



Summary Position Paper Quality Education

National Thematic Forum

The National Thematic Forum is an apex body and a theme-based platform for civil society and grassroots/local organisations. It provides an opportunity for civil society representatives, government actors, and other stakeholders to engage in discussion and formulate recommendations exclusively dedicated to citizens' priorities in Bangladesh. This position paper is based on the experience of the 'National Thematic Forum' (NTF) members who are working at the national level to strengthen civil society and government accountability mechanisms in Bangladesh.

Problems Related to the Quality of Education at the Primary and Secondary Levels

Bangladesh has made good progress in achieving enrolment at both primary and secondary levels, and gender disparities have also been eliminated. However, the quality of education – both primary and secondary – in general, is poor. Around 83% of children complete primary education. However, completion rates decline at higher levels of education, with only 65% of children completing lower secondary education and just 29% completing higher secondary education. A mere 33% of children in Grade 3 have the appropriate reading skills for their grade, and only 18% have the expected level of numeracy skills. The proportion of children with foundational skills is higher among those in more advanced grades. The share with foundational reading skills rises to 74% by Grade 6 and to 91% by grade 10. Acquisition of numeracy skills lags behind somewhat, with 42% of children in Grade 6 and 65% of those in Grade 10 possessing the numeracy skills expected for Grade 3. The majority of out-of-school children lack foundational skills in both areas, with 23% found to have foundational reading skills and 14% found to have foundational numeracy skills (Bangladesh Education Fact sheet 2020, UNICEF).

Probable Causes of the Problems

There were several reasons identified through secondary literature and discussion with the NTF members that cause the low-quality of education in Bangladesh.

The major causal factors included are:

- poverty
- poor teacher performance
- safety and security
- curriculum and learning materials
- weak assessment systems and the burden of public examinations
- expanding coaching centres and guidebooks
- dysfunctional School Management Committees (SMCs)
- inadequate support for students with disabilities
- high teacher-student ratio

Other causes include:

- lack of skilled teachers
- low number of public schools
- parents' inadequate monitoring of their children
- low attendance of student and teachers
- high dropout rate
- lack of transportation options to and from schools
- high travel costs
- lack of mid-day meal provision for less privileged students
- little to no facilities for students' extra-curricular activities
- seasonal inaccessibility of schools in certain areas
- weak communication systems
- and language and cultural barriers

Consequences of poor-quality education for the People and the Community

The severity of the existing problems cannot be comprehended if one does not consider the consequences that low-quality education could have on the people and communities of Bangladesh. General consequences include:

- unemployment
- gender inequality
- social isolation
- illegal activities
- poor economy
- inadequate participation in political and social life
- increased cost of education

Possible and Practical Solutions to Overcome the Problem

Improving the quality of education requires multifaceted and mutually reinforcing strategies and actions on the part of school communities and public institutions. Some policy alternatives suggested by NTF members include:

- strengthening the School Management Committees and involving parents in school affairs
- developing an effective monitoring and evaluation system
- regulate private tutoring
- ensuring child-friendly schools and student-based teaching and learning
- regular updating of academic curricula
- reviewing teachers' recruitment and training practices
- ensuring access to quality education for all and promoting inclusive education
- reviewing the student assessment system and reducing the burden of too many public examinations
- strengthening teachers' ICT capacity to activate digital labs in schools
- rebuilding school WASH facilities focusing on inclusion

The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the NTF and researchers (Dr. S. M. Zulfiqar Ali and Rizwana Islam Moumita). It does not necessarily reflect the views of the Bangladesh Government, European Union, and the British Council