Jomtien, EFA goals and lessons from the ground : The challenge for the Dakar Conference

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Abstract

It is now almost ten years since the last World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand, had called for ensuring basic education to at least 80% of the children. This paper, with latest field level data, argues that the dream of 'education for all' (EFA) has still remains a distant dream for an impoverished country like Bangladesh.

There are, of course, hopes. The enrollment has increased (particularly for girls), the completion rate has risen, and the poor and less educated parents are sending their daughters in larger numbers to school than before. But the progress in terms of net enrollment has been rather slow and the children are not learning much in school. With a net enrollment of 73%, 70% completing the primary cycle, and 57% of those completing grade 5 achieving ' basic education', not even 30% are receiving any meaningful education. The analysis shows that the rate of progress in terms of achieving a minimum level of basic education has been slow-- less than one percentage point per year.

The Bangladesh picture has great implications for the countries meeting for the next decennial WCEFA in Dakar, Senegal. The challenge for the world is how to achieve EFA at the shortest possible time. In this, investment in education in general and its distribution, pluralism in delivery system, appropriate curriculum, positive discrimination in favor of disadvantaged groups, and a supportive supervision and monitoring system will be important ingredients.

Introduction

The World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990 was a landmark in reaffirming the participating nations' commitment to the cause of basic education. 'Education for all (EFA) by the year 2000' was the popular slogan that came out of the conference. Now only a year to go before the next decennial conference and the advent of a new century, how far are we from this goal ? With recent data available from the ground, this paper looks at the progress that has been made in universalising primary education in the context of Bangladesh.

Background

Bangladesh ranks among the bottom 20 countries in the literacy-league table. Between 1980 and 1995, the literacy rate in the adults rose marginally from 32 percent to 38 percent; the rate for females remaining at only about half of males (Table 1). Recent statistics provided by the government indicate that the literacy rate has now reached 56 percent in 1999 (Daily Star 1999), a figure which needs to be confirmed by independent sources.

The Constitution of Bangladesh, framed in 1972, enshrines the right of the child to free and compulsory primary education, but not until 1990 that the Compulsory Primary Education Act was passed. Over the past several years the country has seen increased commitment of the government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and donors to the cause of primary education. The positive development that have taken place in primary education in the 1990s is summarised in the following:

i.   Free and compulsory primary education for all children;

ii.   Free education for girls up to Grade VIII;

iii. Provision of appropriate facilities for non-formal education for children deprived of formal schooling by government and NGOs;

iv.   Adoption of a competency based curricula;

v.   Free supply of books; and

vi.   A 'food-for education' programme in selected schools for poorer children.

According to government statistics, over 37,000 primary schools owned and managed by the government with an enrollment of 12 million students constitute the core of the national system of primary education. Approximately 23,000 similar primary schools with an enrollment of 4.5 million students, set-up with local private initiative, are managed with limited government subvention. The *Ebtedayee madrassas*, which are also estimated to be over 7,000, provide education with a religious focus to about 0.5 million children (Alam and Hussain 1999). Several NGOs have given special attention to primary education; the number of students served by them is estimated to be 1.4 million which includes 1.2 million of BRAC[1] alone. The last in the category of primary level institutions are the English medium schools, collectively known as 'kindergartens', whose number remains unknown.

In terms of public spending on education, Bangladesh (in 1993-94) spent 2.3 percent of its gross national product (GNP) on education which is far too short of what other countries in South Asia invest on education (Table 2). Ninety six percent of the revenue expenditure on primary education

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[1] BRAC is a large Bangladeshi NGO which operates programs for the development of the poor and women. It runs

go to meet teachers salary leaving very little for others such as supervision, training or curriculum development (Ahmad 1996).

Bangladesh is a signatory to the world declaration on EFA, according to which the signatory nations are to impart basic education to at least 80 percent of their primary school aged children by the year 2000.

Methodology

Due to the unavailability of reliable data on education a *Education Watch* has been set up in Bangladesh by a group of like-minded institutions and individuals concerned with education. Coordinated by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a supra body of non-governmental organisations engaged in education, and implemented by BRAC through its Research and Evaluation Division, the *Watch* is an yearly event, and the 1999 report dealt with various indicators pertinent to '*internal efficiency*' (Tan and Mingat 1992) of primary education in Bangladesh (Chowdhury et al 1999). Data for this paper came from the first year's *Watch*, which were collected through a nation-wide survey carried out in October -November 1998.

Instruments

A set of three instruments was used in the survey. Except for some open-ended questions, these instruments were structured and pre-coded.

34.000 one-class. one-teacher non-formal primary schools (Ahmed et al.. 1993)

(I)   Household Survey Questionnaire

This instrument was developed to provide information on gross and net enrollment, availability of textbooks, use of private tutor and parental participation in school matters. Questions relating to each of the household member, particularly the schooling for those aged 4-20 years, were included. Although the primary schooling age is 6-10 years in Bangladesh, different studies had reported that children older and younger than this age group also enrolled in primary schools. That is why it was decided to collect schooling information on all individuals aged 4-20 years.

(ii)   Assessment of Basic Competencies (ABC)

This instrument collected information on the quality of learning. Based on the concept of *basic education* as enunciated in WCEFA, this instrument utilized the following operational definition (Chowdhury et al, 1994):

> *Basic education refers to education intended to develop basic learning skills*
>
> *(i.e., the 3R's) as well as some basic life skills necessary for the children*
>
> *to survive, to improve the quality of their lives and to continue learning.*

The above definition encompassed the following competencies which were assessed through the ABC instrument:

a) ability to read and write a short, simple statement on everyday life;

b) ability to work out everyday arithmetic; and

c) knowledge/attitude regarding selected life skills necessary to improve quality of life.

The ABC was an elementary and curriculum independent test instrument. The minimum level on

the ABC was expected to be achieved through any primary level formal or non-formal schooling in Bangladesh. For further details about the instrument, its modification, validity and assessment procedure see: Chowdhury et al. 1992 and 1994; Nath et al. 1993.

(Iii)   School Observation Checklist

This instrument collected classeroom information, teachers' profile, community participation, retention and dropout, and school visit by the supervisors.

Sampling

The minimum sample size was calculated to be 392 children. Because of known variations in the educational attainment among the geographical regions of the country, independent samples were drawn from each of the following strata:

Rural Bangladesh:	Rural Dhaka Division
	Rural Chittagong Division
	Rural Rajshahi Division
	Rural Khulna Division
	Rural Barisal Division and
	Rural Sylhet Division;
Urban Bangladesh:	Metropolitan cities and
	Other urban areas (non-metropolitan urban settlements).

For each stratum, a similar multi-stage sampling strategy was followed. At the first stage, 30 sub-districts (municipalities for urban areas) were selected through systematic random sampling with probability proportional to size (PPS). At the second stage, one *union* (*ward* for urban strata) for

each selected sub-district /municipalities was selected randomly. At the third stage, one village (*mahallah* for urban strata) was randomly selected for each selected union/ward. This means that 30 villages/mahalla (here called 'clusters') were selected for each stratum, totalling 240 for the whole of Bangladesh. It came out that all 64 districts of the country got represented in the sample.

The household survey questionnaire was administered in 125 to 200 households in each clusters. This range was fixed in such a way that it allows drawing of the required number of children aged 4-20 years for the household survey and can be used as sampling frame for the ABC survey. This range was identified from the experience of a pilot study done previously. Two lists, one each for boys and girls aged 11 and 12 years irrespective of schooling status, were prepared from the filled up household survey questionnaires. Following a systematic random sampling procedure 14 children were selected, seven from each list, for administering the ABC instrument. This means that for each cluster, 14 children aged 11-12 years were interviewed for the ABC survey. In case of unavailability of a child a new one was chosen in the same way from the remaining children in the list.

For the schools survey, all schools located in the selected clusters and its adjacent village/mahallah were surveyed through the school observation checklist. A total of 42,584 households from 312 villages/mahallas were visited through the household survey, where 31,092 children aged 6-10 years were identified. The number of children assessed through the ABC survey was 3,360, and a total of 885 schools was traced. Since the strata population in terms of the number of children varied substantially, weighted estimates were calculated for Rural Bangladesh, Urban Bangladesh and national levels.

Interviewers and their training

One hundred and twenty female and male interviewers, 10 supervisors cum re-interviewers and five senior supervisors worked for the field operation. All of them had at least a Bachelor's degree but many had Masters level education and previous experience in social science research. The field staff were trained in three groups through a seven-day long training workshop each. The workshops included a four-day classroom discussion and role play exercises, and three days of field practice. A detailed instruction manual was prepared

Field operation

The interviews in each cluster was carried out by a team of four interviewers, of whom one was the team leader. A total of 30 teams worked for the whole study. The team leader was given responsibility to distribute the work among the interviewers and to co-ordinate the team activity. Each team spent three days in a cluster. For each cluster, the first two days were used in household survey and the third day for school observation and the ABC test.

For the household survey, the head of the household was the preferred respondent. If s/he was not available the husband / wife was chosen for the purpose. If neither was available, any adult member of the household was chosen. Age determination was the most difficult and time consuming part in the household survey and an *event calendar* was used to estimate the age.

A team of two interviewers interviewed each child for the ABC survey and the interviews took place in the child's own house. While one of the team members conducted the interview the other member subtly kept the crowd and onlookers away. Thus, care was taken to ensure that the interviewee child did not get nervous as a result of the behavior of the interviewers or of the onlookers.

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The headmaster was the key respondent for the school survey and the interview was held at the school premise. If the headmaster was not available, his/her assistant was chosen. If neither was available, any other teacher of the school provided the required information. In a typical situation, however, the headmaster along with one or two other teachers in one sitting provided the required information about the school. The school visit could be considered as a 'surprise visit' as the teachers were not previously informed.

Data quality assessment

Several steps were taken to ensure the quality of the data. First of all, in each team one member was made the leader whose major responsibility was also to ensure the quality of data collected by the other members of the team. Secondly, each supervisor cum re-interviewer who was given responsibility for three teams frequently visited the teams, observed their work and gave necessary guidance. They also re-interviewed a sub-sample of the survey on some pre-selected variables. Thirdly, there were five senior supervisors from the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC, the implementor of the study, who ensured that the teams and the supervisor cum re-interviewers worked as per instructions. These supervisors also offered necessary guidance when needed. Finally, the members of the core research team at BRAC and CAMPE visited different field teams to oversee the data collection.

For post enumeration, 900 households from the household survey and 360 children from the ABC survey were re-interviewed to check the reliability of the data. Only a few items of the instruments were covered which were then matched with the original data to find any deviations. The

matching operation, which was done using a computer software, showed that the quality of the data was satisfactory as most of the indicators matched in more than 90 percent of the cases. Using the Test-retest method the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.926 for the ABC data. Again, using the Kudar-Richardson formula 20 (KR 20), the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.962 which is much higher than the satisfactory level of 0.80 (Carmines et al. 1979). A special note of caution for the schools survey is needed which collected information from schools situated in villages selected for the household survey. Although the villages were random, the same was not true of the schools. Thus, the schools surveyed can not be claimed to be representative of all the schools for a particular stratum.

Results

Enrollment

Table 3 shows the gross enrollment ratios[2] at primary level grades I to V. It includes enrollment in all types of primary level institutions and shows that the gross enrollment exceeded 100 in almost all strata and for both girls and boys. The gross enrollment ratio nationally is 107 with girls having a higher ratio of 109 compared to boys' 104. Division-wise, rural Khulna has the highest of 117 %, and the Metropolitan cities have the lowest of 101%; in both cases girls exceeded those of boys'. In fact, girls were ahead of boys everywhere except rural Chittagong where boys were marginally ahead than girls. The table also shows that the Metropolitan areas were worse off than other urban areas.

Figure 2 shows the gross enrollment by grade enrolled at the national level. It shows several

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[2] Gross enrollment ratio is the total number of children enrolled at primary level per 100 children of primary

things. Firstly, the enrollment decreases progressively every higher grade. Secondly, the drop out rate is highest between grades I and II, and between grades III and IV. Thirdly, there is little difference between boys and girls in the way the attrition takes place. Fourthly, the load of students is highest in earlier grades which may be a reflection of increased enrollment at the lowest grade in the most recent past or higher subsequent dropout or both. Whereas one-fifth of all students should have been in each grade but a third of all students were in grade I alone.

It has been found that 33 percent or a third of the enrolled students were from outside the primary age group and 27 percent were over-aged.

Of the students enrolled at primary level, the government-run schools has the highest number of them, with two-thirds of all students enrolled in such schools (Table 4). It should be remembered that the government schools have also the highest capacity. A far-second in enrollment is the non-government (registered) schools with 12% of all students. The non-formal schools, which are run by NGOs in most cases, are the third with 8.5% of enrollment. The *Madrassas*, have 6% of students; of these *Ebtedayee*, which is equivalent to the primary level, has 1.3 percent share. Others such as non-government (un-registered), English-medium and the primary school attached to secondary schools are much less significant. Of the non-formal schools, 76 percent pupil attended BRAC schools.

The net enrollment is 77 percent which means that this proportion of primary school age children (i.e., 6-10 years) are enrolled[3] and the rest 23 percent are not enrolled at all. The difference

school age (6-10 yrs).
[3] *A further look at the data by class of enrollment show that not all of these children were in primary grades: 4.1% in pre-primary and 0.5% in secondary. It means that the 'real' net enrollment rate for primary stage is 73%.*

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between girls and boys as found in gross ratios is maintained here as well with the girls being significantly more enrolled than boys (p<.0.001). Such a difference between girls and boys persisted for several strata including rural Bangladesh, Barisal, Khulna and Dhaka divisions. An important difference between the gross and net rates emerged when one compares the urban-rural difference. While rural areas did better in gross rates, this is reversed in net rates; this probably implies that urban schools were more stringent in terms of age of the pupil while admitting them or urban parents are more conscious about sending their children to school at the appropriate age or both.

Trend in Enrollment

The household survey collected information on schooling history of the children. The same information was also collected in 1993 for children 11-12 years old in a seperate national survey (Nath et al. 1993). This gives a snap-shot of two groups of children but provide valuable information on trend. When the proportion of children aged 11-12 years who are currently enrolled are compared between 1993 and 1998, some increase is seen (Figure 3). This increase is, however, restricted to girls whose proportion increased by 10 percentage points; the boys actually registered a small decline.

Dropout

In the absence of information on a real cohort, we created a hypothetical cohort with children in grade I as the entrants to the cohort and those passed successfully in grade V as the group successfully passing through the system with the data available from the school survey. Table 5 gives completion and dropout rates using the methodology suggested by UNESCO (Primary and Mass Education Division 1995). Seventy three percent completed the cycle over a period of 6.6 years (instead of 5), and 27 percent dropped out through the cycle. The girls did slightly better than boys. Figure 4 shows several things in respect of completion rates for girls. Firstly, the completion rate is highest for the English Medium and secondary school-attached schools and lowest for Madrassas. Secondly, the number of years taken to complete the cycle for those who actually complete is also lowest for English Medium and secondary-attached. Thirdly, it shows the proportion of girls who actually complete the full cycle in five years without repetition which are 48.6 percent for government primary, 34.2 percent for Madrassas and 87.9 percent for English medium schools.

Attendance

The attendance rate in schools was 59 percent at the time they were visited by the interviewers. The rate was higher for girls than boys. When the estimated drop-out between the time of registration in January and the survey in October-November was considered, the attendance rate increased to 62.4 percent (64% for girls and 61% for boys).

The highest rate of attendance was reported for non-formal schools (81%) closely followed by the

English medium schools (79%). The lowest was 47.4 percent for Madrassas. If one assumes that 20 percent of absenteeism is random, then the proportion of children who are regular in schools is approximately 82% (=62+20). When this is considered in association with the net enrollment rate of 73 percent, the effective enrollment turns out to be about 60 percent.

Teachers

The government-run primary schools, which is the dominant type, has 4.4 teachers per school on an average. There are variations between urban and rural areas, with urban areas having seven teachers and rural areas four. A similar picture existed for non-government registered (and un-registered) schools. As the NGO non-formal schools are generally one-teacher schools, this is reflected well in the outcome of the survey. The teachers in government-run schools have had 12 years of schooling and this was consistently so across different strata. A similar picture existed for non-government schools; the NGO-run non-formal school teachers, on average, they had ten years of education.

Teacher-Student Ratio

Table 6 shows the teacher-student ratio in various types of schools. The government primary schools have the highest ratio with 73 students per teacher. This is followed with 55 by non-government (registered and un-registered) schools. The non-formal schools and *Ebtedayee madrassas* seem to have more favorable ratios. In English medium schools there were only 18 students per teacher.

It was found that only 12.9 percent of the government primary schools have 40 or lesser number of students and 60.2 percent have 61 or more students per teacher. It may be mentioned that the primary schools run by government and private initiatives are held in two shifts : one for grades I and II and another for grades III to V, and the same set of teachers teach in both shifts. When this is considered in calculating teacher-student ratio, the ratios become more favorable .

Learning achievement

Based on the working definition mentioned earlier, 29.6 percent of the interviewed children successfully passed the minimum level of *basic education* (Figure 5). This means that among the children aged 11-12 years in 1998, only 29.6 percent satisfied the minimum levels in all four areas of competency including reading, writing, numeracy and life skills / knowledge. Boys did better than girls ($p<0.05$) and the children of urban areas did much better than their rural peers ($p<0.001$). Similar level of area wise variation maintained when the data were broken down by sex of the child for urban and rural areas. The urban boys showed the best performance (52.7%) and the rural girls the worst (25.2%).

Stratum wise variation was also observed when analysis was done separately for each of the four competency areas. Forty three percent had life skills/knowledge, 54.2 percent reading skills, 51.4 percent writing skills and 83.4 percent had numeracy skills. In all the areas of competency, the urban children did significantly better than the children of rural areas ($p<0.001$).

Table 7 presents the 'literacy' levels of the same children in different strata. 'Literacy' was

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defined as the children satisfying all criteria of *basic education* excluding the criterion of life skills/knowledgewhich is essentially the 3R's. Some may argue that even though it is desirable to achieve life skills/ knowledge, it is not equally emphasised in all types of primary education provisions. For the purpose of comparison among different types of school 'literacy' may thus be suitably preferred.

On average, 42.5 percent of the children had basic *literacy*. Similar to *basic education*, higher levels of stratum-wise variation (p<0.001) was observed in the literacy rates. Urban children showed significantly better performance than the children of rural areas (p<0.001). But there was no difference between the literacy rates of the two urban areas. In general, the basic literacy rate was found to be one and a half times higher than the rate of *basic education*.

Figure 6 presents the level of basic education according to the years of schooling completed by the children. The level of basic education significantly increased with the increase in years of schooling (p<0.001). It is only 7.5 percent among the children with one year of schooling which goes up to 20.8 percent for those completing three years of schooling and to 56.9 percent for those completing the full five year primary education.

The level of basic education also varied according to the type of school the children were attending at the time of survey (Table 8). For obvious reason, the children currently enrolled in secondary schools showed the best performance. Students attending government and non-government primary schools performed very poorly. A moderate level of performance was seen among the students of non-formal primary, madrassa and English medium schools. It was

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discovered during the course of analysis that most of the students under English medium schools and the secondary schools, and some students of the madrassas included in the ABC sample were enrolled at grades six or seven at the time of survey. On the other hand, all the students of the primary schools (formal and non-formal) were in grades between one and five. Thus, more years of schooling (in excess of 5 years) of the students of the secondary schools, madrassa and the English medium schools may have contributed to their better performance in basic education. For a better understanding of the relationship between achievement level and the school type, with years of schooling as a confounder, analysis of data was done separately for students in each grade. Students from only four types of schools and those who were currently enrolled in grades between one and five were analysed (Table 9). The schools were government and non-government primary, non-formal primary and madrassa. This analysis showed that none of the students who were currently in grade one could pass the test. However, the level of basic education of the students of each type of school significantly increased with the increase in current grade of enrollment ($p < 0.01$). In each grade the students of non-formal primary schools performed significantly better than the students of other three types of schools.

Trend in basic education

Figure 7 presents the changes in the levels of 'basic education' and 'literacy' rate over a period of five years. It should be mentioned that following a similar methodology and using the same test instrument a national study on ABC was conducted in 1993 (Nath, Mohsin and Chowdhury, 1993). The figure shows that both basic education and basic literacy rates have significantly increased over the period ($p < 0.05$). Although, a statistically significant increase was shown for

the rural areas, a declining trend was observed in the urban areas (not shown in figure).

Discussion

This paper presented latest data from field level studies on the *internal efficiency* of primary education in Bangladesh. The *Education Watch* collected data from households, schools and children, representing all 64 districts of the country. Quality assessment measures adopted for the study indicated that the data were reasonably reliable. In the following we discuss some of the results.

Access

The study has documented encouraging results in primary level enrollment. Gross enrollment ratio has reached 107. This is more than what the latest government figures suggest. Independent estimates by UNICEF has found the rate to be 111 percent (UNICEF 1999) but the 'Bangladesh Education Sector Strategy Note' prepared for the April 1999 Paris Development Forum quoted a gross rate of 90 to 95 percent (LGC Subgroup 1999).

A look at the type of institution / schools in which these children are enrolled reveals that the government primary schools with its network all over the country remains the dominant type with two thirds of all children enrolled in such schools. The government had nationalised all primary schools in 1973 but started allowing new schools in the private sector in the early 1980's. The registered and un-registered privately managed schools, which now enroll about 15 percent of primary school-going children, are increasingly playing important roles. The third highest in

relative enrollment are the schools run by NGOs. Most of these are non-formal in nature but cater to the learning goals as enunciated by the government (Ghosh 1999; Chowdhury et al. 1997). The NGO schools enroll 8.5 percent of primary school going children. Children going to other types are small in proportion.

The official primary school age group is 6-10 years but one third of all children enrolled in primary level institutions are from outside this age group. The net enrollment rate is a preferred indicator for enrollment. Seventy seven percent of children in primary school age are enrolled in different institutions. This means that 23 percent children are still outside the reach of any educational institutions. This situation is better than what was a few years ago. Both gross and net rates have increased over the past few years which is indicative of the system's capability to improve. In fact, the gross rates have surpassed what was targeted by the government for the year 2000 (PMED,1995). The target of 95 percent is, however, much modest compared to WCEFA goals.

The increase in the enrollment scenario is also confirmed by other analysis carried out in the text. A study carried out in 1993 had found among the children aged 11-12 years that 77 percent were enrolled. For the same age group in 1998 the percent enrolled is 81. This is encouraging, but what is frustrating is the speed at which this is being achieved. It took five years for enrollment in this latter age group to reach 81 percent - less than one percentage point per year. If we move in this pace how long will it take for all our children to gain access to primary school? Probably 29 years! We need to devise ways through which we can move faster.

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Dropout

Dropout also has been reduced. From an average dropout for all grades of 6.2 percent for boys and 7.3 percent for girls in 1993 (Alam et al, 1997), it has now been reduced to 5.7 and 5.5 percents respectively. The cumulative dropout rate has also decreased to 26.4 percent for girls and 27.8 percent for boys. As a result 73.4 percent of girls and 71.9 percent of boys now complete the 5 year primary education (the NGO schools, most of which follow a 3-year cycle, are excluded). A recent report for the World Bank has quoted a cycle completion rate of 60 percent (LGC Subgroup for Education 1999).

The repetition rate has, however, remained high. Because of it the average number of years taken by a child to complete the 5-year cycle is 6.5 for girls and 6.7 for boys; only less than half of the children complete the cycle in stipulated five years. This has great resource implication. The nation has to spend 32 percent more resources because of the repetition (to keep a child an extra 1.6 years in school).

Quality of learning

Quality in education represents the impact of several factors. The purpose of the present study was restricted to looking quantitatively at selected indicators of internal efficiency; quality of education in its broad spectrum (Chowdhury et al 1997) was not studied. We, however, looked at achievement which may, for the present purpose, be considered as a narrow proxy for quality of learning. In doing this we used a test called the *Assessment of Basic Competency (ABC)* and administrated it on a representative sample of girls and boys aged 11 and 12 years (i.e., those

recently passed the official primary school age of 6-10 years). The results corroborated the findings of other studies done previously using the same test (UNICEF 1992; Nath et al. 1993; Murshid et al. 1994) or other similar test (Greaney et al. 1998). Nationally 29.6 percent passed the test indicating that they achieved the basic minimum level of education as defined by the test. A previous test, carried out in 1993, had found this proportion to be 26.7 percent, which means an increase of three percentage points over a period of five years.

When the composite outcomes from reading, writing and arithmetic (which is the 3R's) are considered, one gets an estimate of 'basic literacy'. The proportion achieving basic literacy was higher than that of basic education for obvious reasons, but the quantum of increase for this over the 1993-1998 period was very similar (in 1998 the literacy rate is 42.5% compared to 39.6% in 1993).

The above shows the basic education or basic literacy of children irrespective of whether they had been going to school or not. When the ABC was constructed for children who passed grade V (i.e., primary school), 57 percent qualified. The ABC is a very elementary test and one would except that any child passing through the primary cycle of schooling should easily get through it with little problem. The results on the quality of learning is thus very frustrating-- both in terms of overall achievement and progress since 1993.

In 1998, the government declared that the country achieved a literacy rate of 51 percent. This was much higher than what the various international organizations were reporting (Table1). Recently, barely within 12 months since the last report, the rate increased to 56 percent (Daily Star 6 July

1999). Such a fast improvement is interesting and should be a matter of further research itself. There are two aspects to this. First, the question of the credibility of the claim. If it is done to prove that we are on our way to achieve the targeted literacy rate of 62 percent by 2000 (PMED 1995), then one has to be worried about. Secondly, the quality of this literacy, even if the claim is true, should be under close scrutiny. In the five districts which the government has declared 'illiteracy free', less than half of the children qualified in the ABC, and the gross and net enrollment were marginally higher than the national averages. The government must review the mechanism through which its various statistics are generated. The present Prime Minister and the Education Minister are on record to have publicly expressed their anguish on the quality of educational statistics in the country (Jalaluddin and Chowdhury 1997). The *Education Watch*, may fill some gaps in this respect.

Equity

The issue of equity mainly affects several disadvantaged groups including girls, the poor, ethnic minorities, and street and working children. As has been reported in this paper, the country has made spectacular progress in reducing the gender gap in enrollment which has virtually disappeared. This is a feat which no other country in South Asia has been able to achieve! This spectacular accomplishment can be traced to a number of 'positive discriminatory actions' that the State and NGOs have initiated. A most important contribution to this is the scholarships that the State provides to girls attending secondary schools; as of June 1999, the government provided Tk. 4.8 billion (US $ = Tk. 50) to 7.8 million girls (Daily Star 26 June 1999). The schools also simultaneously received a small contribution from the State for every girl enrolled, which provides

incentive to schools for recruiting more girls. Primary education in Bangladesh is free but the secondary education is free for girls only. In addition, a favorable school environment has also been created by increasing the number of female teachers, both in public and NGO sectors.

The non-government organizations (NGOs) may also claim a share in this accomplishment. Traditionally the NGOs promote women's development, and in Bangladesh they have been particularly successful (Lovell 1992). Scores of NGOs work in thousands of villages of the country and carry on development work which benefit particularly the women. In addition, some of the NGOs have also large non-formal primary education programs which target girls from poorer families. An example of positive discrimination in favor of girls is the BRAC program which ensures that 70 percent of its 1.2 million pupil are girls and 90 percent of the teachers are female. The Madrassas which provide education with Islamic focus, on the other hand, has only 10 percent of their pupil girls.

The disappearing gender gap has also been observed in completion rates. In fact, girls' completion rate is higher and dropout rate lower than boys. Girls also attend schools more frequently than boys. The other facet of this analysis is learning achievement as shown through the ABC test. Unfortunately the girls did not do equally well in this respect. In fact, the girls are trailing behind the boys. Good progress in girls' access to education has been achieved but not so in terms of the quality of what they learn in school. More emphasis, which may be positively discriminatory, needs to be given which will enable the girls to learn more and perform better in school.

Children coming from socio-economically worse-off families have been found to enroll in schools

less in numbers, attend school less frequently, dropout more, and perform worse in achievement tests. However, the positive discrimination enforced through the food for education program of the government and the NGO focus on the poor have had some positive impact. The poorer sections have shown improvements at a faster rate than the better-off in terms of achievement and enrollment.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) where most of the country's ethnic minorities live has been an unknown territory till recently. Very little was known about the educational situation in the three districts that constitute CHT. In mid 1998, following the peace agreement between the *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity* (the armed group in CHT) and the Government of Bangladesh, BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division carried out a large socio-economic survey of five of the CHT's 14 major ethnic groups. Education was one of the focii of study. Substantial differences among the groups in terms of literacy, enrollment, and achievement was reported. It was observed that all the groups were lagging much behind the plainland Bangalees, that girls were behind boys in each group and that some of the ethnic groups such as *Murang* and *Tripura* were far behind the more dominant *Bangalees* and *Chakmas* (BRAC 1999). A new kind of opportunity has ushered in CHT through the peace agreement and this must be taken advantage of by taking development initiatives that will be suitable for and acceptable to the people of different ethnic groups living in the area.

"Government primary schools need improvement"

The schools run by the government is the most dominant type in Bangladesh with 67 percent of all

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enrollments. All the steps taken by the government to bolster primary education in recent past have benefited these schools most. The government's expenditure on education is one of the lowest for the South Asia region, and that too is mostly spent in meeting salaries and allowances. Very little is left for improvement of the efficiency of the system. New resources are needed to improve supervision, training and appropriate curriculum development.

The performance of these schools, however, is moderate in terms of attendance, dropout and achievement. While the national estimate for the ABC test for children who are currently enrolled in any school is 34 percent, the same score in case of students going to government schools is 21 percent. Even the five districts which the government has declared to be free of illiteracy, the situation is marginally better leaving doubt about the authenticity of the claim. This shows that the State-run schools are not performing to the best of its potentials.

"Non-formal schools need more support"

The involvement of NGOs in primary education is recent. Barring a few who run 5-year 'formal' schools, most NGOs operate non-formal schools of varying duration. BRAC, one of the largest NGOs, with almost 76 percent of all non-formal school-going pupil, for example, runs a 3-year system (it is now gradually moving to a 5-grade cycle). Of all the students enrolled in primary levels, NGO non-formal schools constitute over eight percent of enrollees, which suggests a four-fold increase since 1990. The various results presented in this paper show that non-formal schools are run efficiently. The attendance is high, dropout is lowest, girls' enrollment is 20 percent higher than boys (because of positive discrimination), achievement in terms of both ABC

and literacy scores is one of the highest (the average achievement of children going through the non-formal schools on the ABC scale is 38.3 percent, compared to the national average of 29.6 percent). They have also introduced many innovations in both pedagogy and management and invest relatively more in teacher training and supervision (Ahmed et al 1993).

In spite of better performance, there is no room for them to be complacent. For example, a score of 38 percent on the achievement scale is far too low for a 'good' system. The NGO schools, on the other hand, are faced with many problems and challenges. Some NGOs also are confronted with the choice of 'quantity' vs 'quality' though there are examples that they may not be mutually exclusive. Although one would expect the NGOs to scale up their programs further, then there is the question of financing. Not many NGOs, for good reasons, want to depend solely on foreign donors for too long. As these programs target children not well reached by the formal system, the government should consider providing funding to NGOs to achieve the goal of EFA at the shortest period.

"Madrassas need a review"

Madrassa education is one of the oldest systems of education in Bangladesh. It is quite large with a separate Board and has many types within it. The equivalent of a primary school is the *Ebtedayee madrassa*. It has been found that 1.3 percent of enrolled children are in such madrassas and a little higher in other types. Both dropout and repeater rates are highest in such madrassas, particularly for girls. The achievement of students attending Ebtedayee madrassas is also very low (15% on the ABC and 25% on the 'literacy' scale). Moreover, of the students going

to Madrassas only 10 percent are girls, and five percent teachers are female. However, the majority of the students who attend Madrassas are from poorer families. The government spends a substantial sum of money on Madrassas, and so do the community. It is thus imperative that a review of the Madrassa system be done so that the efficiency in the system can be improved and the system is made more appropriate for the modern age.

Towards the Dakar Conference

This paper has painted a generally optimistic picture about the State of primary education in Bangladesh. There are hopes – the enrollment is rising (particularly for girls), the completion rate is improving, and poorer and less educated parents are sending their daughters in larger numbers to schools. There are despairs too – the progress in terms of increase in enrollment is slow and the children are not learning much in school. As per the Jomien declaration, the country is committed to imparting basic education to 80 percent of its children by the year 2000[4]. How far are we from it? With a net enrollment of 73 percent, 70 percent completing the primary cycle and 57 percent of those completing the cycle achieving basic education, only about 30 percent receive some meaningful education. The analysis has shown that the rate of progress over the past five years or so has also been rather slow -- less than one percentage point per year. With this rate of progress, it is reckoned that the goal of basic education for 80 percent children can be achieved only in the year 2093!

The Bangladesh picture has great implications for the countries meeting for the next WCEFA in

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[4] The government has since revised its goal for 2000 for a much modest one.

the year 2000 in Dakar, Senegal. The challenge is how to achieve EFA at the shortest possible time. In this, investment in education in general and its distribution, pluralism in delivery system, appropriate curriculum, positive discrimination in favor of disadvantaged groups, and a supportive monitoring and supervision system will be important ingredients.

Acknowledgement

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Table 1 : Adult (15+ year) literacy in Bangladesh 1980-1995

Year	Adult literacy rate (%)		
	Male	Female	Total
1980	43	20	32
1985	43	22	33
1990	47	22	35
1995	49	26	38

Sources : State of the World's Children , UNICEF (various reports)
World Development Report, The World Bank (various reports)

Table 2: Percent of GNP spent on education in Bangladesh and other South Asian
countries (1993-94)

Country	% GNP spent on education
Bangladesh	2.3
India	3.8
Pakistan	2.7
Nepal	2.9
Sri Lanka	3.2
Maldives	8.1
All South Asia	3.5

Source: Haq and Haq (1998)

Table 3: Gross enrollment ratio at primary level (grades I to V) by stratum and sex

Stratum	Gross enrollment ratio (%)					
	Girls		Boys		Both	
Rural Dhaka Division	112	(1829)	101	(1951)	106	(3780)
Rural Chittagong Division	104	(2397)	105	(2555)	104	(4952)
Rural Rajshahi Division	113	(1663)	105	(1732)	109	(3395)
Rural Khulna Division	121	(1923)	113	(2006)	117	(3929)
Rural Barisal Division	108	(1993)	106	(2041)	107	(4034)
Rural Sylhet Division	107	(2185)	104	(2300)	105	(4485)
Metropolitan cities	103	(1601)	99	(1657)	101	(3258)
Other urban areas	111	(1626)	106	(1633)	108	(3259)
Rural Bangladesh	111	(11990)	105	(12585)	108	(24575)
Urban Bangladesh	107	(3227)	103	(3290)	105	(6517)
All Bangladesh	109	(15217)	104	(15875)	107	(31092)

Figures in the parentheses indicate number of children aged 6-10 years
Source : Household survey

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Table 4 : Percentage distribution of children currently enrolled at primary level (Grades I to V) by type of school, residence and sex

Type of school	Rural Bangladesh			Urban Bangladesh			All Bangladesh		
	Girls (13177)	Boys (13246)	Both (26423)	Girls (3439)	Boys (3367)	Both (6806)	Girls (16616)	Boys (16613)	Both (33229)
Primary school									
Government	68.9	69.2	69.1	57.7	55.5	56.6	67.6	67.6	67.6
Non-government (reg.)	12.9	12.7	12.8	7.2	6.5	6.9	12.3	12.0	12.1
Non-government (un-reg.)	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.0	2.8	2.4	2.8	2.9	2.8
Non-formal primary	10.0	6.6	8.3	9.0	10.4	11.7	10.2	6.8	8.5
Madrassa									
Ebtedayee	1.0	1.5	1.3	2.5	1.9	1.3	1.0	1.6	1.3
Kamil/Fazel/Alim/Dakhil	2.4	4.2	3.3	3.5	2.8	2.2	2.4	4.1	3.2
Hafezia/Kaomi/Kharezee	1.0	2.0	1.5	1.7	1.1	0.5	0.9	1.9	1.4
English Medium	0.5	0.7	0.6	8.8	7.7	6.7	1.2	1.6	1.4
Secondary attached	0.4	0.3	0.3	9.6	10.2	10.7	1.6	1.3	1.5
All types	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Figures in the parentheses indicate number of children currently enrolled at primary level
Source: Household Survey

Table 5: Hypothetical cohort analysis of students registered in various grades using the UNESCO methodology, for all schools (1997-98)

	% of children		
	Girls	Boys	Both
Completion rate	73.4	72.0	72.7
Drop-out	26.6	28.0	27.3
Survival rate	77.2	76.0	76.6
Co-efficient of efficiency	76.5	74.6	75.5
Years input per graduate	6.5	6.7	6.6

Source: Schools Survey

Table 6: Teacher student ratio by type of school

Type of school	No. of school observed	Teacher student ratio
Government primary	349	1:73
Non-government primary	142	1:55
Non-formal primary	232	1:31
Ebtedayee madrassa	12	1:32
English medium *	39	1:18

* Includes KG schools which provide schooling upto standard V.
Source: Schools Survey

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Table 7:   Percentage of children satisfying literacy criteria (the 3R's) by stratum and sex

Stratum	Girls		Boys		Both		Significance
							Rural
Dhaka Division	35.7	(210)	36.7	(210)	36.2	(420)	ns
Rural Chittagong Division	25.7	(210)	33.6	(211)	29.7	(421)	ns
Rural Rajshahi Division	40.8	(211)	43.5	(209)	42.1	(420)	ns
Rural Khulna Division	58.6	(210)	57.1	(210)	57.9	(420)	ns
Rural Barisal Division	42.8	(208)	48.3	(211)	45.6	(419)	ns
Rural Sylhet Division	38.1	(210)	35.7	(210)	36.9	(420)	ns
Metropolitan cities	50.2	(211)	64.8	(210)	57.5	(421)	$p<0.01$
Other urban areas	57.6	(210)	60.8	(209)	59.2	(419)	ns
Significance	*$p<0.001$*		*$p<0.001$*		*$p<0.001$*		
Rural Bangladesh	38.5	(1259)	41.1	(1261)	39.8	(2520)	ns
Urban Bangladesh	54.0	(421)	62.7	(419)	58.3	(840)	$p<0.01$
Significance	$p<0.001$		$p<0.001$		$p<0.001$		
All Bangladesh	40.8	(1680)	44.2	(1680)	42.5	(3360)	$p<0.05$

Figures in the parentheses indicate number of children under ABC test: ns = not significant at $p = 0.05$
Source: ABC Survey

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Table *8:*   Percentage of currently enrolled children satisfying all 'basic education' criteria by type of school, residence and sex

Type of school	Rural Bangladesh			Urban Bangladesh			All Bangladesh		
	Girls (1259)	Boys (1261)	Both (2520)	Girls (421)	Boys (419)	Both (840)	Girls (1680)	Boys (1680)	Both (3360)
Govt. primary	17.0	23.3	20.1	33.6	32.1	33.1	18.9	24.2	21.5
Non-govt. primary	18.4	24.6	21.6	36.6	54.9	46.0	19.9	27.1	23.5
Non-formal	35.0	44.5	38.7	32.4	41.7	36.2	34.5	44.0	38.3
Madrassa	32.4	33.2	32.9	30.7	36.9	34.4	32.1	33.6	33.0
(Ebtedayee)*							(12.1	18.1	15.2)
English Medium	0.0	30.6	26.8	33.4	58.6	47.8	26.7	42.7	38.1
Secondary	53.1	66.7	58.7	75.9	85.8	80.9	58.1	72.4	64.3

Notes: Figures in the parentheses indicate number of children under ABC test:
* Due to small sample size the data were not arranged by residence:
Variations according to school type are statistically significant at p<0.001 in all nine cases
Source: ABC Survey

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Table 9:   Percentage of currently enrolled children satisfying all 'basic education' criteria by current grade of enrollment and school type

Type of school	Current grade of enrollment						
	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	All	Significance[1]
Government primary	0.0	4.8	7.2	20.9	37.7	21.5	p<0.001
Non-govt. primary	0.0$^\psi$	6.2$^\psi$	12.7	23.2	34.7	23.6	p<0.001
Non-formal primary	0.0$^\psi$	21.1	46.5	36.7$^\psi$	66.3	38.3	p<0.001
Madrassa (Ebtedayee*)	0.0$^\psi$	19.4$^\psi$	29.3$^\psi$	12.4	51.8	25.8 (15.2)	p<0.01
Significance	na	p<0.01	p<0.001	ns	p<0.01	p<0.001	

[1] Statistical test for each of the school type was done excluding the children currently enrolled in grade one.
$^\psi$ Sample sizes in these cells are <30: na = not applicable. ns = not significant at p=0.05
* Due to small sample size the data were not arranged by grade:
Source: ABC Survey

Figure 2: Percent distribution of all students in different grades, girls and boys

Current grade of enrollment (gross)

Source: Household Survey

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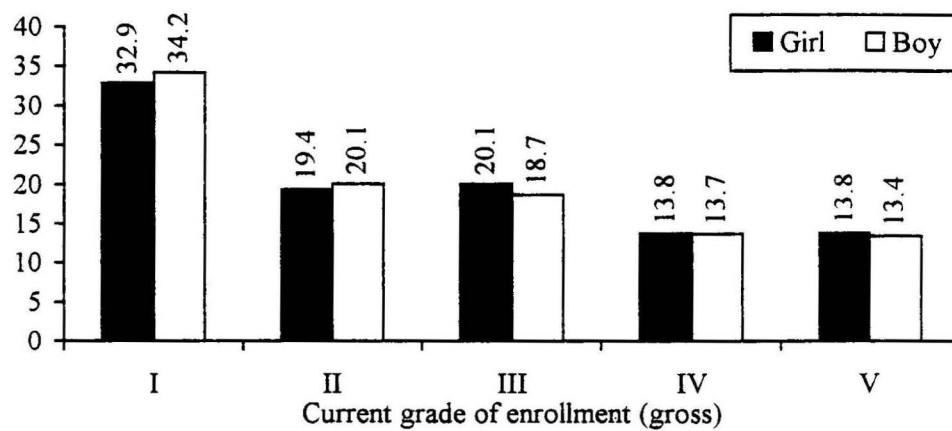
Figure 3: Proportion of children 11-12 years old currently enrolled in school, 1993 and 1998
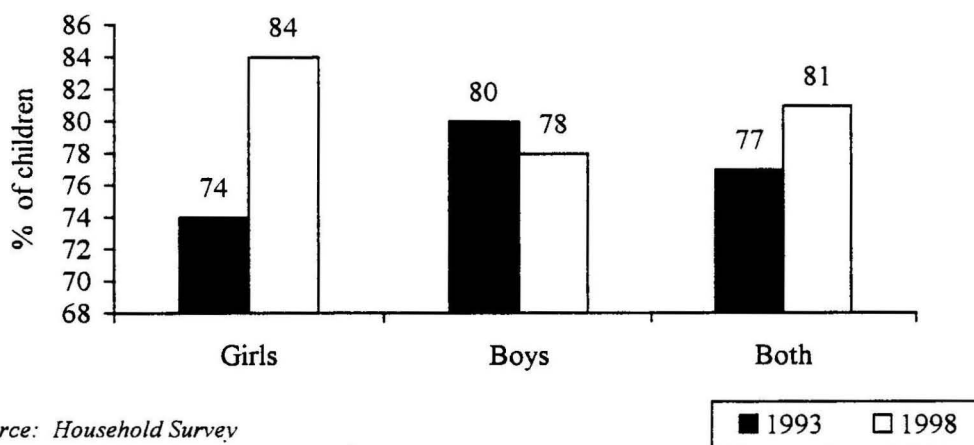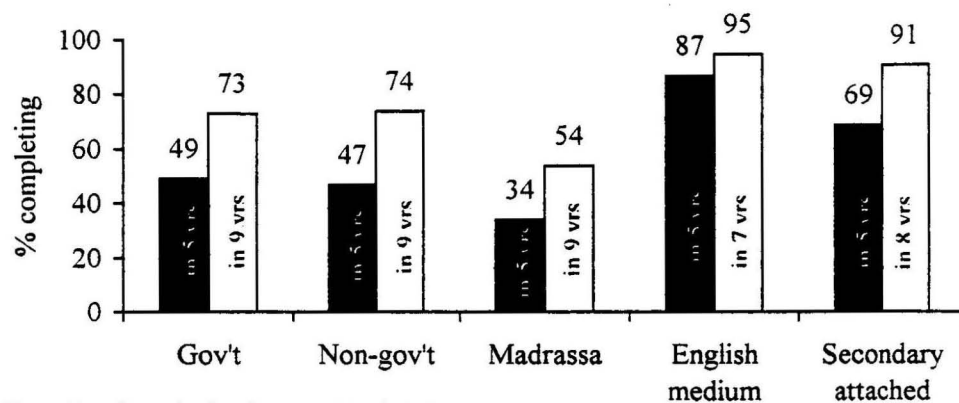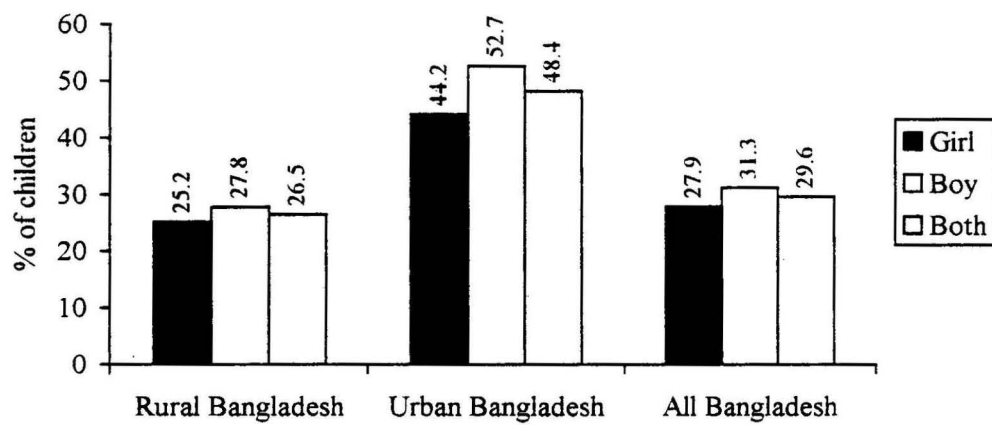

Source: Household Survey

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Figure 4: Proportion of girls completing primary schooling by type of school and number of years taken to complete
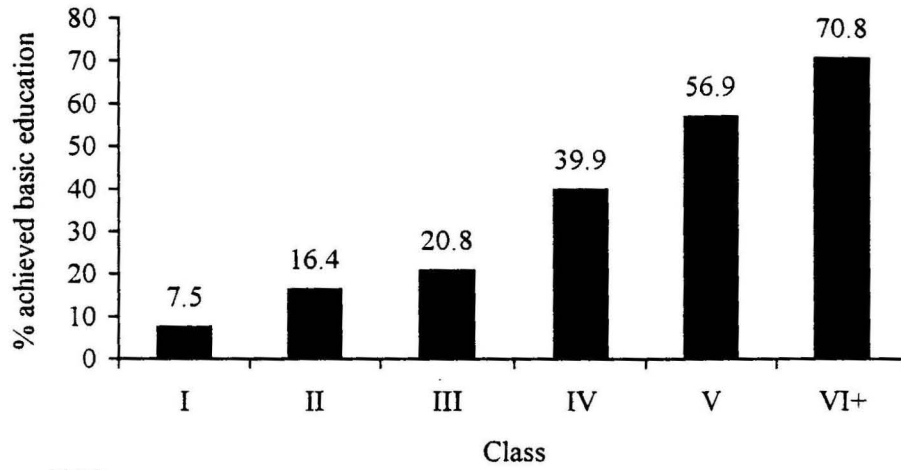

Note: Non-formal schools are not included
Source: Schools Survey

Figure 5 : Percentage of children satisfaying the 'basic education'
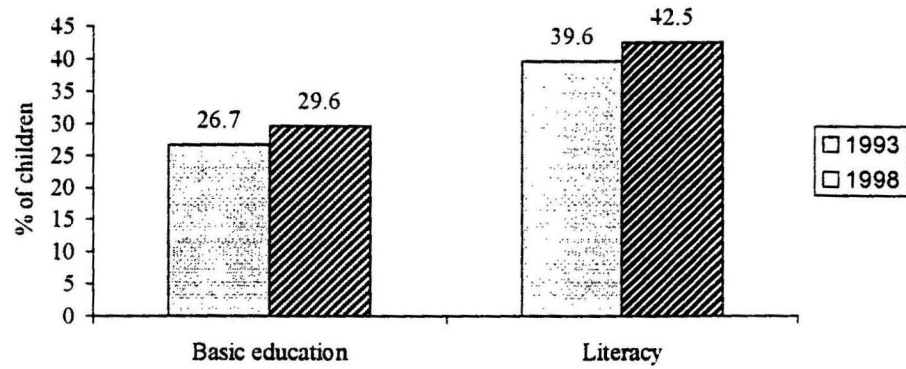criteria by residence and sex

Source: ABC Survey

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Figure 6: Percentage of children satisfying all 'basic education' criteria by years of schooling

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Figure 7: Percentage of children attaining 'basic education' an
'literacy' in 1998 compared to 1993

Sources: ABC Survey : Nath. Mohsin and Chowdhury (1993)

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