

HOPE not COMPLACENCY
State of Primary Education in Bangladesh 1999

Overview of the Main Report

Editors

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Introduction

Access to education is a basic human right. Following the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in March, 1990, many activities in the field of basic education were initiated all over the world. Bangladesh which is committed to providing basic education to all its citizens and as a signatory to the World Declaration on Education for All, prepared a Plan of Action for implementation of the EFA goals. There were many other initiatives which included enactment of the Compulsory Primary Education Act of 1990, implementation of the Act all over Bangladesh in 1993, creation of a separate Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) in 1995, creation of a Directorate for Non-formal Education, introduction of Food for Education programme, free distribution of textbooks amongst primary school students, and special emphasis on girls education. Keeping in line with national goals and plans, many non-government organisations (NGOs) also initiated a number of varied activities in the field of education, including primary, basic education and literacy.

In 1996, some organisations and civil society representatives, concerned with the state of primary education in the country, got together and organised a Conference on Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Bangladesh. The Conference, in one of its many recommendations, called for the creation of a mechanism to follow up on the Conference recommendations. In response, the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a coalition of more than 400 NGOs involved in primary and non-formal education, in co-operation with concerned individuals and organisations, spearheaded the *Education Watch* Project. The first report of the *Education Watch* has chosen *internal efficiency* as its focus. The *Education Watch* is committed to creating more transparency in the primary education system so that an authentic and more credible assessment of progress can be made and the findings used for pragmatic interventions by policy planners, NGOs, aid partners and other stakeholders. The following is a summary of the information contained in the main report.

Methodology

This first Watch report contains information on the *internal efficiency* of primary education in Bangladesh. The areas

covered under the study included: enrollment, dropout, attendance, learning achievement, physical facilities, teachers training, community participation, supervision, and supply of books.

The study covered
64 districts,
312 villages,
42,548 households
& 885 schools

Three instruments were used to collect data, viz., a household level questionnaire, a school level checklist and a child level instrument for assessing learning achievements. The sample design envisaged selection of samples from eight strata thus allowing separate estimates for each. The strata considered were six rural divisions, the metropolitan cities and the non-metropolitan urban areas. The survey, done in 312 villages from all 64 districts, visited a total of 42,548 households for the household survey, 885 schools for the schools survey and 3,360 children aged 11-12 years for assessing learning achievements. Six different types of schools were identified: government primary; non-government primary (registered and un-registered); non-formal primary; Ebtedayee and other madrassas; English medium kindergarten; and primary schools attached to secondary schools. Data were collected in the months of October and November 1998.

The government-run primary schools is dominant in terms of number of students

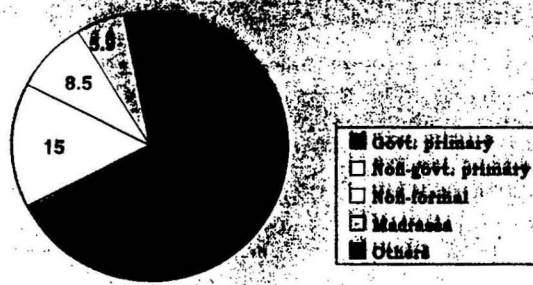
Major findings

Enrollment

Weighted national gross enrollment ratio at the primary level was found to be 107; the ratio for girls was higher at 109 compared to boys 104. Strata-wise, rural Khulna had the highest with 117 and the Metropolitan cities the lowest with 101. Girls were consistently ahead of boys in all strata. Further analysis of the gross enrollment information showed that a

third of all students enrolled in primary classes came from outside the primary age group (6-10 years). Primary schools run by the government were found to be dominant in terms of number of students enrolled; 67.7% of all students belonged to such schools. The non-government schools (registered and un-registered) came a distant second with 15% students and the NGO schools third with 8.5% students.

**Percentage of students at primary level
by type of school**



The weighted national net enrollment rate was found to be 77%. This means that 23% children 6-10 years of age were not enrolled at all. Girls' enrollment was more (78.6%) than boys' (75.5%). While in gross enrollment ratio the rural areas did better than urban areas, it was reverse in case of net rates; this implies that the school authorities in urban areas are probably more stringent in terms of age criterion or the urban parents are more conscious of the importance of sending their children to school at the right age, or both. In net rates, Khulna continued with its lead with 82.6% and Chittagong bringing up the rear with 74%. Major reasons mentioned for not sending children to school were, "too young to go to school" (36.9%) and "scarcity of money" (31.6%).

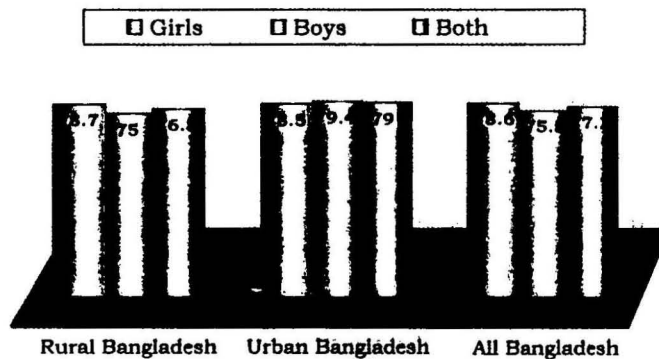
In terms of enrollment and attendance, gender parity has been achieved at the primary level

The study also confirmed the importance of parents' socio-economic status in enrollment. Those children of parents belonging to better socio-economic status were enrolled than of those who were worse off. Religion-wise, Muslims had significantly higher rates of enrollment. Mothers' involvement with NGO activities seemed to have positively affected enrollment.

**Mothers' involvement with
NGO activities seemed to have
positively affected enrollment.**

The above data suggest improvement in our performance in attracting more children to schools. This is also borne out by comparing the figures between 1993 and 1998; interestingly, *the improvement was restricted to girls alone*, and the rate of improvement was rather slow, less than one percentage point per year.

Net enrollment rate by residence and sex



Dropout

Information collected from schools has been used to calculate dropout and repeater rates in the primary school classes. On average, for various classes the dropout rates varied from four to seven percents and repeater rates from four to eleven percents. Considering the students enrolled in the schools at the beginning of 1997 as a 'synthetic' cohort and following them to the time of the present survey (end 1998), the total primary school dropout rate was estimated to be 26.6% for girls and 28.0% for the boys. For formal primary schools (government and registered non-government) only, the dropout rates were 26.2% for girls and 28.4% for boys, which means that the dropout has indeed decreased over the past few years.



Attendance

Sixty two percent students were in schools on the day of visit by the survey team (girls 64%, boys 61%). When the number of students in the school register was compared with the actual capacity in the respective school, the schools had capacities to accommodate up to 66% of the enrolled students. This did not pose any problem, however, because of absenteeism. There were also wide variations among different types of schools in attendance rates. However, there was no such difference found between the schools served by the food-for education (FFE) programme and non-FFE schools.

**In terms of learning achievements
girls do not achieve as much as boys**

Learning achievement

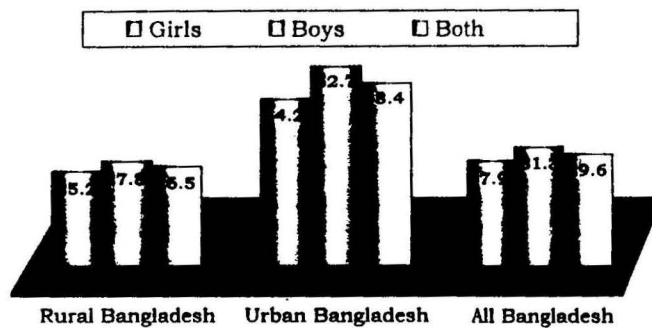
Of the children aged 11-12 years who were tested on the 'Assessment of Basic Competency' (ABC),¹ 29.6% satisfied the minimum levels in all four competency areas, viz., reading, writing, numeracy and life skills/knowledge. The ABC result shows significant improvements since the last time the ABC was conducted on a national scale in 1993. Following the same trend as 1993, boys did better than girls. Urban children (48.4%) did significantly better than rural children (26.5%). Strata-wise, the children of Khulna division did the best (38.1%) and Chittagong the worst (17.3%).

**Less than a third of children
leave primary school age with
some meaningful learning**

Achievement in terms of 'literacy' (ABC minus the life skills part) was also computed. A higher proportion (42.5%) passed the 'literacy' test. Gender and strata-wise difference as observed in the case of ABC also persisted here. A statistically significant positive relationship existed between schooling and basic educational achievement of children, with currently enrolled children achieving better than the dropped out or never-enrolled children. Among currently enrolled children the level of basic education was 34.2%, and 16.5% in case of dropped out children. The level of basic educational achievement increased progressively with years of schooling. The level was 7.5% for children completing one year, 20.8% completing three years and 56.9% for those completing five years. It was observed that the rural children lagged behind their urban counterparts by one academic year.

¹ This methodology was developed in 1992 in Bangladesh. Individuals from government and non-government organizations and research institutions were associated in the development of the methodology. A child was considered to have 'basic education' if he/she satisfied the following criteria: a) answering 'correctly' at least seven of the ten life skills questions; b) answering 'correctly' at least three of the four questions from the reading comprehension passage; c) 'correctly' communicating a given message through a letter; and d) answering 'correctly' at least three of the four mental arithmetic questions. The methodology has been widely used in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

**Percentage of children having 'basic education'
by residence and sex**



The level of basic education varied according to school type; the students from NGO schools performed moderately and the government and registered (or un-registered) non-government students' performance was unsatisfactory. Students from Ebtedayee madrassas performed very poorly but the performance of children attending secondary-attached schools and kindergartens was quite good.

**The rural children
lagged behind their
urban counterparts by
one academic year**

Distribution of textbooks

A third of the students received the textbooks by the first month of the school year, and over 75% received it by February. Less than four percent never received textbooks. When asked whether they needed to pay any money to receive the textbooks, nearly half reported in the affirmative. Over 80% paid some fees to schools for events such as examination, games, and milad (Government primary 15.7%, NGO schools 59% and Ebtedayee madrassa 17.6%).

Private tutors

Students receiving help from private tutors varied widely between urban and rural areas. In urban Bangladesh, nearly 45% received such help compared to 18% in rural areas, with boys (22%) than girls (19.8%) receiving this.

Teachers

Average number of teachers in different types of schools was 4.4 for government schools, 3.9 for registered non-government and 1.1 for NGO-run schools. Nearly 40% of government schools had 3 or less number of teachers. The teachers in government and other formal schools had 12 years of schooling but for NGO-run schools the average was 10 years.

Overwhelming majority of
government and NGO-run school
teachers had basic training

Information on training of teachers revealed that an overwhelming majority of government and NGO-run school teachers had basic training; in contrast, only 32.5% of registered and un-registered non-government schools, 17.5% of madrassas and 15.8% of English medium Kindergarten teachers had their basic training.

Absenteeism of teachers was less a problem than previously thought. The highest absenteeism of over 20% happened in registered and un-registered non-government schools; the absenteeism of teachers was less in government (12.7%) and the least in NGO-run schools (5.3%).

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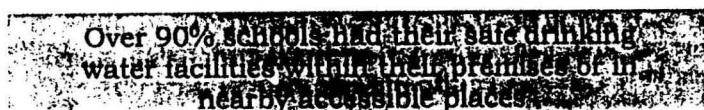
Teacher-student ratio

In government schools, which are the most dominant type, there were 73 students per teacher. Percent of schools where there were 40 or less students per teacher was only 12.9%. The non-formal and kindergarten schools had the most satisfactory teacher-student ratio.

Physical facilities

The government-run primary schools had 3.8 rooms per school, 3.4 for rural and 5.3 for urban areas. Number of rooms for registered and un-registered non-governmental school was three and the same for NGO-run schools was one. Over a third of the school buildings were made of bricks (52.6% in urban vs. 27.3% in rural areas; 46.6% in Chittagong division vs. 17% in Dhaka and Sylhet divisions; 64% in English medium schools vs. 5.7% in NGO schools).

Over 90% schools had their safe drinking water facilities within their premises or in nearby accessible places; half of the schools had those in their own premises. Half of the schools also had their own playgrounds; very few NGO-run and English medium schools had playgrounds.



Over 90% schools had their safe drinking water facilities within their premises or in nearby accessible places.

Approximately 60% or over of the schools hoisted the national flag and also sang the national anthem. More than 90% government primary schools hoisted the national flag compared to only 15% in NGO schools. While over 75% of the NGO schools sang the national anthem, less than a quarter of the Madrassas did so.

Community participation

Community participation was assessed by evaluating the activities of the School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Almost all government and non-government (registered) primary schools and madrassas had SMC. Also, 78.5% of the NGO schools had SMC. The average size of SMC was 10 and only two of them were women;

women's representation was highest in NGO schools (56.7%) and lowest in madrassas (0.2%). On average, 8 meetings of SMCs were held in 1998 and three-quarters of the members were reportedly present in such meetings. Further probe on these information suggested that the information on SMC meetings as supplied by schools should be taken with a grain of salt.

Women's representation
in SMC was highest in NGO schools
and lowest in madrassas

Supervision

The Thana Education Officers (TEOs) visited 47% of the government and 30.8% of the registered non-government schools during 1998; the ATEOs visited 94% and 78.7% schools respectively. On the other hand, the NGO supervisors visited 79.6% of their schools. It was observed that the mean number of visit by the respective education authority was much higher in NGO schools than the formal schools. In this case what is more important is the quality of the supervision or what is being done at the time of supervision. Future Watch report should explore such qualitative aspects of primary education.

Parental participation, supervision by higher authorities, timely receipt of textbooks, training of teachers and other indicators show improved performances

Investment in education


The country spends 2.3% of its GNP on education which is far too short of what other countries in the region spend (compared to India's 3.8%, 1994 estimates). The allocation in primary education is also very little, and 90% of the allocations are spent in meeting salaries and allowances leaving only a negligible amount for supervision, training and curriculum development.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. There has been improvements in various internal efficiency indicators of primary education in recent past. Gross enrollment ratio has increased from 92% in early 1990's to 107% in 1998. Concomitantly, a modest increase in net rates is also indicated. Enrollment among children 11-12 years of age increased from 77% in 1993 to 81% in 1998, less than one percent per year.
2. Primary cycle dropout rate has been reduced to about 30 percent but repeater rates are still high (38%). On average, a child needs 6.6 years to complete the 5 year primary cycle.
3. Attendance rate is still low at less than 62%.
4. Achievement level has improved since 1993 (from 27% to 30%) but at a slow speed (less than one percent per year; slower than increase in enrollment rate over the same period). Literacy rate among children 11-12 years increased from 40% in 1993 to 43% in 1998.
5. With 77% net enrollment, 73% completing primary level and 57% of them achieving 'basic education', less than a third of the children leave primary school age with some meaningful learning; Improvement in 'quality' has not kept pace with improvements in 'quantity'.
6. The gains have mostly been experienced by girls alone. There is no more gender disparity in enrollment and attendance.
There are variations among different divisions and between urban and rural areas. In net enrollment and achievement rates, urban areas are ahead of rural areas.
7. Parental background continues to play an important role in enrollment and achievement. However, poor and socially backward families tend to send their girls to school more than their boys. The children who are not enrolled, who dropout or who perform poorly belong mostly to socio-economically disadvantaged groups.
8. Parental participation, supervision by higher authorities,

timely receipt of textbooks, training of teachers and other indicators show improved performances. There is still considerable room for improvement in areas of community participation and management systems.

9. Investment in primary education needs to be increased, and much of this extra resource should be channelled to improve the efficiency of the system through improved supervision, effective training and appropriate curriculum development.
10. The country is committed to impart basic education to 80 percent of its children by the turn of the century. The goal needs to be revisited in view of the speed at which improvements are taking place. Many countries have done it in a relatively short period and we can do it too with right policies and firm commitments, and active participation of all stakeholders.



**Many countries
and territories
have achieved their
educational goals in a
relatively shorter period.
Why can't
Bangladesh?**

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