Determining the relationship between academic achievement and prosocial behavior of secondary school students in Dhaka City

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The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between academic achievement and prosocial behavior of secondary school students. It contributes facts about the prevalence of prosocial behavior among students. Moreover, it inquires about gender differences in terms of prosocial behavior.

A total of 150 students (Grade IX) of Dhaka city were engaged in collecting data through demographic, prosocial scale questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGDs). Students' academic achievements were assessed using their grade point average (GPA) of Junior School Certificate (JSC) and prosocial behavior was assessed from students prosocial behavior assessment scale (SPBAS). A mixed method research design was applied where qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis were used simultaneously. The findings showed a higher prevalence of prosocial behaviour among students and girls exhibited higher prosocial behaviour than boys. Moreover, the correlation analysis indicates a weak relationship. The qualitative data findings showed that prosocial behavior skills like cooperative and collaborative learning can help for achieving high academic achievement. Students who put more time on study may have less social interaction but also can achieve high academic achievement.

The implications of these findings unfold better understanding of the students' prosocial behaviour, engagement and academic achievement of the secondary schools of Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

In a peer group, some children are always popular for their behavior. They are so well liked for their prosocial characteristics. The word ‘prosocial’ is not a common word in the dictionaries. Very often some people are called antisocial for their adverse reaction to the society. Social scientists used the word ‘prosocial’ first as an antonym of antisocial (Kruglanski and Stroebe, 2012). About the matter of the definition of prosocial behavior “is the label of a broad category of deeds which are defined by society as generally helpful to other people” (Piliavin et al, 1981, p. 4). Prosocial children perform voluntary activities for the help of an individual or group of individuals (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989, p. 3). Prosociality is a term alike variety of forms of behavior including altruism (Farrelly et al., 2019), cooperation (Margana et al., 2019), heroism (Margana et al., 2019), fairness (Bhogal et al., 2016, 2017), and trustworthiness (Ehlebracht et al., 2018). Series of studies (Batson, 1987; Batson et al., 1987; Batson, 1994; Penner et al., 2005; Caprara et al., 2010; Crick, 1996; Layous et al., 2012) indicates there are several aspects linked to prosocial behavior. The major aspects of prosocial behaviors are:

- Empathy
- Agreeableness
- Peer acceptance and
- Volunteer activities

In students learning social interaction plays a significant
role (Blake and Pope, 2008). Vygotsky’s (1978) suggests that, children learn from each other as well as adults and then separately learn by own for better understanding. Vygotsky (1978) alludes social speech as the direction given by adults to children. Vygotsky advocates that child is totally dependent on others, usually parents who start the child’s activities by educating him/her with respect to what to do, how to do it, just as what not to do. Vygotsky’s focal point was the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which utilizes social interaction with more knowledgeable others to push improvement ahead. If an effective capable person, for example teacher, peer or parents aid the student; the student can finish the task with this assistance. Vygotsky’s model of teaching-learning has fundamentally affected the learning and behavior towards learning. Numbers of schools have teacher centered classrooms. The educator focused model is basically learning fixated on the information by the educator, which streams one way, from instructor to students (Wilhelm et al., 2001, p. 8). To counter this prevalent view, Vygotsky keeps up meaningful and productive collaborative activities that should be occupied by both students and teachers. Learning can happen through play, formal or informal guidance, or work between a learner and an experienced learner. Therefore, teacher-students interaction is a better pathway in ZPD. Parents and teachers both can play role as an experienced learner and children are to act collaboratively by their behavior. In this study, it was predicted that the students who can cooperate with their teachers may do well in their academic achievement. However, in the context of Bangladesh, it is shown that the role of their parents may not cooperative for being prosocial of the children. Parents are rather active in guiding for better academic achievement than being prosocial. Therefore, it is worth exploring whether prosocial behavior of children is related to academic achievement or not in the context of Bangladeshi students.

Understanding prosocial behavior within academic context is important because schools give opportunities to children for developing prosocial skills by interacting with peers formally like cooperative and collaborative learning activities and informally like friendship and playing activities (Wentzel, 2013; Wentzel and Watkins; 2011). Positive relationship and interaction with teachers and peers create positive classroom behavior and that kind of prosocial behavior supports the development of academic achievement (Wentzel, 2015a, b).

The rate of dropout is still very high in secondary education of Bangladesh (Rahman et al., 2016). A total of 38.3% students in secondary level dropped out in 2016 (Banbeis, 2017). In most cases, as the reason of dropout, teachers and educators are blamed for their teaching strategies that are not supportive for students’ classroom participations (Mustapha et al., 2010). But in a study Abdullah et al. (2012) suggested that students’ personalities and peer acceptance is also a barrier to speak up in the class. The relation between dropout and study pointed out as cost of schooling, household chores done by girl student. In most cases, children enter school but remain ‘silently excluded’ (Lewin, 2007), which implies that they have poor attendance and low school performance. Moreover, they experience lack of learning materials, inability to pay school fees and employ private tutors (Karim, 2004). These factors increase the chances of children in Bangladesh not to complete primary education. As a consequence, Bangladesh became deprived of development in economy as well as education for better future (Sabates et al., 2010). In many developed and developing countries prosocial behavior is a tempting field of research. A series of studies have been conducted to understand prosocial behavior, factors influencing prosocial behavior and its relationship with academic competence, performance and achievement (Penner et al., 2005; Caprara et al., 2010; Spasenovic, 2004). But there is very little literature such as article, journal, books etc. regarding this topic in Bangladesh. As the aim of this study is to investigate the relation between prosocial behavior and academic achievement in the context of Bangladesh, among hundred hits of the search only selected studies from the western culture were included based on relevance of the study. However, if the students engage in different social activities like cooperative skills the cooperation between them will increase. The cooperation skill helps students engaging in cooperative learning rather individualistic learning. And such behavioral practice from childhood may help to develop future citizen for a better cooperative society which is aim of 21st century development agenda. As accelerating globalization, better partnership will address the global issues of discrimination and implement more inclusiveness.

If relation between prosocial characteristics and academic achievement can be identified and provide a guideline to the students in Bangladeshi context, student would engage more to a successful education program by participating in classroom and also to a society of inclusiveness.

However, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between prosocial behavior and academic achievement among students in secondary schools of Bangladesh. To achieve the purpose of this study, the following three sub questions guided my research.

1. To what extent prosocial behavior is prevalent among urban secondary school students of Bangladesh?
2. How students’ demographic factors are related to their prosocial behavior?
3. To what extent students’ academic achievements are related to students’ prosocial behavior?
METHODOLOGY

The nature of the study followed a mixed method research design where qualitative and quantitative data was being collected simultaneously. For this study, the quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire of prosocial scale named Students Prosocial Behavior Assessment Scale and qualitative data through FGDs. The study involves analyzing the quantitative dataset and the qualitative dataset concurrently, merging the two sets of results by identifying content areas that are represented in both data for comparing and relating results. Here the qualitative data were collected to strengthen for balancing the weakness of quantitative data. Moreover, this design helps to clearly identify quantitative and qualitative parts, which obviously helps readers as well as those who are designing and conducting the study (Creswell, 2012).

The participants of this study were the students of secondary school (Grade IX). A total of 150 participants from three secondary schools of Dhaka city were chosen (One co-education school, one girls’ school and one boys’ school) for data collection. In most of the secondary schools of Bangladesh students are divided into three sections namely science, commerce and humanities as per their interest. And thus 20 students were selected from each group of a school.

However, 50 students among them 20 from high academic achievement, 10 from mediocre and 20 from low academic achievement were selected to collect the data. Researcher collected the academic JSC score from school registrar before selecting the students. For selecting schools and grades a non-probability purposeful technique was used for the reason of time constraints. The reason behind choosing three different types of school was to explore the prosocial behavior among different peers’ settings (within boys, within girls and within a mix group). The higher grades (Grade IX) of the school are selected as literature suggests the prosocial behavior becomes clearer with age (Eisenberg et al., 1983). In addition to this, Bangladeshi students of secondary schools are to take JSC examination which provides the study a uniform or relatively standard academic score for this study.

Instruments

As mixed research method, the present study used a single survey questionnaire and a focus group discussion to collect data. However, the survey questionnaire consists of two parts. Part A includes demographic information; Part B contains prosocial scale named Students Prosocial Behavior Assessment Scale. The following section provides a brief description of the each of the instruments.

Part A

The demographic information consists of five items including ‘name’ which was provided anonymously by the participants and was used as a code for collecting data and did not used in data analyzing, ‘gender’ was used to separately analyzing the male and female data, ‘age’ was used to recheck the age group, ‘stream’ was used to understanding the sections, and students’ Junior School Certificate scores was used as standard scores.

Part B

Students Prosocial Behavior Assessment Scale: To measure the students’ prosocial behavior a prosocial scale named Students Prosocial Behavior Assessment Scale has been developed. The scale SPBAS consists of 20 items (Appendix A). The items were adopted from four different prosocial scales included ‘Prosocialness Scale for Adults (Caprara et al., 2005), ‘Prosocial Behavior Scale (Carlo and Randall, 2002), ‘Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ); prosocial part’, ‘Altruistic Personality Scale (Rushton et al., 1981; Penner et al., 1995). The items were selected and adopted from the original scales based on context and age appropriateness. All the items were translated into Bangla. Two researchers from department of Educational Psychology and Guidance (EPG) were employed to cross check the translation and item validity. A questionnaire is the easiest and cost-effective way to collect a lot of information from a large sample within a very short period. The questionnaire of this study contains close ended questions which has been provided anonymously to the participants for analyzing the attitudes and beliefs of the participants. For SPBAS scale, reliability statistics was determined on Guttman split-half method. Correlation was produced between the items of odd and even numbers respectively. Calculating this, researcher got the value of Guttman split half coefficient is 0.854. Therefore, the reliability of the test is acceptable.

To conduct the FGD, based on the research question, a few themes were developed to facilitate the focus group discussion. The tool of FGD was also pilot tested within a very small group of four students of Grade IX. FGDs were conducted in three sample schools. Four participants were selected for each FGD. Class teachers helped the researcher selecting the students based on their observed behavior and academic achievements for conducting FGDs. Students were asked about the view and belief of social behavior. Each participant of FGDs have given enough time to express participants thoughts, beliefs, attitude and reactions about prosocial behavior and its relation to academic achievement. Though the themes were developed by researcher for expressing the ideas, students were provided just the topic to discuss.
not any type of questionnaire. These free and open discussions which last for at least 10 minutes for each participant helped the researcher to generate new ideas about the topic and give an elaboration relevant to statistical data.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Prevalence of prosocial behavior**

From 150 participants majority of the participants (70%) showed moderate prosocial behavior followed by high (15.33%) prosocial behavior and low (14.67%) prosocial behavior (Table 1).

As in Bangladeshi context there is very little available research on prosocial behavior, the study also did not find available nationally represented data or norm to compare with the prevalence of prosocial behavior. However, the findings of the study showed that 70% of students are lying on the range of moderate prosocial behavior. The result is completely similar to the findings of Candido et al. (2009). According to their study proportion of prosocial students reported significantly higher. As a cause they explained there are concerning issues for youth aggression. As bullying and harassment were increasing there, so their school may give importance to higher prosocial behavior of young adolescents. Consequently, in Bangladeshi context being prosocial can be taken into account for secondary school students. Nowadays, bullying and harassment incidents are happening frequently in Bangladeshi schools (Daily Star, 2019). As already secondary students of Bangladesh are lying in moderate prosocial behavior, the higher prosocial behavior can contribute effectively to mitigate bullying or harassment.

In Bangladesh children have much scope for socialization. There are so many sports for boys and girls. Children have scope for involving in group work, cooperate with others. There are also some youth programs which promotes socialization like ‘APON’ by BRAC, ‘Connecting classroom’ by British Council. As the sample of the study were from age group 13 to 15 which indicates adolescents, this is the age of increasing externalizing problems like anti-social behavior, aggression etc. For decreasing negative social behavior prosocial behavior affects an inhibitory effect. In Bangladeshi schools, sex education is also included in NCTB text books for decreasing negative social behavior. However, it increases the scope for both male and female to discuss more and to be socialized.

**Demographic factor and prosocial behavior score**

The participants scored an average of 62 out of 80 total point. Among them male participants scored an average of 61 and female participants scored an average of 65 out of total 80 point. It is to mention that the SPBAS has 20 items with 4-point scale ranged from minimum 20 to maximum 80 (Table 2).

The minimum score from SPBAS scale scored by participants is 40 and the maximum is 78. Therefore, the range of the total score is being calculated by the formula M ± SD and the range indicates 55 to 69. Moreover, the range of male participants calculated by M ± SD determines 53.31 to 68.18 and of female participants is 60.19 to 70.87. However, it indicates that among secondary school student’s prosocial behavior is significantly prevalent and female participants are having the prevalence of being more prosocial than male participants. And, Table 1 indicates compared to boys (10.89%), girl (24.49%) participants have the tendency to exhibit higher prosocial behavior. Moreover, in Table 2,
the mean score of female students is 65.53 which is greater than mean score of male students (60.75). Therefore, girls have more tendency to be prosocial. Series of studies suggested the same results that girls normally have the tendency more to act prosocially than boys (Carlo and Randall, 2002; Hardy and Carlo, 2005; Candido et al., 2009). According to their studies, from social behavior development theories girls have higher innate predisposition to act prosocially. Girls from the early age belong to role of caring, empathy, leading to higher prosocial behavior (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). Moreover, adolescent girls show more prosocial behavior, empathic and impulsive (sharing, confidences, comfort, indicate understanding), while teenage boys show a public prosocial behavior that is helping with an instrumental behavior like help with sports, sharing and providing physical help (Carlo and Randall, 2002; Hardy and Carlo, 2005). UNICEF reports that there is a rise in enrollment for girls within primary and secondary schools which were remarkable in girls school researcher visited (Nekmat and Lee, 2018). The research, however, clearly indicates the prosocial behavior among girls settings are remarkably higher than boys setting.

In the context of Bangladesh, girls are also helpful in nature, caring, empathetic. They are naturally more helpful than boys. Girls usually work with same sex and girls have the higher capability of interactions. According to Habib and Hossain (2013) female have more trends to have similar peer group relationship. Boys in same peer group can have negative social interactions but in opposite sex peer group they can do better social interactions. Contrarily, girls have positive social interactions in same peer group (Nezlek et al., 1990).

Thus, girls have innate quality also in the context of Bangladesh to exhibit higher prosocial behavior.

Academic achievement and prosocial behavior

The result surprisingly shows that the relationship between prosocial behavior and academic achievement is negative (-0.063). However, the correlation value (-0.063) between variables is very weak and insignificant. For this purpose, bivariate correlation between student’s GPA of their JSC exam and total score on prosocial scale is being calculated.

The graph (Figure 1) represents the correlation between academic achievement and prosocial behavior of the students. The interpretation line represents a very weak relationship. Therefore, it indicates a negative correlation between academic achievement (GPA) and prosocial behavior (total score) which is not significant also. Therefore, it cannot be said with emphasize that participants who have high GPA will have a low score on prosocial scale. As most of the studies in other contexts showed the positive relation of academic achievement and prosocial behavior and the researcher did not find any significant relationship in Bangladeshi context, it can add a new dimension to the Bangladeshi researcher.

Moreover, the findings made a guideline for understanding prosocial behavior and relationship with academic achievement in Bangladesh context which can contribute in secondary school teachers as well as students.

The study also conducted FGDs to understand the relationship between academic achievement and
prosocial behavior of the students, participants identified four major themes in relation to understand the relationship.

**Prosocial behavior promotes cooperative learning**

Participants mostly identified that peers who are social do better result than unsocial peers. Participants explained that students who are prosocial can help each other for study, as one participant said, ‘*For cooperative learning they know each other well and so one can gain knowledge from another and enrich themselves. Thus, social participants can do good result.*’

Moreover, social peers can solve problems by group study. If there is a hard worker in a peer group other can also motivate to do hard work. So being prosocial is a plus for a good academic achievement. However, most of the students in secondary schools of Bangladesh may not be interested in group study or cooperative learning. Therefore, the findings did not find any significant relationship with prosocial behavior and academic achievement.

**Prosocial behavior involves communication**

As students with prosocial behavior have good communication with teachers, teachers also take care of them. Therefore, it is easier to a social student for achieving good academic achievement.

**Prosocial behavior promotes resource sharing**

Participants commented that peers who have prosocial behavior normally have a tendency of sharing. They share their resources like notes, books, sheets and help each other by learning materials and problem solving. Therefore, students can do good results by give and take their resources.

**Prosocial behaviors influence on academic achievement**

The FGD produces a dichotomous understanding of students’ prosocial behavior and academic achievement. In one hand, participants perceived students who are prosocial do better in school academic due to their communication, sharing helping, and cooperating skills. On the other hand, students who put more time on study may have less social interaction but can do better in the examination. Moreover, few participants disagree about the influence of prosocial behavior on academic achievement. They commented that academic achievement depends on personal effort and merit, not prosocial behavior. One of them said that ‘*Only merit is related to achieve a good result, for prosocial behavior result can be also average.*’

In some other contexts, researchers found a positive relationship with prosocial behavior and academic achievement (Spasenovic, 2004; Keung, 2003; Candido et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 1999; Feshbach and Feshbach, 1986; Chen et al., 1997).

According to their study, students show much support and help, they care about others and used to use prosocial strategies to solve interpersonal problems and thus it is related to academic achievement. Parents emphasize on moral training, proper conduct with peers and others, devotion enhances academic achievement. Social manner contributes directly to academic achievement and so school will be achieved success which reflects more general intellectual abilities (Rubin et al., 1999). Interaction with peers (Feshbach and Feshbach, 1986), obeying school rules and norms (Wentzel et al., 1990), loving and polite behavior (Cobb, 1972) reflects a high level of interest in school work and relates high academic achievement. Students also interchange their views and share opinions explaining the instructions of teachers and share teaching materials which help for higher academic achievement. In a study, Nezlek et al. (1990) investigated that academic performance was negatively correlated for males with their social interactions and for females, academic performance and were not correlated in both quality and quantity of their social interactions. The possible reason may that males and females may have similar level of social skills whereas for males the achievement was to the detriment of academic skills and for female interpersonal socialization was more salient.

In the context of Bangladesh, parents may not interest to socialize their children rather focus on achieve good results (bdnews24, 2018). Students with high academic achievement may not accept reciprocity of their peer group. As students concentrate on study much, they have limited time or have not enough skill to socialize in peer group. As students with high academic achievement in Bangladesh may think socialization is a waste of time, they may not participate any sports or any social works. They may only engage in study, tuition and coaching and may focus only achieve good grades in the examination (bdnews24, 2018). Students’ academic achievements are indicating a weak relationship with prosocial behavior.

**Conclusion**

Though the study has some limitations, it provides the researcher an opportunity to understand the prosocial behavior in the context of Bangladesh and its relationship with academic achievement. The prevalence of prosocial behavior among Bangladeshi students is significantly high. As in the context of Bangladesh there are very few
researches indicates the relationship between academic achievement and prosocial behavior, the findings also provide useful information that contributed to theoretical knowledge on this perspective. The weak relationship request parents, educators as well as students themselves to consider the issue why most students with high academic achievement of Bangladesh are not as prosocial as other contexts. Moreover, the findings explored the gender differences among prevalence of prosocial behaviors and factors indicates prosocial behaviors also enriched the related field of knowledge in the same context. Further research is needed for comparing prosocial behaviors among rural and urban students of our country; a study can be also conducted for determining relation between parenting style and prosocial behavior. Researcher faced some limitations also at the time of conducting his study. As the study was done with a small sample and only Grade IX were considered, the findings cannot be generalized for total of the population. For academic achievement CGPA of the last JSC examination was only considered. No standardized achievement test was conducted. But a standardized achievement test can give better indication of the academic achievement. A school as well as classroom environment is substantial for optimizing prosocial behavior. As the prevalence of prosocial behavior is already high it should be utilized properly. Awareness programs could be arranged for parents, educators and students so that a high achiever can also be high prosocial. As female students are exhibit more prosocial behavior some group works, sports, scouts can be organized in school for increasing prosocial behavior among males. For increasing relationship between academic achievement and prosocial behavior, assessment system should be not only dependent on academic based assessment. As academic assessment indicates more individual assessment, some assessment should be dependent on group work, social activities and sports. If students of adolescents’ age cannot be engaged with prosocial characteristics, they may engage with some harmful acts and act irresponsibly to the society. Students’ parents, educators and surroundings should aware of promoting prosocial behavior and cooperative learning for preventing students engaging with harmful acts. Some arrangement of group works, sports and changes in assessment like grading in these works and sports may increase the relation of prosocial behavior and academic achievement. The implications of this study unfold better understanding of the students’ prosocial behaviour, engagement and academic achievement of the secondary schools of Bangladesh.

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APPENDIX A

Survey questionnaire for participants

Part A

Demographic Questionnaire for students

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1. Name: (Name) 
2. Sex: (Sex)
3. Age: (Age)
4. Stream: (Stream)
5. GPA: (GPA)

Part B

Students Prosocial Behavior Assessment Scale:

1. I try to help others.
2. I am liked by my aged people.
3. I value others’ feelings.
4. I help who feels sick or pained.
5. I try to help by supporting peoples feelings.
6. I have done volunteer work for a charity.
7. I have given directions to a stranger.
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<th>Bengali</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I have donated money goods or clothes to a charity.)</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I have let a neighbor whom I didn't know too well borrow an item of some value to me (dish, tools).)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I have helped a classmate who I did not know that well with an assignment when my knowledge was greater than his or hers.)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I have allowed someone to go ahead of me in a lineup (in the supermarket, at a copy machine, at a fast-food restaurant).)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I have offered my seat on a bus or train to a stranger who was standing.)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I have offered to help a handicapped or elderly stranger across a street.)</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I feel happy to share my belongings with my friends.)</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I try to console those who are sad.)</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I am willing to make my knowledge and abilities available to others.)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I immediately sense my friends’ discomfort even when it is not directly communicated to me.)</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I spend time with those friends who feel lonely.)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (I easily share with friends any good opportunity that comes to me.)</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>আমি দান করতে প্রচেষ্টা করি। (It is most fulfilling for me to help others when they are in dire situation.)</td>
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