



brac
institute of
governance &
development



Adolescent Voice and Agency through ICT and Mobile Phone Use

Wednesday, 9 December | 3:30 pm BST



Photo by David Stanley licensed under CC BY 2.0

Team Members

Maheen Sultan

Lopita Huq

Sahida Khondaker

Kabita Chowdhury

Pragyna Mahpara

Saklain Al Mamun

Taslina Aktar

Samia Syed

Rumana Ali

Benayaz Samiul Amin

This research was carried out under the Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE) Responsive Research and Evaluation Fund (RREF2)



Outline



A young woman with a pink and purple patterned headscarf is looking towards the right. She is positioned under a large, textured orange fabric structure that hangs from above. The background is blurred, showing a red wall and some indistinct objects. A solid orange rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Context Setting' in white.

Context Setting

Imagining a digital future

The internet may be a different world in itself but it is merging with the real world more and more
- boy, class 8, rural school



I think we have a bright future ahead of us. It won't turn bad. It will make things better for everyone
- girl, class 8, rural school



I can know what is happening in Delhi, where is Donald Trump going, is he dead or alive, where his wife is going - all the news. This is possible only for internet. Our daily life has significantly changed due to this. It's like a revolution
- boy, class 8, slum school



The next 10 years will be different for different people. Because, you and I don't share the same mentality. Some will take it one way and some will take it another way
- boy, class 8, slum school



What does digitization look like in Bangladesh?



**162.920 million
mobile subscribers**

74% among 15-65 years



**3.6x more
internet users**

from 31.1 million in Feb '12 to
110.8 million in Oct '20*



**Unequal access
to ICT**

38% urban-rural and 62%
gender gap in internet use**

*BTRC, 2012 & BTRC, 2020

**GSMA Intelligence, 2019

Why should we worry about digital divide?

- **Digital access is strongly correlated with digital skills** (BIGD Nationally Representative Digital Rural Survey, 2019)
- Divide in digital access can be expected to **foster inequality** in digital skills across class, locations and gender
- Digital divide, if not bridged, might **deepen existing socioeconomic divisions**
- Steps taken to **facilitate access to ICT** in secondary schools through multimedia classrooms and computer labs

Methodology

A wide-angle photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, rows of students wearing blue school uniforms are seated at wooden desks, viewed from behind. At the front of the room, a teacher in a patterned sari stands near a presentation screen displaying a slide with text and diagrams. To the right of the screen is a black chalkboard with some writing. The room has white walls, several ceiling fans, and a clock on the wall. A wooden door is visible on the right side of the front wall.

Research Question

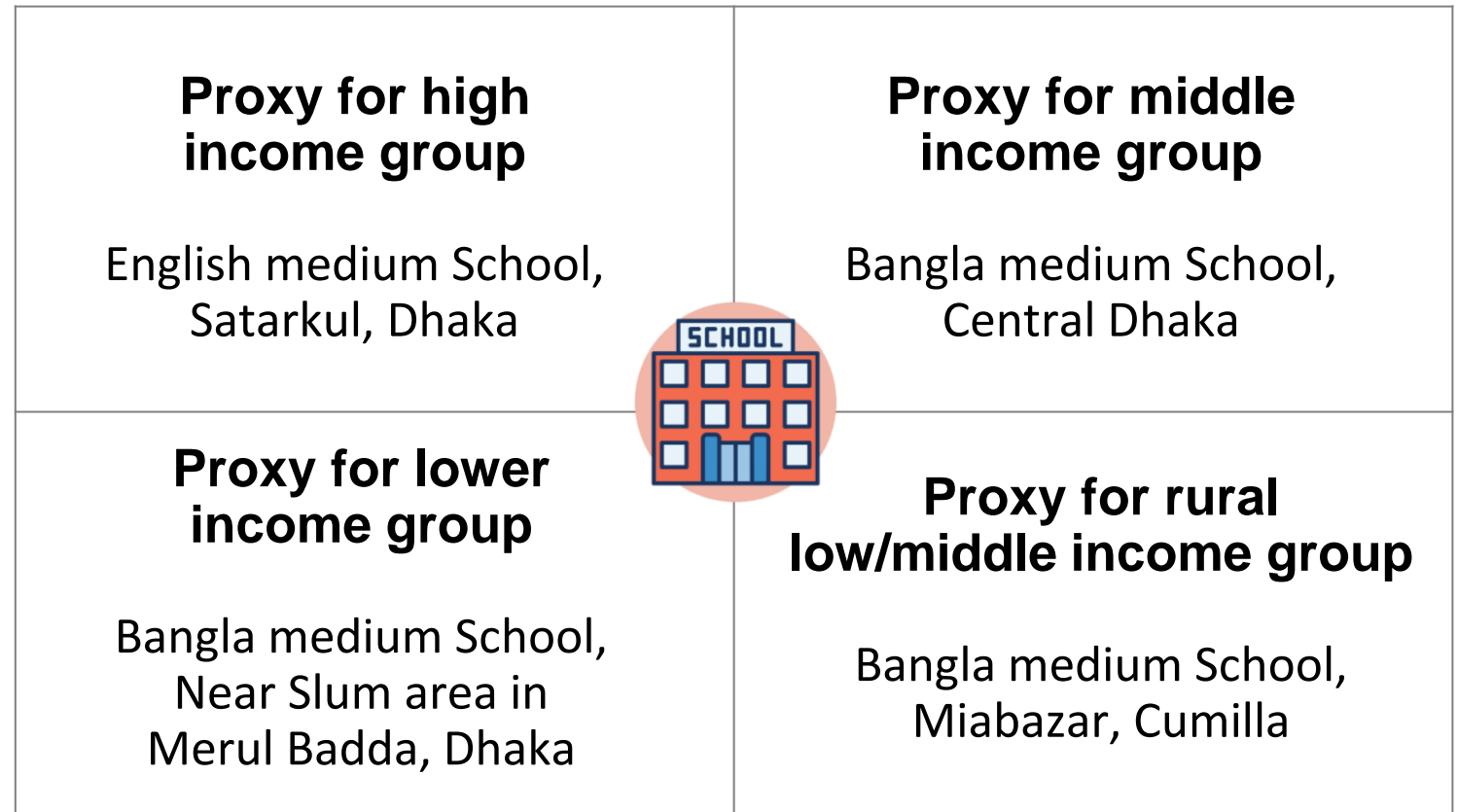
“What are the implications, both positive and negative, of mobile phone and internet use for adolescent voice and agency?”



The ability of adolescents to meaningfully participate in household, school and community life – which are key to them developing the skills required for political participation in adulthood.
(GAGE Consortium, 2017)

Research Sample

- 64 school going male and female adolescents of class 8 (aged 14 years)
- Parents of class 8 students
- Teachers of class 8 students



Methodology

- July 2019 – February 2020
- **Identification** of schools and presentations on research
- **Separate FGDs** with male and female adolescents of each school using vignettes (8)
- **In depth interviews** of 3 male and 3 female adolescents of each school (24)
- **FGDs with parents** (5)
- **FGDs with teachers** (4)
- **Validation and dissemination** events at schools (4)

Voice and Agency Indicators



Developing interpersonal relationships



Accessing information



Ownership and access to mobile phones & other devices and use of the internet



Learning new skills



Contributing to household decisions



Recognizing and mitigating online risks



Connecting to larger virtual communities & movements

Discriminatory gender norms around voice and agency



School completion rate lower for girls (20%) than boys (23.4%) (BBS 2017)



66% girls married before the age of 18 (unicef.org 2020) but “love marriages” are not socially approved



Boys (57%) more likely than girls (36%) to say that men should have the final say in all matters. (Amin 2015)



28% girls feel safe compared to 43% boys going out in public spaces after dark (Mohammed et al 2019)



Obstacles to teaching reproductive health education through school curriculum (Naripokkho 2016); on the other hand misinformation gaining ground in virtual world, distorting interpersonal relationships

Findings



Digital divides exist across class, location and gender among adolescents



Access to devices

Higher socio-economic group

All adolescents from English medium school own mobile phones, laptops, iPads, tablets, and gaming devices

Lower socio-economic group

Majority of other male or female adolescent students rely on shared devices.



Access to internet

All adolescents from English medium school have Wi-Fi.

Other male adolescents sometimes access Wi-Fi in public spaces. Male adolescents more likely to buy mobile data than female adolescents.

Apart from girls in higher socioeconomic classes, all other girls have even less access to mobile and internet than their male counterparts.

Rural girls have least access to digital devices and internet.

Owned vs Shared Devices



Time



Freedom

Owned Devices (Higher socio-economic group)

Spend more time on phones.
Have access to wi-fi
This allows them to use internet for different purposes such as research.

Unsupervised access gives them freedom to visit any site
Have social media profiles on other platforms besides Facebook (Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, etc.)

Shared Devices (Lower socio-economic group)

“Snatch” bits of time to use phones
Rely on mobile data
Because of limited access to internet, they use it mainly for entertainment purposes.

Often watch what the owners watch and refrain from visiting sites not approved by owner.
May not have their own FB/Imo accounts but use their parents’ or siblings’ accounts.

Challenges of Access

“My mother keeps her phone locked and doesn’t let me use it. She says that mobile phones derail girls.”

- Girl, Rural school



“I install Messenger on my mother’s phone at night and chat with my friends. I uninstall it in the morning so that my mother doesn’t find out.” - Girl, Bengali medium school



“When our school is open, I only get to use the phone on Thursdays and Fridays. I have to hand it back to my mother on Saturday.” - Boy, English medium school



Lost potential?



“One can find information about what chemicals to mix for interesting reactions like we are taught in school. There are many examples of these reactions on the internet. There are even video clips of lectures by teachers on these topics...I feel like it would have been better if I had access to the internet.”

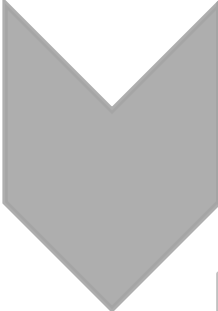
- Girl, Slum school

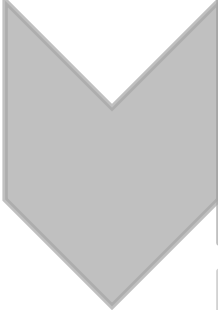
Establishing digital resources does not equal access

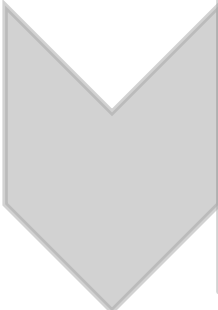
Optimum utilization of ICT labs is not always an option

- Computers not always operational
- Computers often shared in groups
- Low/no internet connectivity
- Hands-on use by students may be limited
- Priority given to boys during use

Negative assumptions of gatekeepers restrict voice and agency

- 
- Most parents view adolescents and the use of mobiles and ICT as primarily a **negative combination**

- 
- Parents are **unwilling to believe** that adolescents use of the internet for educational purposes.
 - They are **worried about possible romantic relationships** their children may get involved in

- 
- Parents invariably **monitor their daughters' use of mobile phones and internet** more closely than that of sons.
 - Teachers provide **more opportunity for boys** to use computers assuming their interest and skills

Limitless possibilities of internet use



Internet contributing to adolescents' voice and agency through building confidence

- **Confident** to show skills and discover hidden talents
- Forming and expressing **own opinions**
- **Challenging** traditional gender roles
- **Improving** areas of weaknesses
- **Expanding network** of friends
- **Aware of risks** of online relationships in the virtual world
- Participating in some **household decisions**
- Helping parents with **information and technical support**
- Widening horizons of **aspirations and engagement** with the world

Aspirations

I could learn the graphic design using online sources and earn money from home.

- Boy, class 8, slum school



If I apply for a scholarship after graduating, internet can help me find out which country would be better for me.

- Boy, class 8, Bengali school

If I become an engineer in the future, I will be able to take orders for delivering different electrical and mechanical components through internet.

- Boy, class 8, rural school

The gamut of perceived risks

Sexual harassment

Repeated calls/messaging

Invasion of privacy

Blackmail

Misuse of private information

Trafficking

Photoshopping images

Fake accounts

Spreading rumours

Body shaming

Pornography

Cyberbullying

Deception

Sending explicit content

Protecting or incapacitating?

- Predominantly faced by girls, but boys also vulnerable
- Some have personal agency to minimize vulnerability and control own risky online behaviour through blocking, unfriending, and filtering
- Only adolescents from the English medium school spoke of privacy modes, switching apps, and reporting
- Gatekeepers tend to “protect” adolescents by heavy monitoring and restricting access
- This prevents adolescents from developing personal agency that would minimize their vulnerability to online risks

Conclusion

Tailor girl in Dhaka, Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE/2019

Conclusions

- Infinite ways in which adolescents use digital devices and internet with **endless scope of knowledge, skills, choices and opportunities**
- This is however **available to only a few**
- Less among girls of lower socio-economic classes. **Least among rural girls**
- Digital divide can widen gender and class differences in digital skills among adolescents and create **new forms of marginalization**, especially in COVID-19 context.
- **Differences of owned versus shared devices** have to be considered while planning interventions
- Adolescents are aware of the multitude of risks in the virtual world. They **must be guided to protect themselves** and regulate their behavior online, but **not at the extent of preventing access**
- Access to devices and internet can bridge the already existing socioeconomic and gender inequalities and contribute to a **level playing field for adolescents**.

Gatekeepers' role in building safe environments for adolescents' mobile and internet use



Parents

- Digital literacy should be a pre-condition of parents to ensure that their children can safely use the internet
- Should be oriented to positive linking between education and internet
- Should be oriented to online risks and risk management
- Should ensure equal access for sons and daughters

Gatekeepers' role in building safe environments for adolescents' mobile and internet use



Schools

- Introducing adolescents to websites
- Encouraging research
- Teaching about online risks and violence, and skills to counter them
- Enhancing voice and agency on social and global issues

Gatekeepers' role in building safe environments for adolescents' mobile and internet use



Government

- Need to strengthen comprehensive teacher training
- Introduce ICT in education and encourage hands-on teaching
- Take stronger measures to prevent under-aged children's access to age-inappropriate material, and protect them from online risks.



brac
institute of
governance &
development



Thank you



Photo by David Stanley licensed under CC BY 2.0