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Education Sector in Bangladesh: A Review of Developments Since Independence (Primary and Secondary Education)

Muhammad Masum

Abstract

Since independence, particularly after transition to democratic rule in 1991, significant progress has been made in human resource development in Bangladesh. Increased enrollment, particularly of girls at the primary and secondary levels, contributed to promoting gender balance besides increasing overall access to education. Failure to improve quality and content of education and low levels of internal and external efficiency of the education system, however, continue to remain as major concerns. A disturbing development in Bangladesh has been limited access of the poor to quality education. Education, instead of serving as a 'great equalizer,' has contributed to exacerbating existing inequalities and passing them on to future generations. Besides, expansion of the religious stream of education that caters primarily to the educational needs of the poor, with content that has little relevance to labor market needs, has possibly contributed to the growing unemployment and discontent amongst the educated youth and the emergence of fundamentalist forces in recent times. All of the above developments call for immediate reforms.

Introduction

At the time of independence in 1971, Bangladesh was perceived by many as 'a test case of development', not only because of its extremely narrow physical and financial resource base, but also because of its underdeveloped human resources--the key to economic transformation. Since then significant progress has been made in human resource development in Bangladesh, particularly after her transition to democratic rule in 1991 that contributed to the elevation of Bangladesh from a low- to a medium-level country as suggested by the Human Development Index. Bangladesh's recent successes in quantitative expansion of the education system contributed to promoting gender balance, besides increasing overall access to education. However, the failure to significantly improve the quality of education in an increasingly competitive global environment in the face of rapidly integrating world economy, and the growing rate of unemployment amongst the educated youth, that reflects a mismatch between education and skills, is of major concern. Limited access of the poor to quality education and upper end of the job market exacerbates the existing inequalities that are passed on to future generations. (Masum 2006).

The objective of this paper is to trace the above developments in primary and secondary education sectors of Bangladesh since independence with a view to suggesting appropriate educational policy reforms. The following sections: introduce the structure and quantitative dimensions of primary and secondary education in Bangladesh with a brief note on how they evolved over time; examine the content and quality of education at primary and secondary levels highlighting their significance for the labor market; and discuss the labor market outcomes reflecting external efficiency of the education sector. Summary of the findings and policy recommendations are presented in the final section.

Education Scenario of Bangladesh: The Quantitative Dimensions

The education system in Bangladesh is characterized by the co-existence of three separate streams: the mainstream being a vernacular based secular education system carried over from the British colonial days; a madrasah based religious education stream which had been functioning in this country since an even earlier period, that gained momentum only after the mid-eighties; and the English medium stream, a more recent development, that uses English as a medium of instruction, modeled after the British education system using the same curriculum.

All of the above streams, however, have certain common elements, and there exists a scope for reintegration of graduates of one stream with another at different levels of education.

Pre-primary Education

One- or two-year, pre-primary education is

Table 1: Early childhood care and education (ECCE)

Gross Enrollment Ratio (**GER**) in Pre-primary Education (%) and New Entrants to the First Grade of Primary Education with ECCE experience **(NEFGPEE)** (%)

		GER								**NEFGPEEE**		
		1998/1999				2002/2003				2002/2003		
Country	Age Group 2002/ 2003	Total	Male	Female	GPI (F/M)	Total	Male	Female	GPI (F/M)	Total	Male	Female
Bangladesh	3-5	22.3	21.6	23.2	1.08	20.6	19.9	21.3	1.07	23.3	24.3	22.3
India	3-5	19.5	19.6	19.4	0.99	34.0	33.8	34.1	1.01			
Maldives	3-5	45.9	46.0	45.9	1.00	46.6	46.2	47.1	1.02	90.0	90.5	89.5
Nepal	3-4	12.1	13.9	10.2	0.73	17.6	18.8	16.2	0.86	9.6	8.7	10.6
Pakistan						47.3	50.1	44.3	0.88			
Developed Countries		76.1	75.7	76.5	1.01	81.1	81.2	80.9	1.00			
Developing Countries		32.9	33.7	32.0	0.95	34.3	34.1	34.5	1.01			

Source: UNESCO (2005) pp.300-302

imparted in private schools/kindergartens. At the time of independence in Bangladesh, the above component, recognized as a useful stage to smoothen the transition from home to an institutional environment, hardly existed and for a long time remained outside the purview of official education policy of Bangladesh. The Education Policy 2000 had recommended its gradual introduction to 5+ children with a view to universalizing one-year pre-primary education by the year 2005. But with the change in government in 2001, the policy was abandoned and no headway could be made in this regard. Rather, gross enrolment ratio in pre-primary education declined from 22.3% in 1998/1999 to 20.6% in 2002/2003 (UNESCO, 2005).

Table 1 presents a picture on early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries.

In Bangladesh, the net enrollment ratio at pre-primary level is significantly less than the gross enrollment rate. It stood at 10.5 and 9.9 in 2003 and 2004 respectively. In 2004, the gender differential seemed marginal, with net enrollment ratio for girls at 9.9% compared to 9.8% for boys. (http://.uis.unesco.org).

In Bangladesh, pre-primary education of uncertain quality is generally imparted in a number of commercially operated kindergartens and nurseries that belong to the private sector, located mostly in the urban areas. As the fees are generally high, only the children from affluent families have access to such institutions. The Report of the National Education Commission 2003 recognized the importance of pre-primary education, and recommended a number of short and medium term measures such as the setting up of a separate section immediately for pre-primary education in the Directorate of Primary Education; preparation of a national curriculum; registration and monitoring of all kindergartens to ensure that the national curriculum is properly being implemented; and appropriate training of pre-primary teachers.

Primary Education

Five-year compulsory primary education for the 6-10 year age group is imparted mainly in government and non-government primary schools and *ebtedayee madrasahs.* In metropolitan cities, however, government and non-government primary schools cater to the educational needs only of the poorer sections of the people, as the better-off families usually send their children to private English Medium schools/ secondary schools that run primary sections as well. There are a substantial number of NGO-run non-formal schools catering mainly to the dropouts of the government and non-government primary schools. Very few NGOs however impart education for the full 5-year primary education cycle. Because of this, on completion of their 2-3 year non-formal primary education in NGO run schools, students normally re-enter government/non-government primary schools at upper classes. NGO-run schools differ from other non-government private schools.

While the private schools operate like private enterprises often guided by commercial interests, NGO schools operate mainly in areas not served either by the government or private schools essentially to meet the educational needs of vulnerable groups in the society. They usually follow an informal approach to suit the special needs of the children from vulnerable groups.

Before independence, primary education in Bangladesh was imparted primarily in schools set up, funded, and managed by the local elites with support from local bodies. Immediately after independence, the government nationalized all existing primary schools and took full responsibility for running these schools. All primary school teachers became government employees. New schools were set up where needed, primarily by local elites, which on registration started receiving government funding in the form of salary subvention for teachers. NGOs also started setting up schools in un-served areas for underprivileged children and school drop-outs. A legislation providing for universal free compulsory primary education was enacted in 1990 that came into effect on January 1, 1992.

In 1970, just before Bangladesh gained independence, there existed 29,082 primary schools with a student enrollment of 5,283,787 (32% girls) and a pupil teacher ratio of 46 (UNESCO: Statistical Year Book, 1973). Independence gave a big boost to primary education in Bangladesh. The number of schools sharply increased to 36,537 in 1972; 39,914 in 1975; and 43,472 in 1983. Student enrollment also increased, to 8,349,834 (34% girls) in 1975 and 8,808,028 (37% girls) in 1983. As number of teachers did not increase proportionately, the pupil teacher ratio, however, increased from 46 in 1970 to 51 in 1983. (UNESCO: Statistical Year Books for different years). In 1972, gross enrollment ratio at the primary level stood at 73 (52 for girls). Since enforcement of Universal Free Primary Education Act in 1992, implementation of various innovative programs and projects such as Food for Education Program enabled children from poor households, till then child workers, to join schools and Satellite Schools Projects. Bangladesh thus made rapid progress in quantitative expansion of her primary education sector. In 1990/91, the net enrollment ratio in Bangladesh was 71. By 2004, it increased to 94.1 (95.8 for females and 92.6 for males) (http://www.uis.unesco.org). Enrollment in primary schools increased from 12.6 million in 1991 to 18.4 million in 2004. Over this period, while the number of government primary schools remained unchanged at 38 thousand, the number of non-government primary schools (including community schools) increased from 12 thousand to 49 thousand of which 19 thousand were government registered (GOB, 1996, and BANBEIS, 2004).

Table 2 presents a picture on access to primary education in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries, and the averages for developed and developing countries.

According to the Report of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2000, of all children attending schools at the primary level, 70.70% were enrolled in the government primary schools, 13.43% in Govt. subsidized schools, 5.39% in private

Table 2: Participation in primary education

Country	2002/ 2003	Net enrollment ratio (NER) in primary education (%) 1998/1999				2002/2003				Out of primary school children (000)	
	Age Group	Total	Male	Female	GPI (F/M)	T	M	F	GPI F/M	1998/ 1999	2002/ 2003
Bangladesh	6-10	84.8	85.6	83.9	0.98	84.0	82.4	85.7	1.04	2632	2925
India	6-10					87.5	90.0	84.8	0.94		14586
Maldives	6-12	99.7	99.4	100.0	1.01	92.4	92.2	92.6	1.00	0.2	4
Nepal	5-9	68.5	76.1	60.3	0.79	70.5	74.6	66.0	0.88	940	918
Pakistan	5-9					59.1	67.5	50.0	0.74		8145
Sri Lanka	5-9										
Developed Countries		96.6	96.6	96.6	1.00	95.6	95.4	95.9	1.01	1991	2375
Developing Countries		82.0	85.2	78.6	0.92	83.2	85.3	80.9	0.95	102052	95459

Source: UNESCO (2005)

schools, while 4.43% attended NGO-run schools: all the above belonging to the mainstream of education. The madrasahs accounted for 4.04% of total primary enrolment while only 1.40% studied in the English Medium schools. (BBS, 2003).

According to a national survey conducted by Education Watch, in 2001, the government primary schools (GPS) accounted for 61% of total enrolment while the shares of registered non-government primary schools (RNGPS), non-government primary schools (NGPS), non-formal education (NFE), madrasahs, English medium schools, and satellite/community schools were 16.6%, 1.8%, 7.1 %, 7.0%, 2.1% and 2.7% respectively (CAMPE-UPL, 2002).

In 10 selected upazilas spread throughout the country, according to child surveys conducted by the concerned Upazila Education Officers (UEO) in 2004, the corresponding figures were 57.4%, 24.4%, 1.7%, 1.1%, 9.2%, 2.5% and 3.1% respectively (CAMPE, 2005).

As the different sets of data are not strictly comparable, it is not possible to discern any trend. But, given the fact that there has been no increase in the number of government primary schools for a long time, the NGPS whether registered or not, the madrasahs and English medium schools have been playing an increasingly greater role in catering to the educational needs at the primary level.

Education Watch, based on a School Catchment Area Household Survey, and a number of focus group discussions, conducted in 2004 in the 10 upazilas mentioned earlier, made the following observations:

1) The commercially operated kindergartens, or the English medium schools were generally perceived to be the 'best quality schools', and all those who could afford them, the well off and the local influential people, sent their children to kindergartens;
2) Compared to the kindergartens, the government primary schools were perceived to be of inferior quality;

The non-formal schools were appreciated by some as 'the teachers taught the students with due care, the supervisors supervised the schools regularly, and the classrooms were not so crowded.' The fact that these types of schools did not charge money for educational expenditures from the parents; but instead some schools provided learning materials and other support, impressed most parents;

1) Religious considerations prompted some stakeholders to support the provision for *ebtedayeee madrasahs* or the religious stream of primary education, but a discernible majority of participants were critical of *ebtedayee madrasahs* and the non-governmental primary schools, whether registered or not, because of their poor quality compared to kindergartens, GPS and non-formal schools.
2) In every upazila there existed a few quality institutions. These could be a GPS, kindergarten, community school or NFE school. These of course could serve only a small proportion of the children, usually not from the poorer families. The so called "good schools" were not promoting equality of opportunity for all children (CAMPE, 2005).

Those who got enrolled, however, could not complete their primary education.

In Bangladesh, the survival rate to last grade of primary education stood at 65% in 2004 (67.3% for females and 63.1% for males). Repeater rate was 7% (6.9% for females and 7.2% for males) in 2004 (http://www.uis.unesco.org).

Education Watch, 2001, based on a national survey, however estimated a much higher completion rate of 75.7% for Bangladesh: 76.2% for girls compared to 73.5% for boys. It also observed that the completion rate was higher for urban students (78.8%) compared to rural students (73.8%). Completion rate was higher for non-formal schools (82.6%), followed by government schools (76.1%), non-government schools (73%), and *madrasahs* (63.4%). In this respect, no area wise variation was observed in government schools, but urban non-government schools and *madrasahs* were ahead of their rural counterparts. On the other hand, the completion rate was slightly higher in rural non-formal schools than the urban ones.

On average the children took 6.6 years to complete the five-year cycle, 6.5 years for girls and 6.7 years for boys; 5.7 years in non-formal schools, 6.5 years in government schools, 6.8 years in non-government schools and 7.4 years in *madrasahs* (CAMPE-UPL, 2002).

Education Watch School Catchment Area Household Survey, 2004 found that amongst children coming from 'always in deficit' households, the incidence of

Table 3: Internal Efficiency: Survival in Primary Education and Transition to Secondary Education in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries

Country	Survival Rate to Last Grade (%)						Transition to Secondary Education (%)					
	1998/1999			2001/2002			1998/1999			2001/2002		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Bangladesh	54.7	50.1	60.0	53.9	49.3	59.0	75.5	69.9	81.7	89.3	83.0	95.7
Bhutan	76.4	74.4	78.9	81.3	78.0	85.1	87.6	87.8	87.4	82.5	82.4	82.6
India	62.0	63.3	60.4	61.4	59.7	63.5	88.8	90.7	86.1	86.7	84.9	89.0
Nepal				64.9	63.3	66.9				78.2	80.1	75.9
Sri Lanka				98.4	97.9	98.9				97.0	96.4	97.3
Developed Countries				97.7	97.2	98.3				98.9	98.5	99.4
Developing Countries				74.5	72.4	76.7	84.5	86.9	81.5	83.3	83.8	82.3

Source: UNESCO (2005) pp. 332-335

both 'never enrolled' and 'drop outs' were much higher compared to children coming from 'sometimes in deficit', 'break-even' and 'surplus' households (CAMPE, 2005). That means that the children from poorer households in Bangladesh not only have less access to primary education; given the higher drop-out rates amongst them, even fewer are likely to complete the full five year primary educational cycle and then move on to secondary level of education.

What were the reasons for non-enrollment and dropping out? Education Watch School Catchment Area Household Survey, 2004, listed poverty (24.5%), refusal of school authorities to admit (20.6%), and 'the child does not like school' (16.3%) as the leading factors accounting for non-enrollment, while poverty (41.3%) and 'the child does not like school' (37.5%) primarily accounted for the drop-out rate (CAMPE, 2005).

Although, no tuition fee was charged, and the text books were supposed to be provided, free of cost, many parents facing economic hardship found it difficult to meet different school expenses like examination fees, cost of school dress or notebooks. In addition to this, was the cost of private tuition that was widely practiced: 43.2% of all students were observed to have engaged private tutors and, on the average, a student had to pay Tk. 152 per month for private tuition. The average cost for private tuition directly varied with academic progress, from Tk. 120 per month in Class I to Tk. 201 per month in Class V. As the schools did not function well, those who could not afford private tuition lagged behind and were discriminated against by their teachers who themselves were often engaged in private tuition. Poverty thus emerged as a major cause of non-enrollment and high drop-out rate (CAMPE, 2005).

Secondary Education

On completion of primary education, students (11+) enroll for junior secondary education that spans over 3 years. At the end, some branch out to join the vocational stream, offered at Vocational Training Institutes (VTI), currently called technical schools and colleges, and Technical Training Centers (TTC) run by the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Labor and Employment respectively, while students in the mainstream continue in government and non-government secondary schools for a 2-year secondary education in their respective areas of specialization i.e. humanities, science, commerce, etc. At the end of their secondary education, the students sit for their first public examination (S.S.C.) under the supervision of seven education boards.

The students of religious education and English medium streams also sit for their respective public examinations, Dakhil, and O-level, conducted by the Madrasah Education Board, and London/Cambridge University respectively, facilitated by the British Council in case of the latter.

After 10 years of schooling at primary and secondary level, students (16+) who succeed in passing the Secondary School Certificate (S.S.C.) examination have the option of joining a college for a two-year higher secondary education in their respective areas of specialization, or enroll in technical/ polytechnical institutes for technical education. After a 2-year higher secondary education, one has to sit for another public examination called Higher Secondary Certificate (H.S.C.) Examination conducted by the Education Boards to qualify for further education.

Students of religious and English Medium streams

also sit for their respective public examinations, Alim, and A-level, conducted by the Madrasah Education Board and London/Cambridge University respectively to qualify for further education.

In Bangladesh, in 1973, at the secondary level, gross enrollment rate (for the age group 10-14 years) stood at 25 (13 for females). In 1980, the above rate (for the age group 10-16 years) was 18 (26 for males and 9 for females). In 1983, gross enrollment rate at the secondary level (for the age group 11-17 years) was 18 (26 for males and 10 for females).

The marked increase in enrollment at the primary level, and introduction of stipends for all female students contributed not only to a significant increase in the enrollment rate but also in ensuring a greater participation of girls at the secondary level. Compared to only 19% in 1990/1991, net enrolment rate increased to 40.3% in 1998/99, and further to 44.5% in 2002/2003, with the Gender Parity Index (Female/ Male) moving up from 0.95 in 1998/1999 to 1.11 in 2002/2003(Table 2.4) (World Bank, 2005, and UNESCO, 2005).

According to a nationwide survey conducted by Education Watch in 2005, the net enrollment rate for the age-group11-15, in classes VI to X, stood at 45.1%-50.6 % for girls compared to 39.6% for boys, registering a marked increase over the last seven years; in 1998 the corresponding rates were, 32.6%, 35.3% and 30.0% respectively. The net enrollment rate for girls in secondary education thus increased at a faster pace compared to boys (CAMPE, 2005a).

Between urban and rural areas, there existed a substantial gap in participation, the net enrollment rate in urban areas being 54.0% compared to 43.6% in rural areas. The participation rate in the metropolitan cities, however, lagged behind the national average, as children from large urban slums had a lower level of participation in secondary education (CAMPE, 2005a).

Disaggregating secondary enrollment rate by level, it may be observed that in Bangladesh in 2004, gross enrollment rate at the junior secondary level stood at 64.4 (67.5 for females and 61.4 for males); at secondary level at 47.3 (48.1 for females and 46.6 for males); and at higher secondary level at 33.6 (32.5 for females and 34.7 for males). It is interesting to note that the female gross enrollment rate which was substantially higher at the junior secondary level narrows down at the secondary level and lags behind that of their male counterparts at the higher secondary level (http://www.uis.unesco.
org).

Access to secondary education has been most inequitably distributed. According to the national household income and expenditure survey of 2000, the bottom 40% of the households by income scale got only 11% of the places in secondary education whereas the top 40%accounted for 73% of the places, the 20% accounting for 46% of places.

A nationwide survey conducted by Education Watch in 2005 also found that there existed statistically significant relationship between net enrolment of children and annual food security status of their households, a proxy for household income. While the net enrolment rate for children from 'surplus' households was estimated at 59.2%, it dropped to 49.9% for children from 'break-even' households, to 40.8% for children from 'sometimes in deficit' households, and to 25.2% for children from 'always

Table 4: Participation in Secondary Education

Country	Age Group 2002/ 2003	Enrollment ratio in technical/ vocational education (%) 2002/2003	Net Enrollment Ratio (NER)							
			1998/1999				2002/2003			
			Total	Male	Female	GPI (F/M)	Total	Male	Female	GPI (F/M)
Bangladesh	11-17	1.14	39.4	40.3	38.5	0.95	44.5	42.1	46.9	1.11
Developed Countries			89.2	89.0	89.4	1.00	91.0	90.3	91.6	1.01
Developing Countries			42.8	45.9	39.7	0.86	50.1	52.2	48.0	0.92

Source: UNESCO (2005) pp. 340-343

Table 5: Reasons for Non-enrollment at Secondary Level
(Percentage distribution of non-enrolled children by reasons of non-enrolment; residence; and gender)

Reasons	All Bangladesh			Rural Bangladesh			Urban Bangladesh		
	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both
School far away from home	3.1	1.5	2.2	3.6	1.6	2.4	0.7	0.2	0.4
Scarcity of money	50.0	46.6	48.1	46.8	45.8	46.2	66.8	52.2	59.5
Admission refused	1.4	0.5	0.9	1.4	0.4	0.9	1.3	0.9	1.1
No use of education	1.5	2.2	1.9	1.5	2.3	2.0	1.7	2.0	1.9
Unsuccessful in exam.	2.9	2.6	2.7	3.1	2.6	2.8	2.2	2.6	2.4
Child works at/outside home	7.2	11.1	9.4	7.7	11.9	10.1	4.6	5.1	4.8
Child's dislike for school	14.7	30.3	23.6	15.7	30.1	24.0	9.4	31.5	20.4
Security concerns	3.2	0.0	1.4	3.6	0.1	1.5	1.3	0.2	0.8
Marriage	8.3	0.2	3.7	8.8	0.2	3.8	5.7	0.0	2.9
Disability	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.4	2.2	2.3	0.4	2.6	1.5
Others	5.5	2.8	4.0	5.5	2.8	3.9	5.9	2.6	4.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: CAMPE (2005a)

in deficit' households (CAMPE, 2005a).

Also observed was a statistically significant positive relationship between children's enrolment in secondary schools and the educational status of their parents. Mothers with tertiary or secondary education were more likely to send their children to schools compared to those with lower level of education. The net enrollment rate was 31.1% for children whose mothers never went to school, compared to 53.6% for those with primary educated mothers, 74.6% for those with secondary educated mothers, and 85.7% for those with tertiary educated mothers. The net enrolment rates at secondary level were, 29%, 46.4%, 66.4%, and 81.2% respectively for similar levels of fathers' education (CAMPE, 2005a).

Most of the children who were never enrolled in secondary schools belonged to poor households, and their parents, 90% of the mothers and 82.6% of the fathers, had no formal education.

Poverty, dislike for schools and the need for children to work at/outside home thus emerge as the primary reasons for non-enrollment at secondary level of education. It may be pointed out that unlike primary education for which no fees are charged and the textbooks are provided free of cost, secondary education in Bangladesh involves substantial costs as not only tuition fees have to be paid but textbooks have to be purchased also in addition to costs of school dress, transportation costs, and the cost of private tuition that has a high incidence at the secondary level.

The Education Watch survey mentioned above, found that, in 2005, of those enrolled in secondary education, only 6% went to government secondary schools, 2.3% went to combined school-and colleges, nearly three quarters went to non-government secondary schools, 1.5% went to junior secondary schools; the madrasahs accounted for 14.2%, and the rest 1% went to English medium, vocational and trade schools, categorized as others (Table 6)

As the government secondary schools, the combined school and colleges and English medium schools were primarily located in urban areas, their shares in total secondary enrollment in urban areas were relatively higher compared to their shares in rural areas whereas in rural areas, in secondary enrollment, the non-government secondary schools, the madrasahs and junior secondary schools dominated overwhelmingly.

It may be observed from Table 7 that the benefits of government secondary education were particularly unequally distributed. According to HIES 2000, 96% of students enrolled in government secondary schools belonged to the top 40% households by income scale.

Table 6: Percentage Distribution of Students by Type of School, Residence and Sex

School Type	All Bangladesh			Rural Bangladesh			Urban Bangladesh		
	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both
Dakhil Madrasah	10.7	11.5	11.0	12.0	13.3	12.5	3.9	2.4	3.2
Higher Madrasah	2.8	3.7	3.2	3.1	4.2	3.6	1.4	1.7	1.5
Junior Secondary	1.8	1.2	1.5	2.0	1.4	1.7	0.8	0.3	0.6
Non-govt. secondary	76.1	73.6	74.9	77.4	75.5	76.6	69.1	64.0	66.7
Government secondary	5.5	6.5	6.0	3.8	3.5	3.7	14.2	21.5	17.6
School & college	2.4	2.2	2.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	8.5	7.1	7.9
Others	0.7	1.3	1.0	0.4	1.0	0.7	2.2	2.9	2.5

Source: CAMPE (2005a): Education Watch Household Survey, 2005

Table 7: Enrollment by socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status	National distribution: Household Income and Expenditure Survey				Distribution of SSPS sampled households			
	GSS	NGSS	DM	Total	GSS	NGSS	DM	Total
Bottom quintile	0	4	8	4	3	19	31	20
Lower middle quintile	1	6	12	7	8	20	23	20
Middle quintile	3	15	15	15	9	21	19	20
Upper middle quintile	13	29	31	28	22	20	19	20
Top quintile	83	46	34	46	58	20	8	20

Source: GOB-SSPS (2005) p.26

From the bottom 20% households, none studied in government secondary schools (GSS). Dakhil madrasahs (DM) tended to serve relatively poorer students. Even in madrasahs the majority of the students did not come from the lower income households. Of all madrasah students, only 20% came from the bottom 40% households, which accounted for only 10% of all students of the non-government secondary schools (NGSS). The SSPS, 2005 however showed that, of the sample households, the top 40% accounted for 80% of GSS, 40% of NGSS and 27% of DM enrollment while the bottom 40% accounted for 11% of GSS, 39% of NGSS and 54% of DM students that indicated to an improvement in the access of poorer children to secondary education. The majority of the poorer children, however, continued to get enrolled in Dakhil madrasahs.

Education Watch 2005 estimated the dropout and repetition rates at 11.8% and 7.4% respectively. Dakhil madrasahs had the highest dropout rate of 17.6% while the government schools had the least, 2.4%. Repetition rate was the highest, 15.6%, in Class X.

Retention / survival rate of students from Class VI to Class X, however, varied by school type. It was the highest in government schools (73.7%) and the least in Dakhil madrasahs. Completion of secondary education (by passing SSC/Dakhil examinations) also varied considerably by school type-the lowest for non-government schools (18.5% of those enrolled in Class VI), and the highest for government schools (57.3%).

Higher Secondary Education

In Bangladesh, a two-year higher secondary education program is offered in School & Colleges, Intermediate Colleges, intermediate sections of Degree (Pass), Degree (honors) and Master's Colleges. In 2003, there were 219 non-government schools and colleges, 10 government and 1350 non-government intermediate colleges, 138 government degree (pass) and 931 non-government degree (pass) colleges, 43 government degree (honors) and 18 non-government degree (honors) colleges, 60 government master's and 25 non-government (master's) colleges–2794 institutions in total, offering higher secondary education compared to only 848 institutions in 1990, to cope with an expansion in enrollment, from 8, 24,112 in 1990 to 14,49,229 in 2003 due to a surge in female enrollment encouraged by the introduction of a Female Stipend Program. Females' share in total enrollment increased from 24.6% in 1990 to 39.2% in 2003. Over the 1990-2003 period, while the number of government colleges offering higher secondary education increased only marginally from 198 to 251, the number of non-government colleges increased manifold, from 650 to 2543 with many new colleges cropping up in rural areas as well, thus extending the scope for higher education to rural students including girls whose participation increased in secondary education. Of the 2794 colleges, 1908 colleges were located in rural areas where the female share in total enrollment was 37.6% compared 40.5% in urban areas. It is disconcerting however to note that the dropout rate at the higher secondary level seems to have been increasing in recent times, from 39.8% in 1999 to 46.7% in 2003 (BANBEIS, 2004)

Qaumi Madrasahs

In addition to the government approved madrasah system of education mentioned earlier, there exists, within the religious stream, another sub-system, which is implemented by Qaumi Madrasahs. Little however is known about this sub-system as the Qaumi Madrasahs operate independent of any government control/regulation, receiving no public resource support, and therefore are not easily accessible.

Content and Quality of Education and their Implication for Labor Market in Bangladesh

No doubt, since independence, there has been significant quantitative expansion of education at primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh. In this section we explore what changes have taken place in the content and quality of education at these levels, which also indicate their implication for the labor market.

Primary Education

Content

Primary education (ISCED level I), also known as elementary education, is normally designed to provide pupils with a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics and an elementary understanding of subjects such as history, geography, natural sciences, social sciences, art and music. Religious instruction may also be featured. These subjects serve to develop pupils' ability to obtain and use information they need about their home, community, country etc. (UNESCO, 2005).

In Bangladesh, the curriculum for the general stream of primary education has been designed following basically the above approach. Spread over five years, Bangla, English, Mathematics, Introduction to Bangladesh, Introduction to Environment, Religious Studies, Physical Education, Music, Arts and Crafts are taught using textbooks produced by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. In the religious stream, Arabic and a few other religious subjects are also taught. The English medium schools do not follow the national curriculum. Each school has its own curriculum and as most of these schools use primarily foreign textbooks, the students generally fail to acquire basic knowledge about their own country, people and culture.

Quality of Primary Education

The significant quantitative expansion in primary education particularly during the nineties as indicated by increased primary enrollment rate was not however matched by improvement in 'quality'. The objective of primary education is the development of basic competencies in language, numeracy and life skills (including values and attitude) amongst children so as to enable them to effectively pursue further education and to be productive in society. To shed light on the quality of education received by these children, they were assessed for basic competencies by Education Watch 1999 through a national survey. It was observed that in 1998 only 29.6 percent of children could satisfy the minimum levels in all four competency areas, viz. reading, writing, numeracy, and life skills/knowledge. Compared to a score of 26.7% in 1993, over the period 1993-1998, there seems to have been some improvement in the quality of primary education, but

such improvement was confined to rural areas only as a declining trend was observed in the urban areas (CAMPE-UPL, 1999).

Education Watch 2000, in a follow-up study probed deeper into the quality issue. It examined the achievement of competencies by students at the end of the primary stage. Since 1992, a curriculum with 53 competencies was implemented at the primary level in Bangladesh. Of the cognitive competencies 27 lent themselves to a paper-pencil test which was administered on a nationally representative sample of students of Class V drawn from three sub-systems, viz. government, non-government and non-formal institutions just before the end of their five-year cycle of primary education. The major findings are presented below:

1. Only 1.6% of the students acquired all 27 competencies tested.
2. By type of institutions, only 1% students of the government schools, 0.9% students of non-government schools and 6% students of non-formal institutions achieved the above competencies.
3. Gender wise, 1.8% of girls and 1.5% of boys achieved all 27 competencies.
4. 1.2% of the rural and 3.2% of the urban students attained all the competencies.
5. None of the students of rural non-government schools mastered all the competencies.
6. Of the six groups of students, students of the rural non-formal schools secured the top position with 7.1% of them mastering all the competencies and the urban non-government schools got the second position, of whom, 4.3% achieved all the competencies.
7. On average the children achieved 16.1% i.e. 60% of all competencies.
8. The boys performed better than the girls, and the urban students performed better than the rural students.
9. Subject-wise achievement of terminal competencies (% of students achieving relevant competencies) were, in cases of Bangla, 36.5; Social Studies, 19.2; General Science, 17.3; Mathematics, 11.6; and English, 9.4.
10. On average, the students performed better in items that tested the knowledge level compared to those that tested the level of understanding. Performance was extremely poor in items that tested the level of comprehension, application, analysis and synthesis.
11. There existed a wide variation in the performance of schools, as on average the students of the sample schools achieved between 1.7 and 26.7 competencies. Such variation as indicated by the coefficient of variation was the highest in rural non-formal schools followed by rural non-government, urban non-formal, rural government, urban non-government and urban government schools .
12. Based on an assessment of the 'best' students of the 'best' schools of Dhaka city, it was observed that 63.9% of the best students achieved all 27 cognitive competencies against national estimate of only 1.6%. Such wide variation was observed in all the subject areas.
13. Mean number of competencies achieved by 'always in deficit', 'occasional deficit', 'break-even' and 'surplus' households were, 15.4, 15.7, 16.4 and 17.7 respectively.

Achievement of students directly varied with the level of education of their parents, and access to private coaching. Students of those schools which had lower student-teacher ratios (<40:1), had better qualified and more trained teachers, and were more frequently visited by the local education authorities had higher learning achievements. Thus, the students' learning achievements were largely a function of their family background, the support they received from their families, the school environment, and the level of supervision of the local education authorities.

Implications for the Labor Market

Given the fact that a large number of children particularly from the poor households don't get access to primary education, a large proportion of those who do, cannot complete the full five year cycle of primary education. Many of those who, even after successfully completing their primary education, fail to acquire functional literacy, one may reasonably expect wide prevalence of lack of functional literacy in the labor force of Bangladesh. Definitely some incidence of child labor in the primary age group prevails, as many of those who don't get access to primary education and those who drop out before completing the primary education cycle join the labor market.

Secondary Education

Content

Secondary education in Bangladesh, mentioned earlier, is imparted in three different phases. In the general stream, in Phase I, known as the Junior Secondary level, spanning over Classes VI-VIII, the subjects taught are Bangla, English, Mathematics, Religious Studies, Social Science, General Science, Agriculture/Home Economics, Physical Education,

Arts & Crafts and Arabic/Sanskrit/Pali as an elective subject. In Phase II, known as the Secondary level, spanning over Classes IX-X, all the students study Bangla, English, Mathematics, Religious Studies and Social Science/General Science as compulsory subjects, and specialize in Science/Humanities/ Commerce by choosing 3 subjects from a number of subjects offered under each group. In Phase III called the Higher Secondary level spanning over Classes XI-XII, the students besides studying Bangla and English as compulsory subjects, generally continue with their studies in their respective areas of specialization. At both secondary and higher secondary levels, the students, if they so desire, may study an additional subject of their choice.

In the religious stream, at the junior secondary level, although as in the general stream, subjects such as Bangla, English, Mathematics, Social Science, General Science, Agriculture/Home Economics are also taught, but as 400 marks (out of 1000) have been set aside for studying Arabic (200 marks) and two religious subjects (100 marks each) Bangla and English receive lesser emphases (100 marks each as opposed to 200 marks each in the general stream). Besides, Physical Education and Arts and Crafts, taught at the general stream get dropped. At the secondary level also the above pattern continues. Although between general and religious streams, a number of subjects remain common, but lesser emphases are put on the study of Bangla and English to make room for studying Arabic and three other religious subjects. Besides, the number of elective subjects also get reduced from three to two. At the higher secondary level also, the above pattern continues in case of compulsory subjects, but in case of elective subjects there seems to be no difference between religious and general streams under different areas of specialization.

At secondary and higher secondary levels, not all schools/colleges however offer all the above specializations. In many schools/colleges, located primarily in rural areas, for shortage of science teachers, and for lack of necessary infra-structural facilities such as laboratories, many rural students remain constrained to effectively exercise their right to make appropriate choices in respect of fields of their study.

Education Watch, 2005 reports that only about half of the schools had science laboratories of varying quality; only 30% of the non-government schools had adequate laboratory facilities; 87% of the madrasahs did not have any. 37% of the schools claimed to have computer education facility, but a fifth of the schools had only one computer, and another fifth had 2-15 computers; the rest had none. Majority of the teachers were not properly qualified. Although, 84% of the secondary teachers had a bachelors or higher degrees, 57% of the teachers claiming bachelors degree were placed in the third division or even did not even take the degree examination. The same was the situation with 78% of those who claimed Masters' degree. Nearly half of the teachers studied humanities; 20% studied science and 23% were madrasah graduates. Of the graduate Dakhil madrasah teachers, only 8.9%, 3.2% and 2.3% studied science, social science and commerce respectively. More than half of the secondary teachers had no professional pedagogic training. Only 19.7% of the Madrasah teachers received some kind of training. All the above factors effectively constrain the scope of specialization for a student, and seriously affect the quality of education a student receives.

Under the vocational stream, the compulsory subjects for study include, Bangla (200), English (200), Mathematics (100), Religious Studies (100), Social Science (100), Trade Science (100), Drawing/Use of Computer, Self-employment & Enterprise Development (100); and an elective vocational trade (300) and relevant practical training (100). At the higher secondary level the above pattern continues.

The introduction of SSC and basic trades programs for students in TTCs/VTIs no doubt contributed to improving the completion rates compared to what it was in the early1990s. Although the student-instructor ratio at 18.3:1 did not seem to be very high, most instructors having no relevant industrial experience lacked necessary skills to teach, with little promotion prospects, neither did they have any incentive for quality teaching. Funds were lacking for in-service training of teachers or industrial attachments. Most VTIs, polytechnics, and specialized degree programs suffered from outdated, obsolete and worn out equipment. No budgets were provided for maintenance of equipment, and little for consumable supplies. The students received group rather than individual training. Lesson plans and job sheets were rarely used in the training. Intended practical training could therefore not be implemented. At the diploma level, internship for students could not always be arranged. As a result, polytechnic graduates often failed to acquire practical shop floor skills. The outcome was that most of the graduates of vocational and technical programs were not skilled, and few got into appropriate occupations (UPL, 2000).

Quality of Secondary Education

The quality of secondary education, defined as learning achievements during the secondary level under different streams, may be ascertained at the exit points on the basis of the results of the SSC and HSC examinations despite certain criticisms of the examinations themselves as they rarely tested the analytical capability of the students, and were prone to widespread copying. In controlling copying, however, remarkable success has been achieved in recent years. Tables 8 and 9 present the results of SSC and HSC examinations under different streams, starting with the general stream followed by religious and vocational streams.

The high rates of failures under all the streams reflect poor quality of secondary education in general. In the general stream as most of the students in rural areas, for reasons mentioned earlier, are compelled to join Humanities group, the lowest pass percentage observed in this particular group, to a great extent, also reflects the quality of education imparted in rural schools.

How did quality of education differ by school type?

Government secondary schools achieved a substantially higher pass rate than other types of school. Urban schools have a considerably higher pass rate compared to rural schools. Differences between the results for boys and

Table 8: Results of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination

Year	% of pass		% of pass in Science Group		% of pass in Humanities Group		% pass in Business Studies Group	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
2001	35.22	33.71	47.79	49.08	23.90	25.35	43.87	49.89
2002	40.66	37.72	53.59	52.30	30.87	30.31	42.78	45.68
2003	35.91	33.60	46.53	45.18	26.10	26.03	40.06	43.45
2004	48.03	45.98	57.66	56.79	38.37	38.27	50.59	52.28

Source: BANBEIS (2004), pp. 30-31

Table 9: Results of Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) Examination

Year	% of pass		% of pass in Science Group		% of pass in Humanities Group		% pass in Business Studies Group	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
2001	28.41	29.72	32.69	37.44	23.73	24.66	37.82	48.62
2002	27.10	27.77	29.62	33.21	22.55	23.87	36.41	45.58
2003	38.43	38.14	38.67	41.76	33.00	33.59	49.60	56.04
2004	47.74	46.78	51.38	54.13	40.63	40.94	58.02	63.32

Source: BANBEIS (2004) pp. 30, 32.

Table 10: SSC Examination Results by School Type, Location and Gender in a Sample of Schools

Year	School Type			Location		Gender		Total
	GSS	NGSS	DM	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	
2002	75	39	48	81	41	63	57	60
2003	68	32	35	77	30	57	52	54
2004	74	46	54	80	46	67	63	65

Source: GOB-SSPS (2005), p.34

Table 11: Level of Participation in SSC/DM Examination, 2004 (%)

Proportion of Class X students sitting in the SSC examination (%)	School Type			Total
	GSS	NGSS	DM	
<33	0	4	11	6
33-66	0	35	30	33
66-100	5	33	46	36
>1000	95	28	13	25

Source: GOB-SSPS (2005), p. 35

girls were less stark; nonetheless they displayed a consistent pattern; boys' pass rates exceeded girls' pass rates (Table 10).

Not all the students enrolled in Class 10 of the sample schools participated in the SSC examination. Had they done so, the difference in performance of the different types of school would have come out much more glaringly (Table 11).

A look at the performance of different types of schools at the junior scholarship examination, another indicator of quality of education at the secondary level, also indicated that success was monopolized primarily by the participants from government secondary schools while none from the sample Dakhil madrasahs succeeded in winning a single scholarship in any year.

Although the quality of education imparted at the secondary level in general is not very satisfactory, there are a number of educational institutions in Bangladesh, both government and non-government, which have already established themselves as centers par excellence offering high quality education as reflected by brilliant performance of their students at both SSC and HSC examinations.

Implications for the Labor Market

As net enrollment rate sharply drops from primary to secondary level, one may expect high incidence of child labor particularly in the age group 11-14 in the labor market of Bangladesh. Those who fail to get enrolled at the secondary level virtually have little option but to join the labor market.

Dropouts from the junior secondary level in the above age group are also likely to join the labor market and thereby increase the child labor population.

Given the content and quality of education at the secondary level particularly of the religious stream, even those who succeed in passing SC/HSC hardly acquire necessary language and numerical skills; and knowledge in relevant fields that are valued in the job market/considered useful for self-employment.

Education and Labor Market in Bangladesh

Having outlined the supply side picture of the labor market focusing on educational profiles of the potential labor force in Bangladesh we intend to discuss here the labor market outcomes, given the demand conditions arising from the pattern of growth experienced by her economy.

The Labor Force Surveys conducted by the Bureau of Statistics serve as our principal data sources. Fragmentary evidences have also been drawn from available other sources.

In Bangladesh, a look at the distribution of employed persons by major industry and educational level indicates that in 2002-2003, only 4.1% of the employed persons for the country as a whole had an educational level, such persons were employed in agriculture, forestry and related works.

The major sectors employing manpower were, electricity, gas and water; bank insurance and finance; education services; real estate, rent and business activities; public administration, and health and social workers. The shares of manpower with degree and higher level of education in the above sectors were 43.9%, 51.6%, 46.0%, 25.3%, 22.0%, and 23.2% respectively. These were also the sectors having amongst their work force a sizeable proportion of SSC/HSC graduates, whose shares were, 21.4%, 28.3%, 34.3%, 26.3%, 35.3%, and 36.1% of the above sectors respectively (BBS 2004). Unfortunately however, these sectors did not account for large proportions of the employed force, their respective shares being, 0.2%, 0.5%, 2.7%, 0.4%, 2.2%, 1.1% only (BBS 2004).

Table 12: Average annual growth rate of employment by industry and gender, 1999-2000 to 2002-2003

Major industry	Average growth rate		
	Both sexes	Male	Female
Total	**4.4**	**3.5**	**7.7**
Agriculture, forestry and related works	**4.1**	**0.9**	**15.9**
Fishing	**19.1**	**23.2**	**-37.3**
Mining and quarrying	**-7.7**	**26.2**	**-72.9**
Manufacturing	**5.2**	**4.4**	**6.5**
Electricity, gas and water	**-10.4**	**-8.6**	**-24.5**
Construction	**10.7**	**11.4**	**2.0**
Wholesale and retail trade	**2.7**	**4.4**	**-22.2**
Hotel and restaurant	**3.0**	**3.9**	**-7.9**
Transport, storage and communication service	**7.7**	**8.2**	**-20.7**
Bank, insurance and finance	**-0.7**	**-0.8**	**0.6**
Real estate, rent and business activities	**14.5**	**19.2**	**-26.9**
Public administration	**8.8**	**9.1**	**5.5**
Education services	**4.1**	**3.1**	**7.0**
Health and social workers	**18.9**	**15.5**	**29.1**
Community, personal service, household sector and others	**-3.5**	**-4.0**	**-3.1**

Source: BBS (2004) p. 48

Table 13: Distribution of Unemployed Population Aged 15 Years and Over by Level of Education and Sex

Level of education	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female
Total	4.3	4.2	4.9	5.0	4.6	6.2	4.1	4.0	4.4
No education	3.4	3.4	3.6	3.2	3.1	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.6
Class I-V	3.3	3.1	4.3	3.3	2.9	4.5	3.4	3.1	4.2
Class VI-VIII	3.9	3.8	4.3	4.3	3.9	5.6	3.8	3.8	3.7
Class IX-X	5.6	5.7	5.2	6.2	6.3	6.0	5.3	5.4	4.8
SSC,HSC and equivalent	7.8	7.0	11.7	8.7	7.7	12.9	7.2	6.6	10.7
Degree and above	9.5	8.1	17.4	7.7	6.2	14.7	12.0	10.6	22.8
Others	9.6	8.9	15.7	9.0	5.7	31.2	10.0	11.0	0.0

Source: BBS (2004) p. 65

Moreover, in the recent past, not all the above sectors experienced high rates of growth in employment.

Employment in several of these sectors did in fact decline. Over 1999-2000 to 2002-2003 period, the annual average rate of growth in employment in the above sectors were, -10.4%, -0.7%, 4.1%, 14.5%, 8.8%, and 18.9% respectively (BBS, 2004). With quantitative expansion of educational facilities in Bangladesh, while increasingly more and more

graduates of different levels of education were joining the labor market for employment matching their expectations, growth in such employment opportunities could hardly keep pace. As a result, open unemployment amongst the educated labor force, particularly, in the youth, reached relatively high levels. In 2002-2003, while, the national open unemployment statistics was, 4.3%, the rate of unemployment for SSC/HSC/equivalent; degree & above, and others were 7.8%, 9.5%, and 9.6% respectively (Table 13). In 1999-2000, the open unemployment rate for the nation as a whole was 4.3%. That means that the open unemployment situation for the country as whole remained unchanged over 1999-2000 to 2002-2003 period. Unfortunately however, for degree & above category, there seems to have been some deterioration, as open unemployment rate for this category of the labor force had been estimated at 7.8% in 1999-2000. For the SSC/HSC/equivalent category, the above rate was 11.5% (BBS, 2002) which indicated to some improvement in the employment situation for the above category of educated labor force.

Looking at Tables 13 and 14, one may notice that, in 2002-2003, amongst the youth aged 15-29, although holders of degree and above constituted only 3.6 % of the labor force, they accounted for 12.8% of the unemployed. The corresponding figures for SSC/HSC/equivalent graduates were 9.8% and 20.9% respectively. Those with schooling up to Class IX- X, constituted 10.8% of the labor force but account ed for 15.3% of the unemployed. Those with no schooling constituted 41.7% of the labor force, but their share in the unemployed was 26.4%. Thus, as the level of education increased,so did the rate of unemployment amongst the more educated segments of the labor force.

In 1999-2000, those with degree and above constituted 8.1% of the unemployed youth that rose to 12.8% in 2002-2003. Unemployment situation thus further deteriorated amongst the more educated youth. The share of those with SSC/HSC/equivalent amongst the unemployed youth also remained high, although, declining over the same period, from 23.5% to 20.9%.

Given the content and quality of education of the religious stream, and students of humanities group of the general stream, it is quite likely that unemployment will be relatively more heavily concentrated amongst them in the category of labor force with SSC/HSC/equivalent.

Summary of Findings and Policy Recommendations

Education that contributes to unlocking the potential of an individual is generally believed to be a powerful instrument for building not only a prosperous economy but also a just society. Rapid improvement in access to primary enrollment, ensuring gender balance over the past decade and a half, no doubt opened up new possibilities, but failure to ensure improvement in the quality of education, did not let us fully benefit as the drop-out rate continued to remain high and the learning achievements of the graduates hardly improved. As secondary education was imparted primarily by the private sector that charged fees, and the students particularly from the poorer households faced high opportunity costs, many failed to pursue their education and were compelled to join the labor market that already included the dropouts of the primary education.

No wonder that in 2002-2003, Bangladesh had a child labor population of nearly five million of which 360,000 were in the age group 5-9, despite provision of free and compulsory education and a nationwide stipend for education program administered by the

Table 14: Youth Unemployment by Level of Education and Sex, 1999-00, 2002-2003

Level of education	Unemployed 1999-2000			Unemployed 2002-2003		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No schooling	13.1	11.3	16.0	26.4	25.8	28.0
Class I-V	22.9	22.8	23.2	13.6	13.2	14.6
Class VI-VIII	14.9	14.2	16.0	11.6	12.2	9.9
Class IX-X	17.5	19.1	14.9	14.0	15.3	10.6
SSC/HSC/equivalent	23.5	23.2	23.9	20.9	20.7	21.4
Degree & above	8.1	9.4	6.0	12.8	12.1	14.8
Others				0.8	0.8	0.7

Source: BBS (2002) p.75 BBS (2004) p.75

government; and 4,631,000 in the age group 10-14 (BBS, 2003a). Most of them were children of uneducated and unskilled workers, who because of their extremely low wages/productivity lived in absolute poverty, and were not in a position to bear the cost of educating their children. They depended, rather, on these children to supplement their family income. The above child labor population, with no access to education, will grow up like their parents, as uneducated and unskilled workers, and in their turn, like their parents, failing to educate their children, will drive them to join the labor market as they themselves were driven to do so by their parents. Unless tackled right now with all seriousness, the phenomenon of child labor will perpetuate in Bangladesh from generation to generation, remaining as a major cause of poverty. There is thus a need for extending the duration of free and compulsory primary education to 8 years instead of 5 years as it is at present, and ensuring that all children aged 5-14 are enrolled in schools and that they remain in their schools for the entire duration of basic education. This would help them acquire useful quality education so that even if they do not continue their education further and join the labor market, they would do so equipped with relevant knowledge and skills and contribute significantly to raising the productivity of the enterprise they will be working for on in their self-employment ventures.

At the secondary level, the current content of both religious and general streams of education that receive public resources seem to have been seriously deficient in meeting the education and skills needed in a highly competitive world. The religious stream does not equip its students with necessary language and numerical skills. The students of humanities and business studies groups of the general stream, and of religious stream of education, do not receive adequate exposure to science education. The students of science group of both general and religious streams of education, on the other hand, get little exposure to social sciences and no exposure to business education. The students of humanities group of both general and religious streams receive no exposure to business education. The objective of secondary education is to equip the students with necessary knowledge and skills for pursuing higher education or for joining the labor market. Thus, there is a need for ensuring appropriate balance between the two objectives. The way the current curriculum of secondary education has been designed, it seems, it is geared primarily to achieve the first objective.

The best way to achieve both objectives simultaneously is to introduce a common curriculum for core disciplines such as languages, both Bangla and English, Mathematics, basic sciences, social sciences and business studies; and computer science, to be studied by all students, essentially to adequately prepare them for the labor market; and allowing advanced students to choose a limited number of courses in their fields of interest, be it science, humanities, business or religious studies. The above core curriculum will, no doubt, contribute to better equipping the secondary graduates not only for wage employment in productive sectors of the economy, but also for self-employment. The fact that deserves to be highlighted at this point is that self-employment is the major type of employment in Bangladesh, accounting for 45% of total employment (BBS, 2004). Definitely, compulsory exposure to a basic course on business studies, particularly accounting, will surely contribute to improved productivity of all self-employed persons.

Quality is a function of investment and management. In 1973, Bangladesh spent 2% of her GNP, and 13% of all her public expenditure on education. But as the size of Bangladesh's GNP at that time was very small, per pupil public expenditure on education amounted to US$4.2 only, compared to US$ 13.6 in India and US$ 1090.8 in USA (1974). Since then, although Bangladesh's GDP has increased considerably, thanks to achievement of a high average annual growth rate of around 5% over 1990-2005 period, allocation of public expenditure to education increased only marginally to 2.36% of her GDP, and 14.24% of her total public expenditure in 2005. (http://www.uis.unesco.
org). The developing countries' average public expenditure on education amounted to 4.5% of their GNP (UNESCO, 2005). For improving quality of education at all levels, Bangladesh needs to significantly increase her allocation of public resources to education to reach the developing countries' average in the shortest possible time.

The increased flow of resources to the education sector needs to be utilized in a way that contributes to the enhancement of quality of education imparted by the academic institutions, i.e. on the training of teachers, betterment of library and laboratory facilities, improved provisioning of learning materials, improving the institutional mechanism for academic supervision, and for developing an institutional mechanism for rewarding excellence both for teaching and learning. Bright students must be provided with adequate resource support in the form of generous scholarships so that they face no

hindrance in pursuing further education.

For efficient utilization of scarce resources that flow into the education sector, management of all components of this sector needs to be significantly improved. Before independence, despite poor pay, those who took up teaching as a profession did so out of their interest in teaching and most were devoted teachers. Classroom teaching was effective and the incidence of private coaching was virtually non-existent. Quality of education imparted did not significantly differ between schools whether they were located in metropolitan cities or urban rural areas. There were many instances of excellent results achieved by students from remote rural schools. After independence, as the educational infrastructure expanded and the government took over responsibility of paying teachers' basic salary, many unemployed youth took up teaching as a profession whether they liked it or not. They considered teaching just as any other job, and in the absence of an effective inspection/monitoring mechanism, quite often neglected their duties. As class room teaching suffered private coaching flourished, with many teachers setting up their own coaching centers. Performance of a student in school examination often depended on whether he/she attended the coaching centers run by their teachers. As students from poor families could not afford private coaching they lagged behind, and often dropped out.

Higher levels of education thus increasingly became a monopoly of the affluent and, rather than playing the role of a 'great equalizer,' turned into an instrument that promoted inequality in the society. The poor were marginalized. At the secondary level, they generally enrolled in the less expensive madrasah stream, received poor quality education, and very few managed to move to the next level of education. Most of those who did, however, could not get into a public or private university, and had to remain satisfied with a place in a poor quality private college. For them, landing with a job in the upper end of the labor market thus remained more as a dream than a reality.

Politicization of educational institutions since independence, particularly after the military takeover in 1982 and the transition to democratic rule in 1991 caused great harm to the education system. In the eighties, the country's military dictator, in order to mobilize political support for his regime, particularly from the religious groups, actively promoted the spread of madrasah education with public resources, which subsequent democratically elected regimes continued so as not to antagonize the religious groups. In order to establish control over the educational institutions, all political parties opened their student fronts.

As members of the parliament were made chairpersons of governing bodies of all educational institutions in their respective constituencies, at the time of recruitment of teachers, political background of the candidates rather than their academic credentials, often received greater consideration. Allegation of corruption was also rampant. All these developments compromised the quality of education at different levels. The proposed move by the present care taker government to dissociate educational institutions from party politics is definitely is in the right direction.

Even under the present circumstances, how can we ensure greater access of students from poor socio-economic background to high quality education?

Although the quality of education is generally poor in Bangladesh, there exist a few pockets of excellence such as the cadet colleges that admit students purely on merit through a nationwide competitive admission test, and the fees to be paid by the students are determined on the basis of their parents' income level. These are resourceful residential institutions with the highest per-student public resource allocation, operating in an environment free from all sorts of disturbances including political ones. Once admitted into a cadet college, a child from a poor household can pursue his/her education free of cost for six years, from Class VII to Class XII. The cadet colleges thus provide excellent opportunities to the children from poor households to acquire high quality secondary education that paves the way for accessing higher-quality education. The specialized nature of the admission test, requiring specialized and expensive pre-test coaching for success- conducted at a limited number of centers- however makes entry into cadet colleges extremely difficult for talented children from the poor households particularly from rural areas (Masum, 2005). If the cadet colleges can be persuaded to pursue a proactive policy in respect of admitting talented students from poor households on the basis of primary scholarship examination results, access of such students to the upper end of the labor market can be fairly ensured.

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