
Quality of Education in Primary Schools of Dhaka

By Ahmed S. Ishtiaque

Assistant Professor & Research Associate

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Introduction

The educational sector constitutes the backbone of any nation with growth aspirations. Although the literacy rate in the country has made great strides in the last decade, the time is high for us to also consider not just the quantitative estimates of educational successes, but the quality of graduates as well. Although Bangladesh has, according to the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and other sources, one of the largest primary education systems in the world with over 37 thousand government primary schools, there are significant impediments to delivering educational quality in our country (Neazy, 2016; The Daily Sun)

In a report by Research for Advancement of Complete Education (RACE) titled “Ambiguity in understanding among teachers and students render creative method ineffective - a study on primary school in Bangladesh” (Source: The Daily Star, 26 January 2016), teaching methods widely practiced by our educationists have significant room for improvement. It is said that the traditional methods of lecture and rote-learning actually contributes to higher drop-out rates and also compromises on the soft skills of students, leaving them under-prepared for the job market. In another study conducted by BRAC (Source: The Daily Star, May 9, 2014), it was indicated that many parents who are from a less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds have to pay considerable bribes at every step for their child’s schooling. This trend is more prevalent in the public sector schools compared to the private ones. That would be of little consolation to any parent as the private schools are already charging significantly higher tuition (Haider, 2014; The Daily Star).

Looking into the quantitative aspects we have done well in raising the literacy rate, which according to a UN report, in 2015 was 91 percent in contrast to 83 percent in 2000. An 8 percent rise in the literacy rate in 5 years is considered a significant improvement by many. Bangladesh has also shown improvements with the dropout rate from 21.4 percent in 2014 to 20.9 percent in 2015. Furthermore our enrolment rate has also improved significantly from 87.2 percent in 2005 to 97.7 percent in 2014. However looking into the qualitative aspects of education the picture is quite different. Where classes are supposed to have a student teacher ratio of 30:1, it is about 53:1 (Source: The Daily Star, May 9, 2014). Our infrastructure remains insufficient as there are still

not enough schools to support the growing demand of students. Seating arrangements are also inadequate as many are forced to even sit outside in the open field during class times. The teaching methodology is still not quite modern such that there is a focus on lectures with minimal use of interactive pedagogical processes. There are also very few activities aimed at nurturing and developing the creative faculties of children. Other challenges include a shortage of qualified teachers and the lack of proper training of the teachers.

Problems According to Experts:

Although there are many problems in the current education sector that can be focused on, we have decided to highlight the most talked-about issues brought forth by experts (The World Bank; “Bangladesh Education Sector Review”, March 2015). First of all there is the issue of the current education system itself which is struggling to integrate English Medium and Bangla Medium, and not to mention, the Madrassa system. The lack of integration between the different systems means that the students from each of these tracks are heading towards certain fixed categories of jobs or businesses, or even diverting from their primary field of choice and joining the workforce within a totally different field. In a recent article by the Daily Sun, the author talks about the uniformity that was pledged to our nation through the national constitution. In his view, this is not being met due to the variety in the primary education currently available in the country such as Bangla Medium, English Medium, English Version and Madrassas. The syllabus diverges significantly among the different school types and the English Medium schools follow either Edexcel or Cambridge, which have little overlap with the national curriculum (Neazy, 2016; The Daily Sun).

Another issue mentioned by experts is the continuous rising of tuition fees, which is not so much of a problem with the Bangla Medium schools as it is with the English Medium schools of our country, where parents are constantly complaining about ever increasing tuition fees. Experts also mention about the health and security concerns of our children in the schools as there are insufficient playing areas and hardly any exposure to greenery and natural surroundings. However, the most worrying concern for the parents is understandably with the quality of teachers that are teaching our children, including out-dated syllabi and teaching techniques. Consequently, more and more parents are moving away from traditional schools and putting their children into international schools, which follow international syllabi from the primary level all the way up to international board exams such as Edexcel or Cambridge (Nayeem, 2016; The Daily Star).

Rising Tuition Fees:

Rising tuition fees, as discussed earlier, is a binding constraint that guardians and the administration at schools are confronted with, particularly in the English Medium schools of Dhaka and Chittagong. Apparently the parents have protested to a continuous rising of the school tuitions which in the last 5 years have risen from 11% to 100% (Source: The Prothom Alo, 29 January 2016). Due to the guardians’ protests, the government

had to intervene and put a price ceiling such that no schools can raise their tuition fees more than 25%, however in practice that ceiling is not being adhered to as many schools are ignoring the directive. Another point linked with the rising tuition fees is the government's decision to put tax on educational institutions. Although the private universities were able to put a stop to the government taxing them, the schools were not spared. This additional cost of taxes is now being passed on to the end-customers, i.e., the parents. (Neazy, 2016; The Daily Sun).

Health & Security Concerns:

One of the common problems evident in the current system is the excessive usage of heavy books which children have to carry. This has been deemed a health hazard by many medical experts as carrying more than their body weight on a continuous basis could lead to back problems and even stunting among children.

Moreover, several schools in our cities are not equipped with proper playgrounds for children to play at, which encourages children towards indoor games and excessive usage of mobile phones and tablet PCs. The lack of play areas and fields also contribute to a detachment of children from natural surroundings, which impedes the emotional and cognitive development of children (Source: Nayeem, 2016; The Daily Star).

Another concern of parents has to do with the overall security issue at schools. Recent national security concerns and events that have occurred in or near school premises have created anxiety among parents. In response to such security threats, whether it is hartals or more serious security concerns, schools are yet to respond with meaningful risk-mitigation strategies beyond closing schools during hartals. (Nayeem, 2016; The Daily Star).

Quality of Teaching:

Generally, teachers are not sufficiently paid through their schools; which can lead to teachers seeking other means of earning income. One of the complaints about parents is that the teachers are not dedicated enough in the classrooms and are even giving low grades to students that do not avail of private coaching through them. This can have the unintended physiological impact on a child by making him/her believe he/she is not capable of getting good grades. This has led to the mushrooming of private coaching centers in our major cities.

One of the major concerns of educationists and other expert commentators has to do with whether our teachers are sufficiently qualified. Are our teachers trained professionals with a degree on education who knows how to properly teach others, particularly, children; or are they O' or A' Level graduates who are joining as teachers at private schools to earn pocket money. National policies should be able to ensure that teachers at all levels have proper degrees and/or certifications, especially in pedagogy of children, before teaching at an institution (Billah, 2011).

ULAB Survey Findings:

A study titled “Parents Satisfaction of Primary Schools in Dhaka City” conducted in March 2015 by the Center for Enterprise and Society at ULAB reveals the demand side of the coin, focusing on what the parents want from a school and what they consider to be a good school. The study attempted to explore the major factors considered by the parents of primary school children. Due to limitations, the study was focused on the quality of education for primary schools in the Dhaka city area only. The critical success factors that were identified are as follows:

S.L	Factors:	Definition:	Importance to Parents:
1.	Infrastructure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parking facilities 2. Playground 3. Utilities 4. Convenience of location 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parents were not very interested in, or expected parking facilities from the schools. 2. Playground is a significant factor for parents and they wished to see schools provide proper playgrounds for children. 3. Utilities were not an important factor except parents wished to avail of generator facilities in case of load shedding. 4. The factor which most parents were concerned with was how close the school is to their home or office.
2.	Environment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proper ventilation 2. Adequate lighting 3. Greenery 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most schools fared well in terms of ensuring adequate ventilation 2. Most parents also agreed that their children’s schools have enough natural lighting 3. Surprisingly most parents were indifferent to whether the schools maintained any greenery within their campus. Parents do not expect this from schools in Dhaka city.
3.	Service Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lab facilities 2. Library facilities 3. Quality of teachers 4. Quality of staff 5. Parent teacher communication 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most parents were uninterested in whether the school provided laboratory facilities. This could be because at the primary levels, a lab is not really considered a necessity. 2. Parents also were unconcerned with the library facilities as they do not expect their children to read much, which is a surprising finding. 3. Quality of the teachers was the most important for most parents, to the extent that they are willing to shift their child to another school if a particular teacher relocated. 4. Quality of staff and their behavior towards parents and children is a concern but not a primary one. 5. Another important factor for most concerned parents is the frequency of parent - teacher communication.

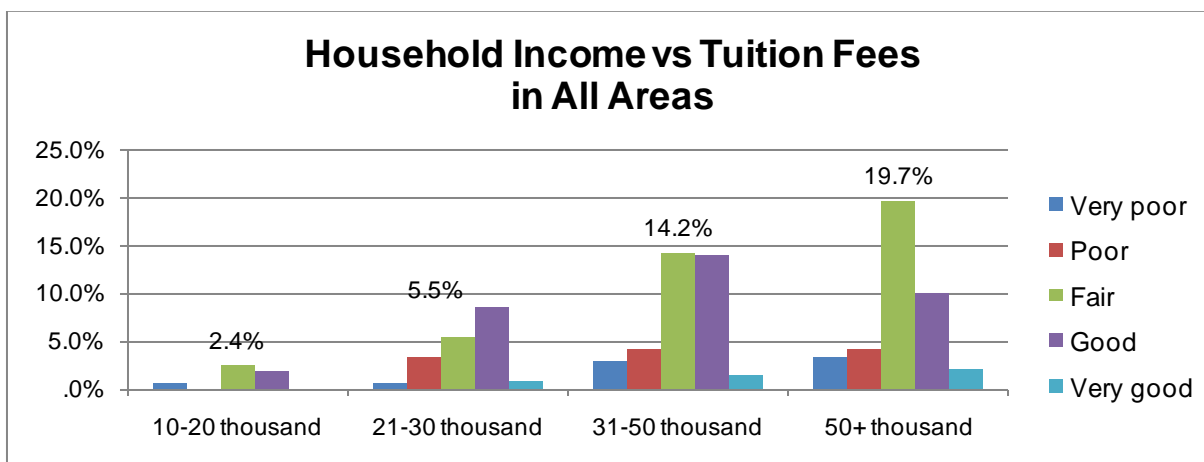
4.	Child's Wellbeing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Security system 2. Food quality 3. Extracurricular activities 4. Transportation 5. Rules & regulations 6. School uniform 7. Safety 8. Medical facilities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Although not the primary concern of parents, many parents are increasingly cognizant and concerned about security measures available at their schools. 2. Food quality is not much of an issue in the schools as most primary school going children bring their home made tiffin. 3. Most parents are concerned that schools are not emphasizing extracurricular activities important for their children's physical and mental health. 4. Many schools provide transportation for students, but the parents are concerned about the quality of transportation services. 5. Most parents are very concerned about the amount of rules and regulations in a school and how strongly they are enforced. The stronger the better according to most. 6. Parents are also concerned about the strict enforcement of school uniform as it teaches the importance of presentation to children. 7. As far as safety is concerned most parents believe that the safety is a measure their schools are providing adequately. 8. Most parents are satisfied with the medical services currently being provided by schools, which is not much.
5.	Cost & Affordability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tuition fees 2. Payment system 3. Scholarships 4. Reward facilities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One of the surprising outcomes of the study is that most parents are quite happy with the current tuition fees. 2. As most schools have a payment system with the banks, majority of the parents are satisfied with the system. 3. Some have mentioned that there could be more scholarships available for their children. 4. Parents would like to see more reward systems being introduced in the primary schools.

The above-mentioned findings constitute the salient output of the study. In terms of the different versions of the schools, there was no significant difference in the findings across the typologies of schools, i.e., whether a school was English or Bangla Medium.

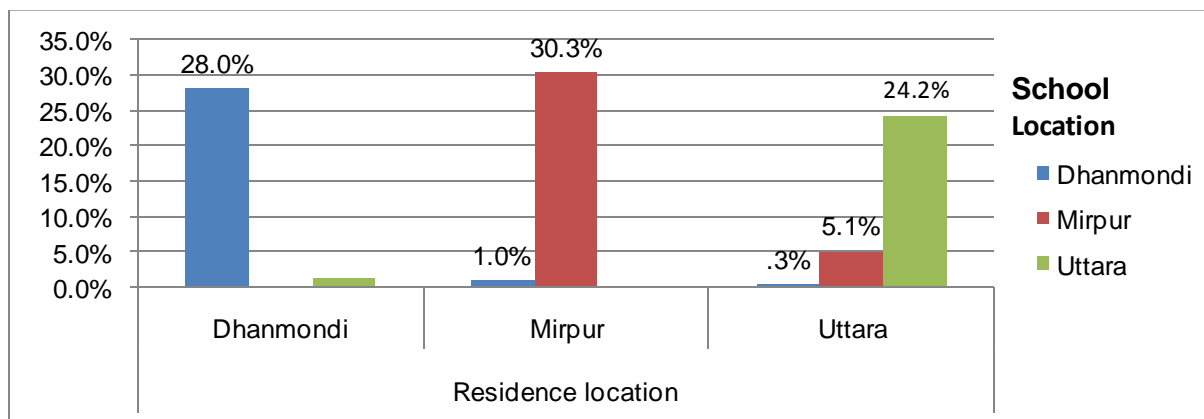
Other Note worthy Findings :

As indicated in the previous section, the study also revealed certain interested findings regarding parents' perceptions and attitudes. For instance it was found that regardless of family income, there was considerable indifference to the amount of tuition fees paid. In fact, at the higher end of the income bracket, parents thought

that the tuition fees being charged were fair and at the lower end, there was a widespread acceptance of the level of fees being charged at present.



Due to the current traffic jam issues of Dhaka city, most parents prefer to have the school be as close as possible to their homes. In that regard it was found that majority of the parents send their children to the schools which are in the same zone as their residence. It was suggested that parents tend to give their child to the schools near their home to avoid the Dhaka city traffic. However, we find that only about 5% of the parents living in Uttara send their children to school in Mirpur area. The only logical explanation to this could be that parents have higher preferences for certain schools and are willing to travel to avail of education there.



Towards a Solution:

UNICEF published a paper in 2000 (Source: Nayeem, 2016; The Daily Star), which provides a comprehensive guideline regarding the factors critical to ensuring the quality of the educational experience. They talk about factors that underscore cognitive development along with social & moral traits. They argue that factors such as the overall health of the child, their relation with their family and community, the surrounding environment

they grow up in, including the classroom and outside, general awareness regarding gender health are essential for an overall development of a child. The paper also focuses on continuous Training and Assessment of teachers and addresses the problems with lack of quality of overall education, where the system is still old fashioned and fully based on bookish learning ignoring the other side of the coin (Haider, 2014; The Daily Star).

Of course, there is no one solution to the challenge of upgrading our primary schooling system in Bangladesh. All concerned parties such as the Government and the private sector have to come forth with a comprehensive and workable strategy to improve the quality of education in our nation. Below are some high-level recommendations geared towards long-term development of our primary education system:

1. The nation has to start with building cohesion if not integration among the different education mediums so that every child has the minimum basic educational foundation. It is important that education, particularly at the primary level, is homogenous, regardless of socio-economic variations among families.
2. Coming up with a comprehensive national syllabus is a much harder task than most are willing to admit. The primary goal of the national curriculum has to be focused towards providing the nation with an active work force. However the curriculum has to cover relevant content for those who want to send their children abroad for higher studies.
3. Adequate training of teachers is a must for the success of the education system and the nation as a whole. All efforts will be in vain if the teachers are not trained on a regular basis with regard to modern teaching techniques. Teaching certificates should be provided to teachers at all levels which may be renewable annually, possible through examinations to keep teachers “on their toes”. Furthermore the entire syllabus should be revised every 5 years and the entire system should also be regularly monitored and modified, as and when needed. The controlling body should be an independent cell representing practicing teachers from various institutes of the nation and ought to operate independently of larger ministries, to ensure hierarchy is minimized and efficiency is enhanced.

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