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Progress and Problems of Primary Education in Bangladesh: A Snapshot of 50 Years

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Abstract

Bangladesh is celebrating its golden jubilee of independence in 2021. This South Asian country has been struggling for ensuring equitable, compulsory, and free primary education since the British period. The main objective of this paper is to explore the progress and constraints of primary education in Bangladesh for the period of 1971 to 2020. This study was conducted following the documentary research method. The secondary data was collected from different personal and official documents. Following the data-driven thematic analysis, it is found that the number of schools, students, and teachers was expressively increased in the last 50 years in Bangladesh. Girls' access increased more than 20%, and the ratio of female teachers boosted 58.2% in primary schools. Moreover, the enrollment rate amplified more than 45%, where the dropout rate drastically decreased by 61% from 1976 to 2020. The education policies had some good suggestions for ensuring the progress of primary education. However, some of the recommendations have not been implemented yet. This study introduces a progress evaluation framework for analyzing the educational progress of developing countries in Asia and Africa.

Keywords: Primary Education, Policy, Progress, Bangladesh, Development

Background of the study

Bangladesh, a South Asian country, achieved independence through massive bloodshed from Pakistan in 1971. It has a long history of discrimination in primary education from the British to the Pakistan period. During the British period (1757-1947), Bangla (now Bangladesh) was lagging behind the region of the British Emperor, where the first steps towards universal primary education took place by accepting the Bengal primary education act 1930 (Mizan & Rahman, 2014). Similarly, in the Pakistan period (1947-1971), East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) faced regional discrimination towards primary education. As Asadullah (2010) stated that "the total number of primary schools in East Pakistan declined, leading to overcrowding of existing schools and classrooms" (p. 1).

Currently, Bangladesh is following the colonial education system (Mizan & Rahman, 2014) as a legacy of the British colony. Mainly, three streams of education are primary,

secondary, and tertiary education. Primary education has been treated as basic education in Bangladesh since its birth as a provision of constitution article-17. It is mentioned as equitable, free, and compulsory for all school-aged children (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). It has five years of education cycle with fifteen types of schools (Directorate of Primary Education, 2019). The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) played a leading role in managing primary education. However, the Ministry of Education (MoE) worked as a key stakeholder for formulating and taking new education policy.

During the last 50 years, several education policies have been taken to reform the education system in Bangladesh. In 1972, the first education commission was introduced, entitled "Bangladesh Education Commission", headed by Dr Quadrat-I-Khuda. He and his team submitted the final report in 1974. After four years of the first education commission, a new education policy was formed with the help of the National Education Advisory Committee in 1978 entitled "Interim Education Policy". In 1983, another education commission was formed named "Education Policy and Management Commission" headed by Dr Majid Khan (Islam, 2003). The third education commission was formed in 1988 called the "Bangladesh National Education Commission", led by Dr Mafizuddin Ahmed. In 1997, the Government of Bangladesh constituted a 56-members education commission headed by Dr M Shamsul Haque, the fourth education commission in Bangladesh. Then a six-member committee headed by Dr Nazrul Islam was formed in 1997, and they submitted a report in 2000 entitled "National Education Policy-2000". Another education commission was introduced to identify immediate implementable reforms of the education sector in 2001 headed by Dr M. Abdul Bari (Islam, 2003), known as the Bari commission. In 2003, a new education commission entitled "National Education Commission" was initiated. The head of that Commission was Dr Mohammad Moniruzzaman Miah. He and his team submitted a report in 2004. Finally, the present education policy was taken in 2010 entitled "National Education Policy-2010", though the committee was formulated in 2009 headed by Dr Kabir Chowdhury. Now Bangladesh Education Policy-2010 is the first education policy ever to work for ten or more years continuously. In the last 50 years, eight more education policies were prepared, whereas these policies remained unimplemented (Ministry of Education, 2010). Due to adopting different policies in the last five decades, the primary education of Bangladesh has not been able to set a holistic child development approach with tracking its progress and problems.

The rationale of the study

As Nelson Mandela said- 'Education is the most powerful weapon to change society'. Education helps increase gross domestic product (GDP), life expectancy and reduce poverty, early marriage, mortality, and morbidity rates. According to Reddy & Rao (2003), "education is directly associated with the gross domestic product, indirectly with poverty, population growth, health and crime rate" (p.1242). Mainly, primary education played a key role in building an illiteracy-free country and active citizen for society. In the last 50 years, Bangladesh has passed through consistent instabilities in politics and educational development. In 2021, Bangladesh is celebrating its golden jubilee of independence from Pakistan. During this period, this paper will create an opportunity for policymakers, researchers, and academics to review the progress and problem of primary education, which will help them to rethink future education.

This is the first attempt in Bangladesh to review primary education for the long period of 1971 to 2020 systematically. As per sustainable development goals (SDGs), Bangladesh must ensure quality primary education for all within 2030. This paper also helps the

MoPME and policymakers to identify the appropriate work ways to achieve SDG4. Moreover, this paper will introduce a progress analysis framework (PAF) for measuring the growth of education following some evidence, implications, and messages for policymakers, researchers, and academics in Bangladesh and for Less Developed Countries (LDCs) or Developing Countries.

Theoretical framework

The progress of education was analyzed in multiple ways in developed and developing countries. Several studies were conducted around the world. Firstly, a study was conducted in the USA for measuring the national progress in education by looking at the changes in data over time- like the number of schools, enrollment rate, school attendance, pupil teachers ratios, student assessment, source of revenues for schools, and expenditures per pupil (Snyder, 1993). Secondly, a study was conducted in India for evaluating the progress and constraints of primary education through analyzing the trends of literacy rate (urban-rural disparity and gender-social disparity), access to primary education (density of primary schools and enrollments vis-a-vis dropouts), expenditure on education (total expenditure, share of primary education in the budget, and expenditure per student), policy initiatives and implications (Reddy & Rao, 2003). Thirdly, another study was conducted in Ghana for assessing the educational progress and challenges of 50 years which tried to analyze the vision of education at the time of independence as a beginning stage, analyze the changes throughout the late 1960s to the mid-1980s as a shifting stage and analyze the late 2000 initiatives as reforming stage of education in Ghana (Akyeampong, 2010).

After reviewing these indicators, the author developed an analysis framework to analyze the progress and problems of primary education in Bangladesh. Three major areas are 'policy direction' from the independence, 'financial allocation' for smooth implementation, and 'numeric progress' over the period. These major areas have been analyzed through different indicators mentioned below the figure-1.

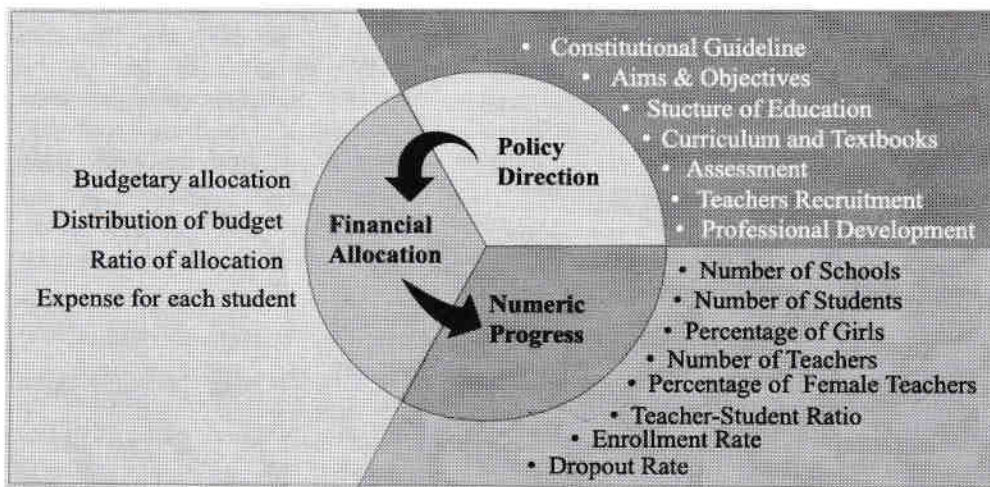


Figure 8: Progress Analysis Framework (Developed by author)

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this paper is to explore the periodical progress and constraints of primary education in Bangladesh for the period 1971 to 2020. The specific objectives of this paper are:

- a) to explore the policy direction for ensuring free, equitable, and compulsory primary education in Bangladesh for the period 1971 to 2020.
- b) to analyze the trends of financial allocation for primary education of the last five decades in Bangladesh.
- c) to identify the numeric development of primary education in the last 50 years in Bangladesh.

Methodology

This study was conducted following the principles of the documentary research method. According to Scott & Marshall (2015), documentary research mainly uses personal and official documents as materials. It may comprise secondary sources like newspapers, diaries, stamps, directories, handbills, maps, government statistical publications, photographs, paintings, gramophone records, tapes, and computer files.

The policy-related data was collected from different laws, education policies/commissions like- the Constitution of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Education Commission report 1974 (BEC74), Interim Education Policy report 1978 (IEP78), Education Policy and Management Commission report 1983 (EPMC83), Bangladesh National Education Commission report 1988 (BEC88), National Education Policy-1997 (NEP97), National Education Policy-2000 (NEP2000), Education Commission report 2001 (EC01), National Education Commission report 2004 (NEC04), and the National Education Policy-2010 (NEP10). The Compulsory Primary Education Law-1990 and other related laws have been analyzed thematically to meet the research objectives.

Besides, the financial allocation was analyzed based on the budgetary distribution of the last 50 years. These data were collected from the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Moreover, the numerical progress of primary education was analyzed based on statistical reports of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) published from 1970-71 to 2020. Besides, some data were collected from the World Bank Data Center, UNESCO Data Center, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, and the Ministry of Education.

Finally, the collected data were verified from different sources and analyzed to follow the data-driven thematic approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Result

The findings of this paper are presented thematically, maintaining the sequence of research objectives. Firstly, the policy directions for ensuring free, equitable, and compulsory primary education in Bangladesh from 1971 to 2020 related significant findings will be presented under sub-themes. Secondly, the budgetary allocation of the last five decades will be illustrated based on the second objectives of this paper. And finally, the numerical progress of primary education in Bangladesh will reveal thematically from 1971 to 2020. Mainly, the periodical progress and constraints of primary education in Bangladesh will be explored based on the progress analysis framework (figure:1).

Policy Direction

After independence from Pakistan in 1971, Bangladesh started its long-awaited journey under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and he introduced a new constitution in 1972. That constitution set a guideline for education that reflected later for formulating education policies. In the last 50 years of Bangladesh, all education policies identified aims and objectives, education structure, the basic component of curriculum and textbooks, assessment strategies, teachers' recruitment process, and professional development guidelines for primary education.

Constitutional Guideline

In 1972, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh identified free and compulsory education as fundamental principles of state policy. This policy illustrated that "the state shall adopt effective measures for –establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law" (Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, p.6). As per the guideline of the constitution, the Bangladesh Education Commission-1974 (BEC74), Interim Education Policy 1978 (IEP78) and Bangladesh National Education Commission-1988 (BNEC88) gave suggestions to ensure compulsory primary education. However, it did not implement before establishing a law in 1990 called "Compulsory Primary Education Law-1990". The President of Bangladesh signed this law on 13th February 1990. In 1992 it was implemented as a pilot basis, and finally, in 1993, that law was effectively executed around the country.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of primary education depend on the overall aims and objectives of education. Similarly, education's overall aims and objectives depend on the 'fundamental principle of state policy. In the last five decades, seven education policies were formulated by the different governments at different regimes. These policies gave importance to developing the child physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, morally, humanely, and aesthetically and to inspire him/her to dream of a better life. However, the basic difference of aims and objectives of these policies was in a point that was "fundamental principle of the state policy". In 1972, the Constitution of Bangladesh identified 'secularism' as one of the four fundamental principles of state policy. But after the fifth amendment in 1979, a major change occurred in the fundamental principle of the state policy of constitution that was 'secularism' replaced with 'absolute trust and faith in the almighty Allah'. Though in 2011, the fifteenth amendment reestablished 'secularism' in the constitution.

Structure of Education

In different education policies tried to identify the duration of primary education either five years or eight years. The BEC74, BNEC88, the National Education Policy 1997 (NEP97), National Education Policy 2000 (NEP2000), and National Education Policy 2010 (NEP10) recommended for eight years of primary education whereas the IEP78 and National Education Commission-2003 (NEC03) recommended for five years of primary schooling. Now Bangladesh is practicing five years of primary schooling while the NEP10 stated that

"... the duration of primary education will be extended from Class V to Class VIII. This 8-year long primary education will be ensured for all children of the country, regardless of gender, socio-economic conditions,

and ethnicity by 2018 through the implementation of appropriate methods” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 13).

In the last 50 years, Bangladesh could not move from five years of primary schooling to eight years.

Curriculum and Textbooks

In the last 50 years, all of these education policies emphasise modern, scientific, life-skill-based, and pre-vocational oriented primary education for the future generation. From 1971 to 2020, the curriculum and textbooks did not prepare as per suggestions of policies. All of these education policies are encouraged to teach the children in the mother tongue ‘*Bangla*’. Besides, ‘*English*’ was identified as a second language that has to be learned from grade six (Ministry of Education, 1974 and 1988), grade three (Ministry of Education, 1997 and 2000), and grade one (Ministry of Education, 2003 and 2010). Now ‘*English*’ is a compulsory subject at the primary level in Bangladesh from grade one.

There was another debate about faith-based education at the primary level. It has a close relationship with the aims and objectives of primary education and the fundamental principle of state policy. In different policies, faith-based education is acknowledged as an optional subject for the primary level (Ministry of Education, 1974). It could be compulsory from grade three (Ministry of Education, 1997 and 2000) recommended by different commissions. Besides, the NEC03 identified religious education as compulsory from grade two, whereas some policies recognized that faith-based education should be compulsory from grade one (Ministry of Education, 1978, 1988, and 2010). All seven education policies/commissions recommended that *Bangla*, Mathematics, Social Environment, and Science should have treated as basic subjects for the students of primary level in Bangladesh.

Assessment

Both formative and summative exams were prioritised in all education policies/commissions. They mostly recommended a paper-pencil test from grades one to five for compulsory subjects and oral tests for other elective subjects. All of the education policies/commissions had a suggestion to take ‘primary education completing examination (PECE)’ either centrally or locally. For example, a commission stated that a school-based examination should be taken through district-based questions at the end of grades five and eight. Students should be identified for a merit-based scholarship (Ministry of Education, 1974). Similarly, another policy told that “after completion of primary education, a final examination should be arranged under a separate primary education board and the certificate should be issued for students” (Ministry of Education, 1978, p.22). The latest education policy was also similarly recommended for PECE and stated that at the end of grade five, the Education Boards would take a terminal examination at Upazila/ Pourashava/ Thana levels (of big cities) with an identical set of questions (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Teachers Recruitment

Teachers' supply is an important issue for ensuring quality education. A commission stated

“...if the highest qualified persons irrespective of male or female are not selected at all levels of teaching and if society fails to recognize the important role played by teachers in our national life, no education reform is ever likely to succeed” (Ministry of Education, 1974, p.172).

So, the standard of education partially depends on the standard of teachers. In the last 50 years, every education policy recommended meritorious and highly skilled teachers for primary schools. All the policies suggested increasing the number of female teachers at the primary level, and it was correctly implemented. Data showed that the percentage of female teachers increased by 48.2% in the last 50 years. Besides, a policy direction was to establish a separate teacher selection commission similar to the public service commission for selecting teachers at the primary level (Ministry of Education, 2010), while it was not implemented yet.

Professional Development

All education policies emphasize ensuring teachers' professional development after getting an appointment as a young teacher at the government primary schools. For example, a policy revealed, "immediately after their recruitment, primary teachers will undergo 2- months' foundation training" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p.65).

Mainly, Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) worked for providing teachers professional development related training as either Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) or Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd). For example, a commission recommended upgrading PTIs as colleges and changing their curriculum by improving one-year-long courses to two years (Ministry of Education, 1974). Similarly, the recent policy wanted to improve the existing teacher education program and recommended

"...the existing primary teachers training program is known as C- in- Ed will be revised and the duration of the new programs will be one year and a half instead of one. Modern strategies of teaching-learning and evaluation will be incorporated" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p.65).

Now 67 PTIs have been providing one and a half year-long (96 credit hours) DPEd program for primary school teachers since 2012. This training modality is in-service through a policy recommended that it be pre-service (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Financial Allocation

After starting a new journey in 1972, Bangladesh has prioritised the education sector for addressing education in the constitution, introducing a new education commission, and allocating 2.8% of the total budget in the primary education sector. Every education policy identified the financial issues and recommended allocating five to seven percent of total national income in the education sector and to spend 60% of the total education budget for primary education.

For example, the first education commission recommended to share 5% of the total national income in the education sector and to spend 60% of its' on primary education (Ministry of Education, 1974). Besides, the other education policies recommended sharing 7% of the total national income in the education sector (Ministry of Education, 1978 and 2010).

Budgetary allocation in 50 years

For implementing education policies in the last 50 years, Bangladesh allocated a minimum amount of money that was not more than 3% of GDP. Data shows that it was less than 1% of total GDP in the 90s though it reached nearly 2% in 2018 (UIS Statistics, 2020). The table-1 shows the overall financial allocation in primary education sectors from 1972 to 2020.

Table 2: Financial allocation in the primary sector in the last 50 years

FY	Expenditure [In Million Bangladesh Taka (BDT)]			% of allocation in primary education	Per Student Expenditure (In BDT)
	Revenue	Development	Total		
1972-73	181.9	41.1	223.0	2.8%	44
1980-81	939.9	239.0	1178.9	2.9%	142
1990-91	5385.0	1910.2	7295.2	5.0%	611
2000-01	13700.0	13540.0	27540.0	7.1%	1559
2010-11	48550.0	32070.0	80620.0	6.1%	4769
2020-21	155360.0	94040.0	249400.0	4.4%	12394

(Sources: Budget of FY 1972-73, 1980-81, 1990-91, 2000-2001, 2010-11 & 2021-22)

At the beginning of the birth of Bangladesh, in the Fiscal Year (FY) 1972-72, a total of 223 million BDT was allocated in primary education. In 1980-81 FY, 1178.9 million BDT was distributed in the primary education sector, reaching 7295.2 million BDT in 1990-91 FY. The amount of budget in the primary education sector was dramatically increased in the FY 2000-2001; the amount was 27540 million BDT. This allocation was increased nearly three times from FY 2000-01 to FY 2010-11. A total of 80620 million BDT was allocated for primary education in FY 2010-11. Finally, in FY 2020-21, a total of 249400 million BDT was allocated in the primary education sector that was three times more than FY 2010-11 and 1118.3 times more than the budget of FY 1972-73.

Trends of revenue vs development portion

The trends of revenue vs development budget were increased gradually over the period. The table:1 shows that most of the budget allocation goes to the revenue sector than the development sector. Mainly, the revenue budget spends as operating cost, whereas the development budget goes to infrastructure development. The allocation trends in the revenue sector were 81.6% in FY 1972-73 and 79.7% in FY 1980-81. At the same time, it was slightly reduced (73.8%) in FY 1990-91. The allocation between revenue and development budget was fifty-fifty in FY 2000-2001 though the revenue was moderately increased by 60.2% in FY 2010-11 and 62.3% in FY 2020-21.

Trends of allocation in primary education

The trends of allocation in the primary education sector show in Table:1 that in FY 1972-73, the proportion of primary education was 2.8% of the total budget, whereas it slightly increased by 2.9% in the budget of FY 1980-81. The allocation was gradually increased and reached 5.0% in FY 1990-91 and 7.1% in the FY 2000-2001 budget. Besides, the proportion of the primary education budget slightly decreased in FY 2010-11 that was 6.1% of the total budget. Currently, in the budget of FY 2020-21, the allocation of primary education was 4.4% of the total budget which indicates that was the least allocation of the last four decades.

Trends of per-student expenditure

Data shows (table:1) that per-student yearly cost gradually improved for the period 1971 to 2020. In FY 1972-73, a total of 44 BDT had been spent in a year for a student while it was 142 BDT in FY 1980-81 and 611 BDT in FY 1990-91. The amount of money crossed one thousand and five hundred BDT in FY 2000-2001 for a student in a year and reached 4 thousand in FY 2010-11. However, expenditure per student in a year intensely reached 12 thousand in FY 2020-21, which is the highest per-student expenditure over the period.

Numeric Progress

The last 50 years were a rising moment for Bangladesh in the education sector and other sectors. Economically, Bangladesh was recognized as an ‘Emerging Asian Tiger’ due to rapid growth where the workers played a key role. The table-2 shows that in 1970, the total population was 64.2 million though now it is 164 million. The growth of the population in the last fifty years was 156.7% which was driven to boost the numeric progress of education in Bangladesh. The table below presents the scenario of primary education in terms of numbers.

Table 3: Population distribution in the last 50 years

Year	Population (Million)	Age group (0-4)	Age group (4-6)	Age group (6-11)	Age group (12-18)	Age group (18+)	Median Age
1970	64.2	18.3	9.5	16.5	14.4	49.4	17.8
1980	79.6	17.4	9.2	16.7	16.6	48.4	17.4
1990	103.2	15.4	8.8	16.4	16.2	51.2	18.6
2000	127.7	12.8	7.5	14.6	16.0	56.3	21.0
2010	147.6	10.4	6.4	13.0	14.7	61.8	24.0
2020	164.7	8.7	5.3	10.8	13.1	67.6	27.6

(Source: Worldometer, World Population Prospects 2019)

After independence in 1971, Bangladesh numerically confirmed the progress in different areas including the number of educational institutions, students, teachers, the proportion of girls’ student and female teachers, enrollment rates, and dropout rates. Behind this significant progress, the policy directions and financial allocations worked as a tonic for primary education in Bangladesh.

Table 4: Progress of primary education in 50 years

Year	Schools	Students	Ratio of Girls	Teachers	Female Teachers	Teacher Student Ratio	Enrollment Rate	Dropout Rate
1971	28,731	50,90,003	31.8	1,17,275	2.2	1:43	52.0	78.9*
1981	40,926	82,85,807	40.3	1,49,909	7.6	1:55	67.7	62.2
1990	45,917	1,19,39,949	44.8	1,89,508	19.4	1:63	83.8	60.0
2000	78,014	1,76,67,985	48.9	3,08,937	30.0	1:57	84.0	48.3
2010	82,674	1,69,04,546	50.5	3,80,957	45.6	1:44	94.8	39.8
2020	1,29,258	2,01,22,337	51.1	7,21,801	60.4	1:28	97.3	17.9

(Source: BANBEIS, 1984; BANBEIS, 1981; BANBEIS, 1990; BANBEIS, 2000; BANBEIS, 2010; BANBEIS, 2020; World Bank Data Center, 2020; UNESCO Data Center, 2020, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, 2010; and Ministry of Education, 2014; *Dropout rate in 1976)

Number of Schools

The number of primary schools had increased gradually from 1971 to 2020. Data shows that there were nearly 29 thousand schools in 1971, these numbers reached around

41 thousand in 1981. The number of schools increased slightly from 1981 to 1990 that was around 46 thousand. In 2000, 78 thousand primary schools were operating while this number reached more than 82 thousand in 2010. In the last decades, nearly fifty thousand schools were included in the total list of primary schools. Now in Bangladesh, more than 129 thousand primary schools are functioning at the primary level of which 75 thousand schools are managed by the MoPME (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, 2019).

Number of Students

At the time of independence in 1971, more than five million students were studying at the primary schools whereas it increased by three million after ten years in 1981. In 1990, nearly 12 million students were at the primary level and this number reached 17.6 million in 2000. Although, the number of students slightly decreased in 2010 from 2000, around 17 million students were at primary schools. In 2020, a total of 20.1 million students are studying at primary schools in Bangladesh, which is four times larger than the number of students in 1971.

Percentage of Girls

The table-3 above shows that gender disparity was one of the problems in 1971 due to the poor proportion (31.8%) of girls at primary schools. This scenario started to be changed in 1981, the ratio of girls reached 40.3% at primary schools. The proportion of girls at the primary level was gradually increased by 44.8% in 1990, 48.9% in 2000, and 50.5% in 2010. In 2020, more than half (51.1%) of the students of primary schools are girls.

Number of Teachers

The number of teachers was increased simultaneously with the number of schools for the last 50 years. In 1971, more than 117 thousand teachers worked at primary schools, which reached around 309 thousand in 2000. Recently in 2020, more than 722 thousand teachers have been working at primary schools in Bangladesh.

Proportion of Female Teachers

The table-3 above shows that the proportion of female teachers were significantly increased from 1971 to 2020. In 1971, the proportion of female teachers was 2.2% which marginally increased (7.6%) in 1981. The number of female teachers was gradually increased and the ratio of female teachers was 19.4% in 1990 that reached 30.0% in 2000. Mainly, the proportion of female teachers was highly improved in the last two decades that was 45.6% in 2010 and now it is 60.4% in 2020.

Teacher-Students Ratio

Data (table-3) shows the teacher-student ratio of the last 50 years. In 1971, the teacher-students ratio was 1:43 which also increased to 1:55 in 1981. In the 90s, this ratio reached at least point (1:63). The situation of the teacher-student ratio was gradually improved after the 90s. In 2000, it was 1:57 and in 2010 this ratio was 1:44. The teacher-student ratio is 1:28 in 2020, which improved around 65% in the last 50 years.

Enrolment Rate

Over the last five decades, Bangladesh faced numerous challenges to increase the enrolment rate. Data shows that nearly half of the children were out of school in 1971. One of the main challenges for a newly independent country was to improve the enrolment rate at the primary level. In 1971, the enrolment rate was 52.0%, reaching 67.7% in 1981 and 83.8% in 1990. After having taken a law on compulsory primary education in 1993, this rate was extended 84.0% in 2000 and considerably reached 94.8% in 2010. Now the

enrolment rate in Bangladesh is 97.3% which significantly increased by 45% from 1971 to 2020.

Dropout Rate

The dropout rate was one of the major challenges of primary education in Bangladesh for the last five decades. The dropout rate was 78.9% in 1976 which steadily decreased over the period. This rate was 62.2% in 1981, 60.0% in 1990, 48.3% in 2000 and 39.8% in 2010 respectively. Mainly, the dropout rate was considerably reduced from 2010 to 2020 which reached only 17.9% in 2020.

Implications

This study has different implications for the researchers, policymakers, and academics not only in Bangladesh but also in LDCs and other developing countries in Asia and Africa.

Implication for further research

Bangladesh showed enormous progress in the quantitative development of education in the last five decades after independence in 1971. In the last 50 years, the number of schools increased by 349.9%, the number of students also increased 295.3%, and the number of teachers significantly increased by 515.5%. Besides, the proportion of girls increased by more than 20%, and the ratio of female teachers boosted by 58.2%. Moreover, the enrollment rate amplified more than 45%, where the dropout rate significantly decreased to 61% over the period. The researchers explored the causes of such kind of vast development in the primary education sector in Bangladesh. Especially, they also explored how Bangladesh could make such huge progress in terms of the number of schools, teachers, students, enrollment rate, and decreasing dropout rate despite having 250 years' history of past discrimination.

It is expected that shortly, it will be possible to replicate this study in other developing countries or the LDCs for measuring their progress in primary education. The progress analysis framework will help them identify the indicators or add additional variables to analyze their progress. Broadly, the international donor agencies and development organizations may take initiatives to analyze the educational progress of multi-countries with similar socio-economic conditions like Bangladesh based on this analysis framework.

Implication for policymakers

Bangladesh took nine education policies /commissions in the last 50 years though no one could be implemented properly except the recent one taken in 2010. In all the policies, there were some good suggestions for ensuring progress and quality of primary education. Some of the recommendations have not been implemented yet like eight years of primary education cycle, learning-friendly assessment policy, independent teacher selection authority (like public service commission), primary teachers' training college, pre-service teacher education program, recruitment of motivated and meritorious teachers, allocate more than 5% of GDP and distribute more than 60% of the total education budget in the primary sector. This study helps the policymakers to take the necessary steps to mitigate the issues mentioned above.

Bangladesh tried to focus more on quality education in the last few years as mentioned in goal no four of the Sustainable Development SDGs). This study explored the quantitative progress of the last five decades where the quality issues were ignored in any way. Hence, this study presents an overall picture of primary education of Bangladesh to

the policymakers that will guide them to take required policies, initiatives, and measures for ensuring quality

Implication academics

'Progress and problems of the primary education in Bangladesh' is a burning issue for policy studies, international and comparative education studies, the foundation of education studies, and documentary research areas. The academics may use these study findings to describe how a less developed country showed massive progress in primary education with more than 20 million students in the classroom. It is an excellent example for LDCs and developing countries of Asia and Africa to compare the progress and problems in terms of quantity. Besides, this paper will also help the students who want to work in education sectors in the LDCs and developing countries in the coming days.

Conclusion

In the last 50 years, Bangladesh developed considerably in the primary education sector in quantitative development. Many developing countries treated Bangladesh as a role model for achieving unprecedented enrollment rates and reducing the dropout rate after promising MDGs. It could be possible for political steadiness since 2009, smooth financial allocation from 1990, and acknowledging the primary education sector as a prioritized area for human development. Besides, the quality of primary education remains a big challenge for Bangladesh. Nevertheless, it has been working after signing SGDs and moving forward to achieve quality through quantity. This paper will help the policymakers of developing countries identify the way forwards for achieving quality primary education.

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