

## Education Streams in Bangladesh Parents' Thinking and Students' Performance

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**Abstract:** Selection of appropriate education streams is one of the important factors for student. But at the entry level students have no capacity to select any one of the education streams out of three such as Bengali Medium, English Medium and Religious Education. At this stage parents mainly play the role of selection. The selection procedure depends on the availability of education institutes, parents' economic condition and their creative decision regarding the future of students. Selection of education streams mainly depend on three factors: most of rural parents select the nearest government primary school, religious people put priority on Religious Education and urban based high income parents select English Medium education. There are some deviations among the three streams. Some parent put emphasis on good institute rather than education stream because of carrier development of their children according to the future needs. But in socio-economic perspective majority of parents are not well aware for children's future. So some students could not continue the entry level education streams. This tendency is highly observed in English medium education and that is why after 3 to 4 years most of the students change their education streams from English medium to Bengali medium. It is also found that some students shift from Bengali medium to Religious education or technical education for gaining a certificate. The education system in our country creates physical, mental and social differences among students of different streams. So the ways of thinking of students are also different. Education streams, social trends, parents' and teachers' attitudes sometime hindered the mental development of students. As a result, most of the students could not perform as a universal citizen in future. The study focuses on the thinking of parents who primarily way out the path of entrance in education stream. The study also highlighted the performances of students of different education streams in their real life.

### 1.0 Introduction

Education is the basis of human resource development which leads to an important prerequisite for ensuring sustainable development of Bangladesh. By 2020 Bangladesh should have achieved a strong system of basic education with virtually all children enrolled and completing primary education with at least minimum levels of competency directly related to life skills. The content of education will stress life skills and problems solving rather than mainly the rote memorization that prevails at present. Rote memorization helps instill a solid foundation in a child's

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learning but children also need to acquire the ability to learn on their own, so they can continue to learn after completion of schooling. In the past education was primarily an English controlled upper class affair with all courses given in English and a very little being done for the common people. Government has taken steps to leave such practices in the past and is looking forward to education as a way to provide a somewhat poverty-stricken nation with a brighter future. In the recent years some innovative and effective programs of basic education have been initiated in the country to tackle the overwhelming problem of literacy. The government launched the Compulsory Primary Education program in 1992 in 68 upazilas and extended nation wide in 1993 (A. M. Sharafuddin, 2003). The government made rural primary education free for girls up to grade 10 and also introduced food for education program at primary level. In 1980s many NGOs began basic education program in support of their poverty alleviation activities. The education system in Bangladesh is divided into 4 levels: primary from grades 1 to 5, secondary from grades 6 to 10, higher secondary from grades 11 to 12 and tertiary. Alongside national educating system, English Medium education is also provided by some private enterprises. They offer 'A' level and 'O' level courses. There is also Religious Education system which emphasizes on Arabic medium Islam-based religious education (Bangladesh, 2000).

The present study highlighted on the main education streams in Bangladesh. The information presented in the paper is generated by a qualitative empirical survey. The study is conducted in selected a Government primary school and an Ebtadae madrasa and an English medium school. The primary data are collected with the help of discussion schedule from students, teachers and parents. A total of 45 respondents were interviewed from three institutes where students (15), teachers (15) and parents (15) are interviewed. Collected data are analyzed by using simple statistical tools like mean and percentage.

## **2.0 Education Streams in Bangladesh**

After the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, the People's Republic of Bangladesh became an independent nation free to choose its own educational destiny. The country constitution obligates the state to provide basic education to citizens and eradicates illiteracy within a given

time frame. Article 17 of the Constitution assures that all children between the ages of six and ten years are to be provided basic education free of charge. As a result of both government and private efforts over the last three decades, some important improvements have occurred in primary education sector. More than 95% of children aged 6 to 10 years are admitted to primary school and drop out rates are now only 28% (BBS, 2003). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were officially established at the Millennium Summit in 2000 and 189 member nations have agreed to try to achieve those by the year 2015 (Wikipedia, on-line). Goal 2 indicates to achieve universal primary education. Every child should have access to primary education by 2015. The government of Bangladesh fully conforms to the objective of education for all and the MDGs' and international declarations. Bangladesh is a secular state; many forms of education are permitted to co-exist. The main streams of education in Bangladesh are divided into three different branches (<http://sanisoft.tripod.com>). Students are free to choose anyone of them provided that they have the means. These branches are: (a) Bengali Medium, (b) English Medium, and (c) Religious education.

## 2.1 Bengali Medium General Education

In the Bengali Medium, all the courses are offered in Bengali with the exception of English courses and the Religious course. The tuition fee is minimal compared to English schools but they still vary largely between schools. After three years of pre-school, students in the Bengali medium do five years of primary school. Primary education refers to education, as determined by the government, for the children of age group of 6 to 10 years in grades 1 to 5 having prescribed national curriculum, text books and school hours. After completion of primary level students move to high school for grade five to grade ten. At the end of the tenth grade, one must pass the SSC Examination, which is common to everybody. These exams are divided in regional boards to be administered and students pass the exams in different schools as indicated by their respective boards.

## 2.2 English Medium

The British rule in Indian Subcontinent is still very influential as English is still the second official languages of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. Students in Bangladesh have the right to attend schools in the English medium where courses are taught in English using English books with the

exception of the Bengali courses and the Religious course. However, English medium schools are mainly private and thus reserved for the wealthy class. After three years of pre-school, students must successfully pass through ten grades and then to be eligible for writing the Ordinary Level Exams, also called the O-Levels. Then after one more year of studies, students can write the Advanced Level (A-Level) Exams. Both these routines are offered for Arts students and to Science students. The O-Levels and A-Levels are both prepared in England and are common to every country in the world at the same time. Once the exams are written, they are sealed in envelopes and sent to England for corrections. After the A-Levels, students are free to choose their subjects in the Universities but many of them tend to leave the country to study abroad.

### 2.3 Religious Education

Religion is the experience and expression of faith (Religious Education, online). In the Bangladesh perspective religious education is one of the important streams which deal with Islamic religious education. In the sub continent madrasa education was started in 1780 during the period of Warren Hasting in Calcutta with Dars Nizamia Curriculum. This curriculum, which historically serves as a model for many madrasa throughout the world, was developed in its original form for the Nizaamia Madrasa in Bagdad (Sha Abdul Hannan, 2002). The first madrasa in Bengal followed traditional courses such as Arabic Grammar, Arabic Language, Philosophy, Logic Fiqh, Kalam etc. At present this education system extended up to tertiary top level but the students have limited scope in job market due to absent of recognition at government level. Madrasa derived from an Arabic word Darsun' meaning lesson. It is a Muslim educational institute. The primary stage of madrasa is called Maqtab or Nurani madrasha or Furkania madrasa. These education centres giving lessons on reading and reciting the Holy Quran are known as Darse Quran. Usually the local mosque serves as the centres for primary education for boys and girls of nearby families. The imams and muazzins of local mosques work as teachers. Other kinds of primary level madrasa are called Ebtadae madrasa, which is fully or partially carried out by local and government supports. Stages of education in the system are: Ebtadaee, Dakhil, Fazil, Alim and Kamil. These education centres are giving lesson on Quran, Sunnah, Fiqh etc in addition to Bangla, English etc according to the madrasa curriculum. In the late 1980s, efforts

were being made to modernize the madresa education system and to introduce to secular subjects in the madrasa curriculum under the Maderasa Education Board. The objective of the madrasa education during the Third Five-Year plan was to modernize the system through the introduction of science course. Under the present Religious education stream there are 12000 institutions with about 3.5 million students who receive a combination of religious and temporal education from more than 150 thousand teachers (MoE, on-line). Islam plays a very dominant role in the education systems of Bangladesh. In all the branches, it is required by the government since 1983 to teach Islamic studies. Hence, children learn to read Arabic from a very early age. Nevertheless, non-Moslem students are never forced to learn the Quran and can regularly be excused from Islamic courses.

### **3.0 Students in Education Streams**

#### **3.1 Freedom of Choice and Parents Role**

It is not possible to select an education stream by a student at the entry level. In the most of the cases the parents perform the role of selecting a certain education stream. Free primary education, free education for girls up to class ten, food-for educational program encourage people to select Bengali medium education. Urban based economically solvent parents' primarily select English medium education due to availability of English medium institutes. Parents of Madrash students believe that Religious education promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Learning about religion and learning from religion are important, as Religious education helps to develop an understanding of themselves and others. Generally socio-economic conditions of parents influence on the decision making process to select specific education stream. Sometimes parents are motivated to the surrounding environment or influenced by the relative to shift from general education stream to English medium or Religious education.

Table 1 shows the parents' reactions on the selection of education stream. It is observed that free education (69%), development of strong English base (55%), and spiritual and moral development (67%) mostly encourages parents to select Bengali medium, English medium and Religious education streams respectively. It is also observed that the thinking of homogeneous group is different from heterogeneous group.

Table 1 : Factor Affecting on Selection of Education Streams

Streams of education	Factor affecting on the selection of education stream	% of Parents Reactions	
		Homogeneous (same stream)	Heterogeneous (other streams)
Bengali Medium	Free education facility	10 (66.67)	9 (60.00)
	Availability of institutes	3 (20.00)	2 (13.33)
	Parents poverty	2 (13.33)	4(26.67)
English Medium	To develop English base	8( 53.33)	8( 53.33)
	Suitable environment	4(26.67)	5(33.33)
	Present day needs	3 (20.00)	2 (13.33)
Religious Education	Spiritual & moral development	10 (66.67)	9 (60.00)
	Learning about religion	4(26.67)	2 (13.33)
	Not fit for general education	1 (06.67)	4(26.67)

[Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage]

Source: Field survey 2006

### 3.2 Students Performance

#### 3.2.1 Teachers' Opinions

Three indicators are identified to evaluate the student performance of different institutes with students under grade four and five. It is observed that 72% student of Bengali medium have excellent friendship like attitudes, 65% students of English medium have excellent self expression capacity and 70% students of Religious education have excellent behaviour (Fig. 1). This information is given by their respective class teachers.

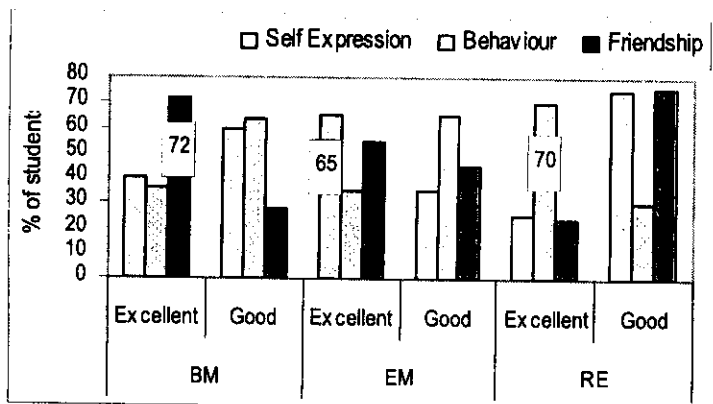


Fig 1: Teachers' Opinions about their Students

### 3.2.2 Parents' Opinions

According to the opinion of parents it is found that Bengali medium students have capacity to manage interaction and sensory difficulties efficiently than those of English medium and Religious education students (Table 2). English medium student could not perform well to manage interaction and emotional difficulties and Religious education student could not perform well to manage interaction and sensory difficulties.

Table 2 : Management Capacity of Difficulties by the Student

Performance	Parents Opinion		
	BM	EM	RE
Social difficulties	B	B	B
Interaction difficulties	A	C	C
Sensory difficulties	A	A	C
Emotional difficulties	C	C	A
Majority	A	C	C

Note: A for manage efficiently, B for not clear to us C for not perform well

### 3.2.3 Parents' and Teachers' Opinions

Table 3 shows that all students from different education streams have positive reaction about their parents which is followed by the teachers. But the issues regarding "speak the truth" and "be kind to every one" are found 4.6 and 4.2 in Religious education. In this regard the overall performances of students from Religious education is found better (4.36) than the others.

Table-3 : Issues of Importance to Students

Issues	Ranking Scale 1-5 (from lowest to highest)		
	BM	EM	RE
to be good to parent	5.0	5.0	5.0
to be good to teacher	4.0	4.8	4.2
to be kind to everyone	3.4	3.0	4.2
to speak the truth	3.2	3.4	4.6
to be honest with everyone	4.2	4.4	3.8
Mean	3.96	4.12	4.36

### 3.2.4 Aims of Students

Most of the students are not well aware about the aim. They are partially convinced by their parent to select future profession. However, majority of student in Bengali medium put emphasis on business (40%) which is followed by service (20%) and teacher (20%). Whereas majority of student in English medium put emphasis on service (60%), this is followed by teacher (20%). But most of students in Religious education put emphasis on the profession of teacher (Fig 2). It is observed that student from Religious education are mentally more suppressed than those of Bengali medium and English medium students and they do not select service as an aim. Some students are found that they have no idea about the aim of life.

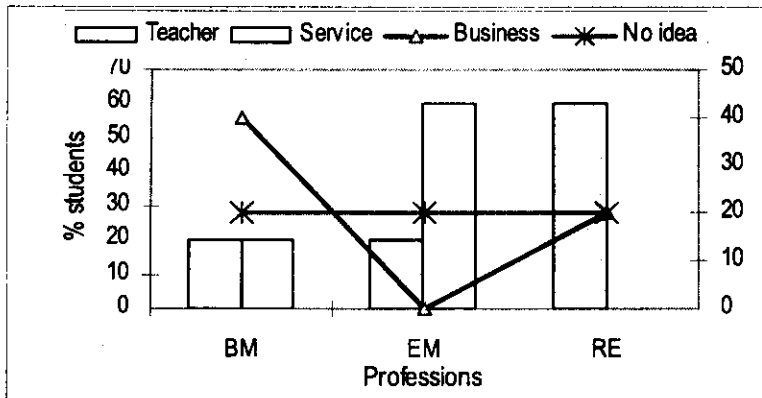


Fig 2 : Aims of Students

## 4.0 Parents' Thinking

### 4.1 Fathers' Positions

It is found that father's education level of English medium students is relatively better than that of Bengali medium and Religious education students' fathers. It is also found that most of fathers of English medium students are businessmen and service holder, which is followed by Bengali medium students' fathers. Majority of them have more than 50,000 taka income/yearly (Table 4). Fathers' educational level and yearly income of Religious education student are lower than that of English medium and Bengali medium students' fathers and they are



mainly unemployed. Most of the Religious education students come from poor family and some of them come from religious family. Their family economy is not good and they need help from others. Their parents are always busy in work for daily necessity. Some students of Bengali medium also belong to poor economic condition but which is totally absent for the students of English medium. So, family economy, parents' education level and their professions significantly contributed to select the education stream.

Table -4: Demographic Characteristics of Father

Categories	Education Level		Professions			Income Level (000'tk/yr)		
	SSC & Below	HSC & above	Service	Business	Other	< 25	25-50	>50
Bengali Medium	10 (66.67)	5 (33.33)	2 (13.33)	6 (40)	7 (46.67)	5 (33.33)	7 (46.67)	3 (20)
English Medium	2 (13.33)	13 (86.67)	4 (26.67)	9 (60)	2 (13.33)	0	3 (20)	12 (80)
Religious Education	12 (80)	3 (20)	1 (6.67)	4 (26.67)	10 (66.67)	7 (46.67)	5 (33.33)	3 (20)

[Figures in parenthesis indicate percentage]

Source: field study (2006)

#### 4.2. Parents' Arguments in Favour of Respective Education

It is observed that majority of the parents put some arguments in favour of their choice in education streams. They also mentioned some reasons for disliking of other education streams and those are shown in the Table 5. Majority of Bengali medium students' parents put emphasis on job security but parents of English medium students put emphasis on development of self-confidence and awareness. Where as parents of Religious education students put emphasis for maintaining life according to the direction of the Quran and the Sunnah.

Table 5 : Types of Education liked by the Parents and the Reasons

ES	Parents Opinion		
<b>B M</b>	<b>Why like BM</b> Ensure job security Reflect on own values Effective medium Fulfill economic need	<b>Why not RE</b> No future at all Teaching quality is not good Emphasis given on religious matter	<b>Why not EM</b> Expensive Minimum Institute No specific job in future
<b>E M</b>	<b>Why like EM</b> Develop self-confidence and awareness Greater job opportunities	<b>Why not BM</b> Environment is not so good Lack of good institute Concise job opportunity	<b>Why not RE</b> Lack of good teacher May be demoralized No recognition
<b>RE</b>	<b>Why like RE</b> Maintain life according to the direction of the Quran and the Sunnah Good for present and also for the next life Increasing knowledge of religious beliefs	<b>Why not BM</b> Not possible to maintain character Reduces norms and values Establish as a corrupt people in future Teachers are not aware about student	<b>Why not EM</b> Religious matter are totally absent Not respecting beliefs on Islam Create social distance Develop proudness

Source: Field survey (2006)

### 5.0 Suggestions

The education system in our country creates physical, mental and social differences among students of different streams. So the ways of thinking of students are also different. Education streams, social trends, parents' and teachers' attitude sometimes hinder the mental development of the students. As a result, most of the students could not perform as a universal citizen in future. So, it is necessary to improve the education system with participation of parents, teachers, students and the people involved in educational management.

### 6.0 Conclusion

Education is the basis of development. No country can achieve its development without need based education. But education arena in Bangladesh is not so developed. Literacy rate is low and there is a significant disparity among education streams. Bangladesh has mainly three education streams. Each of the streams has separate identity. Thinking of parents of students in different education streams, their social positions and economic conditions make difference among students. Moreover, education streams make differences of skill of students. As a result, there are found clear distinction of performances in their real life.

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