

# IMPACT OF E-LEARNING IN EDUCATION SECTOR: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF COLLABORATION IN REMOTE LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

*The education sector has been through a lot of changes over time. Specially the last few months have caused a lot of reshaping in the education sector of Bangladesh because of the sudden flare-up of Covid 19. The highly inoculable characteristics of this deadly pandemic have caused educational institutions throughout the world to follow a work-from-home policy and espouse e-learning. Exploring more about e-learning has become a new norm nowadays. This paper aims to analyze the impact of e-learning in the education sector and the role of collaboration in enriching e-learning. This study analyzes the challenges and prospects of collaboration in remote learning. Empirical data was gathered from teachers and collaborators from different educational institutions throughout the world. Data is collected from a web survey by using a structured questionnaire. Based on the findings the researchers have suggested some recommendations for better collaboration to make e-learning more interactive, successful, and embellished. The study outcome would add value to the current teaching practices and enable teachers and collaborators to make collaboration more effective.*

**Keywords:** E-learning, Management, Collaboration, Enhance.

## INTRODUCTION

With the course of time the education sector has witnessed a lot of change like many other sectors. The sudden outbreak of Covid-19 2020 has triggered the most significant change in the history of education. This pandemic has caused closure in the educational institutions. UNESCO believes that over one and a half billion school and college learners are now stuck at home,

representing roughly 90% of the world's student population at one point in March 2020 according to Times of India. In this situation educational institutions are choosing the virtual platforms to continue their academic activities. Many of the virtual learning platforms are being available to the learners and contributing in the whole learning process. In the changed scenario e learning has become the new norm. This paper aims to look at the history of e learning, present the current scenario of e learning in different countries of the world and discuss the importance of collaboration in e learning.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The major objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify and discuss the importance of collaboration in e-learning during this pandemic period.
- To study the challenges and prospects of collaboration
- To recommend some solutions for better collaboration in remote learning.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained through teachers, management, students and parents from different educational institutions. The source of secondary data includes journals, articles, blogs, newspapers and different publications from websites. A quantitative method is used in this study which includes conducting surveys and collecting information through various IT tools such as Padlet and Mindminister.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Collaboration**

Collaboration is one of the most vital factors in teaching and learning. It is the key to make the learning more interactive for the learners. According to wikipedia "Collaboration is the process of two or more people, entities or organizations working together to complete a task or achieve a goal". Merriam-Webster dictionary defines collaboration as "to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor". Creating a collaborative atmosphere may lead to an increase in the learner's beneficial impact. With the strike of deadly Covid-19 pandemic, like the other important sectors, the education sector also underwent a significant change and collaboration in and outside the institutions also adopted a virtual outlook. With the educational institutions being closed as a means of maintaining social distance learning shifted in the virtual classrooms from the brick and mortar classes and collaboration began to take place through the electronic devices. Most institutions now conduct their regular meetings, preparing the next courses of action virtually and the word collaboration itself has been replaced with e collaboration. In these changed circumstances to have a look at the current e collaboration practices we have conducted a survey where 68 participants from 14 countries including teachers, students, coordinators, principal, Head of schools have shared their thoughts and described the current e collaboration scenario in their institutions. According to 'On Collaboration' book "Social media and technologies have put connectivity on steroids and made collaboration more essential to business than ever. But without the right leadership, collaboration can go astray. Employees who try to collaborate on everything may wind up jammed in endless meetings, struggling to reach agreement. A growing number of organizations – including IBM, Citibank, and NASA are reaping the rewards of collaborative communities in the form of higher margins on knowledge intensive work'.

## **E-Collaboration**

According to IGI Global dictionary e-collaboration is defined as “collaboration, which is conducted without face-to-face interaction among individuals or members of virtual teams engaged in common task using information and communication technologies.” The participants of the survey have defined e collaboration as “E-collaboration denotes connecting students from all strata of life specially from the rural and remote area, through the internet”, “Working with others via Zoom, using google documents, etc.”, “E-collaboration is basically a virtual meeting between two or more parties in the academic arena; it could be either with academic colleagues or with students when they meet virtually and work toward agreed goals”.

### **Examples of E-Collaboration and Current E-Collaboration Scenario across the World**

Schools, colleges and universities throughout the world now are continuing their academic activities online. Conducting classes, regular meetings, preparing planners and resources are being performed virtually which is enabling people collaborating from different corners of the world without travelling. One of the important examples of e collaboration is the commencement of a global IB classroom by Lahore grammar School where they invite educators from around the world to conduct sessions and share their ideas with the learners of different grades. During the pandemic period educators from Germany, India and Bangladesh have joined the global IB classroom and collaborated successfully by conducting virtual sessions as guest speakers.

Virtual art competition may be taken as another example of collaboration where participants have the opportunity to share and present their work. This type of collaboration is one of the dominant factors in enriching the learners' knowledge. Recently in Bangladesh, Dabur Bangladesh in collaboration with The Daily Star, one of the leading newspapers of Bangladesh organized a virtual art competition for kids where children from 25 schools aged between 4 to 13 participated. This was an excellent initiative taken by Dabur Bangladesh and The Daily Star to promote collaboration and engage children in creative activities and utilize the “Stay at home” time of the pandemic period.

The World Bank is also collaborating with the education ministries of dozens of countries to provide technological support to ensure remote learning opportunities for students. They are working in Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Chile, China, Fiji, India, France etc. They are offering their support in utilizing the educational technologies.

Association of IB World Schools (AIBWS) is an indispensable part of collaborating among the IB World schools throughout the world. AIBWS are groups established by International Baccalaureate practitioners aiming to support the IB schools. AIBWS conduct their regular meetings, organizes professional development and shares best practices among the members. AIBWS have recognized association of IB schools in Africa, Europe, Middle East, America and Asia Pacific. These associations work on ATL skills, students' work, assessment, behavioral issues and well-being of the students. All the schools under the associations get the opportunity to exchange their views and collaborate with each other towards one common goal which is the wellbeing of the learner.

Another example of e collaboration is IB matters which is an online podcast focusing on all four programs of IB curriculum- PYP, MYP, CP and DP. These podcasts are for the teachers, learners and anyone interested in IB curriculum. IB Matters discusses various issues related to IB curriculum and provides guidelines for IB learners, teachers and parents.

4 Generations 4 Education is an independent international educational organization established by Ali Ezzeddine, academic advisor, SEK International School, Qatar. The mission of this organization is to ensure sustainable growth of schools by offering educational consultancy services to all types of schools in Arabic, English and French. 4 Generations 4 Education is arranging free webinars, training sessions for teachers, students and parents who are following IB curriculum.

Virtual round table dialogues are also serving the purpose of e collaboration during the pandemic period. This is a tool where learners across the world can meet and share their ideas virtually. Recently grade 2 learners of Abdul Kadir Molla International School, Bangladesh arranged a round table dialogue where learners from Japan, Thailand and India joined. They were exchanging their ideas about the language, culture, tradition of their own countries. They also discussed the safety measures they are following in their own countries to combat the pandemic. This type of arrangement contributes a lot in collaborating among the learners from different countries.

### **E-Collaboration in Bangladesh**

The education ministry of Bangladesh is collaborating with schools, colleges, and universities and giving necessary guidelines to the institutions to continue the academic activities during the pandemic time. To keep the learning ongoing for the kids social media is also contributing a lot. A facebook page is formed for the teachers named English Medium School Association Bangladesh (EMSAB). This group is inviting teachers from different schools of Bangladesh where teachers are sharing and interchanging their ideas and opinions on various issues in live telecasts. This group is contributing a lot in e collaboration in the pandemic time.

There are other institutions contributing in the education sector during the pandemic period. UK Bangladesh Education Trust (UKBET) is organizing webinars and training sessions for teachers. These training sessions are enabling the teachers to make the virtual classes more engaging, interactive for the learners with the use of various online tools and strategies.

### **Online Collaboration Tools**

As the teaching and learning process shifted into a complete virtual process in 2020 due to Covid-19, some online collaboration tools started to be used more for smooth, smart and fast communication between teams and educational institutions. Some of these are

#### ***Google Docs***

This user friendly tool allows several participants to work on the same document at the same time. Participants can edit, write comments, take notes and collaborate at the same time. It does not require any pre-installation.

#### ***Google Slides***

Google slides include advanced presentation tools with great collaboration features and support presentations created in other suites such as power point or Open office. The objective is to enable users to share and collaborate on presentations in real time.

#### ***Padlet***

A free online bulletin board allows entrepreneurs, teachers, students to collaborate, reflect and share links safely. It has a user friendly digital wall which lets the users post their contents.

It is easy to use, links can be attached and can take photos.

### **Wakelet**

Wakelet is another free interactive collaboration tool being used widely nowadays. Users can upload videos, images, articles and collaborate at the same time.

## **INVOLVING LEARNERS AND PARENTS IN THE COLLABORATION**

To make the virtual lessons more interactive, learners and parents also contribute a lot to the entire collaboration process. Parents are being invited as guest speakers and learners are taking their interviews. Reporting to the parents through the Teacher Parents Meeting, Student Led Conference are some examples where parents are being informed about the child's academic progress and contributing to the collaboration process.

To have a close look at the e collaboration scenario throughout the world, we have conducted a survey where 68 participants from 14 countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, KSA, Lebanon, Iraq, Vietnam, Sudan, Sultanate of Oman, UK, USA, South Africa, Canada and UAE have participated. The participants were sent a set of questionnaires where they shared their ideas, challenges and the different mediums they use for e collaboration during the pandemic time. The questionnaires were as follows:

- How would you define E-collaboration?
- How often do you collaborate virtually with your team / grade / department?
- Have you ever collaborated with other institutions?
- How do your learners / students collaborate with other grades / departments / institutions?
- How do you record the evidence of the virtual collaboration?
- What platform do you use for E collaboration?
- What are the challenges you face while E collaboration?
- As a leader what do you think are the success criteria of an effective collaboration?
- What is the percentage of your participants?

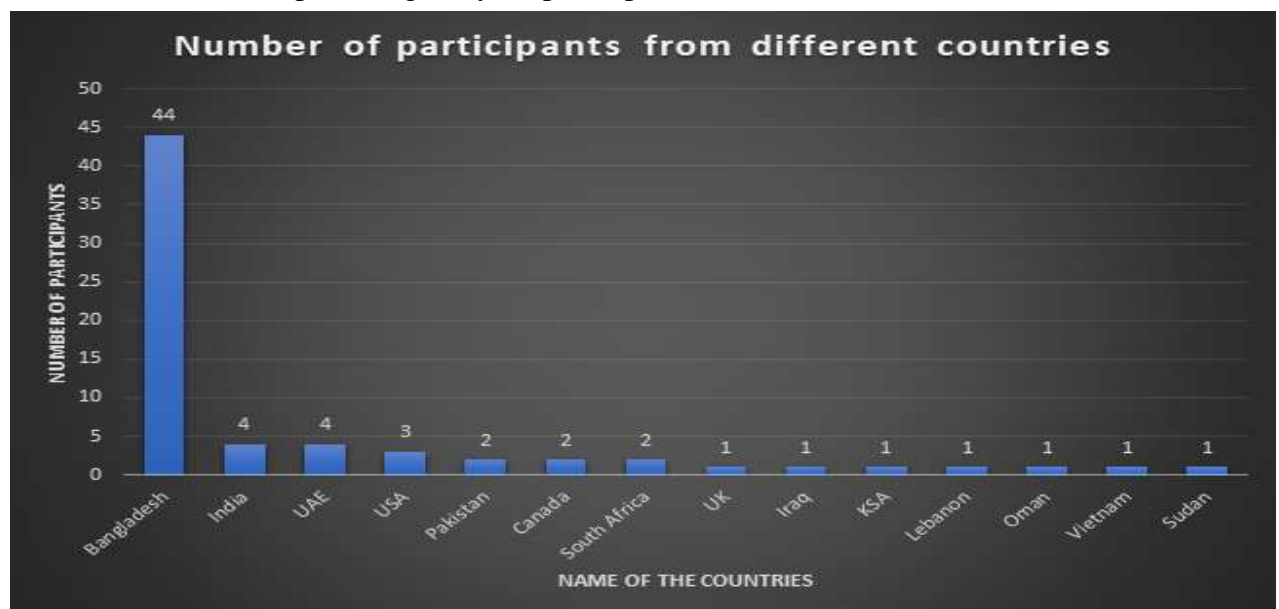


Figure 1. Number of participants from different countries

Figure 1 shows the number of participants from different countries from around the world. There are 68 participants from 14 countries including the UK, USA, UAE, Canada, KSA, Iraq, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Lebanon, Vietnam, Oman, Sudan and South Africa.

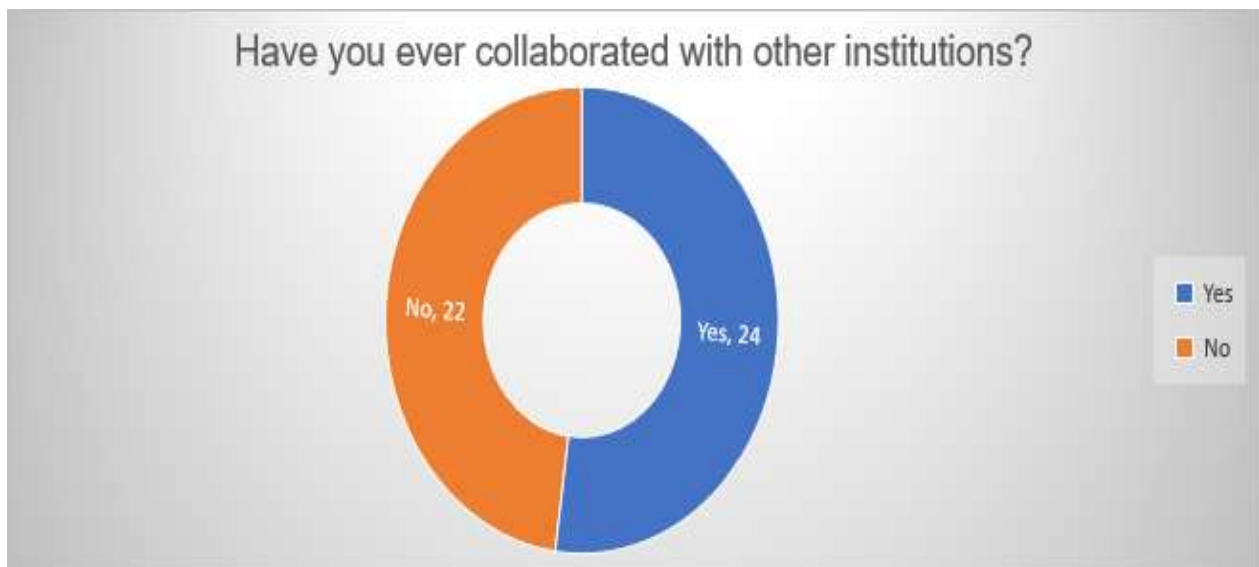


Figure 2. Collaboration with other institutions

Figure 2 shows the scenario of various institutions collaborating among themselves. 24 institutions said that they collaborate with the other institutions whereas 22 institutions are not in collaboration with others.

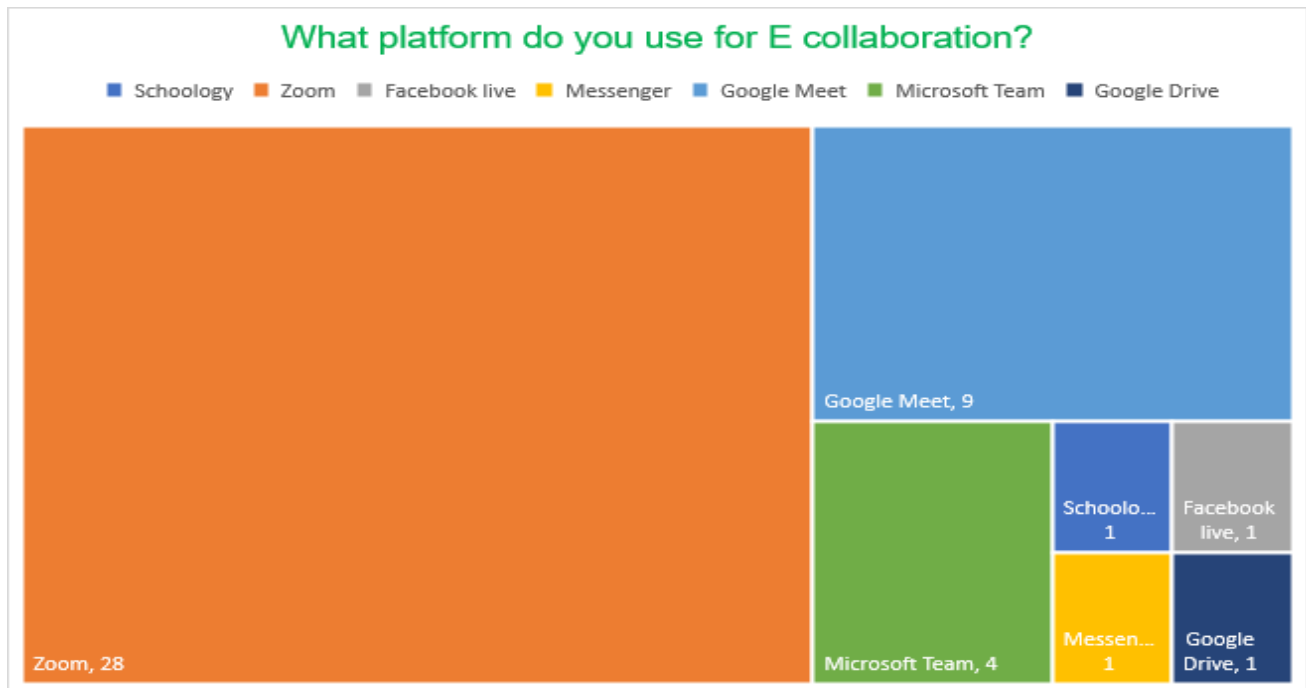


Figure 3. The various online platforms used by different institutions for e collaboration

From figure 3 we see the different online platforms used by various institutions for e collaboration. 28% of the institutions use Zoom, 9% use Google Meet, 4% use Microsoft Team

and the percentage of using Schoology, Messenger, Facebook Live and Google Drive is 1% each.

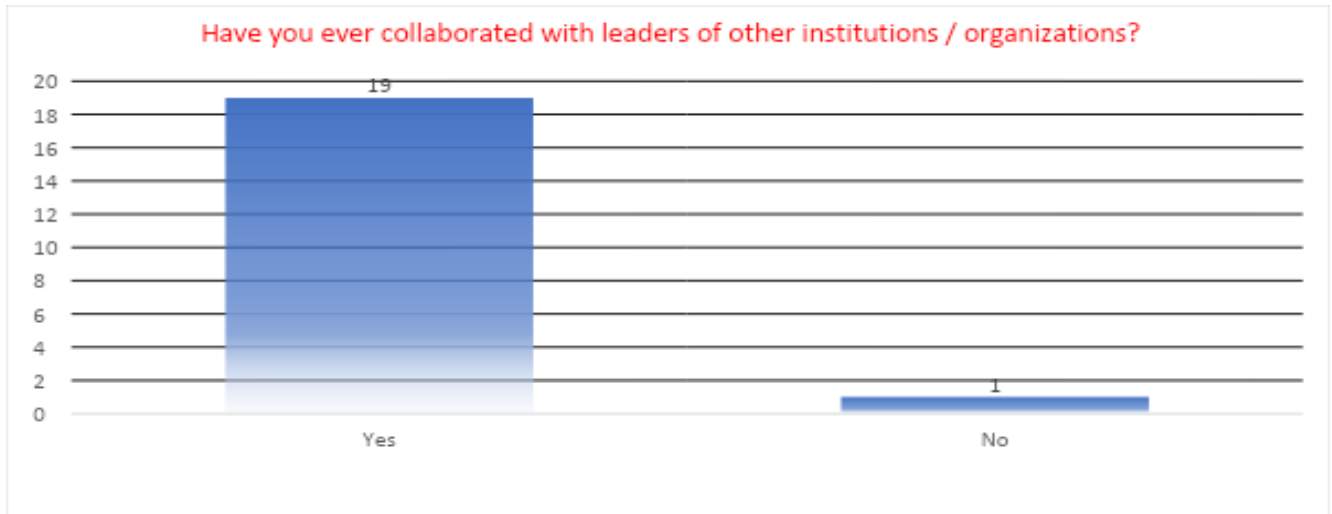


Figure 4. Collaboration of the leaders between different institutions

Figure 4 describes the scenario of collaboration of the leaders of various institutions. 20 leaders from different institutions participated in the survey and 19 of them are used to collaborating with other institutions and 1 leader is with no answer.

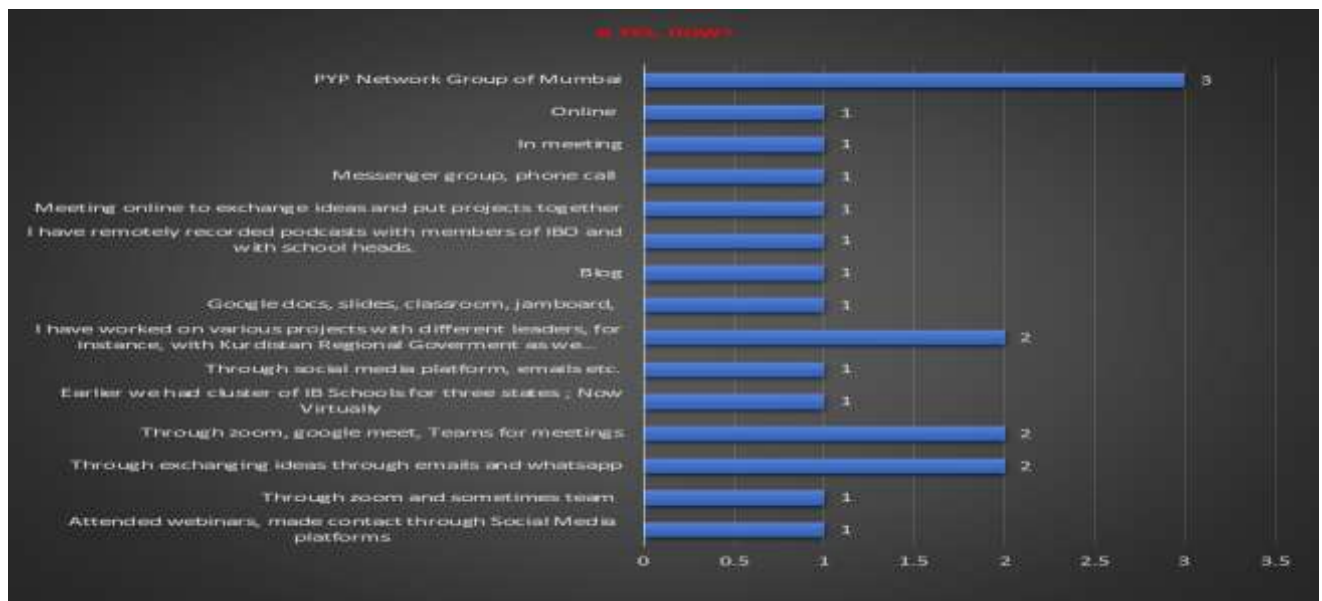


Figure 5. The different mediums/ ways used by leaders for e collaboration

Figure 5 gives a picture of how the leaders of different institutions collaborate with people in and outside their institutions. They are collaborating through phone calls, messenger groups, google docs, google slides, google meet, microsoft team and various social media apps.

To collect information about collaboration we have interviewed teachers and leaders from different institutions. One of the interviewees was Mr. Ali Ezzeddine who is the founder of 4 Generations 4 Education and the other interviewee was Mr. Chad Hyatt and he is an IB practitioner and workshop leader.

The interview questions and response is given below: (Mr. Ali Ezzeddine):

Q.1: What is the objective of 4 Generation 4 Education?

Ans: 4 Generations 4 Education was established 5 years ago in 2015. The objective is to provide quality professional development to teachers across the globe. The professional development sessions are offered in English, French and Arabic.

Q.2: How do you provide support to the educators?

Ans: We try to provide support by offering professional development sessions for educators. The professional development sessions are offered in English, Arabic and French. We try to provide support at a personal level by replying to their mail. Then by meeting with schools on the basis of their needs. We work on improving teaching and learning in English. We offer training sessions, observe classes and give feedback.

Q.3: How many countries have you collaborated so far?

Ans: More than 15 countries including USA, UAE, Qatar, Malaysia and so on.

Q.4: What are the challenges you face while collaborating?

Ans: Some challenges are shortage of time, daily follow up, understanding the approach of the participants etc.

Q.5: What are the major factors we should keep in mind while collaborating with other countries?

Ans: While collaborating with other countries, understanding their culture is a major factor we should keep in mind.

The interview questions and response is given below: (Mr. Chad Hyatt):

Q. 1: How do you collaborate in your organization?

Ans: We collaborate within the team in two ways. We follow synchronous and asynchronous ways of meeting.

Q.2: How your institution collaborates with other educational institutions?

Ans: We use a common platform “HOOSIER” which is an association of IB world schools to meet or collaborate with the other institutions where all the IB schools of our locality share their best practices.

Q.3: How do you record your meeting minutes?



Ans: We use google doc to record the meeting minutes.

Q.4: Do you have any specific schedule for meeting with your other faculties?

Ans: We have formal and informal schedules of meeting with the grade level teachers and specialized teachers.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF E-COLLABORATION**

### **Lack of ICT literacy**

One of the hardest challenges of e collaboration is the lack of ICT literacy of teachers, learners and parents. In many underdeveloped and developing countries still there are no arrangements for ICT training for teachers. Same is the case for the learners and parents as well. Specially the learners and parents from the rural areas do not have the technical knowhow of operating IT devices and using various apps.

### **Unavailability of internet facilities**

Another challenge in having successful e collaboration is the unavailability of adequate internet access. Rural and remote areas of countries such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan etc are not having a good internet connection. The BD Bureau of Statistics Multiple Cluster Survey 2019 shows that only 37.6 percent of households in the country have access to the internet. It also shows that only 5.6 percent of households have a computer.

### **Difference in time zone**

Difference in the time zones is another issue that makes e collaboration challenging sometimes. Collaborating with the learners, speakers or guest speakers of different time zones requires a special adjustment in time. The meeting time needs to be agreed according to the convenience of everyone. Recently Abdul kadir Molla International School in Narsingdi, Bangladesh arranged a round table dialogue between the learners of different schools from different countries where learners inquired about the culture, tradition, language of each other's countries. Many schools were interested to participate in this event but because of the difference in the time zone 7 schools from India, Thailand and Japan could participate.

### **Ensuring participation of every member and making it interactive**

Participation of all the members is one of the challenging factors in e collaboration. People living in different corners of the world with different types of internet access sometimes make it difficult for the participants to join the meetings. Making e-collaboration interactive with various tools and strategies another challenging task.

### **E-collaboration in Early Years programmes**

In early years programme e-collaboration becomes a little bit difficult for the kids. It is challenging for the early years kids to join the meetings, sharing their ideas and participating in the events virtually whereas these tasks are comparatively easier to the primary years kids. Inviting guest speakers from other countries and participating in guest speaker sessions, asking questions and answering can be a little challenging for the early years kids but easier for the primary learners.

### **Inadequate information about e collaboration blogs, journals, and websites**

Enough information about e collaboration is not available in the websites and blogs. There are not enough articles as well. Finding information about e collaboration becomes difficult sometimes.

### **Unwillingness of public institutions to collaborate with others**

In the context of Bangladesh, there is a little effort in public schools, colleges and universities to collaborate with other institutions. This unwillingness makes e collaboration difficult in public institutions.

### **Difference in curriculum**

The curriculum followed by different schools is also a factor in e collaboration. In Bangladesh, the national curriculum does not emphasize any theme based education system which could lead the learners to explore different concepts such as tradition, language, culture, history and geography whereas IB curriculum enables the learners to collect information on the focused theme through collaboration. For example, if a learner is inquiring about the transport theme, the learner will inquire in a broad scale such as the transportation system in Bangladesh and other countries, they will collect information about the most common transports in other countries through guest speaker session or finding information about transport of other countries from the learners of other schools through round table dialogues. This is how the theme based learning provides comparatively more opportunities for collaboration which is limited in national curriculum.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE E-COLLABORATION**

- To make e collaboration effective both government and non-government organizations (NGO) should come up with some projects of providing ICT training for teachers and students as ICT literacy is the most crucial factor in virtual learning. The ICT ministry can arrange workshops for leaders of different institutions. There should be some steps regarding ensuring good internet facilities.
- E collaborators should use different interactive strategies by using various IT tools to make the meetings successful.
- Specialists should come up with some interactive child friendly strategies for early years learners. Renowned faces should be invited as the guest speakers as little children take a bit longer to interact with new people.
- Research and development sector should come up with educational institutions based blogs, journals describing the picture of e collaboration in different institutions. Researchers should be appointed by the ICT ministry to research on e collaboration so that there is enough information about it on the internet.
- Revising the curriculum might provide learners opportunities for collaboration with other learners across the world. Emphasizing on the theme based learning will lead the learners towards effective collaboration by inquiring about the focused theme based information from the learners from different countries of the world.

## **LIMITATIONS**

There are some limitations of this study. One of the limitations is the unavailability of data on the internet. There are not enough articles, journals or publications on collaboration. Another

limitation is the inability to move or travel due to the pandemic. It was not possible for us to visit the educational institutions and collect data.

### CONCLUSION

Collaboration is an indispensable part of teaching and learning. As the entire education system has been shifted virtually because of the deadly pandemic, collaboration is also supposed to take place virtually. Despite the challenges e collaboration is taking place throughout the world. The challenges can be overcome and e collaboration can be made more effective and interactive by adopting appropriate tools and strategies for the learners and participants.

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