BRAC schools informed that the children were taught about social-emotional skills, counting/financial literacy skills, savings and many other life skills. The BEP school teachers were found to be highly respected in the school's neighbourhood, however, lack of digital proficiency has become

a challenge for a number of BEP teachers to overcome. Besides, a good number of teachers lacked the necessary skills and competencies to teach children with disabilities. They found it difficult to give the children the assistance they need, especially those who have hearing impairment and intellectual disability, because not all of the enrolled students with disabilities had the same sort of disability. One of the KI participant said,

“The teacher works with an intellectually disabled girl who cannot read or write but attends classes. She is not like the rest of the students and is behaved badly with. More time and effort are required for her compared to the rest of the students.” (BEP staff, Cox's Bazar, KI)

The qualitative findings also explored the reasons parents are not sending their children to schools. Many of the parents/guardians commented that the schools are too far away for their young children to commute to every day. Parents from the char regions (a piece of land surrounded by water bodies), informed the research team that they often had to use temporarily built bamboo bridges

or small boats to reach the mainland. Moreover, these routes become incredibly challenging during the monsoon and flood seasons to use. In severe circumstances, residents become trapped within their homes when the char lands get completely or partially inundated by rainwater. Consequently, children are unable to attend school due to health and safety concerns. Additionally, a good number

of families are still struggling to recover from the financial setback brought on by the pandemic, making it hard for them to pay their children for long-distance travel to school. One of the BRAC

teachers from the Habiganj district pointed out that natural disasters and poor transportation systems restricted many young learners from accessing quality education. She stated that,

“They cannot go to school when water levels rise during the monsoon. If they wish to study, they have to travel long distances by boat.” (BRAC teacher, Habiganj, KII)

One of the female SMC members from the Habiganj district highlighted the association between poor transportation system and gender of the child.

The member pointed out how parents are more concerned about sending their daughters to distant location schools.

“Distance of schools prevents female students from being regular in school because of safety issues.” (SMC member, Habiganj, FGD)



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CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Through the baseline studies, the research team received a number of recommendations from different study participants. Many parents believe that BEP schools are reliable, in secure locations where they may send their children to receive a high-quality education. Many parents suggested that the BEP schools offer snacks and

stipends to entice more OOSC to enrol back in classes. It was disclosed that many children from low-income families depend on the school lunch programme to get nourishing meals. As a result, the low-income parents asked BEP to set up a system of nutritious meals for the young children.

“Parents think BRAC should encourage the children by giving incentives like snacks and stipend, so that they are motivated to study better.” (Parent of drop out child, Habiganj, FGD)

Many parents were hesitant to enrol their children in BRAC schools because they worry that they would have a hard time transitioning to other schools once they graduate from BRAC. The parents feel that 10 months is not long enough for the children, and they would prefer BRAC schools to hold longer years, at the very least through elementary or primary school, to ensure that their

children receive a high-quality education. Parents are happy with the guidance and attention given by BRAC educators, but many are concerned about the change from BRAC to other schools once their child's course is finished because children also dislike being exposed to changing locations and teaching techniques so regularly. One parent shared,

“After 10 months, I have to take my child away to another school. I need to find a safe, secure school like BRAC but there are almost none like that here. I have to take her to Shibpur School, but their education will not be like BRAC school.” (Parent of drop out child, Dinajpur, FGD)

She continued by saying,

“Parents also want their children to study up to class 5 from BRAC schools because the children cannot cope with the sudden shift from BRAC schools to other schools. Difficulties in coping up make them lose confidence in studies all over again.” (Parent of drop out child, Dinajpur, FGD)

More infrastructure and academic support were sought by the parents as BEP schools aim to enrol at least 3% of students with disabilities. The parents suggested that the BEP schools should be made disability friendly. They further mentioned that access to transportation is a big challenge for children with disabilities. Hence, to make it easier for young children with disabilities to commute, more BEP schools should be established in different areas. Also, to improve the participation of students with disabilities in the schools, assistive devices (glasses for mild

visual impairments, wheelchairs for students with physical disabilities etc.) can be given to those who need them. This would motivate and encourage parents of children with disabilities to enrol their children in BRAC schools.

As schools throughout the world are now rapidly adapting to technological changes due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and to further achieve digitalization, it might be beneficial for Accelerated Model schools to standardise their classrooms according to global standards and incorporate

facilities such as chairs, tables and usage of laptop if resources are available.

In various interviews with key informants, it was suggested that parents and guardians should be more aware of the importance of continuing education of OOSC. Many qualitative participants claimed that some children and families are unaware of the value of education or its long-term advantages. It was recommended that parents be informed of the advantages that education provides for a child's intellectual and moral development. Also, students need to be

sensitised because, at such a young age, they are unaware of the possible advantages that education may have in their life.

Apart from that, a BRAC educator from Jamalpur suggested that the student to teacher ratio needs to be improved. More teachers need to be hired so that they can better manage the students. Recruiting more teachers would mean that more students would be able to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by the BRAC schools.

“Each teacher has to take 7 classes, which is really tiresome. So, if the number of teachers increases then it would be more feasible for all of us.” (BRAC Educator, Jamalpur, KII)

It can be concluded that through the Accelerated Model intervention implemented by BEP, there are positive changes occurring in the BRAC schools and the localities surrounding the schools, even though the current conditions of learning loss and dropout rates have been significantly high compared to the years before

COVID-19. Additionally, with the aid of the models put into place, the literacy and numeracy levels of the OOSC as well as the circumstances of their community, societal values, and financial situation are likely to improve which would help to minimise learning loss and close the overall education gap that has existed for COVID-19.

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