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Manzoor Ahmed
Advisory Editor

Abu Hamid Latif
Editor

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Notes from the Editor

This first issue for 2017 presents two articles on early grade reading and two on concepts and status of education quality with special reference to Indian education.

Researchers from the Read Project of Save the Children -- **Jane Leer, Liana Gertsch, Shahana Parvin Lata, and Akter Hossain** -- report on baseline assessment of early grade reading skill in the Khagrachari district in Chittagong Hill Tracts, which is the home of ethnic minorities, whose home languages are not Bangla. Quantitative and qualitative data reveal that language, socioeconomic status, and the home literacy environment -- especially access to reading materials at home -- are the main drivers of learning disparities. Household socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of word recognition and sentence construction skills, as well as the likelihood of being a reader. These challenges are compounded by the dearth of reading materials in indigenous languages, and low levels of parental support for schooling among indigenous families, who have come to expect little from an education system that is not inclusive of their language and culture.

Jurana Aziz writes on an action research on intervention through volunteer tutors for struggling readers of English at the early level in Bangladesh. The proposition of the action research is that volunteer tutor support to assist the struggling learners, who are slow in reading compared to other students in a class, can help overcome their challenge.

Priyanka Bhau and Jasbir Singh write about some challenges in Indian Basic Education. The authors contend that the quality of education services and the provisions that promote the skills and competencies relevant to life and livelihood of learners must be given attention to bring about the necessary changes in the Indian education system. This paper throws light, based on data from the 71st National Sample Survey, on various challenges faced by the Indian education system.

Manzoor Ahmed refers to the recurrent theme of elusiveness of education quality, both in terms of the concept and the practices to realise it in education systems. J.P. Naik's 'elusive triangle' is recalled and the slow advance in this respect in over four decades is discussed. The article concludes by posing the question whether, Target 7 of the single overarching education goal for SDG4, particularly focusing on the purposes of education, does not add to the elusiveness of the quality objectives of education and complexities of realising them.

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Baseline Assessment of Early Grade Reading Skill: Khagrachari, CHT, Bangladesh

Jane Leer^{*}
Liana Gertsch^{**}
Shahana Parvin Lata^{***}
Akter Hossain^{****}

Abstract

This report synthesizes data from a baseline survey of primary school students' reading skills and a situational analysis of learning and language use in the Chittagong Hills Tracts. Data were collected in Khagrachari district. Together, these findings will inform literacy programming by exploring strengths and weaknesses in literacy development and identifying groups of students who are struggling to read at grade level. Quantitative and qualitative data from both sources reveal that language, socioeconomic status, and the home literacy environment—especially access to reading materials at home—are the main drivers of learning disparities. Household socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of word recognition and sentence construction skills, as well as the likelihood of being a reader. The languages most commonly spoken in the home are Chakma (50 percent) and Tripura (21 percent), followed by Bangla (14 percent) and Marma (8 percent). Most students speak only one language at home, but about 4 percent speak more than one language. Bangla, the traditional medium of instruction, is the language most commonly spoken in classrooms (79 percent of students report speaking Bangla at school). The survey data reveal that Chakma, Marma, and Tripura are also frequently spoken in the classroom. About 40% of students report speaking more than one language in the classroom. These challenges are compounded by the dearth of reading materials in indigenous languages, and low levels of parental support for schooling among indigenous families who have come to expect little from an education system that is not inclusive of their language and culture.

Keywords: Multilingual education, Home literacy environment, Early grade reading assessment

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1. Introduction

Bangladesh has made dramatic strides in improving access to basic education, driven by strong government leadership and successful partnerships among government, donors and NGOs. Despite unprecedented gains in educational access, however, the government's National Student Assessment findings in 2011 and 2013 point to weak Bangla reading results in grades 3 and 5. The findings also indicate that reading skills decrease from third grade to fifth grade, suggesting that children fall more and more behind due to a weak foundation. This has a spillover effect for the education system and economy as a whole.

The Government of Bangladesh's (GOB) Third Primary Education Development Program (PEDP III) provides a comprehensive framework to address these challenges. The Reading Enhancement for Advancing Development (READ) project will support these efforts both inside and outside school walls.

READ is a 4-year collaboration, starting from October 2013, with the Government of Bangladesh, supported by the US Agency for International Development and implemented by Save the Children, to improve early grade reading skill. The project focuses on four areas of intervention: 1) teacher education and continuous professional development; 2) reading assessment; 3) increased availability of reading material, and 4) increased opportunities in the community to read and support to beginning readers by those outside the school walls.

In 2015, READ started working with 45 government primary schools in Khagrachari district in the Chittagong Hill Tracts - a multi-lingual environment. Prior to the intervention, SCI commissioned a situational analysis about language use in schools and communities. Save the Children also conducted a baseline survey of reading skills and students' background that is consistent with READ's baseline in other regions of the country.

This report synthesizes the findings from the situational analysis and the baseline data, with particular attention to how language use at home and in the classroom shapes children's literacy development. These outputs will inform whether SCI will take a customized approach in CHT and, if so, in what way; for what reason.

2. Methodology

This section summarizes the two separate analyses that inform this report: the situational analysis and the baseline reading skills data.

2.1 Situational analysis

The objective of the situational analysis was to understand the learning challenges facing children enrolled in government primary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Data were collected in March and April of 2015 in Khagrachari district by Innovision Consulting. Table 1 describes the data and methods of this analysis.

Table 1: Situational analysis: data and methods

Method	Description
Teacher survey	44 teachers from 27 schools. Schools were chosen randomly, stratified by community (Chakma, Marma and Tripura). The survey asked teachers about their knowledge of Bangla, Chakma, Tripura and Marma languages, and the challenges they face in the classroom (mostly having to do with language).
Focus group discussions	9 focus groups (3 from each upzilla). Each focus group included 8 to 10 community members and parents
In-depth interviews	16 total (6 school teachers, 3 school committee members, 3 NGO staff, 1 district education officer, 3 upzilla education officers)
Classroom observation	9 classrooms (3 schools selected randomly from each upzilla)

2.2 READ baseline assessment

Baseline data were collected in May and June of 2015. The purpose of the baseline survey is to understand children's strengths and weaknesses in literacy development, and to identify groups of students needing additional literacy support in order to read at grade level. In total, the baseline survey includes 2,112 students from grades 1, 2 and 3 from 69 schools in the Khagrachari district. All students were assessed in Bangla. Table 2 describes the literacy measures assessed in the baseline. The content of the assessments for each measure was specific to each grade level.

Table 2: Reading skills assessed

Measure	Description
Letter identification (first and second graders only)	The number of Bangla letters correctly identified (out of 50)
Beginning sound identification (first and second graders only)	The number of similar beginning sounds detected (out of 10 sets of words from grades 1, 2 and 3 textbooks). Each set included 3 words, out of which 2 had a similar beginning sound.
Detecting rhyme (first and second graders only)	The number of ending rhymes detected (out of 10 sets of words from grades 1, 2 and 3 textbooks). Each set included 3 words, of which 2 rhymed.
Single word recognition	The number of words correctly read aloud by the child (out of 20 of the most frequently used Bangla words in grades 1, 2 and 3 textbooks).
Reading	Children are classified as a reader if they can correctly read at least 5 words in reading passage within 30 seconds.
Fluency	The number of words in a reading passage read correctly per minute.
Accuracy	The number of words in a reading passage read correctly (out of the total number of words in the passage).

Measure	Description
Reading comprehension	The number of comprehension questions answered correctly out of 10 questions about the reading passage.
Ability to decode pseudo word (third graders only)	The number of nonsense words correctly decoded (out of 20 common Bangla words with the letters rearranged).
Antonym identification (third graders only)	The number of antonyms given (corresponding to 10 words from grade 3 Bangla textbook)
Sentence construction (third graders only)	The number of words (out of 8 words from grade 3 Bangla textbook) appropriately used to make a sentence.

In order to assess key dimensions of equity, the baseline assessment also collected information on students' background (gender, SES, language spoken at home) and home literacy environment (print materials available in the home, home reading habits, and literacy supportive interactions with family members). Appendix A presents summary statistics for the baseline sample.

2.3 Synthesis of methods

This report uses quantitative data from the baseline survey to present a snapshot of language use among students, teachers and families, the enabling environment surrounding students at home and in the community (access to print, encouragement from parents, etc.), children's baseline reading skills, and the socioeconomic and demographic factors that contribute to reading skills. Qualitative findings from the situational analysis are used to contextualize the results of the baseline assessment by providing a more in-depth analysis of students, teachers' and families' perceptions about the challenges facing students in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

3. Findings and Discussion

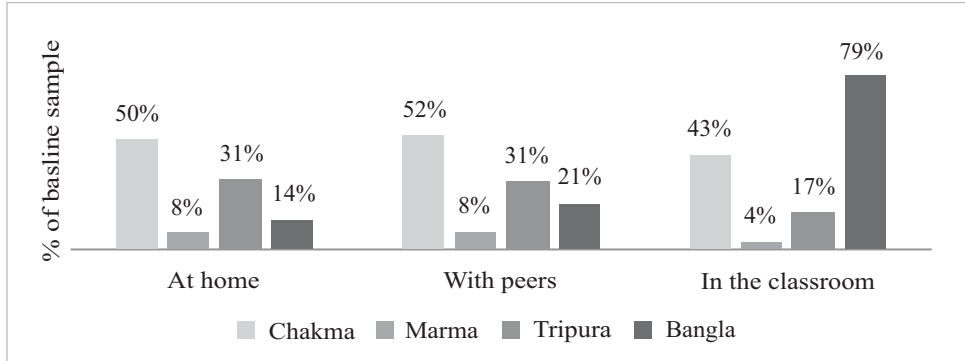
3.1 Language use at home and in schools

Results from the baseline survey demonstrate the diversity of languages spoken among students in the Khagrachari District. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the languages most commonly spoken in the home are Chakma (50 percent) and Tripura (31 percent), followed by Bangla (14 percent) and Marma (8 percent). Most students speak only one language at home, but about 4 percent speak more than one language.

Bangla, the traditional medium of instruction, is the language most commonly spoken in classrooms (79 percent of students report speaking Bangla at school). However, both survey data and the situational analysis reveal that Chakma, Marma, and Tripura are also frequently spoken in the classroom, as can be seen in figures 1 and 2. About 40% of students report speaking more than one language in the classroom (Baseline 2015). Indeed, the situational analysis finds that teachers frequently use multiple languages in the classroom in order to improve students' understanding of the material (Chakma is the language most frequently used). However, while most of the teachers interviewed report at least some degree of competency in Chakma, Tripura or Marma, few are fluent in these languages, which limits

the extent to which they can facilitate learning among non-Bangla speakers. This challenge is compounded by the fact that teachers’ language and ethnicity are not considered in teaching assignments. As a result, schools serving indigenous communities frequently end up with teachers who have only limited fluency in languages other than Bangla¹.

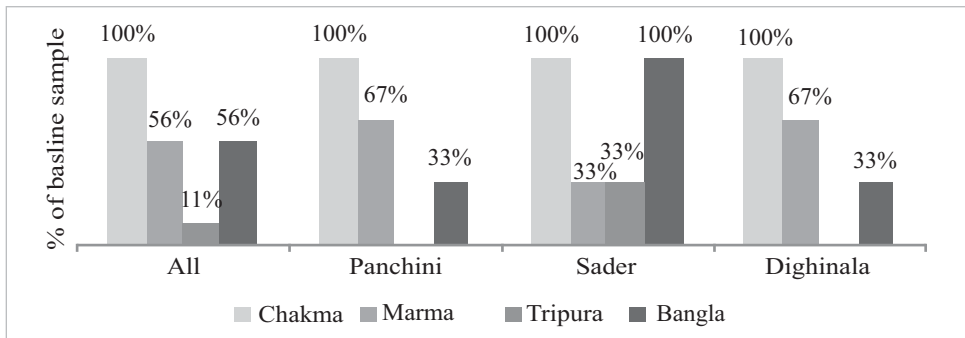
Figure 1: Languages spoken at home, in the classroom, and with peers



Source: Baseline data (2015)

Note: Language questions were multiple response, meaning that students could indicate all of the languages spoken at home, with peers, and in the classroom.

Figure 2: Language use in the classroom, by Upazilla



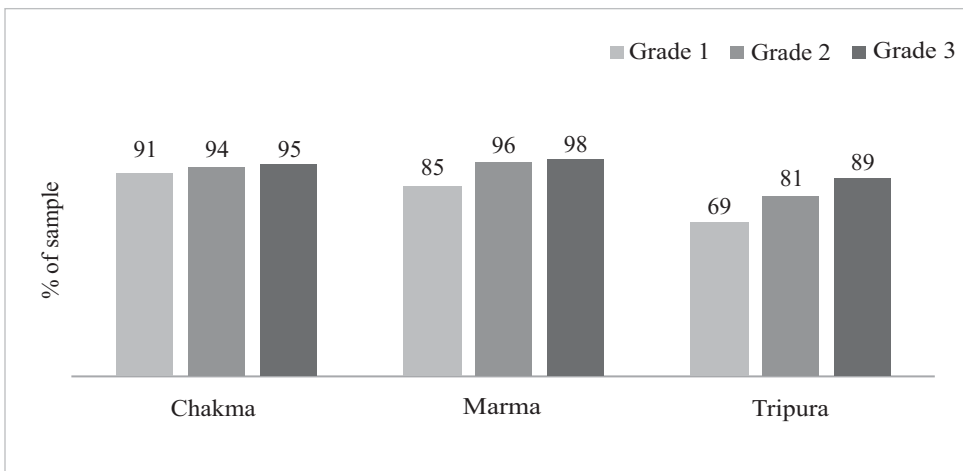
Source: Classroom observations (Situational analysis 2014)

Note: 9 classroom observations were conducted, 3 in each upazilla. Data are not representative. Language questions were multiple response, meaning that classroom observers could indicate all of the languages spoken at home, with peers, and in the classroom.

¹ Source: Interviews with teachers and education officials (Situational analysis)

The majority of teachers surveyed in the situational analysis consider low levels of Bangla comprehension among students to be one of the primary challenges they face in the classroom. **44% of teachers surveyed rate students' understanding of Bangla "low" and 11% "very low."** This diverges slightly from students' self-reported (baseline) data. Overall, 90% of students say they can understand the language of instruction. Encouragingly, this percentage increases over time, from 85% in first grade to 95% in third grade. **There are clear disparities between language groups**, however, as depicted in figure 3.

Figure 3: Percentage of students who can understand the language of instruction by grade level and home language



Source: Baseline data (2015)

Note: Differences between Tripura and other language groups are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) for all grade levels.

The dearth of learning materials in languages other than Bangla poses a further challenge. Teachers, families, and education officials note that **classroom textbooks and lesson plans do not reflect indigenous culture or languages**. Two quotes from the situational analysis highlight this issue:

"In the text books, students read about green fields, trees, paddy fields, but in the reality they see hilly areas, therefore they cannot relate their learning with the real world" (Teacher).

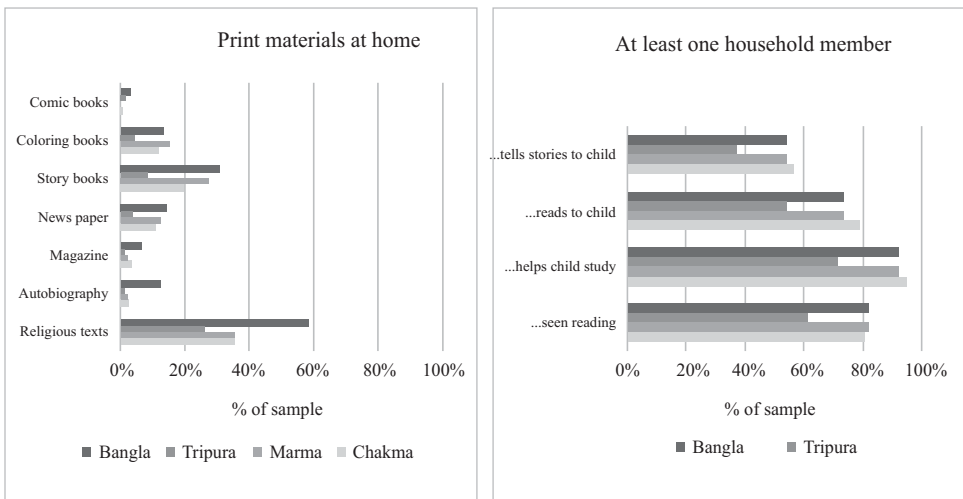
"The presence of cultural activities of the tribal areas in the text books would make it easier for the tribal children to learn" (Upazilla Education Official, Dighinala Upazilla).

3.2 Enabling environment

Outside of the classroom, an important aspect of reading development concerns the enabling environment in children’s homes and communities. To what extent do parents and family members encourage students to read or study? What kind of access do children have to books and print at home? What community resources exist to help children practice their reading skills?

In order to assess the enabling environment, the baseline survey asked students a series of questions about the availability of print materials in their homes and the types of literacy supportive interactions they have with family members. Here, the disparities between language groups stands out: Tripura speaking students are less likely to have access to child friendly print material at home, and are less likely to engage in literacy supportive activities with family members.

Figure 4: Home literacy environment, by language group



Source: Baseline data (2015)

Note: Data shown are for all grade levels. Differences between Tripura and other language groups are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$ for all items except for access to magazines ($p < 0.01$) and access to comic books (not significant).

Household socioeconomic status (as measured by the total number of household assets) is also a strong predictor of the home literacy environment. **Students from the poorest households on average have 0 to 1 types of reading materials in the home**, while students

from **better off households have 2 to 3 types of reading materials²**. Likewise, **50 percent of students from the poorest households have at least someone who in their household who reads to them, compared to 80 percent of children from better off households**. These differences are statistically significant.

In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, as in many contexts, socioeconomic status and language are closely related. Tripura speakers and Chakma speakers are comparable in terms of socioeconomic status, although Tripura speakers are slightly poorer than Chakma speakers. Meanwhile, Bangla and Marma speakers are significantly more advantaged than both groups³. This highlights the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and exclusion.

Data from the situational analysis provide further insight into the enabling environment. Through interviews with parents, community members, and teachers, the authors find overall **low levels of parental support for education, which they attribute primarily to cultural and language barriers. Parents are less inclined to see the value of an education that does not respect their culture and language**. Likewise, parents with low levels of education and/or low levels of Bangla competency are less able to help their children study, and therefore less likely to encourage their children to attend school or to develop home study habits. These challenges accumulate as children get older. As a result, **school repetition and drop out are common among older students**.

Parents with the economic means to do so hire private tutors to help their children develop Bangla skills. Interestingly, the situational analysis suggests that only a small proportion of parents are able to do so, but 63 percent of students sampled in the baseline survey receive reading and writing help from a private tutor. Television programs are another learning resource for non-Bangla speakers. According to parents, many children learn Bangla by watching television programs broadcast in Bangla. However, home television-sets are by no means universal, only 20% of students surveyed at baseline have televisions at home.

Outside of the home, non-Bangla speakers find limited opportunities to practice their Bangla skills. In this regard, children living in urban areas and/or communities close to Bangalee communities are generally more advantaged than their indigenous peers from rural or isolated communities, in part because they have more opportunities to practice Bangla outside of school (for example at the hat-bazaar, where transactions are conducted in Bangla)⁴.

3.3 Reading skills

This section provides an overview of children's reading skills at baseline. Figures 5 and 6 present reading skills by grade level. With the exception of comprehension, it is encouraging to see that children's average reading skills improve from grade to grade⁵.

² Household socioeconomic status is estimated based on the number of household assets (electricity, refrigerator, TV, livestock, land, bicycle, and motorcycle) that children report having at their home.

³ Source: Baseline data 2015

⁴ Source: Situational analysis 2014

⁵ Ho Although, to be clear, these data do not track the same students over time, and as such differences between grade levels are only suggestive of trends over time.

Notably, the percentage of readers nearly doubles from year to year, from 24% in first grade, to 50% in second grade, and 69% in third grade⁶. Overall, the results of the baseline assessment are consistent with parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of students’ reading and writing abilities: namely, that most students **“can read and recognize the alphabet and punctuation marks, but they read without understanding meaning.”**

Figure 5: Early grade reading skills

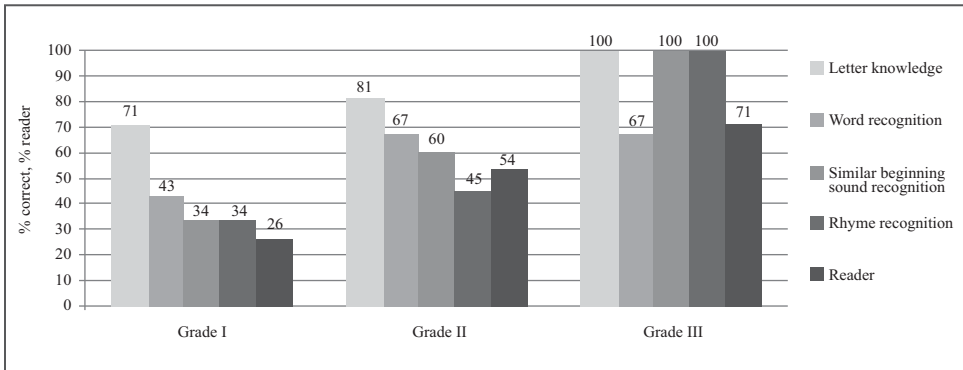
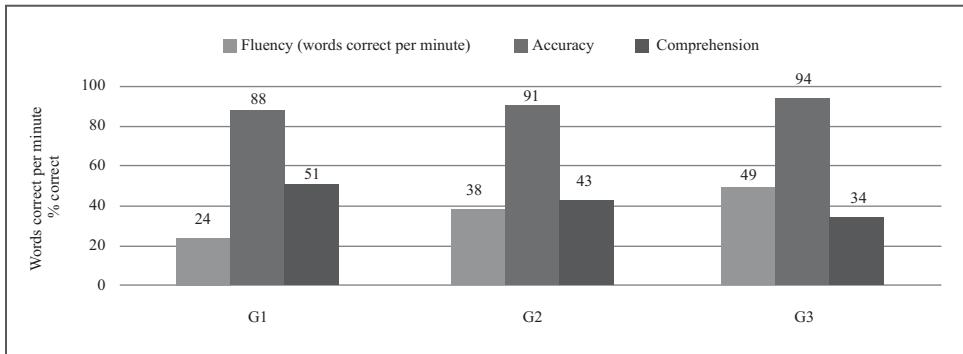


Figure 6: Higher order skills (readers only)

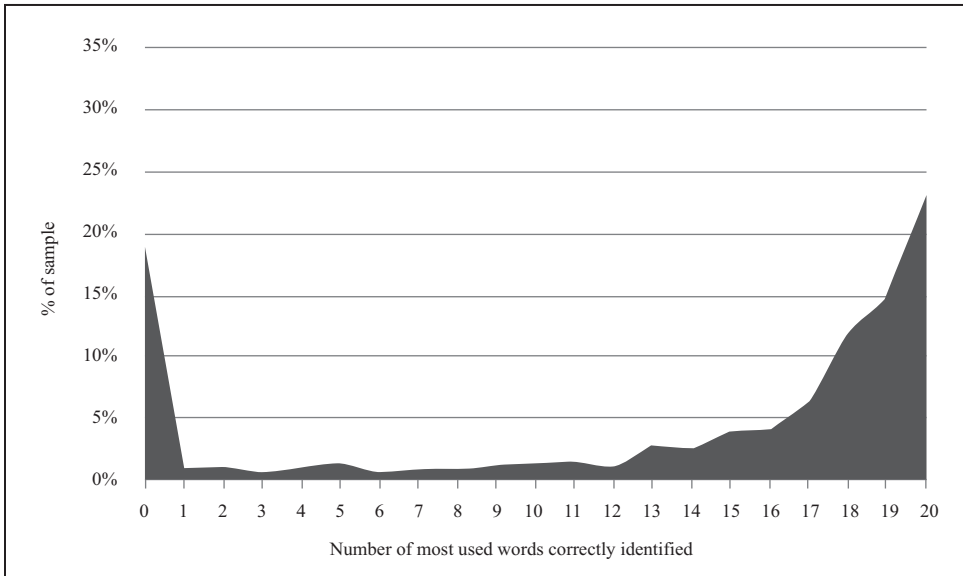


In Bangladesh as in many contexts, the distribution of students’ reading scores is slightly bimodal; meaning that students tend to cluster at the extremes: some can identify very few letters, words, or sounds correctly, while others identify close to all letters, words or sounds

⁶ This could explain why comprehension scores decrease from year to year. The pool of readers in first grade is small, and therefore not representative of the wider population of students in Khagrachari schools- it could be that readers in first grade have exceptional skills in both reading and comprehension. With each year, more and more students can read, many of whom master the mechanics of reading, but fail to understand the text.

correctly. These two groups can be seen in figure 7, which illustrates the distribution of most used words scores among second graders.

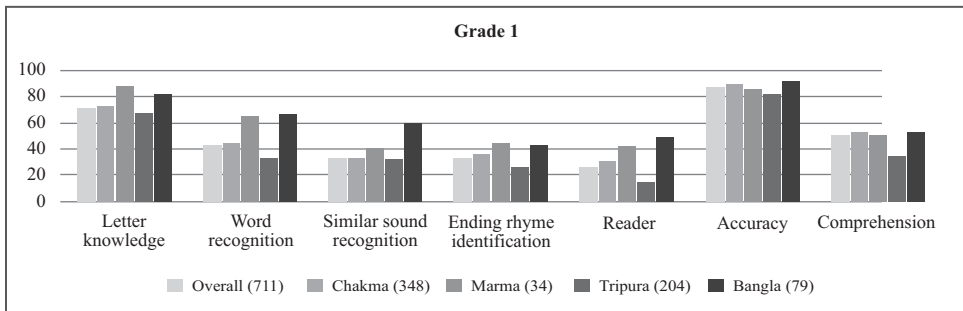
Figure 7: Distribution of Word Recognition Scores (2nd Graders)

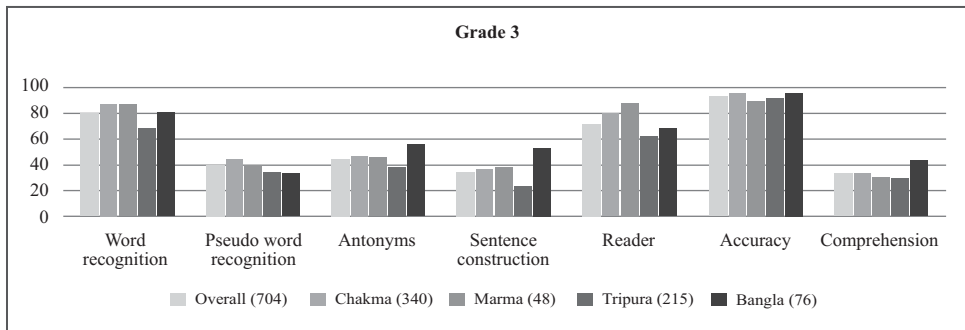
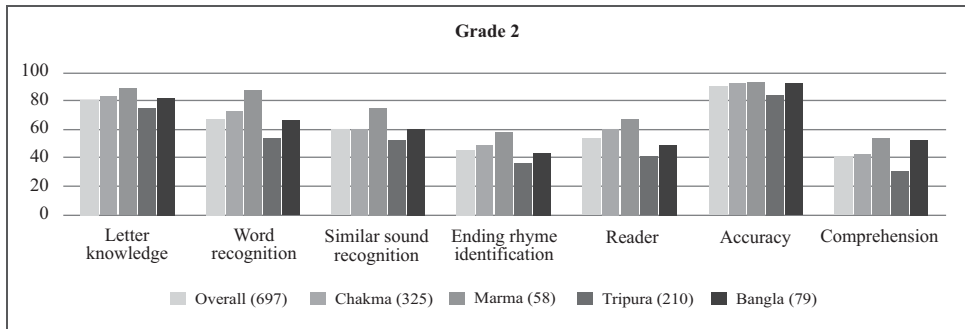


3.4 Equity analysis

By comparing scores across groups of students, we can identify the factors that contribute to these uneven score distributions. Not surprisingly, language, socioeconomic status, and the home literacy environment—especially access to reading materials at home—are the main drivers of learning disparities. Figures 8 through 10 illustrate these patterns, and appendix B presents the results of t-tests and multivariate regression analyses used to identify these patterns.

Figure 8: Reading skills by language



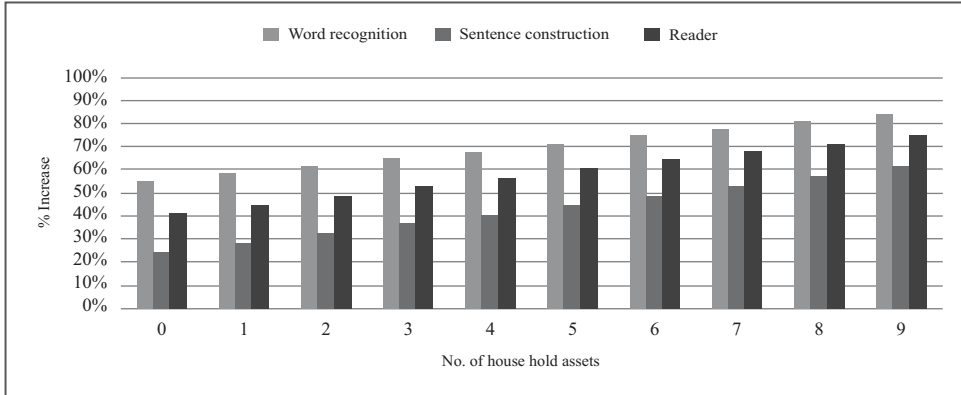


Note: The number of observations per each language group are indicated in parenthesis. Data presented

As can be seen in figure 8, Tripura-speaking students tend to lag behind their peers, although these differences diminish slightly among third grade students. Marma-speakers, meanwhile, are the highest performing students, but again, these differences are most pronounced among first and second graders. Differences between Tripura-speakers and their peers, and between Marma-speakers and their peers are statistically significant. However, it is important to note that these data are not necessarily representative of language groups within each grade level.

The relationship between reading skills and socioeconomic status, and between reading skills and reading materials, are described in figures 9 and 10. Household socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of word recognition and sentence construction skills, as well as the likelihood of being a reader (as depicted in figure 9).

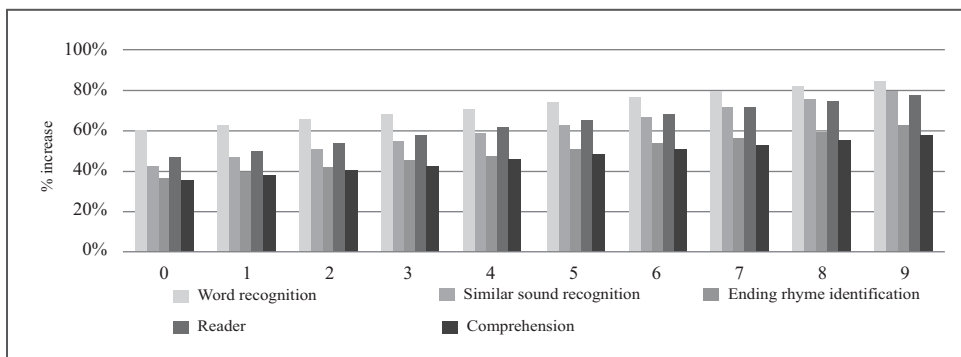
Figure 9: Relationship between reading skills and students' socioeconomic background



Note: Figure 9 represents the predicted increase in scores for each additional household possession, holding other relevant observable factors constant (age, sex, language). The graph displays only skills that are statistically significantly related to socioeconomic status at $p < 0.01$. Data presented include all grade levels.

The number of home reading materials is an even stronger predictor of baseline reading skills than household socioeconomic status, especially for word recognition, similar sounds, rhyme identification, reading and comprehension skills. Reading habits at home are also an important predictor of baseline reading skills, but the strength and magnitude of the relationship between habits and skills is not as strong as it is for reading materials and skills.

Figure 10: Relationship between reading skills and reading materials at home



Note: Figure 10 represents the predicted increase in scores for each additional reading material in the household, holding other relevant observable factors constant (age, sex, language). The graph displays all skills that are statistically significantly related to reading materials at $p < 0.01$. Data presented include all grade levels. Child friendly reading materials (coloring books, story books) are weighted double.

Together, these findings indicate that students who speak Tripura at home, students from the poorest households, and those with the fewest learning resources (print materials) at home are the ones most at risk of not achieving grade-level reading skills.

4. Recommendations

- Although teachers are using mother tongue as an oral bridge to explain lessons in Bangla medium, it is often not used at an adequate level to explain lessons *well*. Moreover, *literacy* in MT is rare even where oral skills exist.
- Therefore, if MT-based education is progressively introduced in the early grades, it will be necessary to first generate a work force of teachers (and preferably parents as well) who have strong oral and literacy skills in MT. It is not yet evident what that benchmark may be in diverse languages.
- We cannot generalize about the Bangla skills among different language communities. *Overall*, early grade students in Khagrachari are not performing worse than Bangla MT speakers. In grade 1, the ethnic children are better in early literacy skills, especially compared to NNPS students, but this gap closes over time. But some groups (Tripura), are lagging behind.
- In introducing MT-based education in grade 1, the govt. should build off the experience of MT preprimary education, using the good literacy practices such as storytelling, reading to children, games and print rich environment. Preprimary teachers with strong MT literacy skills should be identified as a resource for grade one onwards.
- We cannot lump different language groups together in designing interventions in either MT or Bangla. They are in different situations. For instance, Kokborok speakers were weakest in Bangla, perhaps because their language is written in Roman script; perhaps they place less importance on Bangla learning. However, they have a head start in English learning. Marma speakers were strongest in Bangla, perhaps because their numbers are small and they are mixed in Bangla populations. Other groups use Bangla to *write* their language and read the script well while using it to convey a different language.
- The research points to the importance of child-friendly books at home to promote literacy, whether MT or Bangla. This is especially true among the Kokborok community whose weak Bangla skill was most strongly correlated to lack of books at home. This point extends to the print environment in general, not just books. The study advocates that the print environment should be more inclusive by reflecting the lives and landscapes of different groups. This will create more linkages between reading and everyday life; textbooks and mainstream materials are perceived as part of a separate school culture.

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Appendix A: Sample description

Table A1: Summary statistics (baseline data)

<i>Background information</i>	
Age (years)	7.8
Female (%)	50%
Grade 1 (%)	34%
Grade 2 (%)	33%
Grade 3 (%)	33%
Early childhood education (%)	59%
Grade repetition (%)	25%
<i>SES (household assets)</i>	
Electricity (%)	33%
Refrigerator (%)	3%
TV (%)	20%
Cow (%)	43%
Goat (%)	28%
Hen/duck (%)	67%
Land (%)	50%
Bicycle (%)	9%
Motorcycle (%)	3%
None (%)	7%
Total number of household assets	2.6
More than 6 household members (%)	8%
<i>Languages spoken at home</i>	
Chakma (%)	51%
Marma (%)	8%
Tripura (%)	32%
Bangla (%)	14%
Other (%)	0%
Number of home languages	1.0
<i>Languages spoken with peers</i>	
Chakma (%)	52%
Marma (%)	8%
Tripura (%)	31%
Bangla (%)	21%
Other (%)	0%
Number of languages spoken with peers	1.1
<i>Languages spoken in the classroom</i>	
Chakma (%)	43%
Marma (%)	4%
Tripura (%)	17%
Bangla (%)	79%
Other (%)	0%
Number of languages spoken in the classroom	1.4
Understand classroom language (%)	90%

Appendix B: Equity analysis: t-tests and multivariate regression analyses

Table B1: Language skills, by language spoken at home and grade level

	Chakma	Marma	Tripura	Bangla
Grade 1				
Letter knowledge	0.714	0.858**	0.666	0.686
Word recognition	0.450	0.645***	0.351***	0.551***
Similar sound recognition	0.338	0.419	0.332	0.426**
Ending rhyme identification	0.364	0.477**	0.269**	0.420**
Independent reader	0.323***	0.395	0.168***	0.299
Accuracy	88.46	85.74	81.69***	87.82
Comprehension	0.538	0.482	0.447	0.569
Grade 2				
Letter knowledge	0.835	0.893	0.761***	0.814
Word recognition	0.725***	0.873***	0.541***	0.676
Similar sound recognition	0.607	0.768***	0.539**	0.626
Ending rhyme identification	0.489**	0.583***	0.377***	0.448
Independent reader	0.594***	0.712**	0.360***	0.544
Accuracy	92.14	92.62	85.90***	90.44
Comprehension	0.424	0.500	0.344**	0.522
Grade 3				
Word recognition	0.849***	0.834	0.695***	0.797
Pseudo word recognition	0.447***	0.385	0.356	0.354
Antonyms	0.468	0.457	0.391***	0.537**
Sentence construction	0.368	0.388	0.252***	0.525***
Reader	0.775***	0.842	0.576***	0.670
Accuracy	94.43	89.43***	93.50	94.83
Comprehension	0.339	0.315	0.335	0.432*

Note: Differences between language groups are significant at $p < 0.01$ (**) and $p < 0.001$ (***)

Table B2: Relationship between background characteristics and foundational literacy skills

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Letter knowledge	Letter knowledge	Word recognition	Pseudo word recognition Similar beginning sounds identification	End rhyme identification	Reader
Age	0.018* (0.008)	0.068*** (0.006)	-0.008 (0.011)	0.069*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.008)	0.407*** (0.041)
Sex	0.010 (0.017)	0.046** (0.017)	0.074** (0.024)	0.040* (0.020)	0.033~ (0.018)	0.258** (0.095)
More than 6 HH members	-0.048 (0.039)	-0.077* (0.034)	-0.077~ (0.042)	-0.079* (0.039)	-0.034 (0.037)	-0.434* (0.191)
SES	0.019~ (0.010)	0.047*** (0.009)	0.031* (0.013)	0.023* (0.010)	0.027** (0.010)	0.228*** (0.050)
No. of home literacy interactions	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.000 (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.015~ (0.009)
No. of reading materials	0.007 (0.005)	0.027*** (0.005)	0.017* (0.008)	0.041*** (0.006)	0.029*** (0.006)	0.164*** (0.033)
Early childhood education	0.055** (0.018)	0.019 (0.017)	-0.006 (0.026)	0.075*** (0.020)	0.054** (0.018)	0.248* (0.097)
Grade repetition	-0.012 (0.021)	-0.099*** (0.020)	-0.146*** (0.027)	-0.082*** (0.024)	-0.068** (0.022)	-0.745*** (0.116)
Constant	0.606*** (0.075)	-0.005 (0.064)	0.381*** (0.113)	-0.281*** (0.080)	-0.028 (0.072)	-4.058*** (0.449)
N	1377	2077	700	1377	1377	2076

Note: Table B2 presents the relationship between reading skills and student background characteristics, expressed as beta coefficients with robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parenthesis. Coefficients are significant at $p < 0.05$ (*), $p < 0.01$ (**), and $p < 0.001$ (***). All models control for home language, and all are multivariate linear regression models except for model 6, which is a multivariate logistical regression model. Model 1, 4 and 5 include only first and second grade students. Model 3 includes only third grade students.

Table B3: Relationship between background characteristics and higher order literacy skills

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	Antonym identification	Sentence construction	Fluency	Accuracy	Comprehension
Age	0.006 (0.009)	0.004 (0.012)	3.067*** (0.852)	0.014*** (0.003)	-0.022** (0.007)
Sex	-0.009 (0.021)	0.007 (0.026)	10.251*** (2.377)	0.007 (0.007)	-0.000 (0.018)
More than 6 HH members	-0.068 (0.043)	-0.092* (0.047)	-8.132* (3.287)	-0.010 (0.016)	-0.111** (0.038)
SES	0.029* (0.012)	0.060*** (0.015)	-0.954 (1.635)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.015 (0.010)
No. of home literacy interactions	0.006** (0.002)	0.007** (0.003)	-0.197 (0.233)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.005* (0.002)
No. of reading materials	0.014* (0.007)	0.027** (0.010)	1.729* (0.716)	0.002 (0.002)	0.025*** (0.006)
Early childhood education	-0.003 (0.023)	0.005 (0.028)	-9.939*** (2.650)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.058** (0.019)
Grade repetition	-0.076** (0.044)	-0.142*** (0.046)	-8.445** (4.751)	-0.054*** (0.019)	-0.115*** (0.037)
Constant	0.303** (0.099)	0.208~ (0.118)	21.243* (9.266)	0.859*** (0.032)	0.545*** (0.074)
N	700	700	1042	1054	1054

Note: Table B3 presents the relationship between reading skills and student background characteristics, expressed as beta coefficients with robust standard errors clustered at the school level in parenthesis. Coefficients are significant at $p < 0.05$ (*), $p < 0.01$ (**) and $p < 0.001$ (***). All models control for home language, and all are multivariate linear regression models. Models 1 and 2 include only third graders. Models 3, 4 and 5 include only readers.

Volunteer Tutoring for Struggling Readers of English at the Early Level in Bangladesh: An Action Research

Jurana Aziz*

Abstract

This paper reports on an action research on intervention through volunteer tutors for struggling readers of English at the early level in Bangladesh. The proposition of the action research is that volunteer tutor support to assist the struggling learners who are slow in reading compared to other students in a class can help overcome their challenge. A sample of students is taken from one of the better-known English medium schools in Dhaka for a trial with volunteer tutors. The trial shows that if volunteer tutoring could be implemented at an early level, the reading level of students, who struggle to read and comprehend in a second language other than their mother tongue, can be motivated and helped to overcome their problems.

Key words: *Struggling reader, interventions, early level, second language*

1. Introduction

English medium schools in Bangladesh use English as the medium for communication and instruction for all subjects, even though it is not the mother tongue and rarely used at home. As it is the students' second language (L2), they try to master it through regular instruction in school, with the help of their teachers. But there are always struggling readers in every class who are not able to follow the instruction and fall behind in the class. They are always slow in understanding the lessons and are not able to express themselves or explain their difficulties. They are often introverts and shy and are not willing to share their thoughts to the class teacher.

In this article, I have reported the current practices in one of the well-known English medium schools of Bangladesh (Sir John Wilson School), where the teachers always use English in their lessons. It was found, as expected, that there were struggling readers who failed to keep up with their lessons, because they did not acquire the necessary language proficiency. This was manifested in their being slow in reading, or their reading skill was very low compared to the average student in the class.

Trying to understand the problem and designing a remedy for the slow readers, I proposed an action research project with a sample of students who would be assisted by a volunteer tutor in reading, in addition to regular classroom instruction. A control group, who did not receive the intervention, was observed for comparison. In designing the trial, I was inspired by the

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work of Jack Cassidy and Drew Cassidy of Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, Texas, USA, who reviewed research in early literacy and identified “hot” practices that produced results (Cassidy and Cassidy, 1999 and other years).

2. The struggling learners at the early level of schooling

The idea of struggling learners due to poor literacy skills is not new. For example, the struggling learner was a topic of discussion in the 1990s in USA and in 2002 the program *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* supported by the Federal Government was designed to ensure that there would be no child overlooked in a classroom.

The struggling learners are those having the following traits:

- They are slow in understanding the lesson.
- They are usually introvert, as they do not want to share their problems with the class teacher.
- They are poor in comprehension and cannot express what they understand from the instructor.
- They are slower than the other students in reading and fall behind others in the class in performance.
- They are not necessarily learners with disability or dyslexic (though these conditions are often not detected or overlooked).
- They are not able to cope with the tempo of the instructors in the class.
- They often face difficulties in decoding certain phonetic sounds.
- They lack fluency in reading.
- They are unable to transform knowledge into learning for themselves.

Research shows that as the struggling readers progress through the grade levels, they fall farther behind and their academic distance from those who read well grows more pronounced (The Learning First Alliance, 1998; Rashotte, Toregesen, & Wagner, 1997; National Reading Panel, 1999; Torgesen, 1998).

The struggling readers are frequently overlooked in the Bangladesh classrooms. Although research has shown that attention and support to the struggling learners can help them to be successful in school, (Ciolfi and Ryan, 2011), most schools in our country do not take such initiatives.

3. The Concept of Response to Intervention (RTI)

The concept of response to intervention (RTI) has been used to identify the needs of the struggling learners, particularly, in their reading ability in English. Originally developed by Marie Clay (1979) in New Zealand, this short-term intervention program was first introduced to the United States at Ohio State University, which soon became a training site for teachers and university professors throughout the world. This intensive instructional program targeted emergent readers who were at risk of failure in reading.

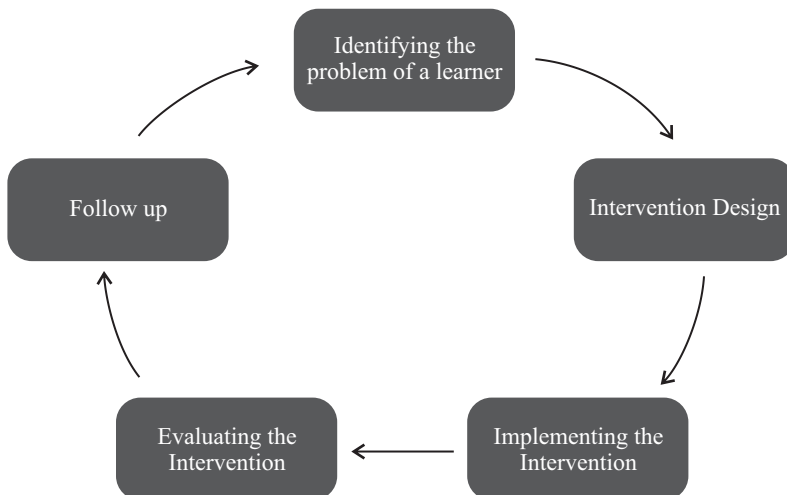
In 2001 the strategies of intervention were initiated in the schools of USA with Federal Government support which showed positive results by 2006 (Cameron, Parks, Schulte, 2006). The emphasis was on not labeling a child as ‘disabled’ for poor reading, without first trying out changes in instruction in the classroom. Children with weak reading skills were too readily being put in the ‘special need’ category. After the Act for Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) was signed in July 1, 2001 the strategies were advocated for implementing special interventions for learners who failed to follow the lessons in the classroom. In one research it was shown that the effectiveness of pedagogical approaches actually depended on how the students were served by high quality instruction and what interventions to struggling students were available (Torgesen, 2007).

In an RTI approach, the students, the teachers and the parents are together responsible to improve reading skills of students. To reduce the academic risk of low performance, RTI does two things: (a) It requires preparation of an instructional plan on how to teach the students, and (b) It emphasizes how with specific steps the special needs students in a class can be helped.

RTI suggests that the early grade teachers follow a model to assist the struggling learners through the following sequential steps:

- Identifying the problem of a learner
- Preparing an intervention design
- Implementing the intervention
- Evaluating the intervention
- Follow up. (See figure 1)

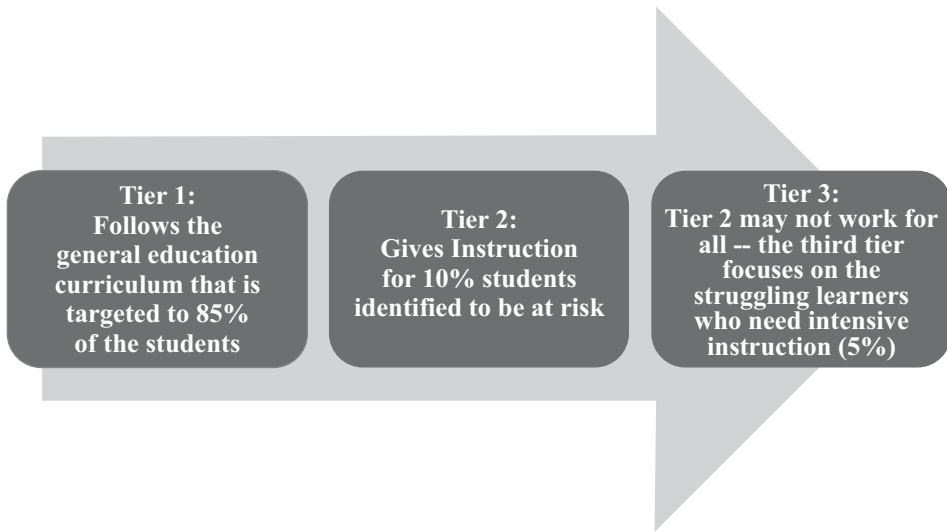
Figure 1: The Problem Solving Model for the Struggling Learner at the Early Grade Level



Source: Cameron, et al., 2006.

This model was further refined and the Standard Protocol Model (Carney and Stiefel, 2008) was proposed to help the struggling learners in USA. The three-tier model was developed and was considered as the most effective to help the struggling readers in English. It aims to do the following things for a reader who is striving to understand the text (Figure 2).

Figure 2: How RTI works for the struggling readers in a classroom: the three tier model



Source: Carney and Stiefel, 2008

4. The Action Research and the Methodology

The concept of RTI is not well-known or practiced by early grade instructors in Bangladesh yet. To apply a remedial approach for language teaching, I chose a renowned English medium schools of Bangladesh where English is the main language for instruction. The sample was taken from the classes of two sections of KG-1 where the total number of students was sixty. The teachers followed the RTI model by implementing the following steps:

- They emphasized phonology and phonetics as the struggling readers were weak in this respect;.
- They designed the instruction focusing on achieving oral fluency.
- They gave exercises on letter identification
- They followed the Target Language (English) for all of their instruction.

Data were collected through survey on the struggling learners on English language performance from those who received the intervention and from a comparable group who did not.

5. The implementation of RTIs for the struggling readers

Initially, the teachers followed the regular instruction for the learners. They operated at tier-1 where they reached at best 85% of the students with their lessons. When the teachers found that some of the students were not responding, they tried to change the tier. Ultimately, they implemented tier-3 where they took steps for the failing learners who were slow in understanding the text, unable to follow instructions of teachers, and were generally slow in reading. Tier 3 involved the intervention through volunteer tutors.

The idea of volunteer-tutoring was first introduced by Cassidy and Cassidy in 1999 where emphasis was given on the weak learners who were slow in learning and following the lesson in a classroom. The volunteer tutors performed the following tasks:

- i. Helped the struggling readers to understand the context of the lesson;
- ii. Assisted the readers by implementing tier-3 to increase their ability to read
- iii. Analysed the problems of the struggling readers in a classroom;
- iv. Ensured extra time for the learners who did not keep pace with the other learners;
- v. Followed up these learners' performance and changing tiers as needed for the next lesson.

In volunteer tutoring the following things are ensured:

1. a coordinator who is ideally a reading specialist guides the process;
2. consistent onsite supervision is provided;
3. early recruitment, training, and placement of tutors at the beginning of the school year are ensured;
4. systematic documentation of instruction and assessment is maintained; and
5. instruction is geared to supporting the classroom curriculum.

In the small-scale action research in Bangladesh, these conditions were not fulfilled. But efforts were made to create a conducive environment for the trial with the cooperation of the principal and the teachers.

The teachers of the two early grade sections of the school were persuaded to implement the volunteer tutoring trial for one term (one term is for five months). First, they helped identify the struggling readers from assessing their grade obtained in the reading tests, grade obtained in the oral tests and figured out the number in the class who lacked at least the average reading ability. Twelve students from a section of 30 were identified as slow readers.

Initially, in a pre-trial phase, the teachers continued their usual teaching approach, without implementing any of the intervention measures. At the end of this phase, they found these learners' performance as shown below.

Table 1. Performance of KG-1 Students before Volunteer Tutoring Intervention

<i>Decoding phonetic symbols</i>	<i>Understanding English texts</i>	<i>Comprehending the text</i>	<i>Ability to reproduce the instruction</i>	<i>Fluency</i>
10-12 students failed	Most of them could not understand the text	Only 6-7 students could comprehend the idea of the text	4-5 students could reproduce	5 students were found to be fluent

After analyzing this data, it was decided that the plan for volunteer tutoring would be applied as a remedy. In implementing the plan, the following steps were taken.

A. Giving extra time for the struggling readers.

The English teachers started giving extra time to the struggling readers. To ensure this they tried to identify their problems in decoding specific phonetic symbols. Examples of problems found: 5 students failed to recognize the difference between ‘b’ and ‘d’; 3 students did not recognize the difference between ‘p’ and ‘b’; 2 failed to distinguish between ‘c’ and ‘k’.

They gave exercises on these issues by giving drills, mimics and tried to prepare lessons to show the difference in pronunciation of these phonemes.

B. Offering incentives for the struggling readers.

The teachers took motivational steps by rewarding students for their effort and performance with small gifts such as pencils, erasers etc. Mostly they used verbal utterances to praise learners. They kept record of these incentives and found that about 10 students were especially responsive to incentives and 6 students were more willing to speak in the class than before. But four were still found to be relatively unresponsive. The teachers took these four students to be high-risk struggling readers who were very shy and introvert as learners and needed very special attention.

C. Talking to parents of the struggling readers.

The teachers talked to the parents of the struggling readers during the parents’ meeting. They also arranged extra meetings with the parents fortnightly to follow up the learners’ performance while at home. The teachers instructed the parents to encourage their children to share their ideas on what they learned in school, to tell their children stories during bedtime based on the difficulties they faced, and to tell children about the importance of listening to the teachers inside the classroom. The parents committed themselves to cooperate with the teachers and the routine was followed for three months. After three months the teachers found marked differences in student response and participation in the class. The students shared their own thoughts more with the teacher, asked teacher for help, and paid attention to teacher’s instruction.

D. Reading texts of interest to the students

As a part of volunteer tutoring, the teachers tried to find topics of interest to the slow readers. They found that seven students liked stories on animals, three liked stories on travel and two

students liked stories about fairies. The teachers gave the other students reading material from the curriculum whereas they gave these 12 students different materials of particular interest to them.

The class was divided into three groups. In Group A, there were the seven students, who were struggling in reading with the regular textbook, and performed poorly during the term. In Group B, the other struggling readers were given books that they liked and at the end of the term these students were reading more books and their interest in reading increased. In Group C, students not facing any special difficulty read books as in the curriculum. They were able to follow the lessons and improved their reading ability during the term, as expected.

E. Giving more time to the struggling readers to complete tasks

The class teachers gave more time to the struggling readers to complete the tasks assigned to them. They gave each of them 5 minutes more than the other students for their reading task and most were able to complete their task with the extra time allowed to them.

F. Giving students positive stimuli

The class teachers tried out the benefits of positive stimuli in their lessons. In some instances students were praised verbally and applauded when they responded correctly; in other cases such positive feedback were not offered. It was observed that the struggling readers responded and showed more enthusiasm in the first instances. With positive stimuli, more of the struggling readers answered teacher's questions, paid attention to teachers' instruction, and more of them had eye contact with teachers.

The teachers reported that they used the following feedback strategies for motivating the learners;

- They were particular about greeting and talking to the struggling readers more often.
- They tried to maintain eye contact with the slow readers during the class time.
- They used positive words like 'I am proud of you', 'very well done' etc. with the struggling readers.
- They did not remonstrate with the slow readers if they made an error. Rather, they overlooked the errors.

6. Recapitulating the findings

The following points may be mentioned as a recapitulation of the findings from the action research.

- The struggling readers could perform better if they were given reading topics of interest to them.
- They need to be motivated by their class teachers to complete their task inside the classroom.
- They needed extra time to complete the task successfully.

- They needed motivation from their parents at home to complete their reading tasks.
- Their concentration and attention to the task increased when they were given positive feedback or stimuli.

7. Limitations of the Study and Conclusion

The following limitations were observed in conducting the action research:

- The school curriculum does not specifically offer the option to allow students extra time to complete tasks inside the classroom.
- The number of struggling readers is not necessarily large in a class, but the normal teaching method and class routine do not allow teachers giving extra attention to the struggling readers.
- The parents are not always able to support their struggling children. Some parents were not willing to accept the truth that their children had difficulties.
- The class size is a challenge to assist these learners. With 30 or more students in a class, it is difficult to help by giving extra attention even with volunteer tutoring. Ideally, a class size should be around 15 in early grades.

In Bangladesh, the concepts of the struggling readers, its cumulative adverse effect and possible remedial actions are not well understood or widely accepted. The early level is clearly vital for developing reading skills in a second language like English. Effective interventions can help the struggling readers and make a permanent difference for them.

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Some Challenges in Indian Basic Education: Need for a New Look

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Jasbir Singh^{**}

Abstract

Right to education means education is accessible to all and the conditions are created for all to participate in education to improve their life and livelihood. In India, a walk into a poor village or a poor and crowded urban area will readily reveal the harsh truth of the trade-off between going to school and seeking employment to subsist. The education system in India, even at the basic level, faces challenges that is encapsulated in the country's mean years of schooling, which is 5.12 years -- significantly below the average for all developing countries (7.09 years). India's official literacy rate of 74.04 percent also means that India is the home to world's one-third illiterates. The authors contend that the quality of education services and the provisions that promote the skills and competencies relevant to life and livelihood of learners must be given attention to bring about the necessary changes in the Indian education system. This paper throws light, based on data from the 71st National Sample Survey, on various challenges faced by the Indian education system.

Key Words: National Sample Survey of Education Indicators in India (71st Round), Right to Education, Child Labour, Dropout and Discontinuation of Schooling.

1. Introduction

Great classical economists have long been aware of the importance of Human Capital in economic development; and in their own way, have described various factors contributing to it. Adam Smith, for example, stressed the importance of education at various points in his seminal work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. He wrote about the 'acquired' and useful abilities of all the inhabitants or members of society in formulating his concept of 'fixed capital'. Alfred Marshal emphasized the importance of education 'as a national investment.' In his view the most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings (Mahore, 2001).

The vision of the Ministry of Human Resource Development of India is to realize its human resource potential to the fullest, with equity and excellence. Since the Constitutional Amendment of 1976, which included education in the concurrent list (sharing the responsibility by the central or union and the state governments), the union government accepted a larger responsibility of improving the national and integrative character of education, expanding access to education, accentuating quality and standards at all levels; in addition to its mandate of coordinating the development of scientific, professional, vocational and technical education in the country.

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The Ministry's endeavor has been directed at achieving Education for All; providing universal access, retention and quality in elementary education, with a special emphasis on education of children belonging to disadvantaged groups and making the adult education programme a mass movement. Simultaneously, it has aimed to provide greater opportunities of access to quality higher education by investing in infrastructure and facility, promoting academic reforms, and improving governance and institutional restructuring.

With the enactment of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, and the fact that Article 21-A of the Constitution of India became operative, it was expected that issues of dropout, out-of-school children, quality of education and availability of trained teachers would be addressed appropriately in the short to medium term (UNESCO, 2015). The Act makes it incumbent on the Government to provide free and compulsory education to all children of 6–14 years of age. The harsh reality is that in 2015, 264 million adults in India lack minimum literacy skills and out of it 67 percent are women. At least 17.7 million children of primary school age are not in school by UNESCO estimate (UIS, e-Atlas of Out-of-School Children, 2016).

India is a nation of young people. Out of a population of over 1.2 billion; around 65 percent are in the age-group of 15-64 years, regarded as the “working age population” (World Development Indicators, 2014). It is predicted that India will see a sharp decline in the dependency ratio over the next 30 years, which will constitute a major demographic dividend for India. This large population can be invaluable human resource if it can be equipped with the necessary skills so as to contribute to the national economy.

It is hardly debatable that a strong nation can be built by ensuring that each citizen is educated. That is why most countries spend substantial amounts on creation and functioning of the educational infrastructure. But to avail themselves of the opportunities, despite the proclamation of the right to education, individuals too have to incur expenditure in the form of course fees, examination fees, cost of books and stationery etc. (NSSO 71st Round, 2015). The result, inevitably, is inequality in access to and participation in education.

2. Objective

The objective of this paper is to present and discuss some pressing issues in respect of basic education, particularly primary education, in India, highlighted by the 71st Round of National Sample Survey, conducted in 2014.

3. Data and Methods

This paper utilizes data from the survey on social consumption relating to education, conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) as a part of its 71st Round. This is the primary source of data on various indicators on education in the country, such as, literacy rates, attendance ratios, incentives received by the students, expenditure incurred for the purpose of education etc. It is an all-India household survey conducted during the period January– June 2014. NSSO collected information from persons aged 5-29 years in relation to education in the country. A total of 4,577 villages were surveyed in rural India and the number of urban blocks surveyed was 3,720. The total number of households surveyed was 36,479 and 29,447 in rural and urban India respectively. NSSO sampling design took into consideration gender, age, and income quintile. It selected 5 quintile classes of the rural and urban households

by the Usual Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure criterion used in national household surveys. The different quintile classes are referred to by numbers 1 to 5, (1 representing the lowest quintile). For the present paper only those elements of the survey have been chosen which relate to various challenges in the Indian education system (NSSO 71st Round, 2015).

To satisfy the objective, data were also collected from Census of India conducted in 2001 and 2011, Annual Status of Education Report, 2014 and Ministry of Labour & Employment Survey, 2015.

4. Findings and Discussion

Present status of literacy in India

According to the 2011 Census, national adult literacy rate was 74.04 percent as against 18.33 percent in 1951. In isolation this may look quite impressive, but the fact remains that even after more than sixty years of planned development in the country, 26 percent (i.e. more than one quarter) of the population remained illiterate in 2011. In eleven States literacy rates are lower than the national literacy rates. These are Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. In Bihar, literacy rate was as low as 63.82 percent in 2011. Kerala had the highest literacy rate of 93.91 percent. In terms of literacy, India’s attainments as compared to several Asian countries are rather disappointing. According to Human Development Report 2011, adult illiteracy rate was 37.2 percent in India in 2005-10 as against 6 percent in China, 9.4 percent in Sri Lanka, 4.5 percent in Philippines and 2.3 percent in Argentina. Undoubtedly, the poor performance of India on the literacy front has affected its overall development performance (Puri and Misra, 2016).

Table 1: Literacy rates (5 years and above) in percentage by geography, age and gender (NSS 71st and 64th Rounds)

Age	Rural				Urban				Total Rural-Urban Gap
	Male	Female	Both	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Both	Gender Gap	
NSS 71 st round (2014)									
Age 5 & above	80.3	62.4	71.4	17.9	91.0	80.9	86.1	10.1	14.7
Age 7 & above	79.8	61.3	70.8	18.5	91.1	80.8	85.9	10.3	15.1
Age15 & above	75.0	53.1	64.1	21.9	89.7	77.9	84.0	11.8	19.9
All age (age 0 & above)	72.3	56.8	64.7	15.5	83.7	74.8	79.5	8.9	14.8
NSS 64 th round (2007-08)									
Age 5 & above	76.8	57.3	67.3	19.5	89.7	78.1	84.2	11.6	16.9
Age 7 & above	77.0	56.7	67.0	20.3	89.9	78.1	84.3	11.8	17.3
Age15 & above	71.8	47.5	59.7	24.3	88.7	74.6	82.0	14.1	22.3
All age (age 0 & above)	68.4	51.1	60.0	17.3	82.2	71.6	77.1	10.6	17.1

Source: NSS: Key Indicators of Social Consumption in India: Education, 2015

It can be seen that the gap in literacy rates across rural-urban and male-female populations persists. The literacy rate in rural India is lower in comparison to the urban areas for all-age groups. Also, male-female literacy gap is the highest in rural areas, though there is an increase in overall literacy rate from 2007-08 to 2014. In the NSS 71st round, male-female gap in literacy rate in rural areas has decreased to 15.5 percentage points from 17.3 in the NSS 64th round, whereas the male-female gap in literacy in urban areas has come down to 8.9 percentage points from 10.6.

Table 1 shows that the gender gap in literacy rate is somewhat wider than the urban-rural gap in both 71st and 64th rounds. Two pertinent observations here are: (a) The large urban-rural gap has stubbornly persisted over a period of 7 years between the two rounds of survey and the improvement in bridging the gap has been small. (b) This situation means that rural women are subject to double jeopardy – for being rural residents and for being women.

Problem of Dropouts/Discontinuation in Education

Human Development Survey (as cited in Desai, 2010) reported that percentages of failures and dropouts are very high in India. Many schools, particularly in the countryside, operate with a single teacher. Overcrowding in classrooms, crumbling infrastructure, lack of teaching aids, dull teaching methods, poor pupil achievements, all of which result in a “discouragement effect” that pushes children to drop out of school. Parents also lose their enthusiasm about sending their children to school (Dreze and Sen, 2006).

Table 2: Dropout at different ages (Percentages of total dropout, 5-29 years, 2014)

Age-group of dropout/discontinuation	Rural			Urban			Total Rural-Urban Gap
	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	
5-15	58.1	62.7	60.3	45.0	41.4	43.3	17.0
16-24	41.5	36.7	39.2	53.6	57.4	55.4	16.2
25-29	0.4	0.6	0.5	1.4	1.2	1.3	0.8

Source: NSS: Key Indicators of Social Consumption in India: Education, 2015

The harsh reality of Indian education is that dropout or discontinuation before completing a stage of education is a serious problem. The literacy rate (age 5 years and above) at 76 percent (rural 64.7 and urban 79.5 percent according to NSS 71st Round in 2014, as noted above) does not tell us whether a functional level of skills and competencies have been achieved by those who are reported to be literate and who presumably have been enrolled in school for a duration.

The definition of “being literate” is “a person who can read and write a simple message in any language with understanding.” This definition clearly doesn’t capture basic competencies required to function in life and be employed productively. Those who dropout or discontinue early may not even acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills which are sustainable and useful in their life. Around 60.3 percent of children in rural areas and 43.3 percent of children in urban areas dropped out and discontinued education at different levels between

the age group of 5-15 years. There are various reasons attributed to it but a common cause appears to be the fact that children from poor families find it necessary to seek employment in low-paid informal market jobs to supplement their families' meagre income.

Is economic activity a common reason for low education participation?

A walk into poor villages and poor and congested urban areas will reveal the harsh truth of the trade-off between educational attainment and the need to earn an income. Leaving education for the sake of employment is an old phenomenon in both urban and rural areas.

Table 3: Dropout/discontinuation for various reasons (Per 1000 persons aged 5 – 29 years, 2014)

Major Reasons	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Not interested in Education	25.1	16.2	20.8	14.3
Financial Constraints	23.6	15.4	23.7	14.9
Engaged in Domestic Activities	5.9	32.9	2.4	23.1
Engaged in Economic Activities	29.9	3.9	33.6	6.9
School is Far off	0.6	4.2	0.2	1.8
Unable to Cope with Studies	5.5	5.1	5.3	3.6
Completed Desired level/class	4.5	4.3	8.3	11.3
Marriage	00	12.4	00	17.1
Other Reasons*	4.8	5.7	5.8	7.0

Note: Other reasons include timings of educational institution not suitable, language/medium of instruction, inadequate number of teachers, quality of teachers,, atmosphere at school, preparation for competitive examination and others

Source: NSS 71st Round

As Table 3 shows, the largest number of Indian males left education for employment opportunities (29.9 percent) whereas the largest number of Indian females left education to meet the demand of household chores (32.9 percent). The reasons such as 'not interested in education' and 'financial constraints' also push young people out of school to early employment.

In poor families, informal employment opportunities become an inducement to abandon schooling as increasing family income is a higher priority to them. In the lowest income quintile, illiteracy and dropout/discontinuation are a common phenomenon. Employment opportunities are available in the market, especially in the form of hazardous informal activities to which poor parents feel compelled to send their school-going children. Despite the programs of Free Education and the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, working children remain a common phenomenon.

Table 4: Situation of children (5-14 years) in India as per Census 2001 & 2011

State/ UT code	India/State/Union Territory	Census 2001		Census 2011	
		Total Working Children (5-14 years)	Total Children (5-14 years)	Total Working Children (5-14 years)	Total Children (5-14 years)
1	Andhra Pradesh	1,363,339 (7.69)	17,713,764	404,851 (2.61)	15,506,027
2	Arunachal Pradesh	18,482 (6.06)	304,982	5,766 (1.64)	350,482
3	Assam	351,416 (5.06)	6,936,344	99,512 (1.41)	7,036,066
4	Bihar	1,117,500 (4.68)	23,868,079	451,590 (1.55)	28,956,159
5	Chhattisgarh	364,572 (6.95)	5,239,700	63,884 (1.13)	5,642,771
6	Goa	4,138 (1.81)	227,403	6,920 (3.18)	216,957
7	Gujarat	48,553 (0.42)	11,355,498	250,318 (2.08)	11,985,281
8	Haryana	253,491 (4.77)	5,306,241	53,492 (1.03)	5,167,435
9	Himachal Pradesh	107,774 (8.13)	1,324,203	15,001 (1.21)	1,230,401
10	Jammu & Kashmir	175,630 (6.61)	2,653,422	25,528 (0.90)	2,825,826
11	Jharkhand	407,200 (5.47)	7,439,049	90,996 (1.10)	8,242,821
12	Karnataka	822,615 (6.91)	11,903,007	249,432 (2.27)	10,978,155
13	Kerala	26,156 (0.47)	5,531,381	21,757 (0.40)	5,377,882
14	Madhya Pradesh	1,065,259 (6.70)	15,883,680	286,310 (1.70)	16,830,956
15	Maharashtra	764,075 (3.54)	21,567,532	496,916 (2.41)	20,555,189
16	Manipur	28,836 (5.75)	501,425	11,805 (1.95)	605,006
17	Meghalaya	53,940 (8.21)	656,311	18,839 (2.44)	771,788
18	Mizoram	26,265 (12.33)	212,924	2,793 (1.18)	234,769
19	Nagaland	45,874 (8.48)	540,749	11,062 (2.29)	481,770
20	Odisha	377,594 (4.37)	8,634,215	92,087 (1.09)	8,423,393
21	Punjab	177,268 (3.22)	5,489,138	90,353 (1.82)	4,951,421
22	Rajasthan	1,262,570 (8.24)	15,310,011	252,338 (1.53)	16,423,256
23	Sikkim	16,457 (12.04)	136,638	2,704 (2.18)	123,601
24	Tamil Nadu	418,801 (3.60)	11,612,412	151,437 (1.29)	11,728,802
25	Tripura	21,756 (2.78)	781,092	4,998 (0.71)	695,425
26	Uttar Pradesh	1,927,997 (4.08)	47,201,660	896,301 (1.75)	50,931,598
27	Uttarakhand	70183 (3.24)	2164891	28098 (1.27)	2204144
28	West Bengal	857,087 (4.50)	19,029,144	234,275 (1.34)	17,404,332
29	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1,960 (2.69)	72,803	999 (1.56)	63,921
30	Chandigarh	3,779 (2.07)	181,963	3,135 (1.69)	184,658
31	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	4,274 (8.84)	48,337	1,054 (1.47)	71,252
32	Daman & Diu	729 (2.58)	28,237	774 (2.16)	35,827
33	NCT of Delhi	41,899 (1.34)	3,115,078	26,473 (0.83)	3,184,119
34	Lakshadweep	27 (0.18)	14,266	28 (0.24)	11,405
35	Puducherry	1,904 (1.06)	178,069	1,421 (0.69)	204,443
	India	12,666,377 (5.00)	253,163,648	4,353,247 (1.67)	259,637,338

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

Source: Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India, 2015

Despite economic prosperity and dramatic fall in poverty levels, unequal access to education leaves millions of children trapped in child labour in developing countries like India (*India Today*, 2015). Child labour is widely prevalent all over India with significant variation among states and territories.

The premise underlying the constitutional amendment proclaiming the right to education and the right to education law is that it is the duty of the state and the parents to guarantee opportunities for education to the child between the age of 6 and 14 years.

The government has been taking various pro-active measures to tackle the problem. However, considering the magnitude and extent of the problem and that it is essentially a socio-economic problem inextricably linked to poverty and illiteracy, it requires concerted efforts from all sections of society to make a dent in the problem (Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India, 2015). In 2001, there were 1.26 crore working children in the age group of 5-14 which has been reduced to 43.53 lakh in 2011. These children deprived of education are pushed into the darkness of poverty, thus setting off an inter-generational cycle of deprivation and poverty.

Eighty percent of working children in India live in rural areas and three out of four of them work in agriculture or in household industries, most of which are home-based employment and may not be recorded in working children data. Five states -- Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra – have over half of India's total child labour population. India's biggest hub of child labour is Uttar Pradesh which accounts for almost 20% of India's child labourers (Save the Children, 2016)

UNICEF, in a review of child labour definition and estimates, found that employment questions used in child labour surveys generally miss unpaid farm work, animal husbandry, and help in family. It is highly likely that the prevalence of child labour in India that prevents or impedes children's participation of education is much higher than the census statistics suggest (UNICEF, 2012).

Decline in Gross Attendance Ratio (GAR) in Higher Grades

GAR at primary level was nearly 100 percent for both males and females in rural and urban areas. But as one moves to higher classes, the trend is of declining GAR. At upper primary level, GAR was 92 percent for males (91 percent in rural and 93 percent in urban areas) and 88 percent for females (in both rural and urban).

Table 5: Gross Attendance Ratio (percent) for different levels of education

Level of Education	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary	102	100	102	102
Upper Primary	91	88	93	88
Secondary	86	84	90	94
Higher Secondary	63	58	73	75
Above Higher Secondary	12	9	18	18

Source: NSS 71st Round, Education in India

Table 5 presents GAR for various broad population categories i.e. rural-urban and male-female by stages of education. It can be seen that from primary to higher secondary level, GAR declined significantly; and quite sharply beyond school education.

Lowest Quintile: The Worst Sufferer

Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of discrimination, since a lack of financial resources compels those in the lower socio-economic strata to compromise with their children's education at an early age. The level of participation at various stages of school education varies significantly across different quintile classes defined by the Usual Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure (UMPCE), especially after the primary level. In both rural and urban India, while only 67 percent people in the lowest UMPCE quintile class participated in secondary education, it has increased to 105 percent and 111 percent in rural and urban India respectively for the highest UMPCE quintile class.

Table 6: Gross Attendance Ratio (in percent) for different levels of education for each quintile class of UMPCE

Quintile class of UMPCE	Level of Education					
	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Primary to Higher secondary	Above Higher Secondary
RURAL						
1	99	81	67	38	82	4
2	99	91	81	48	87	5
3	101	94	86	57	90	9
4	103	94	91	70	93	12
5	107	91	105	89	99	21
All	101	90	85	61	90	11
URBAN						
1	100	82	67	41	82	6
2	101	89	92	65	91	10
3	105	97	100	78	98	16
4	105	96	103	92	100	24
5	101	94	111	99	101	33
All	102	91	92	74	93	18

Source: NSS 71st Round, Education in India

This disparity has increased further at higher secondary level in both the areas. At above higher secondary levels, GARs is only 4 percent and 6 percent in the bottom quintile class for rural and urban areas respectively, whereas these are 21 percent and 33 percent in rural and urban India respectively for the top quintile class of UMPCE.

The discussion above depicts India as a developing country struggling with poverty and other poverty-induced problems in establishing the right to education. Poverty restricts a

person to meeting basic necessities of life. Education is also one of the necessities of life, but poor families find themselves on the horns of a dilemma in choosing between sending their children to work and to school. Better education may open better employment opportunities in the future, but poverty-ridden families often are not able to make that choice. Here, the system fails to provide an environment conducive for education for the disadvantaged segments in society. Educational disparity found across quintile classes, rural-urban divide and male-female gap is a hindrance for a society that is struggling to fulfil equal right to education for all.

The Question of Quality Education

It is necessary to understand the quality of education situation from the perspective of rural India. It is true that the enrollment ratio in rural areas has risen but the question is: Are children, who are going to school in India, learning? According to Annual Status of Education Report (2014), the quality of education, measured by students' literacy competency, pose serious issues which must be addressed.

Table 7: Quality of Education

Percentage of children at different reading levels All India (Rural), 2014						
Grade	Beginner	Letter	Word	Para: Std I level	Story: Std II level	Total (%)
Std III	14.9	25.0	20.0	16.6	23.6	100
Std IV	8.4	17.5	17.9	18.9	37.4	100
Std V	5.7	12.8	14.3	19.1	48.1	100

Note: Reading skill was taken as a proxy for quality of education, and assessed by making students read the text in Hindi and English language of any previous classes. The assessment visit to Government schools was made on any random day in September, October and November. Reading skill was measured on four criteria, i.e. reading out a paragraph from a Std I level textbook, a Std II level story, and letters of the alphabet and words.

Source: Annual Status of Education Report, 2014.

As a matter of fact, reading is a foundational skill; without being able to read well, a child cannot progress in the education system. Table 7 revealed that students struggled in reading at different grade levels. For example, standard V students struggled in reading a Std II level story as only 48.1 percent were able to read it while the rest were at lower levels. Close to 20 percent of the children could only identify letters of the alphabet, whereas 14 percent could read words but not a sentence and 19 percent could read sentences but not a longer text.

5. Conclusion

NSS 71st round conducted in 2014 highlights that mean years of schooling of the people of India remains low compared to the average for developing countries; and that the literacy rate of the population does not represent a functional level of skills and competencies necessary for improving people's life and livelihood.

There are disparities in the education system that affect adversely rural people and women. Poverty and the quality of services provided in schools together impede participation in education for a large proportion of young people, who drop out or discontinue schooling early and engage in child labour. Despite government commitment and efforts, progress has been slow in this respect. Children in the lower socio-economic strata have remained particularly disadvantaged and deprived.

With the low reading levels achieved by most students, which is more common in rural areas and the lower income quintiles, the reasons for dropout and discontinuation and the general quality deficits of the system become evident. Clearly, the education system is not making the expected contribution to preparing young people adequately for the world of work and for life. Merely a quantitative approach to educational expansion have to be replaced by a quality-with-equity strategy that is more effective than what has been attempted so far in planning and managing the education system.

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Education Quality – Chasing the Elusive Goal

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Abstract

This paper refers to the recurrent theme of elusiveness of education quality, both in terms of the concept and the practices to realise it in education systems. J.P. Naik's 'elusive triangle' is recalled and the slow advance in this respect in over four decades is noted. In discussing the discourse on quality concepts and components in the context of EFA and post-2015 SDG agenda, various theoretical perspectives are mentioned. Practical challenges which transcend the specific theories are briefly presented. The article concludes by posing the question whether, Target 7 of the single overarching education goal for SDG, particularly focusing on the purposes of education, does not add to the elusiveness of the quality objectives of education and complexities of realising them.

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Key Words: *Education Quality, SDG4 – Target7, Elusive Triangle, South Asia, India, Quality challenges beyond theories.*

1. The Elusive Triangle

About four decades ago, in 1979, the celebrated Indian educationist J.P. Naik wrote an article in the International Review of Education, titled "Equality, Quality and Quantity: the Elusive Triangle in Indian Education" (Naik, 1979).

Naik observed that anyone reading the history of Indian education would be struck by the fact that every generation lamented a deterioration in standards and it would appear that there has been a continuous fall in the quality of education over the last seventy or eighty years.

Naik argued that this was a partial truth:

- i. Indian education comprised a "dual" system with a core of high standard institutions, mostly private and fee-charging, with highly competitive admission, capable teachers and good management. But they combined quality with privilege and served the well-to-do. This small core of quality institutions was surrounded by "a large penumbra of institutions of medium or poor (or even very poor) quality which are mostly in the public sector and largely utilized by the common people" (Ibid.)
- ii. But then the definition of quality itself has been shifting. For example, Naik noted that for a long time the most prized thing in education in India was the command over the English language, which became almost synonymous with "quality" in education. (b.

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183) The Indian tradition emphasized verbal fluency, language proficiency and capacity to remember and reproduce. Other developments of personality, and especially manual skills, were under-estimated.

- iii. Quality was often defined, Naik wrote, in terms of inputs, such as, education and training of teachers, class-size, quality of buildings and equipment, curricula and text-books prescribed. Important as these are, by themselves these did not guarantee higher standards.
- iv. A legitimate indicator of quality, Naik noted, was educational output measured by examination results. Knowledge, skills and values acquired by students are better criteria than the others mentioned above, provided that examinations actually measured these attainments. The evidence in this respect, however, Naik observed, was mixed -- showing standards going up in some learning output areas and for some students and going down for others. Whether high stake public examinations actually measured appropriate competencies and skills of learners, i.e., the validity of the tests, has become more debatable than in the past.

On the whole it appears that not enough academic work was done to define what quality in education really meant and how it could be measured “in different areas at the same time or at different times in the same area,” concluded Naik. And the discussion of deterioration or improvement of standards over time continued to be very subjective.

Naik pointed out the reasons that hindered quality in education:

- i. The total resources made available were limited; and the claims of expansion had a higher priority over qualitative programmes.
- ii. It was far more difficult to develop qualitative programmes; educational administrators preferred more easily organised quantitative actions.
- iii. Qualitative improvement, especially at the secondary and university stages, demanded a concentration of resources in people, money and materials at a few selected centres or on a few programmes. On so-called grounds of democracy, in Naik’s view, a selective and phased approach to quality development could not be undertaken. For instance, the recommendation of the 1966 Education Commission to select 10 per cent of the institutions at all stages, in the first instance, for qualitative improvement was not accepted by decision-makers.
- iv. Programmes of quality improvement need money, which was scarce; but even more importantly, they needed careful planning and intensive human effort, which were scarcer.
- v. Promising qualitative changes achieved at great cost and effort often simply vanished when hit by such hazards as student unrest; strikes by teachers, students and employees; and political and communal disturbances. Conflicts and violence on a large scale affecting lives and educational prospects of millions, have become pandemic compared to Naik’s time.

In his summation of the Indian experience, Naik, commented:

The experience of free India ... is probably repeated in many developing countries in its essential features. It does highlight the contradictions and immense problems involved in

bringing about a transformation of the educational system on the principles of equality of educational opportunity, life-long education for all and the maintenance of standards, especially when resources are scarce and the over-all social situation is inequalitarian and hierarchical (p.184).

After forty years, quality of education is still an elusive goal because there is no widely accepted dominant concept or sufficient clarity about its parameters and key components, and no broad consensus on how it should be measured and how priorities are set to work on it.

At the same time, there is a consensus that it is a central concern, that educational systems must not side-step it, that the objectives and outcomes of education must reflect the quality issues, and assessing education progress for individual learners and society must be based on quality measures.

2. A Recurrent Theme

Quality in a generic sense refers to the standard of something as measured against other things of a similar kind, the degree of excellence of something, or a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something. The connotation is that it is relative and context-specific, rather than absolute. (www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/quality).

From the beginning of the global education movement with the launching of EFA in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, quality has been a recurrent theme. An evolution in the expression of quality concerns can be noticed through the decades since the 1990s. A generic and philosophical expression in the 1990 EFA Declaration has given way to somewhat more specific constructs related to stages of education and participant groups in the Dakar Framework and MDGs.

A decade later, in the Dakar Framework for Action, recognising access to quality education as the right of every child, declared that quality was 'at the heart of education'. It affirmed that enrolment, retention and cognitive learning could not be achieved without attention to quality in education programmes. An expanded view of quality was put forward which included learners ready to learn (healthy and motivated), teaching-learning process that worked (competent teachers using active learner-centred pedagogies), learning content (relevant curricula and learner-friendly textbooks and materials) and systems (effective and accountable management and adequate/equitable resource allocation). This formulation of education quality went considerably beyond abstract generalities and helped establish an agenda for working towards achieving education quality, (UNESCO-GMR, 2005, ch. 1, pp. 28-30)..

The broadening and a degree of sharpening of the concept of quality in the Dakar Framework were not accompanied by developing related quality indicators and applying them in designing and assessing educational programmes. So in assessing progress of the EFA 2015 agenda, we ended up using such process and input indicators as student's staying in school up to certain grades, and teacher-student ratio, rather than actual learning outcomes.

The World Education Forum (WEF) 2015 in Incheon Korea, proclaimed the Education 2030 agenda (an integral part of SDG 2030). One of five key themes was quality education, along with right to education, equality in education, inclusive education and lifelong learning.

A broader perspective has now been attempted to be articulated without giving up specificity in the SDG2030 and the Education 2030 agenda. The choice of these five themes reflected a clear message that the definition and scope of each connected with others and each had to contribute to realising the objectives of others..(<http://en.unesco.org/world-education-forum-2015/>).

The theme statement of WEF 2015 affirmed that “Good quality education, provided by trained and supported teachers, is the right of all children, youth and adults, not the privilege of the few.”(Ibid.)

It elaborates further:

Not only teaching basic skills like reading and math, but encouraging critical thinking and fostering the desire and capacity for lifelong learning that adapts and shifts in local, national and global dynamics...(ibid.).

Recognising the importance of qualitative aspects of the targets and their adaptation to specific national contexts, an international Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has been at work in developing indicators for SDG4. Four levels of indicators are proposed:

- a. Global - a small set of globally comparable indicators for all SDGs, including SDG 4. These have been under development through a consultative process led by the United Nations Statistical Commission to monitor progress towards the associated targets;
- b. Thematic: a broader set of globally comparable indicators proposed by the education community to track the education targets more comprehensively across countries; they will include the global education indicators; 43 such indicators for all SDGs have been formulated and broad agreement has been reached.
- c. Regional: Additional indicators may be developed to take account of a specific regional context and relevant policy priorities.
- d. National: Indicators selected or developed by countries to take account of their national context and which will correspond to their education systems, plans and policy agendas.

The thematic indicators may be the take-off point for preparation of national indicators. The thematic as well as the national indicators are expected to be based on the criteria of relevance to the population to be served, alignment with the concepts in the target, feasibility for regular annual action. (UNESCO, 2015, Education 2030 Framework for Action)

3. Quality concepts and components – Making it less elusive

GMR 2005 presented a review of various theoretical and conceptual premises underlying the ideas and practices regarding educational quality. Different educational traditions and associated ideas about quality were examined. Among these were the following (UNESCO-GMR, 2005, ch.1).

The rights based perspective saw education, at least at the basic level, as a right which must be provided by the duty-bearers, principally, the state ensuring acceptable quality. The main quality elements emphasized are equity, inclusion, dignity and rights of individuals, and learning objectives derived from universally recognised democratic and human values. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are the main inspirations behind this perspective.

The humanist and constructivist perspective looks upon education as a social process with strong agency of the learner herself/himself. The teacher and the education institutions are the facilitators to allow learners engage in discovery and construction of knowledge.

The behaviourist tradition saw the education system as a standardised, externally defined and controlled process. Examinations and testing played a critical role in directing and assessing the learning of defined skills and competencies. Teachers, curricula, textbooks and examinations are means of controlling and guiding the education process.

The critical education tradition looks at education prompting social change. Curriculum and teaching methods encourage critical analysis, and skills and capabilities that promote learner agency.

The adult education and andragogy tradition puts a premium on learner self-motivation, value of learner experience and critical reflection. This perspective is especially relevant to promote lifelong learning.

The premises underpinning the concept and practice of education quality reflected in the different traditions are not altogether mutually exclusive. They also vary regarding their value and comprehensiveness as guide to educational planning, setting aims and objectives of education, management, and monitoring and evaluation of programmes.

Consideration of the diverse perspectives and a sharper focus on quality have led to the emergence of a conceptual framework for discourse on quality as proposed in GMR 2005 (figure 1). This framework identifies key elements -- learners; the delivery system; schools and classrooms including pedagogy, teachers, learning content and assessment of learning; and outcome for learners and society – all these mediated by the social and political context that determines political commitment and resource provisions. (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A framework for understanding education quality

<i>Learner</i>	<i>Enabling inputs</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
characteristics	Teaching and learning materials	Literacy, numeracy
Aptitude	Physical infrastructure and facilities	and life skills
Perseverance	Human resources: teachers, principals	Creative and
School readiness	inspectors,	emotional skills
Prior knowledge	supervisors, administrators	Values
Barriers to learning	School governance	Social benefits
	Teaching and learning	
	Learning time	
	Teaching methods	
	Assessment, feedback, incentives	
	Class size	

Economic and labour market conditions in the community	Educational knowledge and support infrastructure	Philosophical standpoint of teacher and learner	National standards
Socio-cultural and religious factors	Public resources for education	Peer effects	Public expectations
Aid strategies	Competitiveness of the teaching profession on the labour market	Parental support	Labour market demands
	National governance and management strategies	Time for schooling and homework	Globalization

Source: Global Monitoring Report 2005, Ch. 1. p. 36

The unbundling of the conceptual framework for quality presented in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 and re-stated in GMR 2015 and the first GEM Report 2016 helps chart a roadmap for addressing quality concerns

The framework provides a broad structure that can be used for the purposes of monitoring education quality as well as analysing policy choices for quality improvement. These choices have to be made about the teaching and learning process nested within the support system of inputs and the contextual factors. Teaching and learning is the arena where the impact of curricula is felt, where teaching methods work well or not and learners are motivated to participate and learn how to learn. This is where the quality concepts and practices have to be applied and results produced, but this is where the desired outcomes often fail to materialise.

4. Making pedagogy work in the classroom

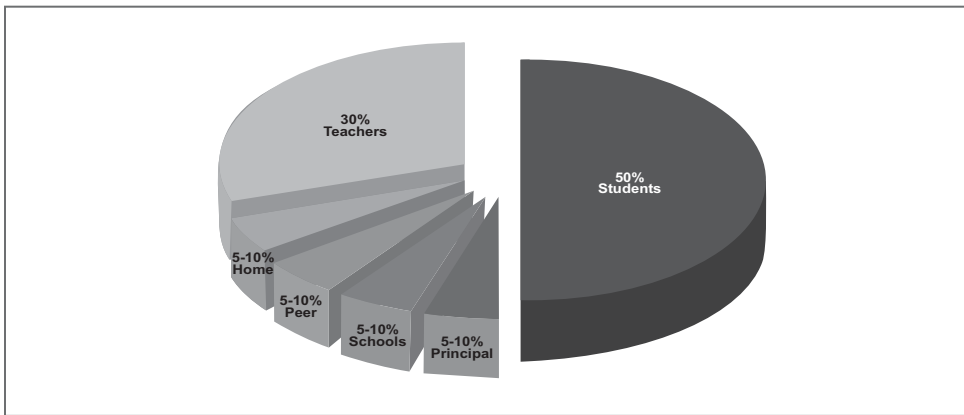
The theories and the heuristic about the concept of quality in education are important, but there is no substitute for effective teaching-learning in the classroom with engaged and active learner. John Hattie, a psycho-metrician who likes to look at size effects, undertook a monumental synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses representing 50,000 studies on learning achievement. Based on his studies, he pleaded for “visible teaching” and “visible learning” where learning can be made the explicit and common goal for learners, teachers and the learning system. Professor Hattie presents in his book, *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, a large collection of evidence-based research into what actually works in schools and classrooms to improve learning (Hattie, 2009).

Hattie identified six factors and assessed their respective contributions to student achievement. These factors are: the child; the home; the school; the teacher; the curriculum and the approaches to teaching. Hattie argues that the child brings to school (from preschool, home, and genetics) factors that influence achievement, as well as a set of personal dispositions that can affect the outcomes of schooling. The home can either nurture and support achievement of students, or it can be harmful and destructive (Figure 2)

What teachers do matters, Hattie notes, particularly those who teach in the most “deliberate and visible way.” They also help students to create a range of learning strategies, including direction and re-direction and maximising the power of feedback from the student.

Overall, Hattie argues that teachers need to seek feedback on their practice from both students and colleagues. They also need to help students become their own teachers. Through more visible teaching and learning, there is a greater likelihood of students reaching higher levels of achievement.

Figure 2: Percentage of Achievement by Students Attributable to Various Factors



Source: Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). “Building Teacher Quality: What does the research tell us?” John Hattie, 2003, ACER e-search.

Evidence-based policy making is the buzz-word today. Research evidence of course has to be taken seriously. At the same time, it is necessary not to forget that in human and social development, the imponderables – the unforeseen intervening variables – never fail to intervene. Caution has to be exercised in interpreting and applying the evidence-based inferences in specific contexts. The proportions shown of relative influences of the six factors cannot be taken as mathematical certainty, but they do point in a general way to relative significance of the factors. It suggests that students have to be placed at the centre of the teaching-learning process and the teacher has a critical role in doing precisely that.

Hattie himself seems to favour a more nuanced position, recognising the interaction of the factors, in his latter writings, including his later books on visible learning and visible teaching. (Dept. of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010)

5. Some Cross-cutting challenges beyond theories

An empirical and pragmatic approach has to be taken about addressing the multi-dimensional challenges of educational systems, in which the quality concerns are central, whatever particular formulation of these are favoured in a specific context. The theoretical perspectives of quality bring to the fore various dimensions of quality. The conceptual framework mentioned earlier offers a way of bringing together the different dimensions,

looking at their inter-connections, and move towards building a quality-oriented and quality enhancing educational system.

However, the reality in respect of the education system in many developing countries is daunting. The Centre for Universal Education of the Brookings Institution reports that education quality and levels in developing countries are approximately 100 years behind developed countries. This global gap in education shows that in the world's poorest nations the average levels of attainment are at levels achieved in developed countries in the early 20th century (Winthrop, 2015)

The recent Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, 2016 projects that by current trends, universal primary completion will be achieved in 2042, universal lower secondary completion in 2059 and universal upper secondary completion in 2084. It mentions a 50-year overall gap in fulfilling the right to education between rich and poor countries. This is only about participation in education, the first step, before steps can be taken for acceptable quality (UNESCO-GEM, 2016)

Whether the gap is 100 years or 50 years in the quality and level of student learning between developed and developing countries, this cannot be acceptable – that is the premise of SDG4 and Education 2030.

In this regard, a number of empirical challenges, which is not getting sufficient attention, need to be highlighted. These are particularly germane to South Asia, the world's largest concentration of illiteracy, other educational deficits and poverty. The experience here is similar to that of Sub-Saharan Africa, where also a regional concentration of educational deprivation and poverty persist..

I would like to mention several concerns, which must be addressed irrespective of the theoretical perspective or definition of quality espoused. My list includes: literacy skills, teachers' role, assessment of learning, trends towards privatisation of education, leadership in education, and thinking about target 7 of SDG4. I do not propose to embark on a treatise on these issues, on each of which a book can be written. I will attempt to raise some key aspects of these topics which deserve serious attention of the education community and policy-makers.

5. a Literacy – a tool for learning

National governments publish literacy rates and the Unesco Institute of Statistics (UIS) does the same every year announcing the numbers and proportions of adults who are illiterate in the world. What do these numbers really mean? Let me illustrate the point by drawing on Bangladesh experience.

The importance of literacy as the foundation and the first step for lifelong learning is well-recognised. It is a foundational skill also for children in formal education. It is expected this foundation would be built in the early grades of primary education. Yet there is a lack of clarity and consensus on how literacy should be assessed, measured, defined and what teaching-learning approach to be followed. The problem can be illustrated by citing the Bangladesh case.

A recent independent national sample survey applying a methodology that tested levels of literacy of the year 11+ population, 51.3% was found to be literate, whereas official figures based on self-reporting showed a rate of 63%. More interestingly, the test, that had four

elements (reading, writing, numeracy and application of 3Rs in everyday life), found literacy rate at an initial level was 25.3% and at an advanced level it was 26.0%. The test attempted to differentiate between four levels – non-literate, semi-literate, literate at initial level and literate at advanced level. Initial level of literacy meant that skills could be used in a limited way and needed to be sustained with further literacy skills development. Advanced level literacy indicated that skills could be used in daily functions and could be regarded as self-sustaining.

This result showing about half of those considered literate not reaching a self-sustaining and functional level was consistent with past survey result carried out in Bangladesh since 2002. The recent survey also showed that among young people who completed five years of primary education, one-third (32.2%) did not acquire literacy at the initial level. Even after eight years of schooling, 8.2% remained semi-literate – a telling commentary on quality by any definition. (CAMPE, 2016). Students who fail to build a foundation of learning tools are handicapped as far as further learning is concerned and suffer from cumulative deficits from which most cannot recuperate.

This is a situation not unique to Bangladesh. But unlike Bangladesh, many countries have not tried to apply tested literacy assessment or recognise and measure different levels of literacy.

Three conclusions are pertinent:

- i. Literacy assessments should take into account different levels of skills and a test-based assessment method should be used to determine sustainable skill level,
- ii. To derive the benefits of literacy and make it a first step in lifelong learning, sustainable skill level has to be achieved;
- iii. Primary education has to give more systematic attention to building the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy than burdening the curriculum with a half dozen different subjects – all given about similar weight.

5. b Teachers' role

It is often said that an education system can be no better than its teachers. Whatever perspective and definition of education quality are adopted, the teacher' role remain critical. A saying attributed to Rabindranath Tagore is, "a teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its flame".

Teaching is the largest single occupational category in which people with post-secondary education are employed in Bangladesh. At least a quarter of university and college graduates seek employment in teaching and related education jobs. Even a higher proportion should be in teaching if the demand in terms of expected student teacher-ratio and quality indicators are applied. in primary and secondary education. Despite the fact that a large share of the graduates enter the profession, there is no pre-service academic programme for preparing and orienting young people for teaching as part of the mainstream undergraduate tertiary education..

Teaching appears to be the last occupational choice for higher education graduates in Bangladesh. In contrast, teaching is one of the highest paid and coveted job in Finland, Germany, Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Singapore and most other OECD countries.

It is partly a matter of salaries offered to teachers. Although salaries of teachers employed in institutions in the public sector or those subsidised from public funds, have been raised

recently by up to 100%, these are not seen as quite comparable in remuneration or status with other public sector jobs with similar educational qualifications.

There is clearly the need for a comprehensive and coordinated human resource development and management policy for the teaching profession, that would help make teaching a top career choice for talented young people. This has been a matter of some public discussion. Four connected steps may be part of such a policy:

- Making education part of undergraduate general degree in selected degree colleges;
- Attracting best students to this programme with incentives, such as stipends;
- Taking the measures to ensure high academic standard for this course; and
- Introducing a National Teaching Service Corps with high salary and status to which the graduates of the new education programme can look forward as a career.

This way a nucleus of talented and qualified young teachers could be placed in every primary and secondary school. They can be catalysts for change in those schools. Thus, a transformation in teaching-learning in the school system can happen over a period of time

5.c. Educational Leadership

The typical pattern in the public school system in the region is that the head of the institution, the principal or headmaster, is one who is appointed to that position by virtue of acquiring seniority as a teacher. The result often is a good and experienced teacher is lost to teaching and the school gets as its manager someone who is mediocre or less in capability.

That the school as an enterprise has multiple and complex roles and functions cannot be denied. These relate to academic planning, managing teaching and other personnel, protecting and promoting wellbeing of students, looking after finances and physical plants and premises, dealing with multiple stakeholders with high stakes in the school, and leading a change process striving for excellence. How prepared, skilled and motivated is the school leader who is vested with all of these roles and responsibilities? How are the status, incentives, rewards and performance standards ensured for the school leader? These questions receive scant attention.

Wherever a school is known for its good performance and acquires a reputation for its accomplishments, it can be found that behind this success there is a leader, who is most likely to be the school-head and who can inspire and get the support of others, such as some of the school managing committee members, parents and teachers. Even in a centralised management structure, and without formal recognition of the special role of the school leader, these good results can be observed sometimes, because of the idealism and dedication of individuals, who manage to become outstanding leaders. These examples can point to what changes are needed and what can happen in the school system, when the need for change is recognised and actively promoted.

5.d ICT in education and for education

The contribution of education technology has often been cited as the means of salvaging schools from poor quality. But it has generally not lived up to the hype. Digital technology, in its scope and reach into all aspects of life and society is qualitatively different from traditional instructional technology.

We can look at Khan Academy as an illustration of the potential. It is non-profit educational organization created in 2006 by Salman Khan with the audacious goal of providing a "free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere". (khan Academy, website) It produces short lecture videos which are posted on YouTube – some 9,000 have been posted on school curriculum-related topics. Its website has practice exercises and tools for educators. All resources are available free to anyone around the world. The main language of the website is English, but increasingly the content is being made available in other languages. The content is licensed under a Creative Commons license.

But how much use is being made of these resources and how can their potential be fully harnessed? These are not substitutes for school, classroom activities and teachers. The point is that everything that can help overcome the many limitations of the school system should be fully used. Much more need to be done to expand the access infrastructure such as laptops/tablets, affordable and reliable Internet connection for schools, students and teachers; and many more teachers or specially recruited teaching aides to support and guide students and other teachers to make use of the IT resources. Otherwise the new technology would continue to widen the rich poor- gap among countries and within countries – with the better off taking full advantage of the best technology, infrastructure and the tech-savvy teachers guiding their children.

5.e. Assessment of learning

The critically important characteristic of a forward-looking middle income country aiming for prosperity and wellbeing of all its citizens is its global competitiveness in terms of skills and capabilities of its human resources. I think all the developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region fall in this category.

The competitive edge for the work force has to be promoted and supported through the performance of the educational system. The great divide in educational performance that separates developed and the poorer developing countries must be bridged by ensuring effective performance of students, schools and teachers. In addition to quality enhancing measures in schools and in the teaching learning process, assessment of learning will have to provide the metrics to monitor progress in quality and performance of students. One way is to participate in international assessments such as Programme on International student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). These provide a comparative view of how the school system performs and help build capacity in assessment in the country for critical review of teaching-learning. (CIEA, website).

Two states of India participated in PISA in 2009–10 and were placed in 72nd position out of 73 countries that participated in student assessments in mathematics, reading and science. Whether participation of students in the international assessments served any useful purpose data table when it was known that the schools, teachers and the system were at a great disadvantage compared to other countries. But is it not the point that the disadvantages must be highlighted and ways found to overcome them? A preparatory process and technical capacity development for participation in international assessment on a trial basis could be the first important steps to this end, before formal participation.

Within the framework of SDG 2030 and Education 2030, basic competencies in language, math, science and computer skills of primary and secondary education students need to

match or compare favourably with those of other higher middle income countries as judged by international assessment.

At the same time, home-grown assessment as those of Pratham in India and ASER measuring basic education competencies of children, both in school and outside school, draws attention to the poor performance and wastage of efforts and resources in the education system. These efforts help identify the points where the system breaks down. A culture of denial of problems among decision-makers backed up by a political culture to encourage such denial prevent action to deal with the problems.

5.f. Private Profit, Public Loss – Privatising schools

‘Low-fee’ private schools are being advanced as the solution to the failings of public education systems, at least as complement and supplement to the public system. There are powerful champions of this point of view including the publishing giant Pearson PLC, billionaires Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, the World Bank Group, and the UK’s Department for International Development. The claim is being made that these private schools deliver a quality education to children from poor families at a low cost.

The Global Campaign for Education (GCE), a coalition of civil society education stakeholders, find these claims about private schools and evidence in their support seriously flawed. “In reality, such schools worsen social inequality by creating an unfair system where the quality of a child’s education is determined by how much their family can afford to pay” (GCE, 2016).

The report finds that these schools: a) stay low-fee by providing low quality with substandard and low-paid teachers, often performing poorly; b) price families in poverty out of school, when a significant proportion of the population is still living below poverty line; c) create barriers for girls’ education, when parents, not able to pay the fees, picked boys over girls to send to school; and d) fail to serve children with disabilities, since these children may raise school’s cost.

The report argues that governments must stop, what it considers, dangerous experiment with for-profit, private schools and instead commit to improving their public education systems. With proper funding, strong policies, and political will, governments can provide a free, quality education that’s accessible to everyone, GCE proposes.

Private education is growing in many countries in the region. A third of the children in Pakistan as a whole and over 40% in Punjab are attending private schools at the primary and secondary levels. India appears to be approaching a similar proportion. In spite of the right to education law and the efforts to improve the quality and attractiveness of the public system, the perception of poor quality of the public system and a “better value for money” in the private sector is widespread, though not always supported by objective assessments. (UNESCO Asia Pacific Regional Office, 2017)

There is a basic contradiction in offering as a product for sale a public good that is basic general education and recognized so by national constitutions and legislation. On the other hand, the resource and capacity limitations in the public sector may make it necessary for the private sector, including profit-making institutions, to take the load off the public sector. Moreover, the diversity and different qualitative features demanded in education services by some of the clientele cannot be offered by the public sector at public cost. (Ibid.)

Yet, there appears to be no mechanism for taking an aggregate view of the total education system that includes public, semi-public and private resources for education. There is also the household sector, in which parents pay for their children in private as well as public institutions. They pay the extra direct costs for their children to attend a public school and off-budget charges, which a public school often demands from parents. There are also the costs of private tutors either in private or public schools, which have become common and require substantial amounts to be paid by parents (Ibid).

6. SDG4 Target 7– Working to be less elusive?

What is the purpose of education? What kind of human beings we would like to see the education system to produce? These are questions on the minds of educationists and citizens. It is simple and which adds to the elusiveness of the education quality goal.

Target 7 of SDG 4 includes a range of items which relate to the philosophical question about the purpose of education and the attributes of the human beings who will grow up as individuals and members of society and how the educational process can influence the desired outcome.

Target 7 attempts to list the outcomes under the broad purpose of “acquiring knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.” Then it goes on to indicate the content and objectives of a range of educational activities under this umbrella. More specifically, the target mentions education activities for:

- sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles,
- human rights,
- gender equality,
- promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,
- global citizenship
- appreciation of cultural diversity ,and
- culture’s contribution to sustainable development

These components of the target confront the technical advisory group working on indicators for monitoring progress on the targets with formidable challenge. Ultimately, for the components of this target, the objectives, content, teaching-learning approach and assessing progress in learning, and more importantly, in behaviour and values have to be elaborated at the country level within the themes mentioned under the target. Each of the themes is still a broad category under which specific elements have to be identified in countries – the listing and their relative prominence would vary somewhat from country to country..

Two points can be made on the themes under this target. First, they clearly relate to some of the paramount challenges humankind face and students must grow up with awareness and preparedness for these issues.

For example, conflict and violence, across borders and within borders of countries, raging in several parts of the world, have produced a horrendous humanitarian crisis. A high level of violent conflict has become the new norm.

Another example is about the effects of climate change. Scientists warn of catastrophe of proportions that human civilisation have not known so far, if green house gas emissions cannot be held back and the increase in global average temperature below 2 °C or 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels cannot be achieved. Time is running out and the global community, nations, societies and every individual has a role to play in capping the rise.

The second point is a question. Is too much being expected of the education system in solving the problems of humanity and the planet, such as the ones just mentioned? Curricula, textbooks, teaching methods, examinations and co-curricular activities seem to be rather inadequate responses to the huge existential challenges. Schools, teachers, and the education system have a role and we have to work on defining and practicing these roles. But it cannot be just the school's job. Society as a whole has to be mobilised and schools can be a part of this mobilisation. We have not quite figured out how schools, and society and each community work together to deal with the common challenges. I would say, this is not enough of a priority yet of either the education community or society at large.

We have now the opportunity and the challenge provided by SDG 2030 and the Education 2030 agenda to refocus on sharpening concepts and identifying effective practices to enhance quality of education, making the quality goal relevant, pragmatic and less elusive in institutions and the system. Some key elements of this re-focusing has been attempted to be outlined in this paper.

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