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by Mr Adnan

Assessing the Role of Digital Education Rights in Overcoming E-Learning Challenges in Rural Bangladesh

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Background Context:

E-Learning, or its dictionary definition, learning done by studying at home, using technologies and materials provided on the internet, has become a pioneer in bridging the education gap in rural areas, as marginalized children with disadvantaged economic and geographic backgrounds can access quality content on various online educational platforms like "10 Minutes School", "Amar Pathshala," and many more.

Nevertheless, fundamental obstacles in E-Learning lead to the gap in education persisting, leading to inequalities in accessing education.

Introduction:

In this digital age, where technology has become an integral part of our lives, including our education, Digital Education Rights are becoming increasingly pertinent to ensure education remains inclusive and equitable, and hence fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4 of UN. However, this may not be the scenario as youngsters worldwide are not always able to access the infrastructure, devices, and knowledge required to navigate their digital education journey in a safe, empowering, and inclusive manner. [1] In this context, while the integration of technology gives them a shiny opportunity to pursue their education via E-Learning, several competitive disadvantages prevent them from doing so. The primary objectives of this proposal are to address the following issues: (a) the obstacles of e-learning in making education more accessible and effective in rural Bangladesh, (b) how the integration and implementation of digital education rights would help to combat these obstacles, and (c) proposing legislative amendments and policies with alignment to the digital education rights.

Research question:

Will implementing digital education rights make education more accessible in rural Bangladesh by enhancing e-learning?

Literature Review:

Research on challenges in E-learning faced in rural areas: Poor internet connectivity is identified as a persistent hindrance to rural learners' e-learning. [2] The challenge is heightened by geographical divides, as most rural areas are outside the range of quality broadband connections, leading to interruptions or worse, an absolute prevention in accessing education materials online. Adding to that, financial constraints create inequalities in technology possession between rural and urban learners,[2] as a large proportion of rural pupil cannot afford digital technologies like smartphones, tablets, and laptops, with households sharing one device seen as a common sight. Another major obstacle is the lack of digital literacy or online skills, vital to utilize e-learning to its greatest potential.[3]The scholarships identified a common theme of challenges faced by rural learners: inaccessible internet connectivity and digital devices, and a lack of basic digital skills among learners.

Gaps in prior research: while the previous papers identified fundamental challenges that hinder e-learning in rural areas, some limitations emerge. To begin with, there may be a sampling bias as the population of the samples was limited to a handful of rural institutions. Moreover, prior studies overlooked Digital Rights in Education as a possible solution to overcome the challenges they identified. It is an emerging topic being researched in Western contexts, research in Southeast Asia, particularly in rural Bangladesh, are yet to be put into paper. This gap indicates a need to examine this possible solution in a rural-specific context of Bangladesh for a more nuanced understanding.

Research on digital education rights: In recent years, access to the internet has become a prerequisite for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as rural Bangladesh. To uphold their education rights, the **right to internet** access becomes a mandatory condition,[4] as with poor or no connectivity, it becomes difficult for them to avail study materials and instructions; such scenarios can be considered as a violation of education rights pledged under international conventions [4]. The concept of digital rights also includes rights that assist in **accessing computers or other electronic devices,[5]** another mandatory condition for rural learners to pursue their e-learning and collaborate with various quality educational platforms is digital skills. On the right to digital education, all studies stress the importance of initiating digital literacy processes among students. **Right to digital literacy** [1][5][6], will allow them to be equipped with the basic digital skills required to navigate online platforms, ensuring better communication and understanding of materials.

Gaps in prior research: Again, the scope of existing literature appears to be a limitation, as most are conducted in a broader global perspective. This gap highlights the need to evaluate these proposed digital education rights in the context of Bangladesh's locality, especially rural areas.

Implications for Research Design and Focus: Current literature gaps suggest the focus of the study should be on a thorough evaluation of the impact on E-Learning after implementing these Digital Rights. By investigating the possible implications, the study seeks to provide insights regarding the digital literacy among rural learners, and the extent to which limited or a lack of access to the internet and technologies is impacting their E-Learning. The study is pertinent in identifying valuable insights required to suggest policy reforms in pursuit of upholding the education rights of rural children.

Research Methodology: The research shall therefore pursue a Mixed-Methods approach.

Quantitative Phase: a structured survey shall be conducted on a representative sample of rural e-learners (N=500) across (N=20) rural districts in Bangladesh, with stratification by education level to ensure representation of a wide range of demographics of primary, secondary, and tertiary learners. The survey shall cover the following: the primary type of device used for e-learning (smartphones, tablets, or laptops), the number of devices available in their households, and if they share a common device in the household, how many hours the learner can use the device for their education per day. Adding to that, learners' internet connectivity strength, if available, and their digital competencies, including skills of using basic communication tools and education platforms, shall be gauged by utilizing the rating system of the Likert Scale. Lastly, the perceived impact of the right to access the internet and technologies for education, including the right to digital literacy, on their e-learning will be collected using a similar Likert rating.

Qualitative Phase: Structured interviews shall be conducted with subsamples of the respondents, comprising (N=10) from each primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of e-learners, therefore a total of (N=30), collecting in-depth insights on issues such as: how interruptive is their internet towards their learning, and would a legal entitlement towards internet connectivity for education improve their learning experience? With their current level of digital competency, what sort of issues are they facing using online tools like "Zoom" and "Google Meet" and how would a legal right to gain digital competencies in using digital tools and platforms by vocational workshops enhance their learning?

Project practicalities:

Data collection will be conducted over a period of 12 weeks, followed by rigorous data analysis. The study will strictly adhere to ethical guidelines involving data privacy, consent, and anonymity of respondents, including parental consent of minor respondents.

Potential Roadblocks and limitations: One potential shortcoming might be that the implementations of the proposed Digital Education Rights may put a strain on the nation's resources, leading to resistance in implementation. However, the budget for the education sector has remained around 11 to 12 percent of the national budget for nearly 16 years. This falls well short of UNESCO's recommended 4–6 percent of GDP or 15–20 percent of the budget [7], which urgently calls for adjustments to fiscal policies and allocating a higher budget for the education sector, particularly on providing internet and technologies to marginalized rural e-learners, and providing vocational digital skills workshops to them. The state may also collaborate with other Non-profit organizations, such as UNDP [8], which

strives to make education equitable and inclusive by promoting E-Learning, to proceed with implementing these proposed Digital Education Rights.

Conclusion: Conducting this research is central to understanding the importance of Digital Education Rights in making E-Learning more accessible and effective in rural Bangladesh. Access to the internet, technologies, and basic digital literacy forms the backbone of E-Learning—and this proposed research will act as a stepping stone for advocating the legal recognition of these rights. As a result, these constitutional amendments would lead to an enhanced E-learning experience in the rural areas, upholding the right to education of these marginalized rural learners.

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