

# Barriers to Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Is it All About Ethnic Background?

By

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

BRAC Institute of Educational Development  
BRAC University  
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**Declaration:**

**I hereby declared that -**

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**



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## Approval

The thesis/project titled “Barriers to Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Is it All About Ethnic Background?” submitted by

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of Spring, 2023 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement on 05.05.2024.

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## **Ethics Statement**

Throughout the study, I have intentionally kept myself aware of the prejudices, biases and perceptions that might obstruct the objectivity and neutrality of the data. I was cautious while upholding any particular values or ideas. Also, I have not omitted data that might affect the interpretation of the findings. Therefore, the findings presented here in this study are authentic and without any manipulation. At the same time, I was strict about maintaining the highest possible ethical and professional research code of conduct, such as the willingness to non participation, the right to remain anonymous, the confidentiality of the research participants, etc.

## **Abstract**

Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, home to several ethnic minority groups, have a lower literacy rate than other regions. Several factors, including location, culture, way of living, language, and parental perception, impact these groups when they shifted from primary to secondary schools. It is necessary to address these concerns to ensure inclusive education for the students of the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. The need for more data regarding the transition of the hill tract students from primary to secondary level is a barrier to designing and implementing effective measures and conducting extensive research for these particular groups. Therefore, this study aims to explore the barriers that ethnic minority students face when they moved from primary to secondary school. For this study, I have chosen qualitative research. Individual interviews with ten students (among them, four students dropped out after primary) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with ten instructors from two distinct schools have been conducted to gather relevant information. The interviews and FGDs revealed that ethnic minority students are struggling due to their socioeconomic condition, language barrier, existing curriculum and teaching-learning method, accessibility, and availability of different school and non-school facilities. Based on the findings, this study recommends taking necessary actions to remove or manage the barriers. It encourages further study with large areas and samples for a more comprehensive idea.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to all the ethnic minority students, my wife, father and mother for their unconditional love and continuous support.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank Manjuma Akhter Mousumi Ma'am, my respected supervisor for her insightful guidance and constructive feedback during the research and thesis writing process.

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## **List of Acronyms**

CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
PEDP	Primary Education Development Program
FGD	Focus Group Discussion

## **Glossary**

Dropout	Dropout can be defined as falling apart from the study due to different reasons
Curriculum	Is defined as the total learning experience students are going to have through an education process.
Pedagogy	It's a method and practice of teaching especially in a formal academic setting
Primary Education	Primary Education is considered from Grade 1 to Grade 5 in Bangladesh
Secondary Education	Secondary Education is considered from Grade 6 to Secondary School Certificate Exam in Bangladesh

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Bandarban, Khagrachari, and Rangamati are three districts that comprise the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It's a hub of at least 11 multilingual indigenous peoples consisting of Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mro, Bawm, Pangkhu, Khyang, Khumi, Chak, Lushai, Tanchangya including a few descendents Assamese, Gurkha and Saontals (Makhdum, 2022). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Population and Housing Census 2022, 9,20,217 people, which is 55.76 % of the total indigenous population, live in three districts in Chittagong Hill Tracts. According to the BBS (2011), the average literacy rate in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is 43.9 percent compared to the 51.8 percent national average. Ensuring the proper transition from primary to secondary education for ethnic minorities of CHT is still remains a major concern. Research shows that geographical location, different cultures, livelihoods, languages, and perceptions of parents act as barriers to their limited access to education. From the very beginning of schooling, language creates a great challenge for ethnic minority students. There is a necessity to address their lifestyle, culture, language, and surroundings with the textbooks and curriculum. Absence of appropriate measures to tackle these challenges means that the light of education struggles to enlighten the community.

In most cases, their diversity and need for inclusiveness are ignored, but to ensure their basic rights and ensure quality education it is necessary. To ensure proper education, the transition from primary to secondary level plays a vital role as secondary education strengthens the foundations provided in the primary level. In the case of ethnic minority people, the presence of data regarding this transition is minimal. In other words, there is a lack of extensive study



conducted to identify and address these challenges. Eventually, this leads to low levels of transition, and a lack of information serves as a significant obstacle for key players to take the appropriate measures. Therefore, this study addressed five ethnic minority groups — Marma, Mro, Tripura, Khumi, and Khiang (Please see chapter 3 for their background information). Among all the ethnic minorities living in this sub-district, these five ethnic minority groups are prominent and commonly found (Sadi, 2021).

Besides, ethnic minorities living in this region have traditionally relied on a subsistence economy, with whatever they produce being used to satisfy their consumptive requirements (Kabir & Nath, 2005). As a result, their socioeconomic condition suffers, affecting the overall educational landscape of this area. As most high schools are more than 2 km from the village, students need to travel a long distance to the schools, and there is also a need for more residential facilities for them (Sadi, 2021). This scarcity and transportation costs create a significant challenge during the primary to secondary education transition. This socioeconomic condition has a direct linkage with education. Due to this, parents are often unable to continue their children's studies. Scarcity of educational accessories and classroom materials are also to be blamed (Rahman, 2021). This indicates the need for locally available materials. Contextualized teaching-learning material could help to establish an efficient learning environment. Remoteness and lack of available quality teachers impact this area. These factors influence students' academic progress and negatively impact the continuity of studies after the primary level. Natural disasters, conflict, and displacement also directly affect the continuity.

Education in Bangladesh basically consists of three stages; primary, secondary, and higher secondary education. Primary education covers children from 6 to 10 years of age. Secondary education covers children from 11 to 17 years of age. The secondary education sub-

structures are divided into 3+2+2 formats. These sub-structures include junior secondary from grade 6 to grade 8, secondary stage (grade 9 to grade 10), and higher secondary stage (grade 11–12) or colleges (Mousumi & Kusakabe, 2020). The transition phase after the primary needs holistic support to ensure enrolment in secondary. Though the enrolment rate in Primary School in CHTs (95%) is nearly equal to national (97.96%) but dropout rate is very high with about 59% whereas the national rate is 19.2% (BANBEIS, 2016). In CHT areas, the primary completion rate is 11% in the local Bengali community, whereas in indigenous communities, the rate is 8% (Begum et al., 2018). According to 'Bangladesh Primary education annual sector performance report 2019' for Thanchi upazila, the primary school dropout rate is 23.9%, which is higher than any other sub districts of the other two districts of CHT. It indicates how vulnerable the situation is in this context. Undoubtedly it has a great influence on the transition from primary to secondary. Very little research has been carried out in this context, and the availability of information is barely found about the transition.

This paper has explored the barriers to transition from primary to secondary education in the hilly area, particularly in the Chattogram division. Later, it may inspire and serve as a great resource for researchers, policymakers, and other concerned individuals conducting further research and implementing inclusive policies in this area.

## **1.2 Research Topic**

Transition from primary to secondary schools of ethnic minority students, particularly in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

### **1.3 Research Title**

Barriers to Transition from Primary to Secondary Schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Is it All About Ethnic background?

### **1.4 Problem Statement**

According to the MICS 2019 report, the out-of-children rate for primary-age children of Bandarban is 11.9%, while the rate for secondary-age children is 23.5%, and this district is one of the then highest-ranking districts of Bangladesh regarding out-of-school children. Furthermore, the primary completion rate of this district is 73.5%. This rate is 9% below the national rate. Moreover, the report revealed that most children (96.86%) are enrolled in primary schools in the district, while the national NER rate of 97.4% is the highest in the country (MICS, 2019). This report indicates the poor condition of the sub-district level. According to ASPR 2019, the primary completion rate for the Thanchi sub district is 76.1%. This data indicates that only a few can complete the cycle of primary education. After so much struggle, starting secondary education becomes even more challenging for them. To create a support system for the transition, all stakeholders need to understand the context and take necessary steps accordingly. However, little research and study exists about the transition from primary to secondary education, ultimately resulting in poor progress in education. Addressing this issue and the availability of information regarding the challenges of proper transition will help stakeholders think and act promptly to ensure the active participation of ethnic minorities in the national education stream.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

This research was conducted based on the following questions-

1. Do the curriculum and pedagogy play any role in helping students transition from primary to secondary?
2. What are the barriers to transition from primary to secondary schools education of ethnic minority children?
3. How do the barriers influence transition?

## **1.6 Purpose of the Study**

Several studies have shown that the dropout rates are higher among the Bandarban hill tract districts. Hence, this qualitative research study has aimed to explore the critical barriers to proper transition from the primary to secondary level at the Thanchi sub-district of Bandarban District. This study attempted to reach out to dropout students after grade five, current students in grades five and six, and assistant teachers in both primary and secondary schools as key stakeholders and identified their challenges in continuing their education. Therefore, among other things, this study contributes to a better understanding of why so many ethnic minority students discontinue their studies after the primary level.

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

The high dropout rate of ethnic minority students after primary level is holding the area back from flourishing further. It directly relates to the low human resource generation. This study reflects the data analysis gathered from interviews and FGDs with relevant stakeholders. It provides a deeper look at the challenges and how these can be mitigated and removed. Data and reflections from students and teachers will encourage further publications and help more in

inclusive policy-making in this area. The study findings will be shared with participating school authorities and other relevant stakeholders in printed form through an informal dialogue sharing. The target is to portray a qualitative picture of the academic and institutional needs, teachers' availability, and quality based on the geographical location. So, it will guide them in understanding the on-ground scenario and gaps. Eventually, it will make them aware and help them to address the situation and take the necessary steps for their students to ensure proper transition from primary to secondary level. The relevant information in the study will enable researchers to understand the context better, empowering them to analyze deeply and produce more informative academic literature that will create a better impact in the future.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Thematic Overview**

In order to gain a better understanding of the difficulties faced by ethnic minority students of CHT during the transition between Primary and Secondary schools, it was essential to conduct a comprehensive literature study to investigate the sociocultural context, communication difficulties, parents' perception, existing information and data regarding current educational attainment, cultural awareness, and livelihood. This literature has explored the context of the specific region. Several aspects, for example, the socioeconomic condition of the geography, current education scenario, the relation of language with policy and curriculum, and infrastructural condition, were explored for better understanding.

#### **2.2 Socioeconomic condition of the Geography**

People from remote and inaccessible geographic regions are isolated from the mainstream locality of the country (Hossain, 2014). Moreover, the Chittagong Hill Tracts are remote geographically, and in terms of communication, it takes almost a day to reach the sub-district areas from the union level. They still depend on the natural environment and traditional livelihoods; many are engaged in day labour/wage labour. It is very difficult for them to survive with such limited income, let alone pursue education (Kabir & Nath, 2005). As every factor of a society is co-related, there might be a linkage between socioeconomic conditions and education. Exploring the relationship between parents' economic situations and continuing their children's studies is important. Besides, CHT has a different language, culture, tradition, and lifestyle, which is heavily based on the practices of ethnic minority groups. Undoubtedly, this diversity

has made ethnic minorities different from the mainstream. In most cases, this diversity needs to be addressed in our education system, which impacts the education system of this area (Rashid, 2020).

### **2.3 Current Education Scenario**

According to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and Directorate of Primary Education, a school should be within two kilometers of a locality. Still, it is a dream for the residents of hill tracts. In 2009, a review of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility (CHTDF) showed that the school enrolment rate in CHT was 73%, whereas the national average at that time was 99.4%, along with a dropout rate of 65%. In the hilly areas, 54% of the head of the family had no education, 9.4% completed primary level education, 4% completed secondary education, and only 2% completed higher education (Begum et al., 2018). As most parents are illiterate, they need to be made aware of the education of children, which eventually influences the dropout of students (Popy, 2022). Besides language and weak foundation at the primary school level, parental unconsciousness, fragile support system, non-sensitized poor quality teaching, and socioeconomic vulnerability are responsible for the poor performance of the students at the secondary level (Kabir & Nath, 2005). It indicates that those who failed or struggled to overcome these challenges during the primary level might leave the study after the primary level. There might be a linkage that needs to be identified. Less participation of the parents in school activities and decision-making or getting updates on their children's academic life shows a poor relationship between the school authorities and them. There is a wide scope of interaction between parents and teachers in primary school, but the scope is limited in secondary education. Though many others address parents' education issues, parents' perceptions regarding their

children's education are barely discussed. A deep dive into parents' perception of education and sending them to school is essential. At the same time, the relationship between parents and teachers must be addressed and emphasized.

#### **2.4 Relation of Language with Policy, Curriculum, and Teaching Learning Process**

In our country, mainstream education is in Bengali, but it is not the mother tongue of the people in this study area. As their mother tongue is absent in the textbooks and teaching-learning process, many might cross the primary level but need help to pass in the secondary level (Kabir & Nath, 2005). We should remember that around 3 million indigenous people do not use Bangla as their first language (Roy, 2017). In their day-to-day life, they are used to their mother language. That is why they struggle a lot when pursuing education in another language. Several studies prove that one of the main reasons for their struggle is that they have to learn a language that is not their mother tongue (Faisal, 2019). That is why this region is one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country and lagging in almost all development indicators (Zohir, 2011; Sen et al., 2014). Considering these issues, the Government considered Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education included in the National Education Policy 2010 for ethnic minorities. After that, several Education bodies worked together to develop guidelines, curricula, materials, and textbooks for ethnic minorities. At the primary level, from 2017, five indigenous groups have textbooks in their language up to grade three, but after that, books are in Bengali and English. Besides, most teachers struggle with teaching in their local languages, as they know how to speak but struggle in reading and teaching. (Correspondent, n.d.). However, in implementation, three minority groups in CHT faced several challenges (Rashid, 2020). One crucial thing needs to be mentioned - after the primary level, all the secondary level books are in



Bengali except English, which creates suffering for the students. Besides, according to Kabir and Nath (2005), students from ethnic groups do not understand the English class as the teacher translates into Bangla. Besides, different contents are written in Bangla in secondary and higher secondary books, creating problems in the students' understanding. During the examination, most ethnic minority students do not write answers promptly. Teachers reported that students at the secondary level need to improve their understanding and writing of the Bangla language. However, more discussion is needed from educationists. As a result, a study was needed to understand how students struggle at the primary level due to the different aspects and explore its influence on their transition from primary to secondary schools which might help us to ensure a sustainable and effective transition.

## **2.5 Infrastructural Condition**

Poor infrastructure is a great challenge for advancing education in the CHT region (Popy, 2022). Studies have highlighted a shortage of hostels and a proper support system for students, especially those who have to enroll in secondary schools far from their homes. Further investigation is needed to understand this barrier's impact on students dropping out after the primary level. A systematic analysis of the infrastructural development plan is needed, which is rarely available.

## **Chapter Three**

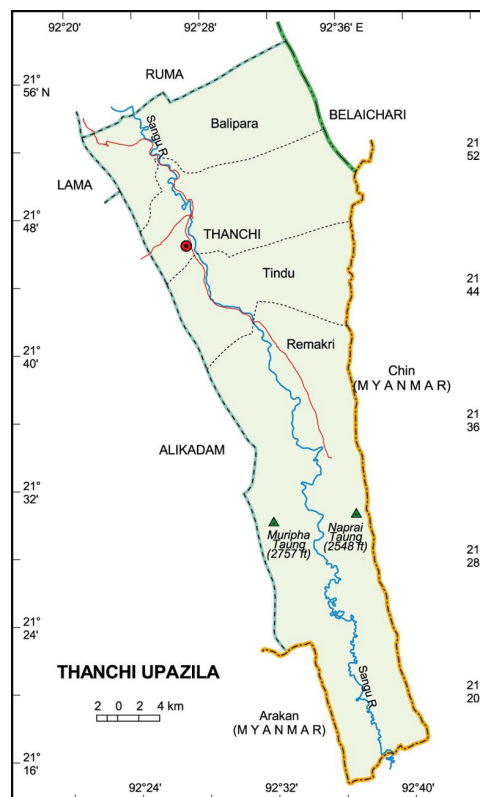
### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The study approach is qualitative. The research aimed to explore the barriers to transition from primary to secondary level, considering a specific sub district as a research site. To understand the obstacles and research site context, reflection from the relevant stakeholders is essential where qualitative study paves the way. Qualitative research helps to understand the scenario through inquiry and analysis of information collected through language and behavior in natural settings (Lincoln et al., 1985). The participant's response to the specific investigations gives an overview of the required information; their thoughts and experience helped to explore the topic and have a deeper understanding. It captures and reflects on expressive details like beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviour and the methods derived from different disciplines and traditions (Silverman, D. 2013). Various participants have different beliefs, experiences, and feelings. These have great value as they directly connect with the reason and are the outcome of their experiences. The analysis helped to dig out the real on-ground issues and to explore detailed data to understand the main reasons. Considering all these, the qualitative research approach was appropriate for this study to understand the context and explore the barriers.

### 3.2 Research site

Bandarban is among the ten highest-ranking districts considering the rate of out-of-school children, with primary children at 11.9% and secondary-age children at 23.5%. The district's primary school completion rate is only 73.5%, 9% lower than the national average (UNICEF & Government of Bangladesh, 2019). However, clearer information about the transition rate from primary to secondary schools needs to be clarified. The dropout rate at the primary level of the Thanchi sub-district of Bandarban district is 23.9% (Government of Bangladesh & DPE, 2019), which is relatively higher than most other parts of the CHT. Additionally, this area has only three secondary schools and fourteen government primary schools. Considering all these factors, the research was conducted in Thanchi of Bandarban District. The research site was one primary and one high school in Thanchi Upazila of Bandarban.



**Figure 1:** Thanchi Sub-District (Source: [bdmaps.blogspot.com/2011/11/thanchi-upazila.html](http://bdmaps.blogspot.com/2011/11/thanchi-upazila.html))

### 3.3 Research Participant

The study participants were dropout students after grade five, current students of grade five and six, primary and high school teachers. The Schools were selected through purposive sampling based on access. The participants of schools were distributed proportionally. Snowball sampling was used to get in-depth and detailed data to select drop-out student participants. The current students of grades five and six were selected from the register. Five assistant teachers and head teachers from each school participated in FGD, three students of grades five and six from each primary and high school, and four grade five drop-out students participated in the interview.

Grade 5 - Three Students	Thanchi Government Primary School			
Male - 1	Female - 2	Stays in Hostel- 1	Joining from Home- 2	
Grade 6 - Three Students	Thanchi Government High School			
Male - 2	Female - 1	Stays in Hostel- 2	Joining from home- 1	
Four Dropped Out Students				
Male - 2	Female - 2	From main market area - 2	From a remote place - 2	
Distribution of Participants according to Ethnic Minority Groups				
Tripura - 3	Mro - 1	Khumi- 1	Marma - 3	Bawm - 2

Table 1: Overview of individual interview participants

Participants of the interview and FGD were representatives of five ethnic minority groups.

A short overview is projected on next page to have a better understanding of those groups.

Name of Ethnic Minority Groups	Brief Information
Tripuras	<p>Streamside or valley tribes engage in traditional plough culture and occasional fruit gardening. Tripuras profess a form of Hinduism and observe many Hindu rites, ceremonies, and animistic rites. They claim caste Hindu status and have personal names of Bengali Hindu origin. As with the Chakma and Marma, there is an emerging middle class. Three Tripura subtribes are the Murung, Uchai, and Riang, sometimes classified as separate tribes. Tripuras have primarily settled in the northern region of the Mong Circle (Khagrachhari District) but have scattered settlements in the Chakma and Bohmong Circles. A few Christian Tripura live in the Thanchi sub-district of Bandarban as a part of the Bohmong circle. Most of them are transformed into the Christian religion.</p>
Marma	<p>Streamside or valley tribes engage in traditional plough culture and occasional fruit gardening. They are found in all districts of the CHT, but the majority live in the Mong and Bohmong Circles, roughly corresponding to Khagrachhari and Bandarban Districts. There are two major Marma groups, those under the Mong Circle under the Mong raja(king) residing in the northern portion of Khagrachhari District, whose residence is in Manikchhari. The southern group's Bohmong chief resides in Bandarban. These rajas(chiefs) were established as tax collectors for the Mughal, East India Company, and British administrations. Originating from Myanmar, the Marmas regard Myanmar as the center of their cultural life, with children often learning the Arakanese language. As with the</p>

	Chakmas, there is an emerging middle class.
Bawm	The Ridgetop tribe generally relied on traditional cultivation, though it also engaged in gardening and trade. Bawms are considered an integration of Mro, Khumi, and Marma ethnic groups. They are concentrated in Ruma thana of Bandarban District, with a few settlements in Thanchi and other sub-districts. Compared to all other CHT ethnic minority groups, the Bawms are considered well-to-do, with 67 percent literacy and a standard of living, the highest among all other minority groups. They grow orange, pineapple, banana, and jackfruit as cash crops and maintain shops and other enterprises. Most luxury goods finding their way into CHT markets are in their hands. They early adopted Christian norms and a rank-stratified society devoted to accumulating goods, particularly luxury ones.
Kheyang	Streamside or valley tribes engage in traditional plough culture and occasional fruit gardening. The Kheyang live in the Rajasthali sub-district and near Chandragona in Kaptai thana of Rangamati District and also on the top of hills in the Chemri <i>mouza</i> between the Sangu and Karnaphuli rivers in Bandarban District. They also live in Myanmar. They have been a nomadic tribe recently residing in houses, living mainly on cultivation. They are very backward concerning education.
Khumi	This Ridgetop tribe generally lives in very remote places and relies on cultivation. The Kumi are mainly in the Ruma and Thanchi Sub-districts of the

	<p>Bohmong Circle (Bandarban District) and owe allegiance to the Bohmong chief. The Khumis are very poor and backward in education. They are nomadic and mainly depend on farming. Their name is thought to come from an Arakanese word reflecting their dog-eating propensities.</p>
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Source: BAN: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project. Prepared by ANZDEC Ltd for the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Asian Development Bank. Link: <https://adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/42248-013-ban-ippab.pdf>

**3.4 Research Method**

The qualitative research method was used for this study. Data was collected from FGD with teachers and semi-structured interviews with students. Focus Group Discussions were on the teacher's perspective and thoughts on discontinuation after the primary level, and were asked for reflection on the existing barriers based on their experiences. It also asked to guide us in finding the specific barriers and areas working behind the discontinuation. For this FGD, assistant teachers were selected from the ethnic minority groups working in this school for at least five years because, other than that, the reflection might not portray the proper in-depth picture. Here, the inclusion criteria for the assistant teachers were five years of working experience and teachers from ethnic minority groups, and the exclusion criteria were Bengali assistant teachers. The intention was always to hear the maximum from their real-life experiences based on case stories. Besides, the semi-structured interviews with students were structured on the area's demography and continuing education's general struggles. The inclusion criteria for the response is to ask for a picture of the current teaching-learning effectiveness and the connection of the

curriculum with their lives. Step by step, it asked for the reflection on the reasons for dropping out or their struggles of continuing after the primary school level based on their observation and experiences on their own and with others in their community and classmates. The school had students from different sub-districts, but the inhabitants of that sub-district were included, and students from other sub-districts were excluded. Students from Bengali families also fall under the exclusion criteria. Small group discussions help to reveal the facts (Hammerberg et al., 2016). On the other hand, Wyverkens and others mentioned that interviews would help to generate insights (Wyverkens et al., 2019). The focus group discussion would help determine the teachers' reflections regarding the factors affecting continuing education after the primary level. At the same time, their reflections helped to find a scope to work on in the future. The semi-structured interview with students reflected contextualized issues and focused on students struggling to continue their education. Both FGD and interviews were in person. Thus, it would help students and teachers to understand the question as there is a language challenge.

### **3.5 Research Tools**

The research tool was FGD, and one-to-one interviews were used to determine the factors that acted as barriers to the transition from primary to secondary level. Based on the literature review, a questionnaire was developed to explore the different dynamics of the participants. Several barriers based on different aspects have emerged from the interviews and FGD. Maximum response factors were considered key factors. The open-ended interview questions also helped in this regard to get maximum reflection and later on to incorporate them in the data set. Based on the participants' initial meeting and commitment, a schedule was created to ensure smooth data collection. Recording and note-taking tools were used during the data collection process.



### **3.6 Data collection process**

Initially, local personal connections were used to inform the authorities and find a convenient date, time, and other essentials to ensure the availability of headteachers and teachers for the first meeting. Later, a physical meeting was arranged with the relevant school authority and teachers to inform them about the study purpose and relevant information, taking their suggestions for arranging interviews and FGD and obtaining paper consent. The students' names were collected from the student register and purposefully selected for the interviews. Students were called to give face-to-face interviews individually. Before that, a meeting was arranged with parents, taking contact information from the school authority and students to inform them about the whole process and taking paper consent. Parents were notified again about the interview time and date of the students during the early meeting, and there was a scope of their presence during the interview. They were informed again through phone calls or letters to students before the interview day. Besides, dropout students after grade five were identified with the help of primary school teachers and classmates. They have also gone through the same process. FGD was conducted with the available assistant teachers and Headmasters. Teachers with at least five years of experience in that area were selected. Both the FGD and interview data were collected in hard copies and had protocols. After getting verbal consent from both parties, the whole interview discussion and FGD were also recorded for further reference. Although observation was not included in the data collection process, the observation during the data collection process was reflected in the discussion.

### **3.7 Data analysis process**

All the data were transcribed first, with the help of the notes and audio clips, and then transcription was prepared accordingly. Later, all data sets were organized based on themes, and coding was done to track them with the help of a developed matrix. Data was analyzed by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps of thematic analysis. The advantage of thematic analysis is that it provides a detailed and nuanced account of a particular theme or group of themes within the data. It helps to connect across the whole or majority of the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Triangulation and member checking were done using the enlisted participants' information and applied code. It helped to validate the accuracy.

### **3.8 Research ethics**

As a researcher, I have tried to ensure the research ethics firmly. I have confirmed proper consent and all the privacy-related steps. The interview took place with children, and researching children's experiences involves negotiating the nature of the researcher. Researchers need the informed consent of a parent or guardian of a child before a child is invited (Nixon, 2013). Before the interview, all potential respondents must be clear about why the interviews are being undertaken and any possible consequences of involvement (McDonald & Rogers, 2014). So, I initially ensured the proper briefing with the student's teachers, parent, or caregiver and obtained appropriate paper consent for their student/children's interview. They were invited during the interview as well. A short brief about the study, its purpose, and its significance was given to the students. No harm policy was ensured, and students could leave the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. Students and educational professionals discussed and shared such information according to their experiences and beliefs. So, building trust and maintain

confidentiality was a prerequisite. Besides, I preserved documents and audio clips with proper privacy and safety to ensure confidentiality. I have provided privacy during the data collection so that others could not know, read, or hear about other's reflections and would not share their documents and information with others. After the interview and FGD, all digital media files were uploaded to a Google storage system with no other person's access. After the study, I would store all the printed paper in a place where no other ones will have access. Without this study, I will not use any information and data for any other purposes.

### **3.9 Role of the researcher**

I have remained bias-free while collecting the data and collected all the data without manipulation. I have also brought out the perspectives and reflections of the participants. During the data collection, I have acted as a non-participant observer. During FGD, I had to ensure the participation of all participants. Besides, I ensured that the audio taping and taking notes were done simultaneously. For the interview, I have tried to be proactive so that the participants do not hesitate to share and maintain the interview protocol.

### **3.10 Limitations of the study**

The first limitation of this study is the need for more literature. As a result, many other aspects, views, information, and areas might need to be added. It might add value to the research and give different dynamics. There was a time limitation during the data collection and analysis, and the sample size was small. So, there could be a better selection of purposeful sampling. Moreover, there could be more data quality and analysis if there is more time. The study was carried out in two schools of one sub-district. This might only partially reflect the barriers of others. Data

collection did not involve parents. Caregivers and parents might add different dimensions to the study. Again, in the case of teachers, this study only included some teachers in that region. As a result, there might be a gap in the reflection. And again, the issue of trust might impact the data.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents findings from ten in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. The participants were grade five and six students from government primary and secondary schools and four dropped-out students from the same primary school. Two focus group discussions were conducted with the class teachers and head-teachers of the Thanchi Government Primary School and Thanchi Government High School, respectively.

Data gathered from the interviews and focus groups are classified into three main themes, and sub-themes are discussed beneath them. Step-by-step theme-based analysis will help us understand the transition's on-ground challenges.

#### **4.2 Socioeconomic Factors**

##### **4.2 a. Obligation to support family in cultivation**

Students from both schools are from different places. Among the students interviewed, half were from the main urban area, and the others were from very remote places. The primary livelihood of the parents is Jhum Cultivation. Among the ten students, the parents of only two students were businessmen and job holders. They depend mainly on the traditional cultivation system of hills, which enables them to have a meager income. Again, it is a very time-consuming process, and during the cultivation, they need the support of their family members. This cultivation support has an impact on the students' continuity and attendance. An assistant teacher in Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, said:

“The maximum yearly income for a family living on agriculture is on average twenty-four to thirty thousand. During the cultivation time, students also support their families. In many cases, families with fewer members and income prioritize their children's presence in the cultivation field rather than attending school.”

To earn a livelihood and support families with lower income students suffer to continue education and for a period of time they need to stay out of class to support their families in the field. Pointing out this barrier another dropped out female student after primary school in interview #7, 30.10.2023, said:

“I am the elder one among two children of my parents. I need to support them in cultivating our field as that's our family's only income source. For this reason I had to stop my studies”.

The traditional cultivation system is a long process. It needs time and lots of hardship. First, the land must be prepared by firing and watering the forest. Later, farmers could grow paddy for only one term a year, and based on time, there were other crops as well. After that, the crop needs to be carried from the field to the market, which needs more investment for transportation and carrying out. Their yearly net income is very low despite being given so many affords. For large families, there are more struggles to feed more people and more expense of study. They need to cultivate as much as they can. From the data analysis, in most cases, large families' elder children have to sacrifice their studies after primary school to help their parents in the field. Acknowledging the lower family income and the need to support the family in earning livelihood another primary school going female student in interview #1, 30.10.2023, said:

“I have three other sisters; my elder sister didn't go to school after primary so that she could support our parents in *Jhum* cultivation. She completed the primary because there was a primary school in our village.”

Students need to support their families seasonally during the harvesting time; at that time, school attendance also remains low. Because of the nature of the cultivation system, it demands a workforce. That is why students need to help their parents during harvesting and cultivation. It lowers their school attendance, which is why there is a gap. Like the sisters of the respondents and others who live a distinct way from the school, this gap creates an issue in their study, and with time, they lose interest. Eventually, it results in dropping out. Its influence could be higher for primary school students as most of the schools are near the village, but for secondary school students, it becomes an issue.

#### **4.2 b Value of Education to Parents**

Most respondents reported that their parents could not complete their primary education. From the interview, I found only one student whose father completed higher secondary level. One female assistant school teacher in Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, said:

“Most of the parents are illiterate, therefore they are reluctant about their children's education.”

As parents are not literate, they feel disconnected from the education system. Besides, they also struggle to communicate with teachers and others due to their language barrier. This background makes them shy about joining meetings or coming to school. As a result, they feel reluctant as they are not aligned with the initiatives and vision of education. Both schools reported significantly little participation and effort from the parents in parent meetings. It has an impact

on the transition from Primary to Secondary. One dropped male respondent in interview #9, 30.10.2023, said:

“My parents are from a very remote place and didn't attend school. So, they stopped my education after primary school when they struggled to bear my expenses. It seems to them I will continue the legacy of maintaining the *Jhum* cultivation of my family to live on.”

This learner's parents have a perception that their socioeconomic status will not be changed and their children will lead the same life as they are living. As there are fewer expectations, there is less need for education. Because to them, education is only needed for a better job. Moreover, they must go to the city and town area for the job. In their lifetime, they did not even go to the district town; they believed their children would do the same and could not go to distant places, leaving them. With the low literacy rate comes low awareness, perception, and care. This point was addressed by an assistant high school teacher in the Focus Group Discussion #2, 31.10.2023:

“As parents are reluctant, students struggle for guidance. It impacts their attentiveness.”

This issue has a significant impact on transition and impacts on the enrolment at secondary schools. Another female assistant teacher during the same Focus Group Discussion #2, 31.10.2023, said:

“Government is ensuring total free primary education, and it's compulsory. In most cases, parents who aren't literate think that's enough for their children, and children should concentrate on money generating or life serving ways.”

Earning livelihood and food is the main priority for the people of this area. They lack knowledge of the modern world and need education for a better life. Parents need to be incorporated into the



education process to create a positive environment for the students, and that is only possible if they are well aware of the need for education. That is why there is a need to develop awareness and parent engagement to reduce dropout after primary school.

#### **4.2 c Financial Barriers to Education**

Students living in remote areas struggled significantly with their socioeconomic status in both schools. Most of the students are from low-income families. With low income, supporting children with transportation, accommodation, and boarding costs is challenging. In Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, with primary school teachers, one respondent mentioned:

“For many students, it takes almost one day to reach the school from the village.

Those two to three hours away from here need to use a boat or jeep for fast communication, it's expensive, and for low-income families, it's tough”

From the interviews, the cost of transportation came out frequently. Students often come from remote villages; their transportation medium is a boat in many cases. On average, for a boat ride, the monthly cost varies from 5-6000 BDT, which is costly for many families. Again, there are primary schools in the remote village but no high schools. Therefore, students from distant places need to stay at a hostel to continue their studies, especially until grade six. A respondent from grade six in Interview #5, 31.10.2023, said:

“It's tough for my parents to bear the hostel fee. Two of my siblings left studying due to this financial problem. They completed their primary at the village school.”

In the government primary school of Thanchi, there is a government hostel, and the school body, along with the government, pays incentives for that. It costs around 6500 Taka in a year for a student, which is manageable. However, for the secondary school, there is no hostel. As a result,

students need to stay in private hostels or the boarding of religious institutions. Still, it costs a minimum of 17000 Taka yearly. This cost is a burden for many families that only live in agriculture. That is why students need to drop out after primary. According to the participants, some primary schools are in remote villages, but most operate a maximum of grade four. Acknowledging this fact, a student participant who stays in a hostel in Interview #5, 31.10.2023, said:

“A few of my village friends have dropped out due to the financial crisis as their boarding cost was not affordable for their parents.”

There are only three stationary shops at Thanchi Sadar. They purchase all the accessories from Bandarban, so there is an additional transportation cost for all the items. It increases the price, which creates sufferings for the low-income family. Like this, the financial struggle of the family creates barriers in many ways. During Focus Group Discussion #2, 31.10.2023 with high school teachers, one participant said:

“Students struggle to buy educational accessories sometimes due to their bad financial situation, after primary, many students drop out only because of the bad financial condition of their parents.”

Besides, as there is low awareness about birth control, there are many families with too many members. The low economic condition then creates an issue with continuing education. This also came out from a teacher in Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023:

“Large families struggle to manage their living; education is sometimes a dream for them. Somehow, they continue the primary, but after that, they fail to continue due to the low financial condition.”

Managing the food is a great challenge for large families with limited resources. Where managing the food is a challenge, their education is a dream for them. To manage the food, students not only need support in the field for cultivation but also need to support their families in income-generating activities. As with grades, the expenses go up, and they struggle to cope. Eventually, it results in dropout.

### **4.3 Influence of Curriculum**

#### **4.3 a Lack of Ethnic Minority Community Representation in the Educational Content and Textbooks**

All the respondents mentioned there are almost no stories of the hill tracts in their books. Still, due to the teachers' examples and connectivity, they could relate a little bit. A student participant in Interview #2, 30.10.2023, said:

“I feel connected with the story and poem after my teacher gave examples of our community and lifestyle and could find the similarities.”

When a teacher goes through the content of the class curriculum, they try to give examples of local stories and abstracts. It helps students relate to their lives and understand the content. However, if those contents were prepared considering their lifestyle, it would be more helpful for them regarding learning outcomes. It helps in students' constructive learning. But not all the teachers could make it in such a way. In Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, a participant said:

"We try to give examples from our community so that students can understand easily. But in many cases, teachers of the remote villages failed to do so. Students lose interest in that.”

From the conversation, it is clear that students from Sadar School struggled less due to the content of qualified and experienced teachers, but the students studying in remote schools struggled with this issue. Parcel teachers often run remote schools in villages, and designated teachers rarely go there. It has an impact on the quality of the education provided here. A dropped-out respondent in interview #10, 31.10.2023, said:

“I didn't feel connected with the textbooks and lessons of my class. Sometimes, things are complicated to understand. So I decided not to continue studying after grade five.”

Coming from a very remote place, this student was admitted to the primary school. That is why he struggled to understand and cope with the mainstream-based content and learning materials. It created a learning gap by default and excluded him from learning. Besides, his class teachers could have been more efficient at that time in helping him relate the content to his surroundings. Therefore, he felt excluded, and it impacted his continuity.

#### **4.3 b Language as a barrier to Education**

Language is another barrier to the transition from primary to secondary education. The study reflects that the textbooks, teaching-learning support, and teachers' support also vary with this barrier and create challenges for students from remote places. Secondary schools have fewer ethnic minority teachers than primary schools. As a result, students suffer a little bit due to the lack of language support during class. Therefore for this language, students feel excluded. A dropped out participant in Interview #10, 31.10.2023, said:

“I struggled a lot with language to understand. Science, English, Social Science and other subject's concepts weren't clear to me sometimes due to the language barrier.”

Though there were different minority teachers in this participant's school, there was only one teacher from his community. Moreover, from the observation, he felt too shy to contact him. Due to the language barrier in the textbook's writing and the teacher's explanation, sometimes students need help understanding. It creates a learning gap for this student. With time, he felt excluded. Moreover, eventually, he dropped out. In primary school, there are teachers from different ethnic minorities; they try their best to make students understand their mother language, which helps them cope. However, in secondary, this opportunity to support ethnic minority groups' mother tongues could be higher. One respondent in Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, said,

“In the primary, we tried our level best to understand a student by translating in their mother tongue. Students coming from very remote places are initially shy and struggle a lot. Many students dropped out after primary due to this challenge.”

That is why primary schools are successful in retaining students. I met at least five teachers from five different communities. It is a strength for the school. Because they could help students with language, this also creates a dependency, which has a lousy impact after Primary. Because in Secondary school, there are fewer teachers from ethnic minorities. That is why language remains a barrier. Even though few primary and secondary books are in the mother language, only Bengali is used as the medium. Students struggle to adjust to it; even for this, they hesitate to ask questions and clarify their concerns. One this a secondary school student participant in interview #5, 30.10.2023, said:

“Many of my friends didn't continue after primary as they needed to come to this main market area to be admitted and continue their studies in the hostel. They were afraid that they wouldn't be able to adjust due to language.”

His friends completed their primary education in their village, and after that, to continue their studies, they needed to go to the main market area. In their town, they had a comfortable situation in terms of language, but coming to main town and continuing study became difficult due to the language. They felt demotivated as there would be learners from different communities with different languages, and they needed more efficiency in Bengali, which eventually increased their suffering in adapting. So, language has an impact on students in different ways. In primary schools, the presence of teachers from ethnic minority groups is reasonable in number. However, in secondary, the portion is low. Students suffer in secondary school because of the support system. All the respondents agreed that if there are more teachers from ethnic minority groups, it will be helpful for them,

Here, the respondents suggested fixing a ratio for ethnic minority teachers in secondary schools. We talk about the quota system for students. Still, this study also comes up with how the ratio of Bengali and ethnic minority teachers creates an impact on the teaching-learning process. One male teacher in the Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, said:

“The primary school government should think about the ratio of the ethnic minority teachers. By policy, there could be a policy to introduce a quota system for teachers”.

If the number of Bengali teachers in a school is higher, they could give support with the Chittagonian language (a common form of language widely used by the people of the Chittagong Division; it has some common attributes with all the ethnic minority languages), which covers 20% of other ethnic groups' languages. As a result, students from different ethnic groups cannot clarify things in their languages. It would enhance the learning gap and distance between students and teachers. When there are more teachers in secondary schools from ethnic minority

groups, they will be able to support more students in terms of teaching, guiding, and minimizing the gap. More students will be addressed this way and will not feel excluded. According to the respondents' reflections, it will increase the student's confidence.

### **4.3 c Learning Materials**

Learning materials are an integral part of the learning ecosystem. The more relevant the materials are, the more easily relatable the learning's are. Students of Hill tracts need help with the learning material and method of teaching. One grade six student in interview #6, 30.10.2023, said:

"Teachers merely use different learning materials in class to support our learning. In most cases, it's a delivery-based class and less engaging. As a result, if I miss anything later, I struggle to understand the contents."

That is why a lecture-based learning environment is always discouraged. However, the concept of learning materials should be made more apparent to the teachers. Due to the scarcity of ready-made materials, teachers feel prevented from using different materials. But they could make contextualized materials that are readily available in their surroundings. Creating that understanding is essential. One assistant teacher in Focus Group Discussion # 2, 31.10.2023, said:

"We struggle with the learning materials. It needs effort and more knowledge. If we could provide more materials in the classroom, it would have helped learners to connect."

From this statement, it's clear that teachers also understand the need for learning materials to make the class more engaging and connecting. With those, students will have a clear idea about the learning topic. A dropped-out student in interview #8, 31.10.2023, said:

"The class seemed very dull to me. If the teacher had used different materials in the class to clarify the understanding, it would have helped me a lot."

This student felt excluded due to needing to understand the class clearly, and later on, he dropped out of studying after primary school. That is the challenge of a lecture-based class. If adequate learning materials were in his classroom, he might relate to the study better and not feel excluded.

#### **4.3 d Teaching Learning Method**

Students mentioned that audio-visuals need better understanding and visualization, and teachers mentioned it is necessary to clarify concepts. During FGD and interviews, all mentioned the need to use visual aids as the teaching-learning tool. A student respondent from high school in Interview #6, 30.10.2023, said:

"It would be more interesting and relatable if we are taught with video and projector."

Visible things always help us relate and connect to understand. As students struggle to understand any learning topic clearly, audio-visuals might help them visualize and understand. With the advancement of Technology, they are also aware of the availability of audio-visual materials. However, they had a minimal scope to explore them. If they had such scope in the classroom, it would have been helpful for them. Due to PEDP, in a few schools, there are few resources, but in most cases, there are no resources. A respondent in Focus Group Discussion #2, 31.10.2023, mentioned:

"We have got several training sessions on the technology used in the classroom. But we need more resources in our schools to utilize that."



Like other teachers, teachers of hill tracts also got ICT and additional training. To utilize the learning from the training, they need to use them on the ground. However, there are fewer resources and structures due to electric connectivity. Undoubtedly, visual representation helps students to visualize and understand. Students joining both primary and secondary schools from remote schools mentioned not needing instruments and access to many technical aspects. Another female assistant teacher confidently said during the focus group discussion #2, 31.10.2023:

“Audio-visual could be a great support to mitigate the learning gap of students and prevent drop out,' another respondent confidently said during the focus group discussion”.

There is no scope to deny that there are learning gaps due to the language, content, and other issues. Audio-visuals could be a better option to address and mitigate the gap. Audio-visual could be a great option to make students relate to the learning materials because there are content and story gaps between the content used and the context of the area.

#### **4.4 Availability and Accessibility to Education**

##### **4.4 a Distance of Educational Institutions**

Geographically, this area is remote from the main market (*Sadar* area) to other unions. Sometimes, it takes two days. This also came out in a response of a grade five student in Interview #1, 30.10.2023:

“My house is almost two days away from here. First, I needed to take a boat ride for one day and walk nearly half a day. There are no high schools near our village, so students must come to the *Sadar* area to attend high school.”

This student's home is almost 21 km from the main town, but he needs to pass three large mountains to come and get the boat to there. However, there is a para-based school but no high school surroundings. That is why it is the ultimate secondary destination. Moreover, regular travel of such distance to continue the study is impossible. That is why the hostel is the last hope for those students. This remoteness and remote communication made life challenging for the learners. Thus, the social, geographical, and livelihood of this area impacts education.

In recent years, the number of primary schools has increased in remote villages at hill tracts. In most cases, students can enroll in a school within walking distance. However, for secondary school, the availability could be much higher. Students had to move to the main market area to enroll themselves in a secondary school. One grade six student in interview #4, 30.10.2023, said:

“If there are more Secondary schools in remote places, students will be more benefited, they will not need to come to Sadar area and stay at a hostel for study.”

Continuing study after primary is a great challenge for students in remote areas. After the primary, they must deal with many things, like shifting to a market area or managing a living place or hostel. Most importantly, the family needs to adjust to their financial condition. The hassle will be less for them if there are more secondary schools. The students will be able to continue their studies living with their parents. More secondary schools will help learners stay home, continue their studies, and minimize expenses. The need of secondary schools also came from a grade six student in Interview #5, 30.10.2023:

“If there were secondary schools in my village, my friends would not need to stop studying after primary school. As they couldn’t go to the town area and continue their studies.”

Friends of this participant left the study due to the remoteness and low availability of secondary schools in their villages because boarding costs are prohibitive and unbearable for many of them. The situation might be different if a secondary school is within walking distance of their village. Another secondary school teacher in focus group discussion #2, 31.10.2023, mentioned:

“There are primary schools in many remote places due to the non-government organizations and steps of the Government. If more secondary schools are constructed, this region will face fewer dropouts from primary to secondary schools.”

That statement clearly states the crying need to construct more secondary schools. There are challenges also associated with this. But this step will move the solution of dropping out forward during the transition.

#### **4.4 b Number of Ethnic Minority Teachers in Schools**

In primary schools, the presence of teachers from ethnic minority groups is reasonable in number. However, in secondary, the portion is low. Students suffer in secondary school because of the support system. All the respondents agreed that if there were more teachers from ethnic minority groups, it would be helpful for them. Here, the respondents raised the need for ethnic minority teachers at the secondary level. One male teacher in the Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, said:

“In schools, the number of ethnic teachers creates a difference. Balancing the ratio of ethnic minority teachers is essential to ensure an effective support system and reduce the dropout. In primary schools, we have many teachers from minority groups, but in secondary schools, the number is low.”

If the number of Bengali teachers in a school is higher, they could give support with the Chittagonian language (the local language of the people of the Chittagong Division), which covers 20% of other ethnic groups' languages. As a result, students from different ethnic groups cannot clarify things in their languages. It would enhance the learning gap and distance between students and teachers. When there are more teachers in secondary schools from ethnic minority groups, they will be able to support more students in terms of teaching, guiding, and minimizing the gap. More students will be addressed this way and will not feel excluded. According to the respondents' reflections, it will increase the student's confidence.

#### **4.4 c Availability of Accommodation Facility**

Transitioning from primary to secondary school involves many tensions and needs. Students from different unions usually get themselves admitted to secondary school. And, in this case, they are always in need of accommodation. One grade six student in interview #6, 30.10.2023, said:

“To prevent drop out after primary is only possible when there will be enough hostels support from government initiatives.”

This comment indicates the need for Government intervention in boarding. There are a few hostels for secondary schools in Thanchi, but they are private. As a result, the yearly cost is very high, and at the same time, management could be better marked. Besides, in many cases, those private hostels are for specific minority groups, which is why they failed to ensure inclusiveness. If there are hostels from the Government side, they will be cost-effective, and at the same time, they will ensure inclusiveness. The need for a hostel was emphasized by the dropped-out students as well. One dropout student in interview #8, 31.10.2023, said:

“In primary school, there was a government hostel, which cost very little, but for secondary school, the private hostel costs higher. That’s why my family couldn’t help me to continue my study. If there are government hostels, students like me will not need to stop studying.”

When this student was in primary school, he could stay in a government hostel. Moreover, it costs six thousand yearly. However, for the secondary school, the minimum cost is thirteen thousand, and there is no teacher in the hostel to support him with what he used to get in primary school. Besides, there are no hostels for his minority group. It also became a challenge for him to cope with other minority students in a hostel as their different power dynamics worked behind him. That is why he needed to leave the study. Based on the situation and reflection in focus group discussions and individual interviews, at present, more infrastructural facilities should be in hostels for ethnic minority students.

#### **4.4 d Availability of Incentive or Financial Aid**

Financial Aids help learners cope with the struggle and carry on their learnings in diverse situations. The need for aid is different based on the context and need. The need is different than the plain land. One assistant teacher mentioned during the focus group discussion #2, 31.10.2023:

“There are different scholarships for the students of all classes up to Secondary School Certificate Exam around the country. The academic results show a talent pool and general scholarship in Grade Four, Eight, and SSC. Our Zilla Parishad provides scholarships for under-served students.”

Students get the scope of available scholarships like other mainstream students. However, there is a need for more. To cope with the contextualized issues and barriers, there is a need for more incentives. Remember that they must pay more for transportation, educational materials, and other study-related expenses than the mainstream. The participants said that aid is necessary to cope with extra expenses. Another primary school teacher in Focus Group Discussion #1, 29.10.2023, said:

“If there are incentives for the transportation for the students of remote places, their accommodation, or educational accessories, it would be beneficial.”

Such aid will help the students of remote places bear the expense of hostels and accessories. According to the respondents, there is a need to raise incentives to prevent dropout and ensure academic continuity. One school dropped out participant in Interview #7, 31.10.2023, said:

“Though, we did not need to pay the monthly stipend in Primary, we had other expenses; in high school, there are more. Considering all this, I left school to support ... If there was some assurance ...expenses, it might not happen.”

This student was in a government primary school with no monthly expenditures. Still, he needed help managing the transport cost from his home to school, which is almost 15 km from the main city area, and needs Taka 200 for local transport. He initially struggled with the transportation cost, so he stayed in the primary school hostel for the last two years. However, after primary, there is a challenge with the hostel as expenses rise. That is why he needed to stop studying and support his family. The scenario might be different if he got the hostel fee as an aid or support. Teachers also mentioned that the incentives frequently. One secondary school teacher in Focus Group Discussion #2, 31.10.2023, said:

"We live where stationery products and educational accessories aren't available everywhere. Only two Sadar Upazilla stores provide those. As they must bring them from the district town, those cost us a lot."

With a minimal income around the year, it's difficult for a family to bear the associated expenses. Participants emphasized on the availability of accommodation and support systems from the Government to subsidize the cost. One of the assistant teachers in the Focus Group Discussion #2, 31.10.2023, pointed out:

"Non-Government Organizations can start a special program for accommodation. Now, a few students are getting accommodation support from religious institutions. If people come with this kind of support regardless of ..... learners, it would greatly help students and reduce dropout."

This statement also indicates the need for a collective approach to create affordable accommodation for students from remote villages. Underprivileged children drop out due to not being able to manage all the expenses and distance accommodation, which is also a great concern for the families. Financial Aid would help underprivileged students manage their studies.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The findings revealed that the socioeconomic factors, parent's perception of children's education, and current teaching-learning methods impede ethnic students from continuing their education. The necessity and eagerness to continue education drops when ethnic students start facing these barriers. Eventually, they become disinterested or frustrated and drop out. The collected data from the research participants shows that most ethnic minority students drop out during the transition from primary to secondary school.

#### **5.2 Discussion**

Socioeconomic factors, curriculum, and availability and accessibility of various related factors are significantly related to education. Location, social context, economy, and tradition are linked with a specific area's education system. Most participants pointed out that the geographical location has made the inhabitants here (research site) vulnerable. Teachers mentioned that financial income is very much interrelated with the land for people living in these locations. According to the participants, most of the families are involved in farming. With such meagre earnings, it is very difficult for them to survive. This economic system, way of living, and the absence of different factors affect the transition from primary to secondary education.

This research finding shows how the study area's social and geographical conditions correlate with education step by step. Respondents resonated with the points in the literature review regarding remoteness and connectivity issues. Geographical location creates a visible barrier in education that correlates with other studies. This study found the impact of remoteness,



nature-dependent livelihood, lack of resources, and distance on the student's transition from primary to secondary education. The student participants who dropped out pointed out that for many students like them at the secondary level, the prime challenge is traveling from home to school. While discussing their struggle, they mentioned going to school, coming home from a long distance, crossing rivers by boat, and moving from hill to hill. Many indigenous students' parents stop enrolling their children due to a lack of schools within appropriate walking distance (Selim, 2017). The Thanchi sub-district is more remote than others, probably indicating a reason for the low passing rate, which was also confirmed by the school teachers interviewed for this study. The people living here are geographically marginalized, which strongly influences the economy. According to the participants, the monthly income is such that it is difficult to bear the expenses of keeping students in hostels. Besides, the scarcity of accommodation for ethnic minority students was a factor in the research. Thus, a lack of financial aid or accommodations can affect dropout rates. Another study with ethnic minority students dropping out in Rangamati pointed this out (Sadi, 2021).

Participants in the study shared that due to the location, their lifestyle is creating barriers in the transition from primary to secondary education. This livelihood also affects the overall education system. The traditional cultivation system called Jhum is the main occupation of ethnic minorities, as reflected by the participants during interviews and FGD. They also mentioned that, in most cases, cultivation fields are away from the main village. A study highlighted that students must move with their families during plantation and harvest, eventually increasing absence from school (Selim, 2017). It has two relations with the dropout during the transition. One, due to their involvement in the field, students miss classes, which causes or increases the learning gap. Student participants who dropped out mentioned that staying away for a long

period from school reduces interest in studying, and school-going students pointed out how they struggle to cope. Besides, when they observe their older family members going through the same life cycle and hardship, it demotivates them from studying and instead work hard in the field to earn a better livelihood. This also came out in this study, and how this obligation to support family and the value of education to parents impacted the transition and influenced dropout came from the participants' reflection. Here comes the coordination point while preparing the academic yearly calendar and the need for a yearly vacation. Recently, a report published that the Government is thinking of providing area-based holidays during summer and winter (Report, 2024). Integrating the ethnic minority students and considering the hill tracts context in this holiday planning could be a game-changer for this area. Considering the reality and engagement of the students in this area, it is necessary to minimize dropout during the transition.

Not surprisingly, this study also found that the parents were more concerned and pushed their children to income-generating activities rather than push them to school, especially after completing primary school. Most FGD participants said that parents are happier if their children complete primary education and join them in earning activities for the family as they feel their children's future will be the same. The plausible reason for parent's lack of interest in investing in their children's education is their poor educational background. Most of the student participants' parents have no formal education. They have completed five years of education on average. A study conducted in Uganda identified that parents' educational level strongly affects relationships and the development of children (Matilov et al., 2002). Additionally, teachers from both schools agreed that the connection between the parents and them is not up to the mark, even though this relationship impacts students' academic performance, retention, and enrolment. A study with the ethnic minority also indicated the need to strengthen the relationship with parents

(Fu et al., 2022). Hence, this vulnerable relationship could be another plausible reason for dropping out of students during transition. In their interviews, and FGD, students and teachers pointed out the gap between class content and contextualized stories. According to them, contextualization is needed in the existing system to reduce dropout. It must be ensured that there is more collaboration and coordination between relevant stakeholders involved in the planning and executing curriculum and content development to achieve the same. Though the Ministry of Hill Tracts Affairs operates primary and secondary education in hill tracts, the current situation demands more participation from the ground. Participation is needed in curriculum and content development.

Besides the need for teachers' training for better support, contextualized examples and learning tools still need to be included. Proper use of existing materials in the classroom and developing new materials would help learners connect more effectively. A study in Rangamati about dropping out during the early stage of education found the need for more emphasis on the teaching-learning process and student engagement in the classroom. In the study, the researcher emphasized that the current situation demands a more collaborative and student-centric approach with the available materials in the classroom and more effort in the classroom management plan, which eventually will develop a comfortable learning environment for the students in this area (Sadi, 2021). However, there needs to be more information regarding the content used in the classroom. During this study, almost all student respondents shared about the eagerness and efforts of teachers to make the content relatable to them. However, a different perspective also came up. One study found that young minds' cognitive development and learning largely depend on the contents of teaching (Ergöneç et al., 2014). However, according to the student participants, the contents of textbooks and examples are not always contextualized. It creates a

challenge for them to have a clear understanding, which creates a learning gap. In this study, students mentioned that they did not get similarities and stories of their community in the contents. A study showed that this misalignment creates a complex situation and a learning barrier. Studies found that low learning impacts students' dropping out (Kaffenberger et al., 2023). As the students in this area struggle with the content and understanding, they eventually drop out after primary education. From the observation of the textbook, it is found that in Bengali and Sociology, there is little content on their community. Introducing more examples in their textbooks will help them to understand and reflect more. Here, a solution could be to teach the students behaviorally based on observation. In reducing the learning gap among the study area students, emphasis on reinforcing and scaffolding their teaching-learning process might work. To do so, more brainstorming and situation analysis workshops and training with the local teachers and academics will help discover more about the next steps.

During the research, student participants mentioned the struggle in secondary school due to the absence of ethnic minority teachers. The discussion also revealed that the absence of multilingual teachers affects the classroom environment during lesson sharing and learning. In a classroom, students are usually from at least five minority groups (Tripura, Marma, Bawm, Kheyang, Khumi). They all have different languages and cultures; the Chittagongian language covers a small amount of that, but not entirely. Teachers from a specific ethnic minority community have expertise in their community language, Bengali and Chitagonian. In that case, it becomes easy for the students to understand a class lesson because those teachers can help them by translating and giving appropriate examples. Therefore, the language practices teachers use in schools directly impact multilingual children's language development and reading performance.

The dropout students mention this struggle which current students are facing less; despite

the critical effect of teacher's language choices on children's language learning, there is a considerable need to understand better what constitutes effective multilingual language practices for teachers (Wagner, 2021). At the primary schools, there are adequate teachers from different ethnic minority groups who give students support. However, it is difficult in secondary school to get such support as fewer teachers from ethnic minorities. The dropout students also mentioned that this created fear for their parents during the decision-making to stop their studies.

Besides, at the secondary level, as the hostel is a more significant concern, parents also have tension regarding the language used by the administration and other students. It relates to sending their children to the hostel for secondary level after primary school. This creates a gap among young learners, who feel excluded due to the language barrier. This phenomenon indicates the need for not only more ethnic minority teachers but also learning methods and tools to support learning and overcome language barriers. Here, the teacher's support and constructive collaboration among classmates are needed.

Due to the government and non-government organizations' initiatives, primary schools are located in different parts of the hill tracts. However, participants in the study mentioned the scarcity and distance of secondary schools. Therefore, students need accommodation, which sometimes needs to be more affordable for parents. Up to primary, there are a few Government, religious, and different ethnic minority accommodation opportunities. However, after primary, accommodation availability is limited and costly, which eventually pushes students to drop out between transitions. Bangladesh's Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) initiated the Primary Education Development Program earlier. With time, this program has received several extensions, and the government is trying to ensure the development of remote places and achieve quality education through this program. According to the Directorate of Primary

Education in the Fourth Primary Education Development Program, the government has taken adequate initiatives to construct more hostels for Primary with LGED. However, the hostels for secondary are still insufficient (Sadi, 2021). There is a significant need to address affordable accommodation for the students of this study area. With the construction, those accommodation and funding sources must be managed. This issue rarely came up in other research studies. It mainly mentioned the scarcity of dormitories that do not have boarding facilities and that financial insolvency constitutes a significant factor in high secondary dropouts (Selim, 2017). However, the issue of financial capability is not talked about; rather, it has a direct impact on the transition.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

#### **6.1 Conclusion**

The study explored the barriers to continuing education from primary to secondary. The findings, such as socioeconomic factors, the influence of curriculum, accessibility, and availability to education, essentially impacted the transition. Geographical, social, and economic context, along with the need for accommodation, aid, and language, resonate with many other researchers' conclusions regarding primary and secondary barriers. The overall education system of Chittagong Hill Tracts, the relationship of dropping out of ethnic minority students after primary school, and the hindrance of continuity are portrayed in this study in the best possible way. Due to the time constraints, themes were limited as the sample size was small.

Interviews and focus group discussions helped to give a deep dive and understand the context through different lenses. Though there are many factors, the analysis of the collected data came up with three main themes. Step by step, their outcomes, and other references are discussed, though more study is required to understand the situation effectively. The study highlighted a few aspects of those three main themes and showed a relationship with the dropouts during the transition. It helps to understand the challenges working as a barrier for the ethnic minority students of the specific study area. The study areas' livelihood and social and economic contexts relate to education and dropout, especially after primary education came out through this study. The relationship of the identified barriers (language, distance, need for more ethnic minority teachers, and availability of accommodation facilities) varied with primary and secondary education and accelerated the dropout; this indicates the need for study-based approaches to ensure a smooth transition after primary education.

Thus, the findings and discussion of this study argue for consideration to ensure a proper transition from primary to secondary schools, and it could be a vital reference for further studies, specifically on the individual barriers mentioned. More studies with a large sample size covering most of the areas, especially with other districts and sub-districts of CHT, are required to reduce the dropout rate after primary school and ensure proper transition.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study would like to provide the following recommendations to ensure a proper transition from primary to secondary education -

There is a geographical need to construct more schools, especially secondary schools, within walking distance of the students. If secondary schools are within walking distance, students can join classes from their own houses; it will reduce the issues with accommodation and dropping out after primary school as it will also reduce transportation costs. At the same time, it will enhance the relationship between the community and teachers.

Recruiting more ethnic minority teachers and creating a pipeline through teachers' capacity development so that all the schools have efficient ethnic minority teachers. Strict policies and monitoring are needed to ensure their presence at school. A policy is required to maintain a specific ratio with the Bengali teachers at the town level. A regulatory monitoring system is also needed to ensure policy implementation. Only a strong and collaborative support system can provide that because the potential development of an individual's learning depends on the teacher's support. Therefore, quality teachers' presence and emphasis on teaching-learning capacity-building training are required. The government is also planning to recruit more teachers



and talking about strictly ensuring their presence in the designated location (Teachers' Crisis in Ctg Hill Tracts Will Resolve Soon, Says Deputy Edu Minister, 2023)

The Government could establish a policy to ensure the enrolment of all secondary school students after completing primary education. This step will reduce dropouts after primary and make schools more accountable. A strong regulatory system is also needed to ensure that the policy is followed. The school authority must also create a good relationship with the community and other relevant stakeholders.

To reduce the language gap, the government must ensure more content about the local context and emphasize multilingualism in the classroom. Local authorities and education boards must collaborate, and local administration must be involved.

More resources should be provided in schools to increase the use of audio-visuals in classrooms. With time, step by step, Teachers can also be aligned and trained to maximize the technological resources. More training opportunities will help them explore the best practices to clarify learning objectives and fulfill the learning outcome.

Bangladesh has successful evidence of a stipend program for female students. It has increased their participation in schools and acceptance in society, who are likely to drop out and get married (Hahn et al., 2018). This could be a reference for the students of ethnic minorities at Hill Tracts. Incentives or more scholarships will help them tackle the challenges, for example, bearing the expenses of learning materials, accommodation costs, etc. It will be a relief for the underprivileged families in such a remote place. Mid-day meal programs could also help learners cope with nutrition issues and be an excellent motivation for families.

The educational marginalization of the study area needs to be addressed more profoundly. Considering the situation, a right-based detailed framework is needed to ensure the transition

from primary to secondary. Eventually, this will be one step ahead of the overall educational development of the study area in the broader CHT region.

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**APPENDIX – A**  
**Guardians Consent Form**

Unique ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

I am Prantick Chowdhury, a student of Masters in Educational Leadership and School Improvement in BRAC University. I am researching “Barriers to transition from primary to secondary schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Is it all about ethnic background?” as a part of my master's.

I am inviting your child/student to participate in my research study.

In this research study, I will ask them questions about sociolect-demographics, school, and overall educational experiences. The interview will take twenty-five to thirty minutes. Your and your children's/student's cooperation will be greatly valued. You may refuse to let your children participate in any question or leave the interview at any time. If you refuse to go, you will encounter no difficulty. All information will be kept confidential, and the information will be used only for study purposes. Your privacy will be protected. Only study-related personnel will be permitted access to the data.

I'd appreciate your assistance. If you are willing to let your child participate in the study, please sign below-

Investigator's Signature & date.  
date

Volunteer Signature &

Witness Signature Date

## Interview Questions

Respected Participants,

I Hope you are safe and well by the grace of the Almighty.

I (Prantick Chowdhury) conducted independent research to understand the factors “affecting the academic continuation after primary school in the hilly area of Bangladesh” for students' of ethnic minority groups in CHT. This survey aims to collect necessary data from you in this regard.

However, the collected data and personal information of the respondents will be kept entirely confidential and used for research purposes only. Your participation will be voluntary in nature. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to answer the questions.

Thank you for your kind cooperation, and best wishes for your future endeavors.

If you want to know more about this research please contact the following person:

Name: Prantick Chowdhury

Fellow, Teach For Bangladesh

Email id: [prantick.chowdhury@teachforbangladesh.org](mailto:prantick.chowdhury@teachforbangladesh.org)

Now please let's begin with the Interview:

1. What is your School Name?

Answer:

2. What is your name?

Answer:

3. What class do you read in?

Answer:

4. How old are you?

Answer:

5. Where do you live?

Answer:

6. What is the approximate distance of your home from the school?

Answer:

7. What is your parent's occupation?

Answer:

8. From where you join school every day?

Answer:

9. How do you come to school regularly ( if you are coming from home)?

Answer:

10. Do you struggle to come to school? If yes then, what are the struggles?

Answer:

11. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Answer:

12. If yes, are they studying?

Answer:

13. If no then, do you know why they did not continue their education?

Answer:

14. Do you have any friends in the community of your age?

Answer:

15. Are they continuing academics with you?

Answer:

16. If not then, what is the reason behind the disruption?

Answer:

17. Do you find the content of textbooks and syllabus interesting and connected with your life?

Answer:

18. If not then, how do they differ from your society and community?

Answer:

19. Do you think academic study is making you competent and providing you life skills?

Answer:

20. Is the teaching learning process effective?

Answer:

21. If not then, why is it not effective and how can it be made effective?

Answer:

**\*\*\*For the primary school student**

22. Will you continue to study after grade 5?

Answer:

23. If not or confused then, what is the reason behind it?

Answer:

24. Where do you go to admit yourself/parents are thinking to admit you after primary school?

Answer:

25. What do you think, what will be the most challenging part for you to continue after primary level?

Answer:

**\*\*\*For the high school student**

26. Is everyone of your classmates continuing their study after grade 5?

Answer:

27. If not then, what are the reasons behind it?

Answer:

28. Where was your primary school and if that is far from here, why did you come here ?

Answer:

29. What do you think, what is the most challenging part for you to continue after primary level?

Answer:

30. Is there anything that you want to share or any concern regarding the continuation of your education?

Answer:

Thank you so much for your time

**APPENDIX – B**  
**Consent Form (FGD)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation of the Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

I am Prantick Chowdhury, a student of Masters in Educational Leadership and School Improvement at Brac University. I am researching “Barriers to transition from primary to secondary schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts: Is it all about ethnic background?” as a part of my master's.

I am inviting you to participate in my research study.

In this research study, I will ask them questions about sociolect-demographics, school, and overall educational experiences. The interview will take twenty-five to thirty minutes. Your cooperation will be greatly valued. You may refuse to participate in any question or leave the interview at any time. If you refuse to go, you will encounter no difficulty. All information will be kept strictly secret. Your privacy will be protected. Only study-related personnel will be permitted access to the data.

I'd appreciate your assistance. If you are willing to participate in the study, please sign the below

Investigators Signature & date.  
date

Volunteer Signature &

Witness Signature & Date

## Focus Group Discussion Guidelines and Questions:

Respected Participants,

Hope you are safe and well by the grace of the Almighty.

I (Prantick Chowdhury) conducted independent research to understand the factors “affecting the academic continuation after primary school in the hilly area of Bangladesh” for students' of ethnic minority groups in CHT. This survey aims to collect necessary data from you in this regard.

The collected data from this FGD and the personal information of the respondents will be confidential and will be only used for the study purpose. Your participation will be voluntary in nature. The FGD will take approximately 30 minutes to answer the questions and I will record this FGD for the research purpose only.

Thank you for your kind cooperation, and best wishes for your future endeavors.

If you want to know more about this research please contact the following person:

Name: Prantick Chowdhury

Fellow, Teach For Bangladesh

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Before we start please do consider that- We all will be considerate about time and will be respectful towards each other. Now let's begin..

- a. Please do share your thoughts about your idea of academic demographic information from the primary to secondary level?
- b. Can you share your thoughts about continuing academics after the primary level?
- c. What type of struggle do the students face to continue their academics after their primary level?
- d. What steps can change the scenario of discontinuation?
- e. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations for the challenges? If yes then, what are they?