

Education and Development: The Backbone of a Nation

A Case Study of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the problems that commonly plague education systems and policies in developing nations. Through primarily qualitative with some quantitative investigation conducted in Sylhet, Bangladesh and analysis of the secondary research, I find that besides poverty there are several other functional problems that impact the quality of education in developing countries. These include, but are not limited to: teaching curriculum and a lack of extra-curricular activities; parents' and teacher's attitude and behaviours towards children/students; and gender inequalities – all of which limit the learning experience of students in Bangladesh. Despite an increase in enrolment and regular attendance, this research finds that even those students who regularly attend class experience low levels of learning satisfaction, resulting in lowered motivation for educational attainment. Also, the current education system perpetuates gender inequality with a patriarchal curriculum and hierarchical behaviour of teachers within the school environment. With further evaluation of these problems and a positive correlation between research and policy making, improvement in the education system may be possible in the current economic conditions since not all problems are a direct cause of poverty. Along with enrolment rate, the quality of education should also be focused on through enhanced policy enforcements.

METHOD

The field study consisted of visits to both schools and households in rural areas within the districts of MoulviBazar and Rajnagar in Sylhet, Bangladesh. Sylhet was chosen as it suffers from low levels of educational attainment, as well as being cost-efficient to the researcher – a necessary factor given the strong budgetary constraints. A purposeful sample was taken within the limits of these districts so as to reflect school environments ranging from poor to significantly improved social and economic conditions. A total of 349 grade nine and ten student interviews across 9 schools are used for this paper. The sample adequately represents a diverse range of households regarding both income and access to secondary education institutions. The objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the dynamics of primary and secondary education. These dynamics are crucial for understanding and analyzing the quality of education as it helps map out the barriers to education. Moreover, it enables governments to more effectively allocate resources and form developmental policies.

KEY WORDS: Bangladesh; Compartmentalized Learning; Development; Dropout; Education; Gender; Private Tutoring; Wastage

INTRODUCTION

Development – social, political and economic – is a complex and multifaceted concept. The development of a nation may be impacted by numerous factors that include domestic and international politics, issues of human rights and freedom, and the nation's access to resources. One of the strongest contributing factors to development is citizens' access to quality education. Education is a pillar of modern society and, as such, it is the backbone to creating active participants in a nation's development. Sharma et al reinforce this statement in their article on education in India; "[e]ducation is the principle instrument in awakening the child to cultural values and thus is the strongest force in the development and growth of a child in preparing him to be a responsible, intelligent, strong and healthy citizen" (201). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) places similar importance on education, stating that it is necessary for an individual's achievement of goals, increase of knowledge and potential, and effective participation in wider society (Myhill 129).

Realizing the importance of education, many developing nations have adopted policies that seek to increase the availability of educational institutions while also encouraging enrolment and regular attendance. Such policies may be evidenced in the nations of Sub Saharan Africa (SSA), India and Bangladesh, each of which has adopted the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with varying levels of success (Oketch and Rolleston 131). Bangladesh in particular has accomplished a great deal in improving educational accessibility to rural areas and other disadvantaged groups (Ardt et al 6) – generating an overall increase in primary education enrolment (Ardt et al 10). This increase may have also benefited from the Food for Education (FFE) program, whereby families who send their children to school would receive not only long term advantages associated with education, but also more immediate rewards (Arends-Kuenning and Sajeda 295).

While it is evident that Bangladesh has increased the quantity of enrolled students, it is not necessarily the case that the quality of education matches the quantity. This not only questions

the students' learning experience but whether the education adequately prepares them as citizens for the further advancement of the nation, household, and as individuals. Unfortunately this question is largely overlooked by policy-makers who tend to focus more on simply increasing enrolment statistics rather than ensuring the quality of educational content and delivery. Many scholars find that the quality of education is just as, if not more, significant than the number of citizens receiving it (Unterhalter et al. 85). This has resulted in a gap between the theoretical policies recommended by scholars and the actual policies implemented by politicians and administrators. The former suggests that educational quality and enrolment must be parallel, whereas the latter sees quality as an eventual evolution upon enrolment. The consequence of this gap is a disinterested student base that may, in turn, lead to dropout or wastage – a low return on educational investment.

As a means of addressing this gap, I have conducted field research in Sylhet, a regional division of Bangladesh. I have sought to analyze and explain the potential consequences to current policies through interviews with students and teachers. The results of my findings strongly favour the quality-centric view of scholars as opposed to the quantity-based policies of politicians and administrators. This paper will provide a brief overview of existing literature on the linkage between education and development in both Bangladesh and other developing nations. Moreover, it will address the effects of particular systems and policies on the student body following which the methodology, findings, discussion, and limitations of the field research conducted in Sylhet will be presented. Finally, I will provide suggestions for future research or policies and present the overall conclusions derived from existing literature and the field research.

EXISTING RESEARCH

Along with the previously mentioned MDG and FFE programs, another policy responsible for the increase in student enrolment in Bangladesh is Education for All (EFA). EFA aims to provide local access to safe schools with acceptable levels of staff, learning materials, and other necessary facilities (Lewin 154). The EFA policy has been especially significant as it has spawned at least three more major innovations, namely the National Education Policy of 2000, the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), and preparation of the National Plan of Action on Education for All (Unterhalter et

al 92). These educational policies have been adopted under the pretences of spurring national development. For instance, completion of primary schooling has shown large economic returns, fewer births, lower infant and child mortality, better child health and education, reductions in gender inequality, and a decrease in youth marriages (Lloyd et al 13).

However, rapid expansion has led to chronic shortages of learning materials and overpopulated classrooms, subsequently reducing the quality of the learning experience (Lewin 155). In regards to increasing enrollment these policies have experienced marked success (Ardt et al 4). It is certainly true that attendance is necessary for education; without regular attendance and initial enrolment at the basic level, children would lack the exposure required for even the most minimal cognitive goals set by national education plans (Lloyd, Mensch and Clark 13). However, attendance alone is not sufficient for maximizing a student's potential. Interest and engage students as the contents are perceived as extraneous. Another problematic characteristic is the inherent gender inequalities built into the curriculum. The perceived superiority of men in texts often make females feel inferior and, in turn, less motivated to learn (Zeelen et al 171). These issues, while not exclusive to developing nations, frequently have roots in past and present societal norms. A study conducted by Sharma et al in a district of Kangra, India showed that even though educational development programmes have increased male and female enrolment, there are still major discrepancies as social norms continue to impede female growth.

Studies done on gender and education in developing countries have stated that parents are less interested in sending girls to school since they are needed at home and their education is unlikely to provide a worthwhile return on investment. Parents in this study reported that girls are likely to assume roles in agriculture, caregiving, and/or "reproduction" – all requiring little to no education (Sharma 203). From a young age girls are expected to be second class citizens within the family and economic society. This expectation is similarly evidenced in the classrooms as well. School policies, classroom dynamics, and teachers' attitudes are important to encourage students (Lloyd, Mensch and Clark 117 - 118). As such if there is a systematic difference in the allocation of time boys and girls spend in the classroom - be it performing duties or receiving punishment, then boys and girls cannot be assumed to have the same learning experience (Lloyd, Mensch and Clark 119). All of the aforementioned factors have had nega-

tive effects on girls in terms of completing their studies and require additional attention from all involved stakeholders (Zeelen et al 172). The deficit of attention placed on gender equality is likely to create an underrepresentation of women in continued education and thus limit the number of potential opportunities available to them (Novoryta 78). Furthermore, it will serve to entrench and perpetuate gender-based stereotypes and injustices.

A student's learning experience depends largely upon the classroom environment, availability of extra-curricular or classroom activities, the qualification of teachers, and the student's workload; the imbalance of any or all of these elements may lead to school boredom and/or frustration. For example, although many children and youth work out of necessity, research show that due to the quality of education, many students "become discouraged" by the schools and prefer to work instead (Das and Mukherjee 464). A national survey conducted in India showed that, among dropouts, 25% were disinterested in school (Das and Mukherjee 454). Similarly, a proportion of children working in the labour market were not there out of economic need, but rather they wanted to spend their time acquiring skills that the schools failed to teach (Das and Mukherjee 454).

Students' interest in school is described as the "psychological investment" and effort dedicated to understanding and gaining knowledge and skills from their academic experience (Pellerin 283). The outcome of this "investment" is crucial for preserving students' interest towards learning since disinterest leads to disengagement. Disengaged students may not develop the intellectual curiosity of challenges possessed by those who are engaged (Pellerin 284). The implications of disengagement extend farther than just time spent in school. Indeed, it may lead to deeper repercussions of halted educational attainment, unemployment, economic instability, and confinement within the individual's current social condition (Pellerin 284).

Leisure activities play an important role in keeping students engaged in school. These activities provide adolescents the opportunity to develop their "identity, motivation, autonomy, and self-regulated behaviour" as well as present opportunities to socialize and build life skills such as planning and decision making (Wegner et al 423). Furthermore, it keeps adolescents away from "low-yield" activities – simply hanging out or watching television which may lead to negative future results

(Wegner et al 423). Despite these findings, nearly all schools in SSA and South Asian countries fail to offer extra-curricular activities (Ardt et al 13). The lack of extra-curricular activities results in boredom which may lead to students' passive non-participation in school, perpetuating the cycle of boredom and ultimately leading to the incompleteness of studies (Wegner 429). These problems with regards to curricula and pedagogy in SSA nations have placed students at a disadvantage, hindering their ability to succeed in school and leading to grade repetitions (varying age groups are represented within each grade) and later dropout (Lewin 171).

A student's level of involvement in school is also dependent upon the behaviour of teachers and parents. In her article on socialization in high school, Pellerin draws parallels between Baumrind's typology of parenting and possible teaching methods, stating that there are four applicable styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and indifferent (Pellerin 285). Authoritative parenting is characterized by high demand and firm enforcement without sacrificing responsiveness or, in other words, "warmth, open communication, and respect for the developmental needs of the child" (Pellerin 285). Authoritarian style, on the contrary, forgoes responsiveness in favour of greater obedience and force, causing children to become heavily reliant on external controls, losing the ability to self-regulate. In addition, many of these children exhibit low levels of self-esteem and social competence. Nevertheless, they achieve high grades and tend to avoid unsavoury or anti-social conduct. Permissive styles are less demanding and more responsive. Children exposed to this style tend to be highly social, but achieve low grades, are disengaged from school, and have a risk of future behavioural problems (Pellerin 285). Lastly, indifference is, as it sounds, a general lack of interest or concern with the child's progression (Pellerin 284). This style places the onus of good grades and behaviour solely on the child, as they receive little to no attention from adults. Children often fail to recognize the importance of their grades and behaviour from an early stage which results in a lack of necessary motivation in learning.

According to Pellerin's findings, applying the authoritative style of parenting to teaching achieves the best results for students' grades and skills building (283). Authoritatively taught students perform noticeably better than those in authoritarian, permissive, and indifferent environments (Pellerin 284). As dropouts are concerned, Pellerin found that authoritarian schools have the best results, while indifference fared the

worst of the four styles in terms of overall achievement and engagement (Pellerin 284; 300).

The next pedagogy affecting students' learning quality is homework, since many schools feel that regular homework will help students learn the material, and create a dialogue between teachers and parents (Deslandes 60). Students are given a large amount of homework, yet most lack the support of parents and private tutors—paid teachers outside of class— due to illiteracy and high prices, respectively. Students are then unable to complete homework and can consequently heighten teacher frustration (Ardt et al 12-3). This frustration may manifest itself as failing grades, damaging potential student retention rate and/or increasing dropout (Ardt et al 12-3) Homework is an important learning method however, as Deslandes argues, its point is to foster a relationship between parents and teachers in order to enhance the students' achievements (61; 66). Thus, when the effects are negative, it needs to be reconsidered.

Each of the aforementioned constraints and obstacles should be reflected upon when forming educational policies since there is no single formula encompassing all of these issues. When officials or managements look at "what works" in a neighbouring nations' education systems for example, they often overlook the unique constraints that block the correct implementation of those policies in their individual countries; it is important to understand why a policy worked elsewhere and not simply what worked (Myhill 130).

METHODOLOGY

The initial focus of this research was to investigate the causes of dropout amongst Bangladeshi youth. However my research caused this focus to shift towards creating a better educational development plan and the prevention of wastage. Preliminary findings in regards to dropout found that the majority of student respondents attended school regularly. While there were many students who dropped out of school during transition years, the most commonly reported issue was instead dissatisfaction with the received education. Student respondents wished for change in the education system.

Although the majority of student interviewees dodged the question of dropout, declaring that they wish to continue further studies, their responses for future goals and comments on the learning experience suggested otherwise. An in depth

study of Kenya's educational challenges by Achola and Pillai demonstrate how a student's learning experience puts them at risk of future wastage. Wastage is the loss of governmental investment in students and the students' loss of effort, time, and monetary expenses (17). Students' learning behaviour, which includes participation in school activities, not only impacts their academic outcomes but also their educational and occupational aspirations (23). The negative outcome of students and behaviour can contribute to their outcome of repetition or dropout (23; 31). Since the causes of dropout can be indirect, I have focused my research to instead evaluate the quality of education and how it influences students' future aspirations, pointing out the possible future risks of these students and thus the deficiency in the education system and initiatives.

The field study consisted of visits to both schools and households in rural areas within the districts of MoulviBazar and Rajnagar in Sylhet, Bangladesh. A purposeful sample was taken within the limits of these districts so as to reflect school environments ranging from poor to significantly improved social and economic conditions. A total of 416 students were interviewed from 11 high schools; however, two schools (67 students) were lost for analysis due to inadequate amount of responses to the interview questions (respondents failed to answer the majority of questions presented) or a lack of administrators' response. Thus a final list of 349 grade nine and ten students across 9 schools were selected within the sample. The sample includes one girls' school and one boys' school, while the rest are mixed gendered. The division of male and female students was 173 and 176, respectively. Although 6 to 13 teachers at each of the schools were gathered for round table discussions of their perspectives and experiences, the students' perspectives remain the central focus of this paper. It is necessary to use grade nine and ten students as the primary respondents due to their prolonged exposure to school environments and the quickly approaching transitional period between high school and post-secondary education. Grade ten is the transition period, where the students must pass the national exam to attain the Secondary school Certificate (SSC) in order to advance towards higher secondary education. This transition represents a pivotal decision for the continuation of further educational attainment and is therefore a key factor of this study. Interviews were semi-structured consisting of both open-ended questions and guided conversation. As the topics of dropout and education are fairly personal, many students required different approaches to attain the necessary answers. However the overall themes of the

study did not deviate between interviews. With the exception of the teacher group discussions, almost all student interviews were conducted on an individual level.

The objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the dynamics of primary and secondary education. These dynamics are crucial for understanding and analyzing the quality of education as it helps map out any potential barriers. The study aims to appraise the characteristics of the school environment as described by students' perspectives, experiences, levels of engagement, and learning processes. Supplementary information provided by teachers and administrators will be analyzed in a similar fashion.

Regular Attendance 80%

Occasionally Attend 11%

Do Not Attend Regularly 9%

Average Attendance

FINDINGS

The findings of this study produced a wide range of qualitative and quantitative data. Although the qualitative research provides richer information about students' and teachers' attitudes, motivation, and a detailed perception of the learning environments, the quantitative data nonetheless, provides a clearer outlook of the findings to better compare and grasp the different variants in the students' learning experience. The collected data confirmed many of the study's hypotheses; however, some surprises surfaced throughout the findings of the project.

Students' attendance in school, derived from the response of students and later confirmed by teachers, showed an average of 80% regular attendance. The rate of students who 'do not attend regularly' was higher for boys (10%) than for girls (7%); with an overall average of 9%. The rate of attendance indicates that most of the students come to school on a regular basis. Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 illustrate the findings of the students' attendance record, along with the variance among girls and boys. There was very minimal difference between the attendance rates of the two genders.

Figure 1.1: Students rate of attendance

Regular Attendance 80%
 Occasionally Attend 13%
 Do Not Attend Regularly 7%

Attendance Among Girls

Regular Attendance 81%
 Occasionally Attend 9%
 Do Not Attend Regularly 10%

Attendance Among Boys

Figure 1.2: Rate of attendance among girls

Figure 1.3: Rate of attendance among boys

Although attendance rate is similar for both genders, the rationality for attendance varies between girls and boys. Figure 2 illustrates students' reasoning behind attending school. It is important to note that the responses were not mutually exclusive – respondents could select multiple motivators for attending class.

0%
 10%
 20%
 30%
 40%
 50%
 60%
 70%
 80%

Socialize
 Other factors
 Number of Students
 Factors Resulting in School
 Attendance
 Student Rationality for Attendance
 Total
 Boys
 Girls

0%
 10%
 20%
 30%
 40%
 50%
 60%
 Continue
 Will Not
 Uncertain
 Rate of Continuation
 Girls
 Boys
 Total

Figure 2: Students' rationality for attendance

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the majority of students attend school with the intent to 'learn' (more boys than girls). However, 'socializing' is second (more girls than boys), and third is 'other factors' which includes fulfilling parents' wish, or better future. All of these are expectation of students which drives them to attend school. Many students who expressed a desire to do well in school also voiced that socialization is a motivation to attend as well. It should also be noted that even if the ambition behind attendance was to gain knowledge, students conveyed discontent and disappointment with the learning received. Students have a desire to interact with their peers and learn interpersonal skills. They try to fulfill that desire during class time, though it would be better suited for extra-curricular activities. Due to the lack of extra-curricular activities, this goal of socializing and learning interpersonal skills goes largely unfulfilled. Along with a lack of skill building and extra-curricular activities, the students are also not taught or encouraged about their future. The rate of continuation in Figure 3 signifies students' motivation to finish their studies and go into Higher Secondary School.

Figure 3 shows that 56% of average students have intention to 'continue'. However, with the combination of students who 'will not' continue and those that are 'uncertain,' almost half of the total student body are distraught about the direction of their future.

Figure 3: Students rate of continuation in studies

While in Figure 1 we see that attendance level is high (80%), responses for future continuation in figure 3 hints towards possible risk as almost 50% of students will not or uncertain about continuing their studies. When students were asked to explain their reasoning for not continuing, students complained about the lack of connection between their future and learning experience. The students are not taught or encouraged about their future in a field that requires further education. In fact, a large number of them were certain that they will find other endeavours through leaving school, and ultimately leaving the country for a "better future." Many students bluntly expressed that although they acknowledge the importance of education, they dislike coming to school and feel teachers are too strict or careless about the students' learning. Many students added that they believe change to the school system is required, with the inclusion of qualified teachers, entertainment, and activities in school.

The future goals of the majority of the girls pointed towards becoming teachers, which is a job teachers themselves complained about as the income level is extremely low and very few qualifications are required. More than 30% of the girls want to become teachers whereas only 11% of the boys felt the same. Boys', although still limited, had a wider variety of future goals than girls, with a large number of them keen on going abroad. Girls state that they can only play certain roles, unlike boys who feel there is a range of opportunities open to them. Many girls and boys who complained about the teachers' behaviours and teaching style declared that they wished to be "good" teachers for future students.

0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%

Boys
Girls

Desired Future Occupation

Teacher
Doctor
Abroad/Others

Figure 4: Students desired occupation

From the 349 participating students, 88% of the students wished to have a private tutor, and 70% of the students indicated that they have had private tutoring at some point in their school career. Table 1 portrays students learning experience in school and the concerns of private tuition. This is mostly because a majority of the class time is spent on laying out the lesson plan and then taking up homework. While taking up the homework includes explanation, there is a lack of ex-

planation of the material before the homework is given. Thus students require private tutors to understand the material. Due to the lack of class time available, which 77% of the teachers complained about (Table 2), it is not possible for teachers to go in depth with their lesson plans.

Table 1: Percentage of students' satisfaction in classroom learning and private teaching

Students' learning	Girls (out of 173)	Boys (out of 176)	Total (out of 349)
Able to understand material during class	37%	28%	32%
Appreciate the learning in class	51%	43%	7%
Wish for a private tutor to higher achievement	91%	85%	88%
Have had private tutor(s) at least once?	62%	78%	70%

Students believe that private tutoring is a necessity for understanding the class material (this is a popular belief among many parents and students and is a topic of debate considering the commercialization of private teaching in Bangladesh). Moreover, the ironic part here is that many of the teachers found in the classroom were also the teachers providing paid private lessons to the students.

Table 2: Teachers' attitudes from school discussion

Teachers' Attitude	% of teachers
Express a lack of motivation for teaching	77%
Admit they lack appropriate training	34%
Assert there is not enough class time to teach correctly (45 minutes)	67%
Voice concern about low income	67%
Private tutors as side job to compensate for low pay	34%
State there is not enough space/material to teach	44%
Blame parents' "carelessness" for students' failures	56%
Believe early marriage for girls is an issue in their education	67%

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Seven major points may be derived from the above findings: (1) regular attendance, both boys and girls, is higher than previously anticipated; (2) while learning seems to be students' utmost expectation, almost 50% of all students also have reasons other than learning for attending school; (3) more girls than boys choose school as place to socialize and both urge for better leisure activities in school; (4) nearly 50% of all students are either certain that they will not continue or are undecided about continuing secondary education or toward Higher Secondary Education (SSC and HSC); (5) students' future prospects include a minimal list of occupations with more girls indicating teaching as a desired occupation than boys; (6) 88% of all students express a need to have private tutoring in order to achieve good grades at schools; (7) teaching quality inside classrooms suffers due to a lack of teachers' training, motivation, and necessary teaching materials; and (8) marriage at an early age continues to be an obstacle for girls' educational attainment, whereas an obstacle to many boys' educational attainment is the strong desire to go abroad.

Within the last two decades, specific policies were put in place to increase the quantity of students' access to schooling. These policies consist of free and compulsory education, books, and scholarships for females in rural secondary schools, many of which resulted in much success (Chowdhury et al 603-4). Figure 1 reflects on the success of these policies as attendance rate for both boys and girls is high. Despite the increase in national access to education, the quality of this education however is relatively lacking. My results are parallel to the findings of Lloyd, Mensch and Clark as they reported the scarcity of time to learn, materials, space, desks, classrooms, and effective teaching are all contributing to an adverse educational environment (117). Although the quantity of students has increased over the years, there is an absence of quality in the education system.

Teaching Style and the Education System

There are a number of issues with school curricula, resulting in the deprivation of students' learning experience. One particular issue may arise from the "compartmentalized" teaching style. "Compartmentalised" learning, as Cohen explains, is "learning reinforced by teachers that is non-transferable and limits creativity"; it is a method often exercised in developing countries (5). The focus of this learning is on possible test or

exam questions and their answers to be inserted into the students' memory for a short period of time. This type of teaching does not provide the necessary skills or knowledge for the later success of the students. This relates back to the aforementioned disconnect that students feel between their learning and their future goals. The teaching is neither holistic nor interdisciplinary (Cohen 5). As pointed out in Table 2, most of the teachers explained this to be a problem of time. As class sizes are quite large, teachers do not have sufficient time to teach a lesson or focus on ensuring each student understands. The teachers admitted to giving brief lessons on topics with seasonal exams in mind, complaining that very little can be taught since the curriculum allows only 45 minutes of class time.

In addition, teachers blame parents for students' failure at school. Likewise, students explain that because most parents are uneducated they are unable to help students with homework. Due to a lack of financial support, many illiterate parents are also incapable of hiring private tutors. On the surface this becomes a matter of poverty. However, a fundamental question arises: why must it be necessary for almost all students to have private teachers? Table 1 shows the students' lack of understanding of the material in class (32%), who were also surprised by the proposed question concerning afterschool help. They did not understand the concept of receiving additional help from teachers after school because the notion of teachers help outside of class for free is extremely rare in Bangladesh. Many students with private tutors admitted to skipping classes because they "know" they will not learn anything in class, instead they attend their private lessons.

A noteworthy concern from the findings is the teaching style at schools and the abilities of teachers. Teachers stated that sometimes they face a lack of personal understanding of the material they teach, while students note a feeling of discontent from the learning in class. Teachers begin administering the learning material - providing the tools to learn rather than facilitating the learning. As a result students are discouraged from learning. Those teachers who are interested in the students' learning take on a more authoritarian role toward their students. Although many believe that discipline should be taught by teachers (Pellerin 297), many students complained that in the name of discipline, teachers were too strict at times. The harshness of authoritarian schools has been stated as a factor for higher dropout than authoritative schools (Pellerin 299).

Teachers' lack of interest or indifferent behaviour was evident in all the visited schools. Students complained that their teachers showed very little interest in their achievements. Many teachers also admitted to this indifferent behaviour, shown in Table 2, contribute to the students' loss of interest. Lloyd, Mensch and Clark have argued that if an academically competent student becomes discouraged, they are more likely to drop out of school (119). Consequently, it is important to empower teachers so they may empower their students (Cohen 38).

Gender and Education

Many teachers, on the other hand, expressed the need for education for both genders equally, while 67% expressed disappointment for girls stating that many girls who do well academically face marriage at an early age. They commented that it was not worthwhile to "waste their energy" on girls. As a result girls are often ignored and put aside to better focus on boys; this is a norm in Bangladeshi society and has become a norm in classrooms. Educational material is also very gender biased. In high schools, girls are taught "greahostho biggan" (home science) while boys are taught "krishi shikka" (farming) without any choice given to the students.

Another problem girls face involves the lack of equipment necessary for education specific to girls, such as physical education, which as a result can make girls fall behind in physical development and teamwork (Lloyd, Mensch and Clark 119). Omwami exemplifies Kenya as another developing nation that also includes a curriculum that reinforces the role of females as caregivers and compliments the educational system to mould females into housewives (21). This is called "proselytization," in which countries aim to improve national condition alongside the existing patriarchal thought process; this results in the subordination of females and thus reinforces the system of gender disparity (Omwami 22). Female students also criticized that most of their teachers are male, making it difficult to connect with teachers. Although schools have female teachers, the numbers are very limited, ranging from 0 to 4 in total per school. Some conditional improvement for girls has been taking place in terms of their household behaviours and tasks. For example, many female students note that as long as they achieve good grades, their parents were more inclined to keep them in school, away from household work or marriage.

Extra-Curricular Activities and Leisure Boredom

Socialization is another significant element of schooling demonstrated in the findings. Illustrated in Figure 2, many students attend school to fulfil a need for socialization, however all the students complained that zero extra-curricular activities are available. Due to the lack of leisure activities during school, students feel that full school days are "too long." This also shows the schools' deficiency in developing students' skills thus resulting in boredom. Leisure \boredom is defined as "subjective perception that available leisure experiences are not sufficient to instrumentally satisfy needs for optimal arousal" (Wegner et al 423). A respectable school system should supply the appropriate time and activities to satisfy, challenge, and engage students outside of the classroom (Pellerin 287). A study conducted in Cape Town, South Africa, discovered leisure boredom as a significant predictor for poor performance in school leading to dropout, especially among students aged 14 and up (Wegner et al 421). This may be higher for girls as more girls expressed a lack of socializing opportunities outside of the household, thus school is seen as a free pass. Although a large number of students admit that they attend school to socialize, activities through which they can fulfil that need are lacking, hence class time for them serves that purpose.

Private Teaching and Student Achievements

Along with a lack of extra-curricular activities, a lack of learning also seems to be prevalent inside the classroom, therefore increasing the need for private lessons outside of class time. This has to do with a lack of "expertise, sincerity, knowledge and commitment" teachers express towards their students during school (Hamid et al 298). In order to do well, students are forced to self-teach or hire private tutors. Table 1 shows that 88% of students reported that they have or wish to have private tutoring for their educational success. As a result, having a private tutor has become a necessity to be successful in school and is considered to be a societal norm. Many students feel school is a waste of time as they are not taught adequately in class. To resolve this, affluent children hire private tutors whereas underprivileged children are left feeling helpless. This dynamic inherently discriminates the less affluent children, who are then inevitably subjected to a worse learning experience because they are unable to hire a private tutor. Students with private tutors expressed a feeling of satisfaction with the private lessons over learning in class.

Private teaching is also a must in order to keep up with regular homework. To recap, homework has been seen as an instrument to encourage parent-teacher communication, parent-child interaction and to create a link between family and school life for students. Homework is essential in strengthening students' ability to acquire a proper understanding of the school's curriculum (Hampden-Thompson 129). However familial input in a child's education is not helpful for the family or the child when expectations of familial assistance in homework puts stress on poor families (especially on mothers) who may lack the appropriate material and knowledge; once again, putting the students from poorer families at an educational disadvantage (Deslandes 72).

Many teachers complained that parents' lack of education and apathy towards their child's education negatively effects students' learning. Many students do not receive help from parents with homework and are not able to afford private tutors. The "good" student must have a private tutor, especially those in higher Grades preparing for the SSC exam in grade ten. As a result students without private tuition are unable to compete. During this period of grade nine and ten, many students explained that they were introduced to new material that is harder for them to grasp and without private tuition they did not have the capacity to understand the material.

It is important to note that private teaching has become commercialized in Bangladesh. Most of the class teachers also play double roles also providing paid private lessons outside of class. These are curriculum teachers who described this as a necessary endeavour in order to properly sustain themselves due to their low level of income from teaching at school.

Policies for Improvement/Policy Implementation Problems

Furthermore, new policies enacted for the improvement of the education system are also influenced by the old policies already in place, for example policy reforms with the introduction of new policies do not look at classroom obstacles (Myhill 131). Both the teachers and students complain about the difficulties of the new exams; a new policy in Bangladesh which requires more wide reading and critical thinking. This is similar to Myhill's analysis of policy implementation to improve literacy quality without changing old policies (131; 133). To elaborate, in order to help students learn to analyze, Bangladesh introduced "srijonshil" or analysis base examination.

However, no particular steps within the teaching system were taken for the success of this specific policy. Classroom settings and the teaching style continue to reproduce knowledge that is memorization based. Accordingly, students do poorly in examinations because they do not learn to analyze.

This encounter in educational policy implementation points out that "dominant pedagogic discourse is monologic, with high levels of teacher control and didactic teaching strategies" (Myhill 131). The teaching is examination-led, emphasizing reproductive knowledge transmitted by the teacher. These difficulties are due to the teachers' limited experience as responsive educators and the expectations of students as having limited capacity (Myhill 131-2).

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Throughout the study, several limitations became readily apparent. The data accumulated in this research came from discussions with students and teachers. It was difficult to conduct individual interviews with teachers as the entire faculty often insisted on answering questions together as a group. This may have resulted in the phenomenon of groupthink, whereby individual opinions are sacrificed in favour of greater conformity and forming consensus. On the other hand, conducting these interviews in groups allowed for a certain degree of brainstorming and recollection. Similar situations occurred with student interviews conducted in the home whereby parents would at times accompany children, potentially impacting their responses.

Another limitation was locating absent and dropped out students. As a result, respondents were limited to those who attended class during the days of the interviews. Although some students were tracked down for home interviews, the availability of contact information was largely lacking. According to attendance sheets on the days of the interviews, an average of 15% of the total students were absent. Naturally, this causes limitations as the responses of these absent students would have shed additional light on the reasons for their absenteeism.

Moreover, it would be erroneous to assume that school quality is purely exogenous. It is also impossible to conclude that a statistical association of the findings has a direct causal relationship with dropout probability. It is unlikely that any one cause, in this paper or otherwise, is solely responsible for dropout, but rather an amalgamation of potential factors.

IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This investigation shed some light on relatively under-researched areas of Sylhet division in Bangladesh. The results generated not only pointed out critical factors within the perimeters of schools in those areas, but also demonstrated a parallel relationship between other developing countries and Bangladesh that can be used for better policy analysis and execution. Overall findings and insights infer that educational policies need to be readdressed for extensive review.

Incentives are provided to students or households by governments or NGOs to attract students to schools (Ardt et al 17) while what students learn in the class is disregarded. If the teachers were trained, felt motivated, and classrooms had a better student to teacher ratio, then students would feel engaged and motivated towards learning with less incentives required. It is essential to understand that NGOs or government programmes can offer incentives and “bribe” students for a certain period; but if the material incentive is not provided the succeeding day, then the students will be discouraged to continue attending school. If students enjoyed the learning experience and felt a drive towards education, then they would be enthusiastic to continue schooling even without the material incentive.

Although many students enrol in secondary school, their lack of success can lead them to discontinue attending school. The reasons for student dropout may include affordability and poor performance, but other factors such as loss of motivation, lack of relevance and quality of the learning and school environment may also contribute (Lewin 157; Zeelen et al 1). The findings show that even students who attend regularly can undergo a loss of motivation or become disengaged from the schools and feel unsure about continuing their studies. When almost 50% of the students say that they are unsure about continuation or feel certain they will discontinue, it signifies grave concerns for the educational system.

Students, especially girls, can benefit immensely from empowerment. In the late 80s Cohen wrote a bulletin pointing out ways to help students think creatively and become active in their learning. She noted that empowerment can start from classroom learning, where students gain some autonomy to select their learning topics or stories in class. This will demonstrate that teachers care about student interests, helping them feel positive about themselves so they may find a source

of self-direction through education (Cohen 38; 45). For girls specifically, it will also help them build self-esteem and open opportunity for individual development.

Along with learning material, teaching and parenting need to become authoritative. Instead of the authoritarian or indifferent behaviours currently seen, schools can be more demanding and hold students to standards of discipline (authoritative), while maintaining responsive relationships with them. Schools need to provide teachers who support and demand, in order to encourage students to feel confident while ensuring higher engagement and responsibility to become academically motivated and achieve higher grades (Pellerin 279; 288).

Teachers in Bangladesh attend yearlong training, but very little learning is found in practice and little to no renewal training is required after years of teaching. Both teachers and students express that they are mostly passive and not very interactive with each other. Annual training on life skills knowledge and monthly refresher training sessions with frequent meetings with supervisors who guide them in their teaching can improve teaching strategies (Ardt et al 16; Nath 20).

My interviews with teachers pointed out dissonance in terms of the pedagogy in teaching and teachers' expectations of their pupils. My account of teachers' feelings is similar to Hamilton's (418) account of teacher's dissonance, whether it is in personal (teachers, head teachers) or institutional levels (422). Hamilton's article, focusing specifically on teachers and narrative identity within the school system, points out different issues that can appear in school in terms of teachers and how they can improve the learning environment. Their attitudes can lead to positive results or negative results in policy implementation in the school. He also points out ways to improve the narrative between teachers and students (Hamilton 421- 3; 427). These kinds of research can be used for policies on teachers' training and to assist teachers to build their identity hence enabling them to better guide their students. Moreover, there must be an understanding or a shared dialogue between policy makers and teachers. Teachers are unable to passably teach students subjects or provide lesson plans that they themselves lack the capacity and/or tools to comprehend and teach. Students' learning within the school environment also shows a gap between researchers and policy makers in Bangladesh. The communication level between researchers and policy makers are minimal and their views are diverging. The current education system shows that edu-

cation policy has been planned and designed parallel to the values of educational administration in central government and large NGOs instead of generating them from scientifically acquired research on pupils' needs. Elite groups closely connected to central government also influence and in many cases are in charge of education policy development. Many scholars on education and development also stress that very little research has been done that is independent of governments or commissions from large NGOs (Unterhalter et al. 85). However it is crucial to understand that not only is there a loss of investment for the students, but also for the government when students do not receive any quality education and are likely to repeat classes or dropout as a result. Oketch and Rolleston note that an increase in enrolment in Kenya has resulted in a decrease in quality of education (156). A review of Kenya's educational policy prospect showed that an increase of 91% in budget (0.8% GDP) is necessary by the government for all household education costs in order to sustain the net enrolment rate of 94% (Oketch and Rolleston 150). Other SSA nations have also shown similar effects. Ugandan educational policies are made to increase access to school but the main problem faced now is keeping students from dropping out (Zeelen et al. 31).

Since communities have many linkages with the school and education system in developing countries such as Bangladesh, communities can provide programmes that improve the skills of educators in supporting students with learning difficulties. Suggestions from a social survey done in South Africa emphasize the need for communities to support local education. Communities can provide drop-in-centres after school for learners with homework or provide extra-curricular activities. They can also support caregivers with parenting programmes such as adult's basic education and training (“Social Survey” 5). In the realm of development, as Muzmder and Halim point out, participatory development in broader terms is considered a bottom-up approach (153). In this type of development, the beneficiaries are not passive objects of their own development and instead act as active subjects. The focus of development is also specific in that communities are the main sources for identifying the problem as well as the solution for themselves. These include sharing ideas and contributing resources and time (Mozumder and Halim 153). All of these approaches can be utilized to improve the education systems of developing nations and thus the quality of students' educational attainment.

Finally, throughout the research process, I realized that there is a need to further investigate the work of the school managements and how resource allocation in each school takes place. The managements include strong community members who control the resources of the schools and impact the learning of the students. They control the system and internal behaviours, which means they control teacher selection thus directing the type of teaching and learning inside the institutions.

CONCLUSION

Ginsburg's examination of polarized economic empowerment levels portrays power relations and their pervasiveness in hierarchical structures – which in the times of colonialism laid the foundation of power relations in economic and socio-political structures (Omwami 17). Developing nations experience similar effects in terms of resource allocation and developmental, whether it is in the international field of resource allocation or within the national sphere across cultures and groups in a society (Omwami 17). The implication of these gaps in policies can be disastrous and instead of developmental success it can be detrimental for a nation.

Educational efforts and expansion have all aimed to contribute to modernization and economic improvement, even though government and development groups mainly try to improve quality of life (Omwami 15). Development concerns are raised while arguing against modernization theories. Yet in reality developing countries go through a path following developed nations. Government policies implemented in developing nations now had been the focus of developed nations decades ago. Why not learn from the experience of first world nations and evaluate their successes and failures. International institutions and NGOs helping developing nations should help make better policies that will bring a series of changes instead of a cycle that repeats and keeps the country in a recurring "developing" stage. Formulation and implementation processes of policies need to focus on how and whom they benefit. Governments, NGOs and other organization involved in recent policies on access to primary and secondary education must concentrate on who the policies benefit and how excluded groups can be reached and the institutionalization and financial sustainability of these policies.

These findings do not undermine the importance of enrollment and attendance but rather complement them. Development in education should also look at the institutions that these children are enrolling in and the quality of education provided in

these institutions. Helping children become literate individuals themselves empowers them to develop their nations towards progress rather than repeating the same cycle. What benefit is there for a nation to increase the number of students if these numbers lack substantial quality of education? If education is the backbone to development, then the government and other international and national actors should make sure that this backbone is strong for the nation to stand on its own, without the risk of trembling due to a weak foundation.

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