

DIGITISATION AND INCLUSIVITY: TAKING EVERYONE ALONG

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Poverty and Exclusion

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and potential users. All students do not have equal access to technological resources, because their families cannot afford them. The majority of children in Bangladesh do not come from tech-savvy home environment. Schools themselves are not able to make the appropriate technology resources available adequately and equitably to all students, and most communities lack libraries and community resources. A new digital divide can exacerbate the existing societal divisions. How the benefits of technology outweigh the negatives, therefore, is a critical concern.

The key to education technology outcomes still is appropriate teacher-student interaction. Technology can be a highly effective tool, but that's all it can be—a tool. Technology and teachers are not substitutes of each other, though technology portends new roles and tasks for teachers. (V. Himmelsbach, *6 pros and cons of technology in classroom*, 2019. <https://tophat.com/blog/6-pros-cons-technology-classroom/>).

Building “Digital Bangladesh” is seen by the government as the vehicle for propelling the country to the status of a modern and prosperous

nation. “We want to give the students education in a modern way as part of our efforts to give them a modern technology-based education as they can move with the changing pace of the era,” said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina while launching the free textbook distribution programme for this year and receiving the primary and junior secondary public examination results on December 30, 2019 (*The Daily Star*, “PM stresses modern tech-based education for students.” December 31, 2019).

Various initiatives are being taken to harness technology for education with

better learning outcomes. A Tk 45 crore project initiated in 2018 aims to create Wi-Fi hotspots in 587 educational institutions in the eight divisions of the country. Students will have individual access to the Internet through 10 Mbps bandwidth in each institution free of charge for two years and subsequently for a small fee. The public sector Bangladesh Telecommunication Company Limited (BTCL), running the project, expects to increase the bandwidth and coverage of institutions in the future. (*The Daily Star*, “146 educational institutions get govt. Wi-Fi,” January 13, 2020).

Equipping schools with multimedia equipment has been a major government initiative to bring technology into the classrooms. A multimedia classroom, equipped with laptops/computers, internet connection, projector and a sound system allow use of teaching-learning techniques through ICT based media. The results will depend on how efficiently and effectively these plans and programs are implemented.

IMPROVED GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT: KEY TO ACHIEVING RESULTS

The technology initiatives and the aim of transforming education and skill development by harnessing the potentials of information and communication tools can produce the results only when they are planned and designed well, managed and implemented effectively, and monitored and assessed objectively with accountability and transparency. These issues are challenges across the board in the public sector including the education sub-sectors.

A case in point is the well-intentioned initiative for multimedia classrooms in which Tk 10 billion has been already invested. “If providing 35 thousand classrooms of different educational institutions all over the country with multimedia equipment is part of the government’s digitisation

effort, the programme has failed to live up to the expectation,” according to an editorial comment of a national daily. (*The Financial Express*, “Editorial,” August 14, 2018).

The editorial cites the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education noting that, “the performance of only a few districts is satisfactory in the use of multimedia technology in school classrooms. The rate of usage is negligible in most others.” The obstacles include lack of qualified teachers to use and run the equipment, few teachers who can select and compile the relevant content and absent or erratic power supply. A two-week training offered to some of the teachers has not removed the shyness about technology and the reluctance to depart from known ways (*Ibid*).

It is obvious that achieving equity and inclusion has to be a key governance agenda in education as in other sectors. Basic information has to be collected regarding the proportion of children accessing, participating in and completing primary and secondary education, with a breakdown of students by geographic location (urban-rural, remote); socio-economic status (income quintiles); gender; ethnic-linguistic characteristics; and special needs. A useful step would be to introduce tracking of education resource flows to schools and communities. Such tracking of resources is promoted by various organisations, such as, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). However, the tracking of resource flow and the results is not a common practice yet and its influence on governance and management decisions is not noticeable (UNESCO, Ensuring adequate, efficient and equitable finance in schools in the Asia-Pacific region, 2017).

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E-WALLET



BGMEA signed an agreement with ICT Division, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology, GoB regarding implementation of digital wallet for wage digitization and conducting digital transactions for RMG factory workers in Bangladesh.

Cashless economy and financial inclusion of the working class

Key features of digital wallet for RMG workers

1. Inter-operable
2. Vendor neutral
3. No charges, instant cashback, reward points and merchant discounts to increase the value of wages received



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✗ Cash wages are insecure, inefficient and disempowering

Risk of theft
and fraud



Workers often
stand in line
for hours



Women have
less control over
their money



* Digital Wages benefit both workers and employers



**53% savings in staff
time** for their admin
and finance team



Increase in access to
formal financial accounts
from **20% to 98%**



**15% more likely that
women participate in
household decisions**
related to spending
and saving



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