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Research Article

Parents' perceptions of sending their children to primary school during the COVID-19 pandemic in Dhaka North City (DNC), Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Like other developing countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously affected the public's mental and physical health in Bangladesh. People, especially, in the country's capital city, Dhaka, have suffered as a serious consequence of the pandemic in various ways, for instance, fear, stress, sadness, isolation, and loneliness. The study investigates parents' perceptions of sending their children to kindergarten or primary school during the COVID-19 pandemic in Dhaka North City (DNCC), Bangladesh. The research employs several qualitative tools for answering the stated questions and objectives. Adopting a purposive sampling procedure, 30 informants from two wards were selected in the DNC area. We examine the "Field Theory" approach developed by Brager and Holloway to prepare the interview guide administered to these 30 informants. Apart from in-depth interviews, the study utilizes focus group discussions (FGDs) to obtain comprehensive data from them. The study reveals that parents have various perceptions about sending their children to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, making decisions based on psychological state, behavior patterns, quality education, and school safety measures. Parents feel insecure about sending their children to school as the institutional authorities are unaware of sanitizing the premises. As well, quality education greatly concerns the parents making such decisions about sending their children to school. The study recommends that the government, school authorities, and guardians take safety measures seriously inside the homes and the schools' premises to help ensure children can safely attend primary schools.

Keywords: parents' perceptions; COVID-19 pandemic; primary school; field theory; qualitative method; Bangladesh

1. Rationality of the study

COVID-19 has dramatically impacted many societies worldwide[1], especially their economic, healthcare, and social system[2,3]. Similarly, education, irrespective of primary, secondary, or tertiary levels, has been seriously disrupted worldwide due to imposed lockdowns. Students, especially at the primary school level, are vulnerable as many educational institutions physically closed down in many countries[4,5], and they continue their studies via distance learning or online platforms[6–8]. Around 45 countries throughout the world did close down their educational institutions. The primary purpose of the closure was and still is to control the rate of

transmission of this pandemic among children[9]. School closures generated substantial problems and inconsistencies in providing good quality education.

The developed countries recouped rapidly by taking various initiatives to ensure an uninterrupted education system. The United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), and many European countries launched innovative ways of distributing learning materials through the Internet to ensure a smooth transition of studies to take place at home[10]. Conversely, countries from the developing world, particularly in the South-Asian region, suffered significant losses in providing education during this pandemic[11]. Many low and middle-class families lost their jobs, and many school-aged children dropped out of school to assist their families[5,8]. The World Bank (2021) stated that in 2020, 1.6 billion children dropped out worldwide, and the South-Asian region suffered a loss of 622 billion due to the closure of schools. The concern is now for many dropout students who still need access to appropriate digital resources to support the continuation of their education through online systems[12].

On 17 March 2020, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) enacted a widespread lockdown in rural and urban areas to reduce the risk of coronavirus transmission[13]. As a result, educational institutions were kept closed to ensure students' safety and stop the spread of COVID-19. However, evidence shows that this closure of educational institutions has created an education gap, and around 39 million students have been seriously affected. Although policymakers have generated and proposed innovative learning methods to reduce the problems of access to learning[14], scholars now reveal that participatory education cannot be effectively ensured through online learning systems. Studies pinpointed that people living in rural areas lack the necessary digital equipment, internet connection, and well-qualified and technically competent teachers[15]. These factors have created severe barriers to providing online education. Primary school students have suffered more than the secondary-level, and university-level students, as many lack self-regulating abilities to learn via distance education[8,10]. In addition, teachers at the primary school level in Bangladesh cannot effectively use electronic devices or digital media to teach students[16]. Therefore, it has become a significant challenge to continue undisrupted and ensure quality education among primary school-going children using online platforms.

Many scholars, educators, teachers, and parents agree that educational institutions should be open to school-parent cooperation and mutual support, aiming to bring about effective learning outcomes[17]. A few researchers reveal that some parents fear sending their children to school due to health and safety concerns, particularly at the primary school level. Zhan et al. noted that some factors are responsible for the willingness or unwillingness of parents to send their children to school during the COVID-19 outbreak[18]. Parents prefer to send their children to school, considering the learning effectiveness and school environment, and it is a hard habit to break. School-aged children are more vulnerable and need more awareness or awareness about school safety measures. Evidence pointed out that a few researches have been carried out to explore parents' perceptions of sending their children to educational institutions, particularly at the kindergarten or primary school level in Bangladesh. Thus, this paper explores the knowledge and views of parents regarding making decisions on sending their children to school. The research will fill the gaps in our knowledge by documenting parents' opinions and perceptions on sending their children to school during the COVID-19 outbreak and how these perceptions have progressed or changed. Therefore, we investigated two research questions: (1) What are parents' perceptions about sending their children to school during the COVID-19 outbreak? and (2) How have these perceptions developed among the parents? The findings will be a vital reference for researchers and policymakers to explore related education services during the pandemic in Bangladesh and worldwide, as the impact of COVID-19 is still severe in many countries.

2. The theoretical framework: The field theory

Brager and Holloway devised what is known as "Field Theory," which explained how environmental factors impact human psychology (see **Figure 1**)[19]. The study examines the "Field Theory" to explore the research questions and specific objectives. The theory involves experimental psychology, behavioral science, and humanistic psychology by objectively evaluating human behavior. The scholars stated that human behavior varies according to two major influential factors: the driving and restraining factors. The former activates changes in actions while the latter impedes such changes. These individual behaviors and human psychology are the outcomes of present environmental circumstances and how people perceive such circumstances. To understand reality, Brager and Holloway explained that people understand their current states as being sustained by specific events or forces[19]. This individual behavior and human psychology are therefore seen as the outcomes of the present environmental circumstances and how people react to them. They illustrate that behavior can be expressed by the functional relationship with the person, environment, and living space. In another way, the theory states that the more individuals interact with the environment, the more likely behavioral changes occur. Within a steady state, it constantly oscillates (Ibid).

Figure 1. Factors influencing parents' perception of children's education (Source: Framework developed by the authors, 2022).

This study examines parents' perceptions of sending their children to kindergarten or primary school by investigating such a theory. The environmental circumstances have changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the perceptions of parents also vary from family to family. Although most parents are concerned about these health and safety issues and quality education for their children, they do influence parents in making decisions for their children's education. Evidence argued that parents' perceptions and consciousness or awareness about their children had been greatly influenced by various personal, environmental, and social aspects during the COVID-19 pandemic. These have been reasoned to be stimuli that change the parents' behavior patterns. Based on the theoretical framework, the study explores parents' opinions and perceptions about deciding to send their children to school. The study analyses how those associated perceptions developed by parents have changed concerning making vital decisions regarding their children's well-being at kindergarten and/or primary school.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The researchers utilized various qualitative methods to answer the central research questions and attain the objectives. We were able to investigate deeper into parents' perspectives regarding their children's education by using the qualitative research approach. We carried out in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect primary data from the informants who had been specifically selected. We devised an interview guide and a checklist to attain the study's objectives. We put them through their paces to determine whether the interview guide and the checklist required any modifications. After that, we translated the interview guide into the Bangla language, which is the native language of the informants, so that they could fully comprehend the questions to participate in the research.

3.2. Selection of the research area and informants

There are 54 wards (administrative units) in Dhaka North City[20]. We applied a purposive sampling technique to choose wards 14 and 32 in Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC). We took several issues into account while selecting the research sites and informants. First of all, kindergartens/primary schools (where children aged between 5 and 11 years) are located in these wards more than others in the city, and many children have subsequently enrolled in the primary schools in the study area. As well, the areas were affected mainly by the coronavirus pandemic. In the second stage, we selected 15 parents from each ward, and thus 30 informants were finally chosen. During this time, we visited the kindergartens and primary schools to establish the names and numbers of guardians who did not send their children to their respective schools. Then, we made a list of them, including their contact details, phone numbers, and home addresses. Finally, they were contacted over the phone to conduct the interview discussions. After receiving their consent, we visited their homes wearing masks and conducted face-to-face interviews maintaining proper social distancing practices.

4. Methods and procedures

4.1. Individual interviews

Interviews commenced on 21 October 2021, and continued through to 22 December 2021, and these discussions were in-depth. The guide was translated into Bangla so that participants would find it easier to comprehend the questions and move through the process more quickly. For this investigation, interviews were conducted with 30 guardians, comprising 15 from each of the two wards. The Bangla language was used to conduct interviews with the informants, and afterward, we translated the collected data into English versions. Every interview was recorded but only with the participant's consent.

4.2. Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Before initiating the focus group discussions, we prioritized engaging individuals with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. We consisted of a group with six participants for carrying out FGD where a checklist was used to elicit their ideas and thoughts on the topic. Both male and female guardians assisted and directed us to a more suitable location for the discussion. Six focus group discussions were conducted during this investigation to answer the research questions. With the assistance of an interpreter and a note-taker, we completed an approximate sixty-minute discussion in a focus group.

4.3. Data management and analysis techniques

The information received from the informants was sorted into categories according to the salient themes and patterns from the narratives from the interviews. We highlighted the segmented, coded, and acceptably presented data as we progressed through the thematic analysis. Firstly, the data was coded, then interpreted, and the narrative analysis concepts were tackled. A thematic analysis technique detected Any similarities and differences across data patterns. Using the qualitative software application NVivo 10 assisted us in the

structuring, organizing, and coding of the qualitative data. Then, after dividing these into themes, further building subgroups to filter them down, and developing meaningful analytical units using both a priori and inductive codes could be created immediately from observing the data to help finalize the conclusions.

4.4. Ethical considerations

A written agreement was received from each participant before conducting in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and tape-recording activities. We ensured our sources that their identities would be kept confidential and that their remarks would be treated with the utmost discretion. We also informed our respondents that they could end their participation at any time in the study if they were uncomfortable with how things were going.

4.5. Limitations

We were unable to conduct interviews with many potential informants who did not send their children to the schools due to being COVID-19 positive, as well as the time constraints preventing us from doing so. Based on this limitation, it was very challenging to obtain all pertinent data regarding the research objectives.

4.6. Positionality statement

Initially, we were seen as outsiders in the community since we could not comprehend other people's viewpoints. On the other hand, the note-takers and one insider made them feel like they belonged. We gradually established a sound position to carry out our inquiries since we thoroughly explained our research goals to the participants in our study. As we began interviewing the guardians, we observed a very different picture. The guardians questioned what we planned to do with the data we collected. Several people have written and recorded their accounts of the problems. We overcame such difficulties or suspicions by explaining the objectives of our study and showing how the data collected would be utilized to analyze the problems that prevent children from acquiring education at school.

5. Data analysis and findings

5.1. Human psychology

While understanding human decisions regarding sending children to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents make these decisions based on the surrounding social environment. Due to the pandemic, parents and guardians felt a great sense of fear of sending their children to primary school. Studies pointed out that most guardians feel insecure when sending their children out of the home. Recent studies revealed that parents, especially women, were primarily influenced by the psychological factors which largely guided them to make decisions in their daily activities[21,22]. This leads to parents taking restrictive measures for their children[23,24]. One of the interviewees stated as follows: "During the COVID-19 period, I was afraid to send my little kid to the kindergarten. I was especially concerned about my boy's safety in the school. I found that many schools did not follow the safety protocol properly. During the pandemic situation, I asked my boy, once he returned home from school, about the hygienic protocols in the school, and he replied that minimum safety issues are maintained on the school premises" (Tasfia, female guardian, 34 years old, own translation). In this connection, one FGD interviewee commented, "During the quarantine period, I was not motivated to send my child to school. Since I was scared to be affected by my girl after attending the class. I was a bit convinced by one of my neighbors to send my child with his daughter, and thus I did so. A few days later, I observed that my child was facing some symptoms of corona disease" (Kabir, male guardian, 45 years old, own translation). People became concerned once they found out that their children became sick and showed symptoms of the coronavirus. One informant remarked at length: "I got scared and tried to understand how my child was

affected. I understood that I took her to the school last week and found that the safety and cleanliness measures were not properly maintained. The children are seated very closely without maintaining a social distance. I was mentally very shocked and decided not to send my daughter to school during the pandemic" (Muslima, female guardian, 43 years old, own translation).

5.2. Human behavior

Scholars (such as Khawaja et al., Rahman et al.) argue that humans are enabled to make decisions using their intrinsic behaviors in various activities[8,25]. Individuals make decisions based on their health[26] and safety behaviors[27]. One interviewee commented that: "When the pandemic started, health protocols of the schools were not fully maintained. However, as time passed, we learned that children should maintain safety measures properly (**Table 1**). I understood the importance of safety for my child by watching TV media" (Tania, female guardian, 30 years old, own translation). Parents ensure safety measures are in place for their children before sending them to school. They taught them how to wash hands, use sanitizer, wear masks, sit away from friends, and not hug their friends or shake hands with them. One informant commented, "I am concerned about their health, so I taught my child these safety measures to protect them from the infection of COVID-19" (Kashfia, female guardian, 36 years old, own translation). In this connection, one FGD participant argued, "It is our responsibility to take care of our children at home and school. I always ask my kids to take necessary safety measures once they return from school. However, it is not possible for me to look after the safety issues once they attend the class. Therefore, I am a little bit confused about sending my children to school during the pandemic situation" (Shakila, female guardian, 39 years old, own translation).

Table 1. Key factors associated with parents' perception of sending children to school (Source: KIIs and FGDs, 2022).

(i) Human Psychology: • Concerned about safety issues. • Fear or feel insecure about children's health
(ii) Health Concerns: • Taking restrictive measures for children • Insecurity remains constant about the role of the school authorities • Educating children about safety protocols
(iii) Human Behavior: • Increasing awareness about children's health • Confusion or dilemma arises regarding sending children to school
(iv) Intuitive Expectations: • Eagerly waiting to get back to everyday life • Hoping that their children will go to school again
(v) Quality Education: • A sudden disruption in the education system worldwide • Lack of face-to-face learning, and then the effectiveness of the education becomes questionable • Inequality in education arises due to a lack of access to online education methods

5.3. Intuitive expectation

Emotional socialization occurs in everyday life through the actions of parents[28] and other caregivers, which is influenced by their intuitive conceptions about children's emotional competence[29]. Studies reported that different emotions are valued, and these are handled and expressed in various ways. One informant asserted, "As sons and daughters attend school in an urban area, the school authority maintains the COVID-19 protocol nicely. The school authority also strictly handles the guardians gathering before and after school time" (Roman, male guardian, 56 years old, own translation). Many are not satisfied with the school authority's role in ensuring safety measures. Though they took great care of it at the beginning of the transmission of the

Coronavirus, their vigilance waned as time passed (**Table 1**). One FGD informant commented, "I observed that the kindergarten authority did not properly manage the school safety measures, which involved the proper sanitization of the chairs and tables used in the classroom. Moreover, I found that the school authorities are not conscious enough to provide any necessary information to the parents if any students are affected by the virus. It leads me to make decisions not to send my children to school during the pandemic at this moment" (Kolpona, female guardian, 43 years old, own translation).

5.4. Social environment

Social environmental factors also play an influential role in directing the parents' behavior during the pandemic. Interaction between students and teachers is essential for effective learning and a good quality education, yet concerns for health, safety and social environment keep parents in a constant dilemma regarding the decision to resume classes. It is the responsibility of the school authorities to guide them properly and make them aware of the pertinent health issues. One informant stated, "The school committee cannot effectively look after the safety issues for each student of each school. This is surely not possible. The school authority was not entirely aware of how to follow the safety issues for themselves. So for the school children" (Kolpona, female guardian, 43 years old, own translation). Apart from this, students from poor socio-economic backgrounds did not receive adequate attention and support from the school authority. Consequently, as one FGD pointed out, "It is impossible to completely rely on school authority in children's safety issues" (Tasnim, old male guardian, 27 years, own translation). Another informant stated that "My child was affected a lot once he attended class during the pandemic period. I asked my daughter about the safety issues in the class. She replied that the cleaning staff did not clean the chairs, tables, and doors properly. She added that the floor of each classroom was washed properly and the hand sanitizer was not found to be available in front of the classroom or at the entrance of the school gate" (Mahbub, male guardian, 35 years old, own translation). In light of the perception, one FGD informant asserted that "It is not the sole responsibility of the school to protect them from infection. Family teaching and motivation work a lot for their child to be protected" (Kalam, male guardian, 40 years old, own translation).

5.5. Health concerns

The coronavirus shocked many people's confidence and its seriousness guided the decision of parents to not to send their children to school. At the very outset of COVID-19, people were wary about sending their children to school like other people. The ultimate fear and the main reason for this is the health concern of their kids. In this regard, one informant said, "Sometimes I fear sending my children to school because the authorities concerned cannot provide students with one-to-one service. It is truly tough for the school authority to observe and ensure the safety for each student. So, in this case, insecurity remains constant when evaluating the role of school authority in protecting our children from the coronavirus" (Jubaer, male guardian, 34 years old, own translation). One FGD informant argued, "I heard that one of my neighbor's children was affected by the virus. The boy was affected after attending the class in his school, and the other family members were also affected by the virus. As a result, I got scared to send my children to school" (Zinnia, female guardian, 30 years old, own translation). The death incidence caused by the coronavirus affected people largely to take decisions for sending their children to kindergarten or primary schools. One interviewee said, "A neighbor's boy passed away due to the coronavirus who read in class 4. This incident hurt me, and it took a long time to get over it. After that, I feared sending my children to school" (Tania, female guardian, 30 years old, own translation).

COVID-19 has led to a serious mental health crisis among people from every corner of the world. The rates of suffering from mental disorders, depression, and anxiety significantly increased during the pandemic.

One guardian in this study pointed out, "My son becomes anti-social, keeps himself confined in his room, and gets addicted to digital devices. I noticed a drastic change in his behavior" (Shafiq, male guardian, 36 years old, own translation). Another informant offered a similar opinion and she stated, "I have two school-going children. During the lockdown days, they are confined at home and get addicted to digital devices that physically and mentally hamper them. I observed that they focused on digital devices, which made them unsocial day by day. So, I strongly support opening up every education institute immediately" (Mahmuda, female guardian, 30 years old, own translation). Another interviewee said, "Besides the problem of mental health issues, my children have got myopia and gained weight as they have no place to go. They go to school; they play with their friend who is a beneficiary of good health" (Tuhin, male guardian, 40 years old, own translation).

5.6. Quality education

Many parents are concerned about sending their children to school because they want them to get back into a regular routine and function like children again. Learning effectiveness is only ensured by the school authorities where children can learn systematically and in an organized way (**Table 1**). Teachers undertake face-to-face learning and communicate with them directly. Similarly, the students learn about proper collaboration with other students. In these ways, the physical and mental development of the children cannot be interrupted. In this case, one informant stated, "I do believe this. My son eagerly waits to return to school and play with his friends. He became depressed by staying home for a long time. It is not possible to maintain their daily routine when staying home. The school plays an important role in developing our children physically and mentally. So, I think children will get back to normal life when we send them to school" (Alpona, female guardian, 29 years old, own translation). One FGD informant said, "Yes, I do believe this. Coronavirus is no more a fatal disease for children and can be adequately managed. We don't know when the coronavirus will leave the world. If students stay at home for too long, their education will be hampered seriously. So, there is no alternative for the children but to go back to school," (Monir, male guardian, 35 years old, own translation).

Opening the schools again can help bring back everyday life unlike staying home for long periods of time. In this regard, a guardian offered his opinion about newly emerging online education systems and stated, "Online learning isn't learning. Face-to-face teaching and learning are a must. So, schools should be opened," (Jamil, male guardian, 32 years old, own translation). Again, on this issue, one interviewee emphasized learning effectiveness by stating, "Schools can ensure effective learning systems, and teachers can teach students better than the online system" (Tasfia, female guardian, 30 years old, own translation). When an argument arises about quality education during a pandemic situation, one informant emphasized the importance of a face-to-face education system: "School is a second home for children where they get the opportunity to learn and develop themselves. Direct supervision and support from teachers are needed for an effective learning process. The online education system is a new concept, and students cannot concentrate for long looking at a small device. So, in my opinion, a school can make the learning process more effective as our children are habituated to that system," (Hasan, male guardian, 38 years old, own translation). One FGD informant added, "Her son entered into online classes via Zoom or Google meets through the laptop; after a while, he started playing games on the phone. As a working mother, I cannot properly monitor my son's education through the online system" (Jamila, female guardian, 28 years old, own translation). Direct supervision through the school system is needed for the learning process to be meaningful and effective. Students receive proper guidance and support from the teachers, which is very important.

Currently, COVID-19 is being increasingly compared to seasonal flu and this is the way to treat it in the future. It is time to normalize ourselves and prepare to lead our lives with this disease. In other words, by taking proper precautionary measures, we can get back to our normal life. The FGD informants asked how

they would react if the coronavirus transmission rate increased again. In these circumstances, one informant said that: "COVID-19 is not going to vanish overnight from the world. We need to take it as a common disease and should not be frightened of it. As a parent, we must teach our children how to cope with this new normal life by maintaining proper health protocols" (Shamrid, male guardian, 35 years old, own translation).

However, one informant said, "I believe in normalcy, and I send my children to school whatever the transmission rate is" (Rahim, male guardian, 35 years old, own translation). Education systems throughout the world have been entirely disrupted by the suddenness of the COVID-19 outbreak. The shutdown of the schools cannot be the ultimate and only solution because this has some drastic consequences especially in terms of retaining the expected high quality of education. Here, one interviewee commented, "Government should not close down the education institutions anymore. It will affect our children's education badly. This decision has a long-term effect on the future. If children remain at home for years, they will create a nation without intellect," (Kabir, male guardian, 45 years old, own translation).

On the other hand, one informant opined, "I think schools should be closed down when the transmission rate is very high. From my point of view, my children's safety is more important than their education" (Shafiq, male guardian, 40 years old, own translation). The study pointed out that parents sent their children to school during the pandemic and identified a different aspect of the school environment. One informant pointed out that, "During the pandemic period, I observed that the quality of education provided in the school is not up to the mark. It happens when the teachers and the staff of the institution lack concentration on academic activities. The teachers are even scared to come to the school as the virus spreads alarmingly throughout the surroundings. In addition, I found that my children did not get effective education while attending classes. Therefore, I decided not to send my children to school during the COVID-19 period" (Rakib, male guardian, 37 years old, own translation).

6. Discussions

This study explored parents' perceptions of sending their children to primary school during the COVID-19 pandemic in Dhaka North City (DNC), Bangladesh. We examined the 'Field theory' approach to answer the central research questions and reach the desired objectives. We found that parents feel psychological distress when sending their children to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were afraid for their safety and well-being. A few studies revealed that psychological distress affects parents, especially women, which significantly compromises their ability to make children's education decisions[22,30]. A recent study found that about 71%–90% of English parents would not send their children to school if there were a pandemic[9]. The findings revealed that people cared more about their health and safety than what they learned in school. A few parents agreed to send their kids to school because they know how important it is and because their children want to go. The study pointed out that the parents' behavior about sending their children to school was unfavorable. The study showed that several factors, including children becoming adjusted to online schooling, parents juggling several responsibilities, and families getting used to new public health procedures, contributed to the stress that many households experienced. Scholars argued the vast majority of parents were worried not just about their children's psychological well-being and aspects of their behavior, but also about the social context in which their children were raised and the quality of the education they received[31,32]. Haller and Novita argued that the degree of satisfaction that parents have with the social environment could be influenced by several variables[33]. These factors can dictate whether parents agree to send their children to school. Besides, the study showed that teachers need to possess the skills required for the new method of instruction to actually work effectively. A recent survey conducted by Mahmud et al. focused on the difficulties that are encountered by both students and teachers once they attempt to adapt to the new system of learning in

the classroom[16]. This finding is supported by the outcomes of the present study. The education system is rendered inefficient due to a lack of technical expertise and digital equipment[6], in addition to an inadequate amount or reliability of internet access. Sabani and Istiqomah, argued that students who come from financially struggling households find it challenging to participate in online programs because digital gadgets and internet connections cannot be purchased or are unaffordable[34]. This makes it difficult for them to participate in online learning programs.

The study pointed out that few parents put emphasis on this fact in order to ensure the children's return to school can be possible through the concerted efforts of both the government and school authorities. The findings agreed with the recent work carried out by Zhan et al.[17]. Jothinathan et al. demonstrated that some personal and environmental factors are responsible for influencing parents' decisions to send their children to school[11]. They illustrate that parents do not support the online education system and have an interest in reopening the schools so that their children can go to school again. Meghani et al. argued that parents are concerned about their children's mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, etc.[35]. They want a proper plan put in place by the relevant authorities to send their children back to school. The present study pinpointed that various factors are responsible for influencing the parents' satisfaction with their children attending school classes. Technical knowledge of teachers and technological infrastructure are needed to retain parents' satisfaction with what is happening. In addition to the present research findings, Haller and Novita pointed out that teachers' competencies are essential for implementing new and online teaching methods[33]. Hornstra et al. explored parents' perceptions before and during lockdowns about secondary school students' motivation and well-being[36]. Our findings revealed that the perceptions of parents vary due to the different characteristics of their children, which involves students' needs, inspiration, and well-being which are all vital for sending their children to school. Furthermore, the study stated that most parents think that the COVID-19 lockdown creates family-school relationships that enhance the children's learning performance. These findings were indeed echoed by Serrano-Díaz et al. who argued that parents and teachers could support sending their children to their schools as long as the socio-economic adaptation process was agreed to by all parties concerned[37].

The study showed that children lose motivation to learn through distance and online learning processes. The research, moreover, revealed that the teachers should assist the children in preparing the class materials and provide an affordable internet package, which will play an essential role in continuing their education online. Lase, Zega et al. revealed that parents positively perceive distance learning as the only way to continue their children's schooling[38]. However, an online learning system creates an extra economic and/or social burden for the parents[39]. The parents are concerned since they cannot properly monitor their children during study at home. They initially support online-based education, but they do not want this to last indefinitely. Likewise, Li et al. revealed the effects of COVID-19 on primary school students living in rural areas of Bangladesh[40]. The study discovered that a lack of digital devices and access to the internet creates barriers to continuing education, increasing the dropout rate significantly. They recommend that teachers and students need proper training and support to make the learning process effective.

7. Conclusion, limitations, and scopes for future research

The study examines how parents in Dhaka North City (DNCC), Bangladesh, felt about sending their kids to kindergarten or elementary school during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research employs a qualitative approach to address the study's specific objectives. The research shows that parents have different ideas about sending their kids to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. They make choices based on their mental health, how their kids act, the quality of the education, and how safe the school is. Parents worry about sending their kids to school because the people in charge are unaware of how to clean the building. The study, however, has

several limitations which include: first, the number of informants, in our case it was 30, to get in-depth insights central to the study-specific objectives. Second, we could not manage many of the informants' oral consent during the pandemic to be part of our research and also failed to get access to meet them physically. Finally, the then lockdown situation interrupted us to carry out face-to-face interviews among the sample informants. We tried to mitigate the pertinent challenges to overtly illustrate the study objectives among informants. We repeatedly transferred the information that their experiences and insights are vital for uncovering the current issues. Afterwards, the informants were given kind consent to provide their thoughts, and experiences regarding our study objectives. The findings of the present study have provided important insights into parents' perception of their children's physical safety, education quality, and well-being in their schools. In line with the outcomes of the research, the relevant policymakers of the GoB, school teachers, and administrators would learn significant lessons to provide quality education among the children in the schools even in the event of any hazards. Furthermore, the policymakers will be able to formulate relevant policies to overcome the potential barriers in order to deliver education among school-going children, and thus lessen the fears and associated concerns to send their children to the schools. In so doing, a range of stakeholders, such as parents, school teachers, administrators and relevant personnel of the GoB will capacitate to develop the required knowledge and skills to avoid the negative consequences of any pandemic situation.

Future research should shed light on students' and teachers' perceptions and activities to participate in the learning process during the pandemic. Regarding government policymakers, future studies could focus on existing policies and strategies to support the relevant stakeholders in reducing challenges to maintain regular, viable, and normal learning progress for the students at home and school. Regarding the methodological issues, the quantitative method (data collection and analysis) could provide a unique platform for comprehensively understanding their perceptions regarding sending children to schools. In so doing, some significant factors in line with their concerns could be found and thus would facilitate appropriate stakeholders to take necessary steps to overcome the hurdles in providing education during the pandemic.

8. Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations, which have emerged from evidence-based information. These are stated below:

(i). The students should use masks properly once they attend school.

(ii). The schools should provide students with the vaccine, coronavirus test kits, hand sanitizers, and temperature machines to ensure proper health protocols and safety regulations are followed and maintained.

(iii). A proper social distance of 1–3 meters is desired to reduce the risk of infection, and it should be strictly maintained. Classes or lessons can be held in two shifts to maintain social distance in the classrooms.

(iv). A teacher's job is to inform the students of the dangers of COVID-19, especially the risk of fatality.

(v). The responsibility of the school authorities and guardians is to ensure the safety of all students. Both should play a major role here in getting children to be proactive in this case and learn how to look after themselves.

(vi). Guardians should learn the outcomes of the coronavirus. They should not gather in front of the school gates when they take their children to school.

(vii).It is also the responsibility of the Mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation to enlighten the people and make safety tools available at all times.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman) and PA; methodology, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman); software, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman) and PA; validation, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman) and PA; formal analysis, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman), PA and MMR (Md. Mizanur Rahman); investigation, PA; resources, PA and MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman); data curation, PA; writing—original draft preparation, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman) and PA; writing—review and editing, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman) and PA; visualization, PA, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman) and MMR (Md. Mizanur Rahman); supervision, MMR (Md. Mahbubur Rahman). All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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