

The State of Primary Educational Quality in Bangladesh: An Evaluation

M. Nurul I. Shekh

Associate Professor,
Oslo University College

Abstract: *The positive relationship between education and development is well-established. There is common agreement among researchers, policy makers, donors and development practitioners that education is the most important tool for development and poverty reduction. Since the 1990s, a greater emphasis has been placed on Education For All (EFA) and significant amounts of resources have been invested by national governments, various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and international donor agencies to realise the goals and objectives of the EFA. By using data from ten primary (five governments and five non-governments) schools from Gazipur district in Bangladesh, this paper shows a substantial progress since the 1990s in terms of both enrolment and gender equity in primary education. The paper, however, argues that the quality of the education is being deteriorated since the implementation of the EFA. The paper, therefore, argues that unless the quality of the education is ensured in addition to increase in access to education, the purpose of education and its effects on development and poverty reduction in a country like Bangladesh will remain minimal. The paper calls for an immediate in-depth scrutiny and thus appropriate policy changes so that the goals and objectives of the EFA will not be compromised.*

1. Introduction

Quality of primary education¹ depends upon multiple factors. These often include educational planning, national curriculum, management, teacher's training and classroom teaching and learning conditions. It is often assumed that the classroom teaching-learning situation is an important determinant of the expected output from an educational system. Therefore, the main purposes and objectives of this paper are to examine and understand the quality of primary education by observing the classroom situation. In order to understand the quality of primary education it is important to take a closer look into the classroom climate, teaching style, classroom management, and understanding the subject matters during the lesson in the class. In order to seek answers to the above objectives, the paper will scrutinise the following questions: How is the classroom milieu where the teaching takes place? What do teachers and students actually do in the classrooms? How is the curriculum delivered by the teachers to the students in reality? What are the ways in which teaching – learning is managed? What are the learning outcomes of the current teaching methods?

The primary education sector in Bangladesh has undergone huge changes since the 1990s. The reason for these changes is the government's commitment and extensive effort towards achieving Education for All (EFA), a declaration made at the World Conference on Education for All in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. In the year 2000, United Nations declared eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and education is one of them. As a result of these

¹ Providing a definition of education is very difficult and complex. According to UNESCO (1991), the definition of education is the following: "Education is taken to comprise organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning".

commitments, the access to primary education has increased steadily over the last two decades. The gross enrolment rate has increased from 71 percent in 1990 to 97 percent in 2003. The current net enrolment rate is estimated to be at 87 percent. The dropout rate has gone down slightly from 35 percent in 2000 to 33 percent in 2002 and the current completion rate is around 67 percent (UN, 2005). In addition, the gender parity index has also increased from 0.87 in 1990 to 1.02 in 2004. Despite all these improvements, the learning achievement and quality of education remain to be a huge problem. Even though the government of Bangladesh has intention to ensure the quality of education together with net enrolment and completion rate, evidence suggests that the quality of primary education is deteriorating ((Latif, 2004; Sedere, 2001). Scattered evidence from Bangladesh is now pointing towards the direction that the quantitative target of EFA and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in relation to education may be achieved to a certain degree but the quality issue remains to be a huge concern for the education sectors.

Quality matters in education. There is no substitute to education for the development of human resources which often starts in the classroom. Even though the new millennium sets out to provide education to everyone, which can satisfy the changing needs of the students, the matter of educational quality to develop the students' cognitive development remains to be a huge concern. Recent studies on student's performance revealed low score in the achievement level which suggests the schools are not providing quality education (Greaney *et al.*, 1998; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2001; Hossain *et al.*, 2003). This deteriorating quality in education has raised the concern among education providers, policy makers and civil society as a whole. Therefore, it has become important to scrutinise the classroom teaching-learning situation and the outcome as well as find ways to improve the quality of education in order to make the students better human resources. With this reason in mind, a total of ten primary schools, five government and five non-government² semi-kindergarten type schools were chosen for this study from Gazipur district in Bangladesh.

1.1. The State of Primary Education in Bangladesh

Primary education has been one of the top priorities by the Government of Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. Bangladesh is also a signatory to the world declaration on EFA that was agreed in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. Since the 1990s, both the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have launched campaigns to publicise the importance of education and create a literacy atmosphere widely throughout the country. The government has also undertaken various measures to increase access, reduce dropout rate, increase completion rate, improve quality of education and increase the literacy rate.

At present Bangladesh has a five years primary education system. Children in Bangladesh start primary education at the age of six. Children of the age 6 to 10 are offered primary education which is compulsory by law and free of costs. There are several types of schools offering primary education throughout the country. The government has also extended the number of government primary school and created environment for other actors to provide primary and basic education to alleged children. As a result the total number of primary level education institutions is now over 86,000 and they offer primary education to a total of more than 18, 4 million children (GoB, 2005). Government recognised 11 types of primary educational institutions that provide primary education. Despite various actors providing

² Some of the registered non-government schools have a mix of government primary schools curriculum and kindergarten curriculum. As a result of this, I have referred them as non-government primary school throughout the paper.

primary education, the government primary schools still remain the largest provider of primary education. It is estimated that 61 percent of the students enrol in government primary schools, while the rest enrol in registered non-governmental school, private kindergartens, various religious schools and in transitional community and satellite schools.

Recently Bangladesh has increased its educational expenses to comply with the commitment of EFA. The government has now allocated nearly 14 percent of the national budget to the education sector of which the share of primary and mass education is nearly 43 per cent (GoB, 2005). Despite government's priority and special efforts the ratio of student per teacher remains to be higher compared with any developing countries. The average of current national teacher-student ratio is about 1:52 and the ratio is even worse for the government primary school which is about 1:66 (BBS, 2005). The table below presents the number of primary school, teachers, teacher-student ratio and enrolment rate.

Table 1: Number of Primary School, Teachers, Teacher-student ratio, and Enrolment-2003

Type of School	Institution	No. of Teacher		Teacher-student ratio	Enrolment	
		Total	Female		Total	Girls
Govt. Primary School	37671	162114	61955 (38.2)	1:66	10665075	5361783 (50.3)
Registered Non-Govt. Primary School	19428	75793	24292 (32.1)	1:54	4124608	1983376 (48.1)
Non-Registered Non-Govt. Primary School	1670	6434	3105 (48.3)	1:32	206078	102164 (49.6)
Other Primary Level Institution	27968	109944	39359 (35.8)	1:31	3435559	1625240 (47.3)
Total (Primary)	86737	354285	128711 (36.3)	Average- 1:52	18431320	9072563 (49.2)

Note: Figures in the parentheses indicates percentage of female. Source: Directorate of Education, GoB, 2003.

In order to increase the enrolment in primary school education the government financed the "Food for Education" programme which was introduced in 1993 to compensate opportunity cost of poor parents for sending their children to school. This helped increase the enrolment, attendance in schools, decrease dropout and prevent child labour. About 27 percent of the areas of the country covering about 2.2 million disadvantaged students were under the "Food for Education Programme" in 2001. From the financial year 2002-2003 "Food for Education" programme was replaced by a "Cash Support Stipend" programme. Under this programme, parents of poor students of the primary schools in the rural areas are given monthly stipend at the rate of *Taka*³100 (US\$ 1.50) per month for sending one child to school and *Taka* 125 (US\$ 1.75) for sending more than one child. The programme is continuing with an allocation of *Taka* 5,200 million (US\$ 86 million) for the financial year 2004-2005 (GoB, 2005).

The government of Bangladesh has also taken steps towards reducing gender disparity in primary education. To create gender equity in primary education and to ensure wider participation of women in development activities, 60 percent of the teacher posts have been reserved for female teachers. As a result, the percentage of female teachers at present has reached 37.6 percent whereas it was only 20.57 percent in 1990s (BBS, 2005). Huge efforts have been made and massive social mobilization programmes have been undertaken to encourage parents to send their girl child to school. These steps have contributed to the increase of girl enrolment and completion rate bringing gender parity in education. As a

³ *Taka* is the name of local currency in Bangladesh, 1US\$=70 *Taka* (in 2005).

result, in the year 2000, boys and girls ratio of completion rate stood at about 68:63. Despite huge success both in enrolment and completion rate for both sexes with 80 percent enrolment and 72 percent completion rate, it can be said that about 40 percent of the children cross their primary school age keeping their primary school incomplete (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2002). And those who complete their full cycle of primary school do not learn much, for example, the last *Education Watch 2000* study from Bangladesh showed that about a third remain non-literate or semi-literate after completing primary education (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003).

2. The Concept of Quality in Education: Definition

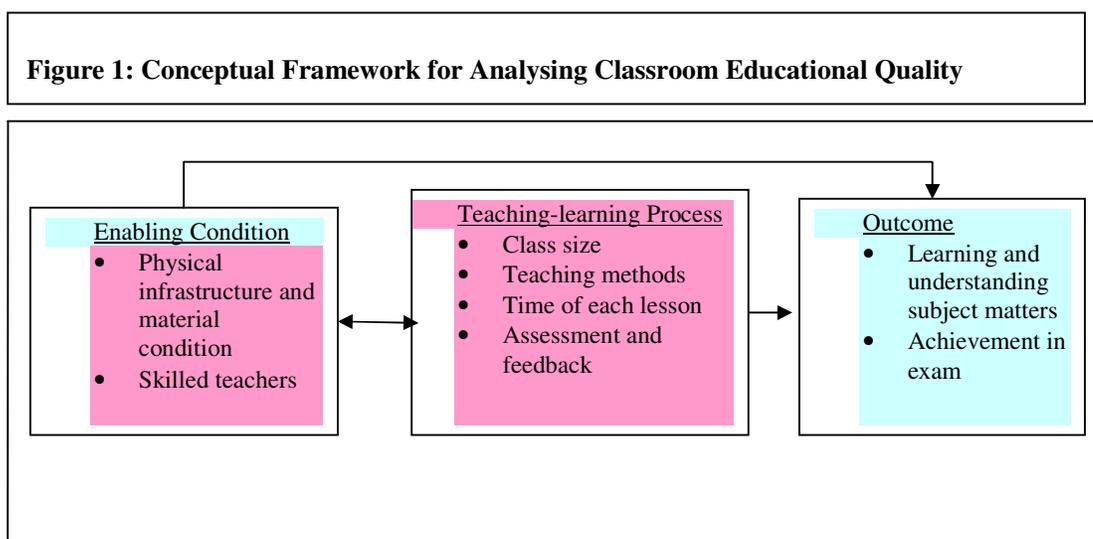
Quality is a complex issue in an educational setting. Defining the concept of quality in education is not all together an easy task because different institutions and people define educational quality in different ways. The definition of quality depends on the perspective of the person/institute who attempts to define it. The World Education Forum that met in Dakar in 2000, agreed on six explicit goals for EFA. Even though most of the goals have a component of quality, the sixth goal is concerned explicitly with educational quality. The sixth goal imply that “*improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills*” (EFA declaration, 2000).

According to the EFA global monitoring report there are two main principles that define the quality in education. By this definition, education should have the explicit quality in initiating the learners’ (students’) cognitive development and promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005: 17). The Save the Children Alliance define quality in a more practical and ideal manner. Quality for them is characterised by, “relevance, participation, flexibility; appropriacy; and inclusiveness” with inclusion as the central “cementing” goal for raising quality in education (Williams, 2003). Even though different people define the concept of quality in education differently, there seems to be a common agreement though that quality is “clearly a good thing” (Stephens, 2003). From the above definitions it seems that quality is directly linked to what occurs both inside and outside of classroom. This means that quality should also include the whole context where education takes place.

2.1. Conceptualisation of Quality: Dimensions for Analysis

It is very difficult to measure the quality in education in the light of the definitions above. In Bangladesh, the “*input-process-output*” framework is one of the most popular for assessment of quality. But all three component of quality is seldom considered in one study. Most of the studies are focusing on the input and output components. This is because the process component in quality assessment is relatively new and thus less common in practice. To assess input, one generally assesses physical structure of the school. In this regard, the researchers often focus on the textbook, curriculum, teacher-student ratio, teacher training, students’ attendance, teachers’ absenteeism. In a few cases short and long term nutritional status of the students, their family status including parental educational status and economic background are also taken into account under the input variables. On the other hand, in assessing output, measurement of students learning achievement against curriculum objectives is a common one (ESTEEM, 2004). In assessing the quality of primary education in Bangladesh, the PSPMP (2001) study identified four main characteristics. They were teaching and learning process, school learning climate, outside input and enabling conditions.

In this study the quality of primary education is mainly conceptualised by using the classroom dimension and what happens in reality inside the classroom as well as the learning outcome of the inside classroom interaction. In order to conceptualise the quality of primary education by using classroom as a main unit of analysis, I have developed a conceptual model. Figure 1 below presents the analytical framework for this study.



Enabling condition: The success of teaching and learning is likely to be influenced by the resources made available to support the process and direct ways in which these resources are managed. Adequate resources are pre-requisite for ensuring educational quality (UNESCO, 2005). In order to be able to do an effective job in relation to education, schools must have adequate and well skilled teachers, relevant textbooks, appropriate learning materials, and the availability of classrooms, libraries, toilets as well as other infrastructure. Creating an enabling condition by providing various inputs into the educational systems are intrinsically important to acquire the desired outcome of education. The enabling condition for teaching and learning is the key arena for human development and change (UNESCO, 2005). As we can see in the framework that enabling conditions has a direct link with the teaching-learning process and with outcome of the education.

Teaching-learning Process: A healthy and appropriate teaching-learning process is crucial to ensure active participation of the teachers and students in the classrooms. In this study the teaching-learning process is measured by the size of the classroom, the sitting arrangement, teaching methods, time management by the teachers and the assessment and feedback by the teachers.

Outcome / Achievement: It is often difficult to measure the outcome of education. As a result of this there is still disagreement among the educational researchers on whether the outcome of education can be measured fully and satisfactorily. Disagreement and debate also continue about the criteria that are used in measuring outcome. Achievement often refers to examination result and test performance. The term, however, is often used interchangeably with educational quality when describing the situation of a school or group of schools. In Bangladesh, it is often taken for a sign that the students, who can pass in every exam satisfactorily, are achieving the expected learning outcomes. In this study the outcomes are

measured by using the following dimensions: learning and understanding of subject matters by students in the classrooms; and achievements in the yearly exam.

3. Research Methodology: Primary Data Sources

Data was collected over a period of five weeks during July-August 2005. Data was collected through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Semi-structured interviews, face-to-face questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions and classroom observations were used for data collection. The local/national language *Bangla* (Bengali) was used during the data collection process as I can speak the same language as the respondents. A combination of purposive and random sampling frame was used to choose the sample of this study. At the first stage, a total of ten primary schools, five government primary and five non-government registered primary schools, were chosen from Gazipur district. This was done by using purposive sampling. At the second stage, 30 students from each school were chosen by using systematic random sampling in order to include them into a face-to-face questionnaire survey. The students were chosen from class III to V as they would most likely be able to answer the questions. The total of 300 students were chosen for face-to-face questionnaire survey. Research assistants were recruited and training was provided on how to conduct the survey. The semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observations were conducted by me.

In addition to questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20% of the survey respondents, which makes up a total of 60 interviews. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with teachers, parents, members of the school management committee and other key persons. Focus group discussions were arranged with teachers and parents at the beginning of the data collection process. This gave me important insights into the educational systems and relevant issues. Non-participant classroom observations were conducted in order to observe the real teaching situation and interaction between teachers and students from class III to V. During the observation, no questions were asked to the teachers and/or the students. This was done in order not to interrupt with the normal routine of the classroom procedures. Observations were made mainly on the Bengali, English, mathematics, science and social studies classes. These observations helped me to cross-check the data that was collected through other methods. In order to maintain the anonymity, the actual name of the schools was removed and schools were labelled with alphabetic letters.

The data/information that was gathered through various techniques was analysed and presented under the three broad headings: Classroom condition; Teaching methods and classroom management; and students' performance and achievement in the yearly final exam. Classroom condition includes physical and academic infrastructure, teaching staff, class size and sitting arrangements. Teaching methods and classroom management include establishing rapport with the students, introduction of the lesson, lesson preparation, contextualisation, summing up, on-going evaluation of the lesson and addressing the slow learners. Although performance of the students was not measured by administering any test, the information was gathered using observation related to performance of the students, in terms of responses to the questions, compliance with the regularity in handwriting and homework as well as students' understanding of subject matters. In addition, performance was also captured by individual interviews and school records on the performance in the yearly final examination.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Classroom Milieu or Condition

In order to assess the educational quality, the learning situation inside the classroom is important to scrutinise. There is a common belief among the educational specialists that classroom condition always plays an important role in teaching-learning process, especially with children. Psychologists often suggest that young students have to learn in a commotion-free, not too crowded, clean, open and benign environment. Therefore, it is always expected that physical facilities should be ensured for the sake of students' greater interest (Hossain *et al.*, 2003). It was found that most of the government primary schools have in average three windows and a door which provided sufficient ventilation and light. The classrooms were also wider compared with non-government primary school. It was evident that the government primary schools have better conditions in terms of lighting, ventilation and other facilities, such as toilets and tube-wells compared with non-government primary schools. All the government primary schools have a playground but only one out of five non-government primary school has a playground in front of the school.

It is often argued that teacher-student ratio has direct effect on the teaching learning process of any school. As I have noted earlier that government's priority and increased focus on primary education since the 1990s the enrolment of pupils in the primary school increased significantly. As a result the ratio of students per teacher and classroom has also increased. The number of students in each class can vary and range between 21-105 for the government primary schools, and 09-61 for registered non-government primary schools. The government primary schools that have been part of this study have in average teacher-student ratio 1:68. The ratio for non-government primary schools is lower, is about 1:26 in average. The table below provides a comparison of government and non-government primary schools in terms of total number of students including the number of boys and girls as well as the total number of male-female teachers of the sampled schools.

Table 2: A Comparison of Government and Non-government Primary School in Terms of Total Number of Student and Teacher

Type of School	Number of student		Total students	Number of Teacher		Total teacher	Total classroom
	Boys	Girls		Male	Female		
Govt. Primary School - A	475	450	925	9	5	14	10
Govt. Primary School - B	92	120	212	2	2	4	3
Govt. Primary School - C	99	112	211	2	1	3	3
Govt. Primary School - D	291	259	550	3	3	6	5
Govt. Primary School - E	121	116	237	3	1	4	3
Non-Govt. Primary School- A	70	75	145	2	3	5	5
Non-Govt. Primary School- B	37	32	69	1	3	4	5
Non-Govt. Primary School- C	92	79	171	3	3	6	5
Non-Govt. Primary School- D	109	113	222	4	4	8	6
Non-Govt. Primary School- E	68	76	144	4	2	6	6

(Source: Field data 2005).

It was found that the ratio of teacher-student in the sampled schools is higher than the national average of teacher-student ratio which is about 1:52. There were classes where students have

to stand at the back of the class or sit on the floor of the classrooms. The students who were sitting on the benches were found to be sitting very close to each other. They had difficulty to move their hands and arms to take notes of what are being said by the teacher or the things that are being written in the blackboard. However, considering the total enrolment of students in class III - V for government primary schools, it would not be easy to accommodate the students if all attended the class regularly. Despite in average 20 percent of the students being absent for the classes, the situation of sitting arrangement for students for government primary schools was very unsatisfactory. It is often believed that class size and sitting arrangement issues as investigation points for determining how the learning achievement of one system could possibly be different from others, and determine the possible impacts of the classroom climates on the student's learning (Hossain *et al.*, 2003).

In terms of teachers' qualification criteria, the teachers in government primary schools were more qualified and most of the teachers have C-IN-ED training from the primary teachers training institutes while only 7 out of 29 teachers from non-government primary schools have C-IN-ED training. There have also been teachers in government primary schools that have B. ED. and MA degree. It was found that most of the teachers in the non-government primary schools have just finished their Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam or Bachelor degree. However, by looking at the educational qualifications of the teachers, one may project that the quality of education should be better in the government primary schools. But this study suggests an opposite trend of classroom teaching-learning quality.

Discussions with teachers, parents and representatives from school management committee have revealed that the sampled government primary school has experienced more than triple their pupils compared to before 1990. As a result the classrooms are being crowded. It was often mentioned that increased focus on education has increased the enrolment and government has in certain cases recruited more teachers, especially female teachers. But there is still a burning need to ensure the additional teachers for these additional pupils. In addition, the investments on the improved infrastructure, especially the extension of classrooms also should be prioritised. There has also been allegation that when the finance is being made available by the government for classroom extension most of the money has been consumed by the corrupt school management committee members and very little improvement is being made to the school.

4.2. Teaching Methods and Classroom Management

It is observed that the teaching technique adopted by the teachers varies from teacher to teacher and school to school. The time for each lesson is about 45 minutes. Teachers come to the class and the students stand up from their sitting positions to tribute respect to the teachers. For the first lesson the teacher used the first few minutes for roll-call, exchange greetings, and any other information exchange. After roll-call the teacher used another few more minutes for checking and correcting the written home task from previous day's lesson.

It was found that no teachers in government primary schools came to the class with lesson plans. But the teachers in non-government primary school often came to the class with a lesson plan and preparation. In *Bangla* lesson, teachers often read from the textbook and ask the students read after them. Afterwards, the teachers ask the students to read from the textbook quietly and try to understand the substance. The teachers then ask the students to identify difficult words in the text and the teachers often write down those along with their meanings on the blackboard. The teachers often did not explain the issues in details.

In English also where the students are traditionally very weak, the teachers did not explain the lesson or give line-to-line meaning. Often the teachers ask the students to read after them and only few of them do and the rest only humming with the teachers. The teachers often wrote down the difficult words with meanings on the blackboard and ask the students to copy them. Memorising English lesson without understanding the content was found to be common especially for the government primary schools students. The situation is slightly different for the non-government schools and students seem to have difficulty to understand a simple English sentence when it is written down separately. It is a common practice in Bangladesh that the students should often memorise the lesson. The teacher, therefore, wants the students to memorise the lesson and present it in front of the class. There was lack of practical exercise by using English language for discussions in the classrooms and it was not encourage by the teacher either.

In the mathematics class, the teachers often did not give any introduction or explanation of the concept or rational behind the mathematical issues at hand. The teachers often started working out the sum on the blackboard and after completion of the sum the teachers often asked the students to solve one of the sums of a similar kind from the same chapter. Most of the teachers were walking around the class during these kinds of exercise and/or sitting on the chair. When only very few of the students managed to solve the sum and show to the teacher, the teacher then worked out the sum for the entire class. The teacher often did not ask any questions to those who did not manage to solve the sum and did no inquiry about what and where they have difficulty to understand it. If time allowed, then the teachers would ask them to do another sum of a similar kind. This was the usual pattern of mathematics teaching in the classroom regardless of the school types.

In social studies and science classes the situation was a bit different. In most of the classes the teacher started the lecture by showing a picture and/or drawing of an object such as picture of a tree, mountain, stone, or the map of the world. Sometimes the teacher brought a real tree/plant to the classroom in order to explain the different parts of the tree and their functions. This situation made it easier for the students to understand the subject matters better as they could associate with the issues easily. The teachers were also explaining the issues at hand with real life example so that the students would understand the context better. Interests for the lesson and participation of the students in the class were much higher than any other classes. The reasons could be the use of teaching materials or simply it could be the subject matters.

Pedagogically it is argued that the learning outcomes are achieved better when students participate in the discussion and engage in dialog with the teacher and others in the class. Even though the positive effect of participation is widely discussed and accepted among the educational advocates and policy makers in Bangladesh, teacher-students participation in the classroom seems to be a distant reality for all the sampled schools. It was found that the weaker students sat at the back of the classes and whenever any task was given they just did not make any effort to do it, as if they were not expected to do it. Also the teachers did not ask any direct questions to them or took any initiatives to include them in the discussion. Some of the students who sat in the middle benches presented to be attentive but the teachers never came to them to see what they were actually doing. Only the good students, who sat in the front bench, have received significant attention from the teachers. They were found to be more attentive and were participating in the classroom discussion and activities. Girls were found to be less receptive, especially in mathematics and English classes.

None of the teachers in government primary schools presented their lesson in a uniform and sequential way. For example, by reviewing the previous day's lesson, introducing the new lesson, presenting, evaluating and encapsulating the lesson. Contextualisation of the lesson and summarisation at the end, as a part of lesson presentation were absent mainly in all government primary schools and in two out of five non-government primary schools. In the non-government primary schools the practices of reviewing previous day's lesson, presenting, and teaching style of each teachers within the same school were identical. It was observed that the non-governmental primary schools follow some sort of standard procedures within the schools but the procedures were not uniform between all the schools. The time management by the teachers were not in satisfactory level in government schools. Often the class came to an end in the middle of a reading or writing exercise with the ringing of the bell. But the time management was better in all of the non-governmental primary schools.

Giving home task by the teacher was found to be common in both types of schools. But the situation was that teachers in the government primary schools often did not check the homework properly on the next day. There was not any follow-up of the home task for those who did not comply with the task. Often they were found to be the weaker students in the class who did not comply with the home task. On the other hand, in non-governmental schools home tasks were followed-up by the teacher closely. It is compulsory for each of the students to maintain a home task exercise note-book where the day's home tasks are recorded. This procedure made it easier for the teachers in non-government primary schools to follow-up the home tasks properly.

In the government schools the practice of taking notes and writing was absent in most of the classes except for *Bangla*. When the students were taking notes, these were mostly copy the teacher's notes on the blackboard. Often the students were given written tasks only a few minutes before a class suspended. And the teachers checked the copies of only those who came to him/her. The students were often found to be very shy in participating in any discussion.

The teachers, however, who teach subjects such as math, English, and science do explain the subject matters by writing in the blackboard with chalk-pencil often without asking students whether they have understood the issue or not. Sometimes the teachers ask the whole class whether they have understood or not. Often the students remain silent even though they did not understand. The students who say that they did not understand can be subjected to humiliation by the teacher. The teacher often comments in this situation that "*you did not pay enough attention during the lecture*". The situation is, however, a bit better in the non-government primary schools.

Most of the teachers in government primary schools did not come to the schools on time. On the other hand, teachers in non-government primary schools were found to be on time and more attentive compared with the government primary school teachers. More absenteeism of teacher was found in government schools compared with non-governmental schools. Some of the above mentioned drawback of deterioration classroom teaching-learning quality may be contributed with the government's changes of policy in terms of recruitment and designated work place.

Towards the end of the 1990s government implemented a policy to allow transfer of teachers close to their permanent residence. As a result, most of the teachers have got a chance to

choose a school in their own community or neighbouring community. This in return has created positive impacts for the teachers' livelihoods and negative impacts on the students' learning outcome and thus on the primary educational quality. On the positive side, the teachers now can work in their own firm or fields and take care of their farming and combine teaching and farming together. Now most of them can save travel time to and from school as they often come from the same or neighbouring villages/communities. The teachers also can live in their own houses, which helped them to save money as they do not have to pay any house rent. On the negative side, now teachers are not punctual and attend school on time. During cultivation season some of them did not come to school at all. In addition, when they come to school and thought the lesson, they are often too tired to concentrate and be attentive to the classes. This situation was mostly prevalent among male teachers whom have farmland and are involved in agriculture.

Not explaining the technical hard subjects like math, English and science well in the classroom by the teachers seem to have adverse consequences for most of the students. The students, who do not understand the subjects in the class often have to hire a private tutor. The frequency of students who take private tuition will be discussed in section 5. For the teacher, this practice opens up the possibility to provide private lessons to the students in exchange of money. This kind of lesson takes place before and/or after the school time at school and sometime in the home of the teacher.

For the teachers who teach subjects that needs explanation and is somehow technical such as math, English and science, not explaining the subject matters well in the classroom has its own reasons. According to the teachers who teach these subjects, they claim that the curriculum is too big and they have to cover the entire curriculum. In addition, the number of student's has increased and the classroom has become more crowded which makes it impossible for the teachers to follow-up each and every student. Further, it is impossible to make sure the students' understanding of everything that is being taught in the classrooms. A majority of the parents, however, did not agree with the teachers reasoning. They claimed that the teachers deliberately do not explain the subjects well enough simply to create a possibility to earn money. As a result, the students who can afford to hire and pay for a private tutor can understand and learn the subjects by the help of the private tutor at home or elsewhere. Those, who do not understand the subject matters in the class and cannot afford to hire a private tutor, become irregular in the class attendance, and consequently, drop-out from the education system.

According to parents the punctuality of teachers and quality of teaching depends a lot on the quality of the school management committee. It was found that there is a school management committee in every school. The school management committee members are often selected among the parents and influential/respected members from the community. It was found that a punctual school management committee often plays an important role in ensuring a good school milieu and educational quality. Schools that have good and punctual management committee members were found to be well disciplined and have a better quality compared with schools with non-punctual school management committees. The students and teachers attendance in the class, time spent on each lesson, and punctuality was higher in the schools where they have a good and well functioning school committee compared with the schools that have a mal-functioning school management committee.

4.3. Learning Outcome: Understanding the Subject Matters by Students in the Classroom

The evidence suggests that most of the students did not understand the subjects such as math, English and science when taught in the classroom in a satisfactory level. The students were more or less able to read their textbooks except English. Some of the students, however, did not know the English alphabet well. This was the case mostly for the government primary school students but the situation was much better for non-governmental primary school students.

In order to capture students' understanding of subject matters, interviews were held with students' right after the classroom observations. Observations were mainly made in regard to the following subjects: Mathematics, English, and Science (social studies). Table 3 presents the percentage of students' understanding of subject matters in the classroom. The table shows that only 4, 7 and 14 percent of the students in government primary schools understand fully the subjects like math, English and science respectively. The table also shows that, 82, 69 and 65 percent of the students in government primary schools understand the subject matters slightly or not at all of math, English and science subjects respectively. The learning outcome is better for the non-government primary schools compared with government primary schools. For example, in non-governmental primary schools the students understand math, English and science subjects fully in 22, 27 and 37 percent of the cases respectively.

Table 3: Students' Understanding of Subjects Matter in the Classroom

Type of School	Math (%)				English (%)				Science (%)			
	Fully	Moder.	Slightly	Not at all	Fully	Moder.	Slightly	Not at all	Fully	Moder.	Slightly	Not at all
Govt. Primary School	4	14	26	56	7	24	39	30	14	21	57	8
Non-Govt. Primary School	22	41	34	3	27	68	5	0	37	61	2	0

(Source: Field data 2005).

The reasons for this difference could be many fold-factors. The most common reason, among other, is that the teachers in government primary schools are government employee and will be able to remain in their job and get regular salary regardless of their performance in the classrooms. There is a common perception that government jobs are difficult to get but easy to keep once you're in the job. I have discussed earlier that government policy allowed the teachers to get transferred in a school closer to their permanent residence. As a result, it was found that most of the teachers in government primary schools were often permanent residence from the neighbouring community. This situation also gives a teacher the chance to use his/her socially conferred power to exercise irregularity in school attendance. The school management committee would most likely remain silent in such situations. This is because most of the teachers know well the majority of the members of the school management committee, as they often come from and reside in the same or neighbouring community.

Other reasons could be that the differences in teaching competence, age and special education on the subject matters. The teachers in the non-governmental primary schools work in the competitive environment, which means that if a teacher lacks the skills to convey the message and do not teach well then the teacher will be out of job. Often the non-government primary

schools employ teachers who are young and have special skills on the subject that he/she will be teaching. The teachers also use their time more effectively and explain the subject matters by using real life example and explaining the issues in detail. As the class size in non-governmental primary schools is relatively small, this also allows the teachers to give feedback and follow-up on lectures. As the class size is big for the government primary schools, it makes it almost impossible to follow-up on each and every individual student.

According to the views expressed by the teachers, parents and educational advocates the curriculum in the schools are very much theory and ideology driven and not very much adopted to the local context. Considering a global perspective, the government laid special emphasis on English, mathematics and science in every grades of the primary education cycle. They raised concerns that because of the education reforms for the purpose of making our educational systems similar to international standard, the curriculum is being changed and new issues and themes are being added into the curriculum constantly. But one very important point has been undermined that our children are not equally exposed to media communication and not in touch with technological innovations like other developed countries. So trying to standardise our educational systems in line with other countries will not have the similar effect. The students also expressed that the subject matters that are taught in the class are too difficult for them to understand and internalise. It is important to note that the current study did not scrutinise the relevance of curriculum, because of this reason, I will not discuss this issue further here.

4.3.1. Achievement in Examination and Upgrading

Achievement in the examination and acquiring good results in exam seems to be one of the main goals of the students who were part of the study. In order to achieve good results, it is important to understand the subject matters that are taught in the classroom. We discussed in previous section that a majority of the students do not understand the subjects fully through classroom teaching. Consequently, they have to hire a private tutor. Those who are poor often cannot hire private tutor and consequently fail in the exam, especially in math, and English. Table 4 below shows the percentage of exam achievements for both types of schools.

Table 4: Comparative Achievements in Yearly Examination (%)

Type of School	Passed in all subjects	Fail in one subject	Fail in two subjects	Fail more than two subjects	Total
Govt. Primary School	38	24	16	22	100
Non-Govt. Primary School	70	20	7	3	100

(Source: Field data 2005).

It seems to be a common situation for the government primary school that most of the students (62 percent) failed in one, two and more than two subjects. In comparison, the situation is much better for non-government primary schools as the percentage of students who failed for one or more than one subject was 30 percent. Those who failed in one subject are automatically upgraded to the next class. If someone failed in two or more than two subjects they are also upgraded on request by parents. It was also evident that the government schools sometimes upgrade the students who have failed in all subjects. These types of

upgrading happen in exchange of some kinds of special compensation from the parents or by a special request from one of the member from the school management committee or by an influential member of the community.

It was found that the ratio of upgrading by request was higher among the girls than that of boys. This is because there is a perception in the Bangladeshi society that girls should not repeat a class because it can give her bad reputation. It is important for a girl to be in a class where she is supposed to be based according to her age. If a girl repeats a class, she may have to sit and study with the children who are younger than her. This can bring hazardous consequences for her. There is a common perception among the poor parents that it is more important which class a girl read in rather than what she understands of the subjects. A parent commented that, *“when one of our daughters will get married, the groom’s family will ask: up to which class the girl have studied. They will not be concerned about the quality of her education or whether she has ever passed all the exams”* (Fieldnotes, 2005).

Students were found in class V who never have passed all of their exam within the last five years and were unable to understand a simple issue from a lower class textbook. The students who have repeated classes at least one time during the last three years were 12 and 1 percent respectively for government and non-government primary schools. The reason for this difference is that there are more students who pass in all subjects for the non-governmental schools, and only 3 percent of the students were found to be failing in more than two subjects. Another reason is that the students who perform poorly in the non-governmental schools and failed in exam are often transferred to the government primary schools.

There were found no significant differences between the ratio of girls and boys when it comes to academic achievements. It is often claimed that girls in Bangladesh help their mother in household chores and as consequences of this they perform poorly in their education (Shekh, 2003). The data from Gazipur district do not support this hypothesis. There could be two possible explanations for this. First, the girls were too little and not matured enough to give helping hands to their mother; and the second reason could be that people in the society have realised the importance of girls’ education because of the ongoing campaign run by government, NGOs and other civil society organisations. As a result, parents do not over-burden their daughter with household’s chores.

5. Get Help from Private Tutor or Other

Due to the large number of the students per teacher in the schools, the teachers are unable to follow-up all the students in the classrooms. In order to pass the exams and upgrade into the next class without any request, the students must get help from a private tutor. Data suggests that currently 65 and 96 percent of the students from government and non-government primary schools are getting some kinds of help at home or school from private tutor respectively. This suggests that hiring a private tutor in addition to classroom lesson is a rule rather than an exception. Most of the students arranged a private tutor from outside the school.

Most of the parents acknowledged that because of the large number of the students per teacher, the teachers are unable to pay enough attention to all the students in the classrooms equally. Consequently, many students remain weak. Some of the poorest parents are concerned about the deteriorating quality of classroom teaching as they cannot afford to hire private tutor for their children. The situation can be very harmful for the poorest families as they often may withdraw their children from the schools and can contribute to the high drop-

out. The reason for the majority of the non-government school students to get help from private tutor is that their parents could afford it as a majority of them came from relatively better economic background. Another reason is that the curriculum in the non-government primary schools is different and often said to be harder compared with the government primary schools. Therefore, students need additional help to understand the subject matters and to comply with the home tasks.

Parents and others whom are concerned with education mentioned that the current government schools systems are not efficient enough to stimulate students learning potentials. Students do not hire private tutor for the purpose of better achievement in the school and exams, these days you need to hire private tutor just to get pass in the examination. As consequences of deteriorating educational quality in government primary schools, parents prefer to send their children to non-government primary schools. Interviews with parents revealed that almost 94 percent would prefer private or Non-governmental schools over government schools, if they could afford to bear the school costs. One of the parents explains the reason for this situation and maintained the following:

“If I could afford to send my children to private school, I would never send them to the government school. The government school teachers are the government employee and they know that they do not have to do a good job in order to remain in employment. Therefore, they often just come to the school just to show up and gossip with other teachers. These days they do not worry about the student’s learning situation. During my childhood, I used to hear that people choose teaching profession because they want to contribute towards the learning outcome and help the students to become a better human being. They believed that education can be very important to reduce poverty because educated people can make best use of their resources, capacity, take care of environment and can help to create sustainable development. I feel that these days those philosophical values have disappeared from our current teachers community” (Fieldnotes, 2005).

6. Concluding Remarks

Education is recognised as one of the most powerful aspects of human development and poverty reduction. There is a wise saying that *“education is the backbone of a nation”*. Bangladesh government has taken various measures to educate its population in recognition of the potentials of education for its nation. Since 1990s, Bangladesh government has recognised education as one of the top priority areas. Despite various efforts, the quality of education is deteriorating and the current trend of deterioration should be dealt with if cognitive development of the students is to be assured.

Both types of school that has been studied followed the teacher-centred approach of teaching in the classrooms. There was very little and in most cases none participation and dialog between the teacher and students. The current approach of teaching may be contributing negatively towards the development of life skills of the students and thus development of the nation. This study has challenged the conventional thinking that the teacher-student ratio and proper enabling condition are the main detrimental factors in classroom educational quality. It was made clear that even though the teacher-student ratio in the non-government primary schools was reasonably low, the learning outcomes between the two types of schools were not found to be significantly different.

The current classroom teaching-learning education approaches seems to be failing when it comes to make the subject matter understood to the students. The teachers are not explaining the subject matters to a satisfactory level are found to be a rule rather than the exception. In addition, the rapid deterioration educational quality of government primary schools can have adverse effect to the entire education system. This is because still today the government primary schools remain to be the major provider of primary education in the country. Under the current situation, the parents are already losing their faith in the government schools and increasing number of parents is enrolling their children to the non-government primary schools. This development can lead to a scenario where only children from resource poor family will remain in the government schools. Consequently, this will leads the government schools to be more resource constrained. If this current situation continues, the goal of EFA and MDGs may be compromised.

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