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Assignment as a Tool for Assessment at Secondary Level: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

This qualitative study tried to explore what teachers and students understood by assignment; usefulness of assignments as a tool of assessment; the challenges faced by teachers and students during implementing the assignments; and the ways to consider assignments as a tool for assessment even after the Covid-19 pandemic is over. This study utilized a purposive and convenient sample selection process. Five secondary schools were selected conveniently from Dhaka division and it comprised three schools from Dhaka city, a school from Keranigonj, Dhaka and one school from Narsingdi district. These five secondary schools included government, non-government, co-education, and private schools. The researchers carefully chose the schools so that they included rural, urban, boys, girls, and co-education schools. In this study, 10 teachers from each school were selected for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and thus 50 teachers participated in five FGDs. 10 students of class ten from each school were selected for this study and thus the number of students were 50. The head teachers of the five selected schools were interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. Moreover, a curriculum expert and a teacher educator were interviewed with semi-structured interview schedules. Hence the study covered a total of 107 respondents including students, teachers, head teachers, curriculum expert and the teacher educator. Data were analysed thematically and were presented in a descriptive way. The major findings of the study included: teachers and students had fairly good understanding of assignments; assignments were useful during Covid-19 standstill; the major challenges were problem in understanding the assignments, copying from others, getting the assignments done by others, and the readymade assignments were available in the Internet; and assignments could be continued in normal situation by minimizing the number of assignments and giving the school authority responsibility to set the topics and to decide on the number of assignments. Moreover, teachers and the teacher educator suggested to include items such as singing the national anthem and

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other patriotic songs; reciting poems; project work and report writing; presentation through the use of PowerPoint slides; acting and dramatization; delivering speech in Bangla and English; summarizing stories and poems; preparing physical and electronic teaching aids; anchoring a program, etc. as assignments.

Keywords: assignment, assessment, Covid-19, pandemic, challenges

Introduction

An assignment is a piece of work that is given to someone as part of their job or as a part of a course of study (Longman, 2009). In the educational setting, an assignment is used to enhance and assess students' learning of a certain program. Although assignment is a well-known strategy of teaching, learning, and assessment, in most cases, it is not usually used at the secondary level of education in Bangladesh. However, assignment has been used to engage students in academic activities and to assess students' learning to promote them to the next grades as there was no scope to organize on-campus educational activities and year final examinations due to the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021 academic years. Assignment is a new experience for the secondary school students, teachers, and education administrators in Bangladesh. As it was not possible to assess students on-campus, Bangladesh education authority employed assignments as a tool of assessment to promote students to the next grades. It is worth mentioning that, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) formulated those assignments on different subjects of different grades and provided them to the students as per the directives of the Ministry of Education, Bangladesh.

Statement of the Problem

Assignments are means of fostering learning and assessing students' progress. Although the secondary curriculum (NCTB, 2012) keeps provision for assignments as a way of learning and a tool for assessment, the researchers' experiences as teacher educators show that assignments are not implemented in most of the institutions. The paper and pencil based examination system dominates the assessment strategies in Bangladesh education. It has some adverse effects on the way to achieving quality education as it drives the learners to take preparation for examinations and for getting better grades, not for learning. Many researchers (e.g. Spann & Kaufman, 2015; Shohamy, 2014; Booth, 2012; Qi, 2005; Wall &Alderson, 1996) have showed the negative impact of examinations on teaching-learning, teachers, and on students. In this regard, Al Amin and Greenwood (2018) stated that this kind of testing creates considerable educational and social pressures. In this system teachers feel pressure to teach what they believe about teaching (Maniruzzaman & Hoque, 2010) and it compels students to memorize answers instead of understanding (Das et al., 2014). Despite all the stated limitations, paper-and-pencil-based assessment system was in practice.

However, the recent Covid-19 pandemic created a new situation where arranging paper-and-pencil-based examinations were not possible during the 2020 and 2021 academic sessions. Therefore, assignments were introduced to assess and promote the students to the next grades.

As these assignments were a new strategy for assessment in Bangladesh secondary schools, it deserve an in-depth study on the implementation of assignments.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. to explore students' and teachers' understanding of assignments
2. to identify the usefulness of assignments as a tool of assessment
3. to identify the challenges in implementing assignments during Covid-19
4. to identify ways to incorporate assignments as a tool for assessment at secondary level of education in Bangladesh

Research Methodology

The current research employed a qualitative methodology as it is possible to go deep into the research problem (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).The method used for the study include FGD (Focus group Discussion) and semi-structured interviews.

Sample and Participants

This study utilized a purposive and convenient sample selection process. Five secondary schools were selected from Dhaka division. These schools comprised three schools from Dhaka city; one school from Keranigonj, Dhaka and one school from Narsingdi district.

The reasons for choosing Dhaka division and the schools include the consent of the schools to take part in the research despite Covid-19 restrictions and the communication to and from the schools were easier for the researchers.

These five secondary schools included government, non-government, co-education, and private schools. In this study, 10 teachers from each school were selected for FGD and thus 50 teachers participated in five FGDs.The teachers who taught especially in grades nine and ten were selected. The grade 10 students were selected as they were at the terminal stage of the secondary level. 10 students from each school were selected for FGD. The total number of students was 50. The students were randomly selected through lottery. The head teachers of the five selected schools were interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. In addition, a curriculum expert and a teacher educator were also interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. The curriculum expert was selected as they remain engaged in assignment setting, formulating marking rubric for assessment. Moreover, the teacher educator was chosen as they were considered experts in the pedagogical areas.

Tools for Data Collection

FGD and semi-structured interview guides were the tools for collecting data for this study. FGD guides were used for collecting data from the students and teachers; and semi-structured interview schedules were used for the head teachers, the curriculum experts and the teacher educator respectively.

Findings and Discussion

To get to the findings, the researchers transcribed the data, coded and categorized them. During coding of the data, the prominent themes came to the surface and the themes were described individually as findings. The followings are the findings of this study:

Students' and Teachers' Understanding of Assignments

Students' and teachers' understanding regarding assignments were sought through FGD. The students understood assignment as-an innovative work which is written in combination of textbooks' information and own views; a form of homework developed using data from various sources; and the activities that are given by the teacher of a particular subject for student assessment. The students in FGD-1 have expressed their understanding of assignments by saying that assignment is a creative activity that the students prepare by using textbooks and integrating own ideas and thoughts. In the assignments, students have to provide critical analysis or arguments while writing. In this regard, one participant of this group further added, "In writing this assignment, we have to follow the guidelines given by the authority due to which it sharpens our thinking and reasoning ability".

The students in FGD-2 have defined assignment as a kind of homework given by school teachers which they do with the help from various sources including textbooks, the Internet, teachers, friends, and parents. The following quotation proves what they said in this regard:

> *The assignment is a kind of homework given to us by our school during the closure of the schools due to corona virus [Covid-19 pandemic] and we prepared and submitted it to school with the help of textbook, Internet, YouTube and our friends.*
>
> (A student of grade ten of FGD-2)

The students in FGD-3 maintained that during Covid-19, when they were confined at home, they were given some activities from their schools on different subjects. Each of the activities was called an assignment. "We have prepared these assignments using the textbooks on different subjects. We have also prepared assignments with help from the Internet, YouTube, etc." claimed the students.

The students in FGD-3 have further described that assignment as a kind of homework for them to do individually. The students in this FGD claimed that they had the experience of doing such small things before as their school used to give them assignments from long time before but the assignments given during Covid-19 were quite large and sometimes difficult to prepare because only textbooks were not enough to prepare them.

The students in FGD-4 also provided similar opinion regarding assignments. They also believed that assignments were a kind of homework which they had to write with the help from the textbooks and the Internet.

The participants in FGD-5 defined assignments as a set of tasks given from the schools. For instance, one participant said, "An assignment is a written work which an individual has to accomplish and submit to schools for grading". The other students supported him.

The researchers tried to explore the perceptions of teachers about assignment through FGD, and their perspectives predominantly contain- assignment is a series of problems

designed to assess students' knowledge, skill and attitudes, and which students solve using a variety of sources in the light of prescribed guidelines; an investigative work involving report writing; creative writing task; etc. The following descriptions and excerpts in this regard elucidate their perception.

The teachers in FGD-1 defined assignment as "a number of questions that students solve at home following the set guidelines and taking help of the textbooks and other resources including the Internet. Assignment is given to assess the students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes". The teachers have further claimed that assignments require the students to apply higher order skills, that is, students have to exhibit their higher-level thinking ability in preparing the assignments. According to the teachers, assignments could be given to individual students or to a group and the students could be assessed based on their performance in preparing the assignments.

Again the teacher participants in the FGD-1 claimed that assignment is any work assigned to a student to complete within a timeframe and following specific guidelines. According to the teachers, engaging students in some practical activities and assessing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes in performing the task could be called an assignment.

The teachers in FGD-2 described assignment as investigative work in which the students have to study on a particular problem and write a report and that report is called an assignment. They further claimed that assignments given during Covid-19 pandemic were to engage students to study as most of the students remained detached from teaching-learning activities because of the closure of the educational institutions. It was expected that students would write analytical essays on the given topics from their textbooks; it was a try to engage the students to read the textbooks so that they could continue their learning.

The teachers in FGD-3 described assignment as a given task to be completed by students where there would be clear touch of creativity in their writings. Assignments were given with a view to assessing the students so that they could be promoted to the next classes. The purposes of the assignments were also to remove the monotony in the confinement at homes.

Teachers in FGD-4 claim that an assignment is a given work which aims at enhancing creativity of the learners and used as a tool for assessment.

The teacher participants in FGD-5 have claimed that assignments are that which students accomplish in a given period of time and following guidelines. Teachers further claimed that assignments could be written, a project work, presentation, or any practical work related to the course.

The data stated above show that the secondary students and the teachers of the study schools have fairly good understanding of assignments; that is, all the students and teachers have fairly clear ideas about assignments. It is worth mentioning that, in two of the study schools, the teachers and the students were aware of the assignments that were being used for continuous assessment much before the Covid-19 pandemic. It indicates that those schools followed the curriculum guidelines to implement assignment as a tool for formative assessment.

The Usefulness of Assignments

Students, teachers and head masters were asked about the benefit of the assignment through separate FGDs. Each group expressed different views on its benefits. Again, some of them had mixed reactions in this regard. However, the most important aspects of its usefulness that emerged from the discussion with them are enhancing interest in reading textbooks; developing guided writing skills; improving critical thinking skills and creativity; fostering self-confidence; getting used to rigorous study; increasing subject knowledge; being skilled in searching information and educational resources; facilitating effective learning and assessment; and accelerating an effective way of student engagement. However, the data representative of their views on this issue are as follows:

The students in FGD-1 said that their interest in reading the textbooks increased much as they had to read books to complete the assignments. As they had to spend much time in writing the assignments, they had to cut time from computer games. One of the students maintained:

> *Our attention to reading increased as we had to write assignments from reading the textbooks and other materials. We could not play computer games as we had to invest much time in reading and writing. We got back to the textbooks as we had to write assignments.*

The students in FGD-2 asserted that they had to study the assignment writing guidelines again and again. Not only that, they had to read the textbooks to write the assignments. One of the students claimed:

> *We have studied the assignment guidelines and the textbooks minutely. We have written the assignments at home and we have been much benefitted from the reading of the books and the writing of the assignments. The writing of the assignments gave us a sense that we are moving forward.*

The students in FGD-3 said that they felt the flavor of going to school after a long time when they started to write the first assignment. They claimed:

> *We gained knowledge through preparing the assignment as the school was closed due to Covid-19 pandemic. We came across new educational thoughts while doing the assignments. We were able to think creatively and critically. Assignments were good things.*

The students in FGD-4 maintained that they were not interested in studies during Covid-19 pandemic; they were passing time by playing games on the computers. They claimed that by studying to prepare the assignments, they learnt a lot. They further claimed that assignment writing gave them confidence to read, write, and think independently. Assignment compelled them to go back to the textbooks after a long time.

Similar voice was echoed in FGD-5 students. They also claimed that assignments were very good at the beginning but later on, they became useless because of many number of assignments. They were under pressure and they tried to minimize workload by getting the assignments done by parents or house tutors or by copying from the Internet or from friends.

During the FGDs with secondary school teachers, they expressed their mixed reactions regarding assignments. Teachers in FGD-1claimed that assignment certainly had positive aspects in developing students' subject knowledge. Teachers believed that it was impossible for students to write assignments without reading the textbooks and other materials. Therefore, reading books and other resources minutely would make the learners knowledgeable.

The teachers in FGD-2 focused on the value of student assessment through the assignments. One of the teachers claimed where others supported him:

> *Assignment can be used to test students' progress in a particular subject or at least in a chapter. So, our opinion on the assignment is that giving assignment is a positive step. As a result of assignment preparation, the students can have a clear idea about the topic or subject matter of the assignment.*

The teachers in FGD-3 viewed, assignment as a different method of assessment. In the traditional approach, claimed the teachers, they assess students through written examinations. According to them, assignment is a different way of assessing students' progress. They alleged:

> *Writing an assignment is different from the conventional method of writing in the examinations. The purpose of the assignment is to make sure that they (students) have acquired the subject matter well through intensive and extensive reading. Through assignment writing, skills and level of knowledge of learners improve gradually.*

The teachers in FGD-4 have maintained that assignments are useful but the way they (assignments) are being prepared is not doing any good to the students because many students are reported to plagiarize in the assignments. One teacher maintained:

> *The sad thing was that many students copied their friends' assignments or got them prepared by their parents or house tutors. Readymade answers are also available in the Internet. We do not have time to read and evaluate each and every assignment. So, we are not sure who plagiarize.*

The teacher participants in FGD-5 have maintained that the assignments are useful and they can be continued even when Covid-19 pandemic is over. However, the number of assignments should be reduced and the areas of assignments should be widened. One of the teachers in FGD-5 proposed poster and teaching aids preparation, reading and summarizing, recitation, dramatization, etc. as assignments.

Like the students and the teachers, the head teachers also gave their opinion about the usefulness of assignments. Their opinions in this regard were mostly positive. For instance, head teacher-1 claimed:

> *Students started to study during Covid-19 closure because of the assignments. Before giving the assignments, they were passing idle time confined at home. They had to read textbooks and other resources to prepare the assignments. They got something to do while they were confined at home because of the epidemic.*

Head teacher-2 spoke highly of the assignments. According to him, assignments were very effective at the beginning but later on it lost its worth. He maintained:

Assignments were adopted as a very effective learning tool when the students were living in complete panic during Covid-19 pandemic and were far away from learning by being disconnected from their teachers as well as friends. We received reports from the guardians that their children got addicted to mobile games and they remained awake till the morning and slept until 2/3 p.m. Those behaviours seemed abnormal to the guardians.

Head teacher-3 viewed assignment as an effective way to engage students when they were away from academic study. He claimed:

Assignments emerged as an effective method of learning and assessment when students were completely away from studies due to Covid-19 pandemic. As a head teacher, I see this approach as positive; students were also interested to be reconnected with schools as well as the textbooks.

Head teacher-4 claimed that assignments were considered to be an effective method at a time when education system came to a standstill as a result of adverse effect of Covid-19 pandemic. He maintained:

Assignment was an effective approach when our education system, like the rest of the world, was completely disrupted due to Covid-19 pandemic. Assignments were able to bring back the students to study. As a head teacher, I firmly believe that assignments have positive effect on students. I think assignments are effective in developing students' creativity and critical thinking skills.

Head teacher-5 has maintained that assignments are very useful to develop students' intellectual ability. But he further claimed that for some reasons, these good efforts were being hampered because of unethical practice of the learners.

The data stated above show that assignments are effective to develop students' knowledge and academic writing skills. It emerged from the interviews and the FGDs that assignments are good learning and assessment tools. It has also been revealed that because of load of assignments, most of the students plagiarize in preparing their assignments. Teachers, too did not have much time to read all the assignments for assessment and evaluation too. The negative aspects of preparing assignments should be minimized to have better results.

Challenges to Implementing Assignments during Covid-19 Pandemic

Assignments were appreciated by teachers and students during interviews and the FGDs. However, they mentioned some challenges to implementing the assignments. The challenges were disclosed during interviews with the head teachers, FGDs with the teachers and the students. Head teacher-1 claimed:

Distributing the assignments to the students during Covid-19 was a big challenge. It was very difficult to contact all the students. My colleagues made arrangements to send the assignments to students through parents, and in many cases by students of the same locality.

Head teacher-2 alleged that understanding the assignment was a big challenge at the beginning. He maintains:

> *Some of the learners and their guardians were not able to understand what to do and how to write the assignments. We arranged Zoom Meeting with the students having Internet connections and devices to clarify the assignments but those having no Internet contacted the teachers (teachers also used to call the students who could not be reached otherwise) over mobile phones. In some cases, we invited the guardians to schools to collect the assignments.*

Head teacher-3 mentioned that most of the students could not maintain deadline. The teachers had to call students over phone asking the students to submit the assignments. Head teacher-3 disclosed:

> *Maintaining the deadline for submitting assignments for most of students was a big challenge at the very beginning although the situation improved gradually. There was another problem which was students' involvement in plagiarism. They started to copy the assignments from the Internet or from other sources such as copying the friends' writing, getting the assignments written by guardians and private tutors, etc.*

Head teacher-4 asserted that there was lack of creativity practice in the later assignments. He claimed that assignments worked as stimuli at the beginning but later on it became a vain exercise. He regretted:

> *Later on, students started to copy assignments from the Internet and submit them for grading. Readymade assignments available in the Internet were a big challenge to engage students in creativity practices. Teachers, too, in many cases did not have opportunity to read and identify the strengths and weaknesses in students' writing.*

Head teacher-5 appreciated the assignment method of teaching and assessment. However, he mentioned some challenges. He alleged:

> *Examining the assignments properly and then preserving them was a big challenge. Students submitted anything in the name of assignments; they lowered their moral standard in writing the assignments. This cannot be allowed to run. Moreover, if the teachers do not provide feedback, what is the use of writing the assignments?*

The teachers in FGD-1claimed that many students did not understand what they needed to write and how to write them. They alleged that some students submitted the assignments like an application to the head teacher. They used to write in the cover page, "To the head teacher, --- High School, ---". Most of the students wrote assignments with the help from the Internet.

The teachers in FGD-2 claimed that, students became tired of writing assignments as they had to write for a longer period of time. Teachers claimed that they tried to motivate them but because of huge number of assignments, the students became lethargic.

The teachers in FGD-3 alleged that some students became face book addicted; most of the students used to play games on the mobile phones or on the computers instead of searching for resources. One of them revealed:

The parents complained that their children grew addiction to mobile or computer games in the name of searching the answers of the assignments. This addiction kept them awake for longer period of time at night.

Teachers in FGD-4 alleged that the difficulty level of some assignments were higher than the students' level. The teachers claimed that sometimes they themselves did not understand what was to be written. They claimed:

Some of the given assignments were higher than the level of learners. As a result, learners were in a fix regarding how to write the assignment. It was sometimes impossible to clarify as we were not well-connected with students. So, learners were bound to find answer from the Internet, face book, and YouTube from where readymade assignments were downloadable.

The participants in FGD-5 expressed similar opinions as FGD-4. They were worried about the way the students wrote the assignments. According to them, students' learning is close to zero if they copy and submit the assignments.

The students in FGD-1 alleged that the number of assignments was too many to finish in the allotted time. The students said, "The number of assignments was big and some assignments were difficult to understand".

The students in FGD-2 also claimed that the assignments were very difficult. They maintained:

We could not find the answers of some of the assignments from the textbooks. It was difficult to understand the question of the assignments and answers were not available in the textbooks. Moreover, there was no time to do so many assignments!

The students in FGD-3 also alleged that they did not understand some of the assignments mostly because the assignments were new to them. They claimed:

Assignment was new to us as some of the assignments were given from chapters that we did not read or teachers did not discuss. That was a problem for us all. Why did the authority give us assignments from the chapters our teachers did not teach us? Moreover, it is difficult to prepare assignments simultaneously with the classes and home work.

The students in FGD-4 complained regarding the number of assignments. According to them, the numbers of assignments were too many to be able to meet the deadline. They, like the students in FGD-3, did not understand the assignments. They claimed:

We could not concentrate on other activities when doing the assignments. Our eyes hurt and there were physical problems because of sitting at a place for a long time to finish the assignments.

The students in FGD-5 claimed that although they liked the assignments at the beginning, it had become a kind of torture for them later on because of the pressure of writing consecutive assignments. The students requested the researchers not give so many assignments when the schools run normally after Covid-19 pandemic. They requested the researchers to inform the government about their demand.

The challenges, teachers and the students mentioned, seem valid. Therefore, the education authority need to try to minimize the challenges related to plagiarism and the number of assignments. There is no provision for giving feedback on students' writing; moreover, the number of students in a single class is a big problem. That is, one of the reasons why teachers do not provide feedback to students' writing that would be helpful for students' development. In this respect it is worth mentioning that most of the teachers are poor in providing appropriate feedback and assessment skill. In this regard Farhana et al. (2020) from a study at secondary level claimed that teachers lacked training on implementing assignments as well as assessment.

However, the researchers believe that despite challenges, the assignments benefitted the students much during Covid-19 pandemic at secondary level of education in Bangladesh. The researchers' belief is supported by Maison et al. (2020) where the positive influence of assignments on students of Physics Education at Jambi University, Indonesia was 72%.

Considering Assignments as a Tool for Assessment at Secondary Level

Although no literature was available about how assignments influence the secondary students, Maison et al. (2020) confirmed the positive impact of assignments on tertiary students. The Bangladesh secondary teachers, too, revealed in the FGDs that assignments could be used as an assessment tool if some challenges are minimized to have the positive result of the assignments.

The teachers in FGD-1 claimed:

> *Alongside the traditional assessment strategies, assignments can be used as a tool for assessment but there should be check-bulb to identify if the assignments are authentic or not. There should be proper measures taken so that the students cannot cheat in preparing the assignments.*

The teachers in FGD-2 maintained that too many assignments would confine the students at home and that would hamper their physical and mental wellbeing. A small number of assignments could be effective to nurture creativity of the students.

The teachers in FGD-3 have claimed that if a small number of assignments are continued to check students learning and understanding after the Covid-19 pandemic is over, that would be effective. They claimed:

> *If the assignment is taken as a tool for evaluation on a regular basis, some aspects need to be considered such as giving a small number of assignments, assignments must be based on the textbook topics, and assignments should be on topics that interest the students. Again, it must be ensured that the learners themselves are preparing the assignments.*

The participants in FGD-4 claimed that assignments can be incorporated with the other strategies for assessment. But according to them, the number of assignment should be less as students have to do other tasks when the schools run in full swing. Moreover, according to the participants, there should be arrangement to provide feedback to the students' writing before final submission for grading as this feedback and students' edits improve students' intellectual level and writing ability.

The participants in FGD-5 asked the authority to include some other activities as assignments. They suggested that, poster and teaching aids preparation, reading books and summarizing, recitation, dramatization, etc. to be treated as assignments.

The data collected from teachers and the students were similar; they talked in the similar tone. Students in FGD-1 alleged that assignments during Covid-19 pandemic were good to engage themselves in learning activities but then after some months, the schools started to function normally. Then, assignments became a burden for them. They demanded, "Assignments should be stopped now as the schools are going to start in full swing".

The students in FGD-2 claimed that it was very difficult for them to write assignments when schools are functioning after Covid-19 pandemic as they have to spend the whole day in the school and then they have to write assignments at home.

The students in FGD-3 echoed the same voice. They asked the authority to stop assignments or to give them easier and small number of assignments. They suggested that assignments could be given when the schools are closed for a longer period of time.

The students in FGD-4 demanded that they did not want any more assignments as the schools are organizing regular activities. According to them, assignments are good but they need much time to prepare an assignment. So, they can be given when schools are out of session for 5/6 days or more. One student claimed:

> *During the pandemic, to focus on the textbook assignments was important but now that the school is open, I don't think it's necessary. Assignments have lost their importance.*

The students in FGD-5 have maintained that assignments can be there, but they should be given from their books or from areas related to their life. The school teachers should set the assignments; they should not be given by any other organizations. They claimed that there were some assignments that even their teachers did not understand!

The curriculum expert expressed his views by saying that assignment is a good way to develop students' intellectual ability and academic writing skills. However, according to him, the students and the teachers must go through a rigorous process. In that process, students would study intensively to write a particular assignment and the teachers would provide positive feedback for students' development. Teachers' corrective feedback and the learners' edits before final submission for grading benefit the both.

The teacher educator, too, appreciated the inclusion of assignment as assignment writing improves intellectual ability of the students and improves their academic writing skills which are required in the tertiary education as well as in practical life. However, the number of assignments should be less and there should be variation in the assignment activities. Alongside written assignments, the teacher educator mentioned some other activities that can be included as assignments. He mentioned that singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs; reciting poems; delivering speech in Bangla and English; oral presentation through using Power Point slides; acting and dramatization; working in the garden, growing plants and describing the activities; preparing different teaching-learning aids; rearing fowls; and similar other items can be treated as assignments.

The teacher educator further emphasized on teacher training for providing effective feedback on the students' writing and assignments assessment. He said:

> *However, for proper implementation of the assignments, teachers should be provided with training so that they can provide appropriate feedback on the students' writing and can assess the assignments based on the rubric.*

He (teacher educator) additionally maintained that plagiarism may be reduced if assignments are completed at one sitting in the schools. Books can be allowed to write the assignments but the assignment writing should be proctored until the assignment is completed.

The above data show that assignment can be used as a tool for assessment but the number of assignments should be less. Besides, the area of assignments should be expanded. For example: alongside written assignments, singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs; reciting poems; delivering speech in Bangla and English; reading books and oral presentation through using Power Point slides; acting and dramatization; working in the garden and growing plants; and similar other items can be included as assignments. Although the students spoke somewhat negative about assignment, it is believed that if the stated items are included, the students will take part in those activities happily and their real learning will happen.

Summary of the Major Findings

- The teachers and the students have fairly good understanding of assignments.
- All the respondents (head teachers, assistant teachers, students, curriculum experts, and the teacher educators) supported assignments as useful for learners' intellectual development and assessment.
- Initially, the challenge was to reach the assignments to students. But later on new challenges emerged. The major challenge was plagiarism. Later on, most of the students copied friends' assignments or they copied from the Internet. As a result, the leaners' morality degraded much and their learning was minimal. Moreover, the students grew addiction to mobile/computer games. Another challenge was lack of feedback opportunity. If teachers cannot provide feedback on students' writing, students will not be much benefitted from the assignments.
- Assignments can be continued in secondary level institutions. But before that, the following things should be considered:
- The number of assignments should be minimized.
- Plagiarism in assignments should be strictly checked.
- Sources where readymade assignments are available must be banned /restricted!
- Students can be engaged in assignment writing during the school hours and the textbooks and reference books can be allowed. However, it should be proctored.

- New items such as memorizing and singing the national anthem and other patriotic songs, recitation, reading books and summarizing, acting and dramatization, Bangla and English speech, video editing, organizing workshops, planting in the garden, taking care of them, and writing the growth of the plant, etc. can be included as assignments
- According to the teacher educator, teachers must provide written feedback on each assignment. If necessary, teachers will arrange face to face oral feedback.

Recommendations

The followings recommendations are made from the study:

- In order to maintain the quality of assignments, almost all the categories of respondents in this study expressed their opinion about reducing the number of assignments. Researchers also think that the number of assignments needs to be judiciously minimized.
- Available sources where readymade assignments are available should be banned. Measures should be taken so that plagiarism can be stopped. The teacher educator suggested creating provision for one-sitting open book and on-campus assignment writing in order to avoid unethical activities.
- Alongside description, there must have some opportunities for higher order thinking in the assignments. Scopes should be created for critical thinking.
- It is emerged from the opinion of students and teachers that one of the major challenges faced by the students in the implantation of the assignments was the problem in understanding some of the assignments. Therefore, the assignments should be in easy language so that almost all the students and the teachers easily understand them. Moreover, schools can be given the responsibility to set the assignment titles considering the level of ability of their students.
- To make the assignment more effective and meaningful, the suggestions from the teachers and the teacher educator can be seriously considered. According to them, assignments should cover a variety of activities related to affective development and psychomotor skills such as planting and taking care of the plants; memorizing and singing the national anthem, and other patriotic songs; reciting poems; delivering speech in Bangla and English; reading books and summarizing; organizing workshops; acting and dramatization; video editing; and many similar assignments can be chosen.

Implications

The policy makers and the education planners, especially NCTB, can ponder upon the recommendations regarding how to implement the suggestions. If the recommendations can be implemented, it is hoped that there would be positive changes in the area of learning and assessment.

Conclusion

The study explored what teachers and students understood by assignment; usefulness of assignments as a tool of assessment; quality of the assignments given by DSHE; the challenges to implementing the assignments; and the ways to consider assignments as a tool of assessment even after the Covid-19 is over. The major findings of the study included teachers and students had fairly good understanding of assignments; assignments were useful during Covid-19 standstill; the assignments lacked higher order thinking opportunity; the major challenges were understanding the assignments, copying from form others, getting the assignments done by others, assignments were available in the Internet; and assignments can be continued in normal situation by minimizing the number of assignments and giving the school authority responsibility to set the titles of the assignments.

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