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Access to Education as 'Rights' and 'Ability': A Case Study of Access to Basic Education in Bangladesh

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Education is a catalyst for human development. Considering this fact access to basic education is made free and compulsory for all citizens in Bangladesh. Government has been taking numerous policy measures and programmatic interventions to enhance the access to education and thus to achieve the target of 100 per cent access to education by 2015. However this study using secondary research method reveals that despiteachievements in some areas there are still notable gaps between achievements and targets. This study uses an analytical lens constructed with rights and ability notions of access. It analyses the present scenario of access to education to explore to what extent the education system is providing rights of access to education. At the same time it examines the efficiency of the education system and policies to see the extentto which these system and policies are able to empower the students with ability to enter, sustain and succeed in basic education. The study has found commendable achievement in enrolment and gender disparity. However, from the ability perspective the education system is still not enough inclusive with ethnic and socio-economic disparity. Special measures need to be taken in the area of access to education of children with special needs, access to education of indigenous peoples and more investments in infrastructure.

Keywords: Access to education, rights and ability, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, primary education.

Introduction

Education is considered as a catalyst for economic and human development worldwide. Concerning this Bangladesh has been encircling its social, economic and political development around education since its independence. Education is the strongest driving force of all developmental activities in Bangladesh which has been reflected on its policy discourse. Free compulsory basic primary education is human right in Bangladesh which certainly posits the state in one hand on duty bearer role, citizens the right claimer on the other. Therefore, access to education in Bangladesh entails the dynamics of entitlement as well as reality check of availability and capability to benefit from the entitlement.

Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of access to education. Studies have been mostly conducted based on the notions of equity, equality of opportunity, universalism and rights. Access to education has been conceptualized from the perspective of equal accessibility to education based on financial affordability (Maile, 2004). It has also been seen from the perspective of equity in access to education based on universalism (Acedo, 2010). Access to education has been researched as full integration of the students into education system (Lewin & Little, 2011). In international and national policy tools and instruments access to education has been conceptualized as universal rights and mechanism for inclusion (UNESCO, 2005). Although there are number of researches on access, very little

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is done on access to education in particular. Moreover, in case of access to education in Bangladesh most of researches are based on rights, equity, equality of opportunity and poverty. Hossain & Zeitlyn (2010) has explored the impact of poverty on enrolment and thus on access to education. Ahmed et al (2007) has done exploratory situation analysis focusing on poverty, gender, disadvantages and policy implications. Among others Rahman (2010) has focused on the dimension exclusion in accessing education and suggested multilingual education for culturally marginalized peoples. Choudhury (2011) has studied the accessibility of disable children from the perspective of inclusion. However theoretically as well as country specific very little research has been done in terms of access to education as 'rights' and 'ability'. Access is mostly seen from the rights perspective. The ability dimension has been mostly overlooked.

The objectives of this study are to explore what policies and legislative provisions are in place to ensure right of access to education, to evaluate the extent to which the education system provides accessibility to the children. In addressing the research topic this study also aims to explore the extent to which various policies and programs empower the children to easily enter into the education, sustain and progress to the next level of education. By doing these this study argues that despite of various policy and programmatic interventions in place there is significant gap between the assigned goals and achieved results in the field of access to basic education in Bangladesh.

This is a secondary research based on secondary data available from the Directorate of Primary Education (DEP) of Bangladesh. It uses data from the Annual Primary School Census 2014 report. The data range is 10 years from 2005 to 2014. This study uses the data to explore the trends, similarity and disparity against the indicators used in the census.

Including this section introduction this paper is structured into 4 separate sections. By setting the scene the introduction addresses the objectives of the research, brief review of significant researches in the field, methodology and outline. Section 2 constructs an analytical framework based on literature review on access and access to education. Section 3 deals with the empirical analysis where it examines the data on various indicators. The section 4 concludes by drawing upon the findings based on analytical framework, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Analytical Framework

Access as rRght and Ability

Access can be defined as the ways through which any form of entitlement can be enjoyed. Access can be conceptualized with particular significance in terms of goods and services. Goods and services are generally offered with the degree of accessibility and availability depending on their nature. Accessibility and availability depend on approaches, actions and organizations (Thynne & Peters, 2014).

Access involves arrangements concerning the easy and ready availability of goods and services. It requires specific action to ensure easy derivation or enjoyment of accessibility to goods and services making them readily available (Thynne & Peters, 2014; Ostrom & Ostrom, 1977).

The broad notion of access consists of two dimensions: 'right' and 'ability'. A right or rights can be defined as the legal, justified, recognized and protected entitlement or claim to anything (Burton, 2007). Ability concerns the actual capacity of an access-seeker to enjoy the rights of access through various means inherent in the system. The combination of rights and ability requires that accessibility to any specific good or service comprise three dimensions: availability to all without any legal or other basis of

discrimination, easy access without any physical barriers, and no economic conditions that limit or deny enjoyment or benefit (Sidoti, 2000; Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

Individuals or groups are accordingly positioned within the access process depending on the power dynamics of social relationships. A range of powers are generally exercised in this access process in the form of 'bundle of powers' within the 'web of powers' where different people, different institutions, different groups hold different dynamics of these powers in terms of deriving benefits from the resources or services (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Some people or organizations or institutions get the direct control of access to resources. They control this access with the power dynamics irrespective of their legal or illegal entitlement while, there are some people or institutions who gain access and maintain it through those people or institutions that have direct control over access to resources (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Therefore, the power dynamics related to access determine beneficiary of a particular resource or service depending on individual's ability to exercise power from the 'bundles' and 'webs' of power depending on the social relationships.

Access is a continuous process in terms of deriving benefits effectively from resources using both 'right' and 'ability'. A meaningful access can be conceptualized as gaining access to derive the benefits through a systematic entry interface, controlling the dynamics of benefit deriving process either direct influence or via any individual, organization or group of individuals and maintain that influence over time to get the benefits from the resources or services (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). In this way access becomes a process of 'identifying and mapping' the mechanisms for entry, control and sustain the benefits (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Maximizing the access in its fullness with smooth entry, balanced control and sustained enjoyment of benefits the access process requires built-in linkage to the legitimate distribution process through political lobby or any linking mechanism (Schaffer & Wen-hsien, 1975).

Access process is generally shaped by various mechanisms which primarily can be divided into two types i.e. 'right-based' and 'structural and relational' (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). In right-based mechanism authoritative entity such as state or agent enjoys greater discretionary power in allocating access. Moreover, in this mechanism the form of 'right' legal provisions determine and shape who *gains, controls* and *maintains* the access (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). The target access-seeker may not have ability to enjoy the right of access acknowledged by the right-based access mechanism. Therefore it needs reciprocal relationship between right and ability. Access can also be shaped by another set of mechanisms i.e. 'structural and relational' mechanism, where 'technology, capital, markets, knowledge, authority, social identities, and social relations' determine and shape the process of gaining, controlling and maintenance of benefits from resource or service (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Each of these factors influences the relationship between power dynamics and resource or service and shape the mechanism differently. Among them 'access through social identity' might have relevance in exploring how the peoples' shape the access mechanism for fairer distribution depending on gender, ethnicity, religion, status, place of birth and attributes of socially constructed identity dynamics (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Moreover, it is evident from various studies that the culture shapes the perception of fairness and equality in terms of resource allocation (Hatfield et al, 2011). The access mechanism may create different effects in terms of fairness perception of resource allocation due to its dependency on different social situations (Schaffer & Wen-hsien, 1975). The access mechanism may exclude individuals or groups depending on social and cultural dynamics. In that case a special kind of 'integration' and 'mobilization' can be enacted within the access mechanism to include the excluded (Schaffer & Wen-hsien, 1975). This special access mechanism might be used to enhance the capability of the peoples of a particular group or individual in order to maximize the participation of all in the society by minimising exclusionary practice (Polat, 2010) which enables to achieve fairness and equity leading to 'scope of justice' (Hatfield et al, 2011).

Access 'Right' and 'Ability' in Relation to Education

Education is a fundamental human right which is necessary for the human entity to flourish in its fullness. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights had acknowledged the rights to education for all in 1948. It had stated in its article 26 (1) – '*Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.'* This international declaration had formulated the framework for access to education as inalienable human rights which must be free, easily accessible and non-discriminatory by offering availability of education for all. Ensuring education for all depends on providing easy access to education by creating environment in schools and offering education programs which enable the children learn easily and comfortably (UNESO, 2005).

Access to education can be described as opportunities for entry into educational institutions and programs without any barriers. It also can be seen as the ability to take those opportunities to get into the education institutions and programs. Based on these notions, access concept can be of two types of constructions, i.e. organizational and personal (Hayward *et al.*, 2013). According to overarching MDGs and EFA goals the indicators for access to education are set as the measurements of enrolments, school attainments, dropouts and completion of schooling up to the last grade of the primary schools (Lewin, 2007) and the EFA global monitoring on the status of universal primary education is done based on these access status (UNESCO, 2015). Moreover, access to education does not necessarily constitute only the narrower notion of enrolment but also the sustainability and completion of the education programs successfully (Lewin, 2007). Therefore, access to education can be seen as easy pathways to participate into educational system regardless of organizational or personal barriers such as infrastructure, classroom environment, curriculum, policy & human resource and community barriers (Polat, 2011).

Access to basic education does mean learning and skill development simply beyond enrolment and attendance rate. If the issues of regular attendance, cycle completion of schooling and grades are taken into consideration, then it will result into the actual access scenario with many children out of or in school but 'silently excluded' (Lewin & Little, 2011). Meaningful access to education is not only enrolment and completion of the cycle of basic education, but also enjoying the opportunities to learn through that educational environment and programs and should be benefiting the children equally (Lewin & Little, 2011). Access to education goes beyond enrolment and necessitates the elimination all barriers to get quality education through appropriately developed curriculum which incorporates the material, personal and social elements (Maiztegui-Oñate & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2008).

Access to education can also be seen as the ability of the children to learn and develop their skills from the cycle of basic education and successfully transit to next level of education where this transition indicates that the appropriate access process enables the children to derive the benefits from the system and be empowered for the next level overcoming the 'zones of exclusion' (Lewin & Little, 2011).

The 'integration' and 'inclusion' concepts might be useful to address the issue of 'exclusion from education' from the perspective of equal access (Polat, 2011). During last few decades the access to education literature experienced paradigm shift from integrating the disadvantaged ones into the mainstream to accommodate them through inclusionary measures avoiding the assimilation of differences. In inclusive access to education the process is seen as the way to address the diverse needs of all children from different cultures, communities, socio-economic and physical capabilities through customized contents, approaches, strategies and structures (UNESCO, 2005).

The notions of 'equity' and 'equality' both have shaped the access to education discourse through much contested body of knowledge for last few decades which is mainly grounded on the theory of social justice (Maiztegui-Oñate & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2008). The notion of 'equity' in particular is accommodative to the special needs of disadvantaged groups and communities in regards to ensure justice and redistribution in education (Maiztegui-Oñate & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2008). This notion of equity itself accepts special treatments in education process in the form of 'vertical equity' which addresses the issue of unequal socio-economic and socio-cultural situations and different starting points through affirmative action measures (Maiztegui-Oñate & Santibáñez-Gruber, 2008). The affirmative action measures are necessary in order to eradicate the barriers to access to education such as language and geographical barriers and promote the disadvantaged groups' inclusion into the education system.

Discussion/Empirical Analysis

Policy Commitments: Recognising the 'Right' to Access Education

Education is acknowledged as one of the basic needs for human life and as fundamental human right in the constitution. In article 15 (a) of Part II of the constitution education has been identified as one of the basic necessities of life along with food, clothing, shelter and medical care. The role of the state in fulfilling these basic needs has also been stated as fundamental responsibility. Moreover, the article 17 states 'education' as free and compulsory. It states – '*The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of - (a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law.*' This constitutional framework for educational right explicitly accommodates the notions of 'rights' and 'ability' where state is obliged to ensure the entitlement of citizens as well as create enabling mechanisms to derive the benefits from them. Furthermore, the constitution provides a strong ground for 'equality of opportunity' in article 19 of part II. It embraces 'social justice' as one of the fundamental principles of state policies. It prohibits discrimination on any ground such as religion, race, caste, and sex or birth place. Moreover, it provides scope for making 'special provisions' for emancipation of disadvantaged section of population (Article 28 & 29, Part III).

Reflecting the constitutional obligation and affiliation to international norms and commitments Bangladesh is very active in creating necessary legislative, policy and strategic framework for providing access to education for all. The existing policy instruments have extensively outlined the strategies and mechanisms to provide access to education as claimable right and enhance the capabilities of citizens.

*Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990:*The Compulsory Primary Education Act was enacted in 1990 to make the primary school attainment for all children mandatory and enforce the liabilities for citizens and state for free and universal basic education which was later on acknowledged by international community in Jomtien, Thiland in the same year (The World Bank, 2008). Aligning with these international commitments and domestic constitutional obligation Bangladesh enacted this act with the aim to undertake administrative and legal initiatives in ensuring education for all children of the country (MPME, 2014).

*EFA National Plan of Action I (1991-2000) and II (2003-2015):*The first EFA National Plan of Action (1991-2000) was aimed to achieve goals in primary education, non-formal basic education and adult literacy by 2000. However, the targets were not achieved by 2000 and it necessitated the formulation of second EFA National Plan of Action (2003-2015). The EFA National Plan of Action II was formulated with the goals to provide early childhood care and primary education for most vulnerable and disadvantaged children including ethnic minorities. The plan aimed to ensure access, participation and successfully completion of

the courses through appropriate learning programs (World Data on Education 2006). The goals of this plan were aligned with the international commitments of MDGs as well as the Dakar Framework of Action (MPME, 2015). The plan initiated some significant programs in the area of basic education addressing the issue of access and equality (UNESCO, 2006) such as Primary Education Development Program II & III, which are still operational up to 2016 (MPME, 2015).

*National Non-Formal Education Policy 2006:*National Non-formal Education Policy 2006 has created the ground for access and inclusion to lifelong education opportunities. In order to enhance the policy framework and activity implementation the Non-formal Education Act 2014 was enacted. The law has broadened the scope of activities and strengthened the legal framework for promoting the non-formal education (MPME, 2015). The act explicitly outlined the necessity for inclusion of the children out of school due to disadvantaged situation, ethnic minorities and physically challenged children by providing appropriate access mechanism and opportunity for continuous leaning (GoB, 2014, Part II, Article 6).

National Education Policy 2010: This policy aimed to make the education system more easily available, universal, uniform, well planned, science oriented and pro-people. It stated the necessity and outlined the mechanisms for mainstreaming of all education streams into a uniform stream. Especially the policy outlined necessary directives to ensure the access to education of disadvantaged ones, ethnic minorities by lifting various barriers and initiating learning in mother language in pre-primary education for ethnic minorities. It also acknowledged the need for the development of curriculum in the languages of ethnic minorities' mother language in order to make the access and integration of ethnic minority children smooth and meaningful (MoE, 2010).

Five Year Plans: The continuation of strong commitment for educational development has been reflected in the Sixth Five Year Plan 2011-2015. It aimed to achieve universal primary education for all with 100 per cent enrolment and completion rate by 2015. Complying with National Education Policy and Perspective Plan this policy framework outlined the plan to increase the access to education, participation and completion of at least primary education for ethnic minorities by initiating education in mother tongue, introducing textbooks in languages of ethnic minorities mother tongue and collecting segregated data on ethnic minority children for better analysis of disparity (GED, 2011). The Seventh Five Year Plan 2016-2020 aims to promote economic growth with highly skilled human capital through quality education based on equal, inclusive and quality education. Its focuses are on reducing income inequality, education and skill development. In doing broad based access to education is considered as imperative to economic growth (Sen & Rahman, 2015).

Perspective Plan or Vision 2021: In the development discourse of Bangladesh the initiation of Perspective Plan 2021 has reshaped the pathways of Bangladesh's development. It provides a holistic framework for future development and reflection of political commitments for development within 2021. Especially the plan aims to build an '*informed, knowledge-based, technologically-oriented, gender equitable learning system for all*' which prioritizes the access to equal and quality education of all children irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, geographical location and socio-economic situation (GED, 2012). This perspective plan is being reflected in all development policies such as National Education Policy and Five Year Plan in order to guide the development stream towards the vision of making Bangladesh one of the middle income countries within 2021, the 50th Anniversary of independence (GED, 2012).

Policy Commitments: Recognising the 'Ability' to Access Education

In order to ensure the enjoyment of the committed rights through various policy instruments the creation of necessary enabling environment is must. It is mentionable here that Bangladesh had committed to

provide basic primary education for free and it was made mandatory by enacting Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990. This commitment as well as other international commitments is being implemented through the active role of Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) under the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. Various programs have been being implemented to enhance the ability of citizens to get access to education since the adoption of commitments.

Primary Education Development Program: Within the existing development policy framework Bangladesh started first Primary Education Development Program (PEDP I) for the period of 1997-2003 with the contributions from development partners which was focused on 10 specific objectives in the areas of enrolment, completion, quality inputs and monitoring. However, it was found inefficient in institutionalization of achievement and later it was decided to switch to sector wide approach of programming (DPE, 2011). The second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II) for the period of 2004-2011 was initiated with the focus on quality improvement, institutional capacity building and systematic reform. The program was the first one to be designed with sector wide approach (DPE, 2011). The third Primary Education Development Program (PEDP III) has been being implemented since 2011 for five years. In order to make the education system more inclusive this program has particularly focused on the issue of access to education of indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities. The program has dedicated a sub-component to establish inclusive education for the children of ethnic minorities (DPE, 2011). In order to guide the implementation of the program a framework titled 'Indigenous Peoples Framework' had been formulated which consisted the necessary framework and guidelines to address the indigenous peoples issue which includes ADB's IP safeguards, compliance to national laws and regulations, guideline for social impact assessment and contents and proposed activities under the PEDP III targeted to indigenous peoples (DPE, 2010).

Stipends: Bangladesh has implemented various demand side and supply side innovative programs to incentivise the school attendance and increase the enrolment rate and reduce dropout rates (Ullah & Perumal, 2012). It started its first demand side innovation in the form of food transfer to encourage poor families to send their children to school. Food For Education (FFE) was the first program introduced in 1993 which covered 27 per cent of the country providing 15 kg of wheat or 12kg of rice per beneficiary to 40 per cent enrolled students (DPE, 2013). It continued up to 2002. Another program titled Primary Education Stipend (PES) was introduced for the period of 1990 to 2000 providing BDT 25 per month per beneficiary. Primary Education Stipend Program (PESP) was started in 2002 covering whole country (DPE, 2013) which replaced the previous programs FFE and PES both. This program significantly expanded in 2010 in terms of coverage (DPE, 2013). Moreover, Bangladesh initiated other steps to incentivise the school attendance of poor children such as free text books, new infrastructure development and repair and abolition of school fees (DPE, 2013).

The policy instruments, frameworks and programs discussed above have enhanced the efforts to create enabling environment for students for easy access to quality and lifelong education through various programs and interventions. However, despite of tremendous efforts in achieving the goal of education for all Bangladesh still faces disparities in rural-urban, gender and ethnicity indicators. The gap between the realizations of rights through appropriate channel of ability is still a major factor in achieving the desired goal of education for all. However, the achievements must not be undermined as the overall result is evaluated. The following sub-section analyses the present status of primary education in Bangladesh to explore success and possible discrepancies.

Policy Achievements: Fostering the 'Right' to Access Education

Bangladesh has targeted to achieve 100 per cent in all indicators of access to primary education by 2015 (GED, 2015). In achieving those targets Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in increasing enrolment, completion of schooling cycle and survival rate, reducing dropouts and enhancing education quality in primary and pre-primary level (GED, 2015). Various initiatives and programs such as curriculum development and free distribution of text books, subject-based teacher training through Upazila Resource Centre, stipends for poor students infrastructure and physical facilities for primary education such as construction of schools and repair of old ones, water supply and sanitation facilities for boys and girls, play grounds and access facilities for children with disabilities (MPME, 2014).

Pre-Primary Education: In total 84,710 government, non-government, madrashas and community schools are providing pre-primary education to 308,8460 children all over the country (DPE, 2014). According to Education Watch Pre-school Survey 2013 the enrolment rate for 5 years aged children in pre-primary education program was 52.6 per cent. Moreover, ASPR 2014 revealed that at least 67 per cent children who enter formal primary education are covered with pre-primary education (MPME, 2014).

Enrolment Rate: Currently the primary education profile consists of 19,552979 students out of which 50.7 per cent is girl. Total number of 482,884 teachers is teaching these students in 108,537 schools all over the country (DPE, 2014). In addition to students and institution numbers the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment Rate (NER) indicators reflect the status of access to education. The increasing trend in GER (gross enrolment rate) and NER (net enrolment rate) indicates the progressive achievement of the country.

Table-1

Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) & Net Enrolment Rate (NER) by Year and Gender

Year	GER (%)			NER (%)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2005	91.2	96.2	93.7	84.6	90.1	87.2
2006	92.9	103	97.7	87.6	94.5	90.9
2007	93.4	104.6	98.8	87.8	94.7	91.1
2008	92.8	102.9	97.6	87.9	90.4	90.8
2009	100.1	107.1	103.5	89.1	99.1	93.9
2010	103.2	112.4	107.7	92.2	97.6	94.8
2011	97.5	105.6	101.5	92.7	97.3	94.9
2012	101.3	107.6	104.4	95.4	98.1	96.7
2013	106.8	110.5	108.6	96.2	98.4	97.3
2014	104.6	112.3	108.4	96.6	98.8	97.7

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 50)

Table-1 shows that the GER increased from 93.7 per cent in 2005 to 108.6 per cent in ten years period, whereas the NER increased from 87.2 per cent to 97.7 per cent during the same period. The table also shows that the enrolment rates for girls are continuously increasing in higher rate than that of boys which

indicates the achievement of gender parity in enrolment. The gender parity index for girls is 1.07 in GER and 1.02 in NER in 2014 which indicates that girls are ahead in terms of either indicator of enrolment (DPE, 2014). The data represents a significant improvement in enrolment of children into primary education. However this improvement is still not enough to attain the preset target of 100 per cent by 2015 as there is evidence of disparities in access to education regarding ethnicity, disability, location and socio-economic conditions (CAMPE, 2014).

Intake Rate: In order to have a clearer picture on access to primary education the indicator 'intake rate' is helpful as the GER and NER have limitations of covering entry for overage and underage and repetition (MPME, 2014). The trends of GIR and NIR also demonstrate the increase in access to education during last ten years.

Table-2
Gross Intake Rate and Net Intake Rate by Year and Gender

Year	GIR (%)			NIR (%)		
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
2005	105.9	111	108.4	93.3	96.1	94.7
2006	104.1	110.7	107.3	93.2	95.3	94.2
2007	104	110.2	107	93.5	95.8	94.6
2008	105.8	112.1	108.8	93.9	96.8	95.3
2009	113.6	116.3	115.1	98.6	99.3	98.9
2010	115.4	118.5	116.9	98.8	99.5	99.1
2011	125.6	126.2	125.9	99.9	99.8	99.9
2012	105	106.7	105.8	95.7	97.1	96.4
2013	111.5	112.6	112	97.5	98.2	97.8
2014	109.1	108.3	108.7	97.6	98.1	97.9

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 25)

In table 2 the GIR has increased from 108.4 per cent in 2005 to 112.0 per cent in 2014. Likewise NIR has also increased from 94.7 per cent in 2005 to 97.9 per cent in 2014. Both the indicators have reached their highest points in 2011 and have dropped in next year. However the trends are upwards the later years. The data also represent significant increase in girls' access to education with the constant higher percentage points for girls throughout the period. Overall the data shows that the access to education has been enhanced significantly during this period.

Enrolment of children with special need: Physical and mental health condition and disability are important barriers to access and progression to successful completion of education (Sabates, Hossain & Lewin, 2010). In order to improve the accessibility for physically challenged students inter-ministerial interventions have been made by establishing school facilities, countrywide integrated programs and establishment of National Centre for Special Education (Choudhury, 2011). Currently total 109,144 students of special need are enrolled out of which 59,966 boys and 49,178 girls (DEP, 2014). The number

of enrolled students is far way bellow than the estimated total number 1.6 million students of special need who are in the primary school going age (Choudhury, 2011).

Policy Achievements: Fostering the 'Ability' to Access Education

The policy frameworks and interventions have empowered the education system to offer accessibility to it. However to what extent the students are benefiting from those interventions and to what extent the education system is accommodative towards the students in providing access to quality education depends on efficiency of the system.

Repetition Rate: The repetition rate indicates the level of internal efficiency of the education system to enable students to progress to next grade.

Table-3

Repetition Rate by Year and Gender in (%)

Gender	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Boys	10.7	11.4	11.8	11.7	12.3	12.8	11.6	7.7	7.3	6.9
Girls	9.6	10.9	11.3	11.4	11.8	12.4	10.6	6.9	6.5	6
All	10.2	11.2	11.6	11.6	12.1	12.6	11	7.3	6.9	6.4

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 65)

Table-3 shows that the average repetition rate has significantly decreased from 10.2 per cent in 2005 to 6.4 per cent in 2014. The table 3 also indicates that the trend reached the highest repetition rate in 2010 at 12.1 per cent just before sharply drop in 2012 to 7.3 per cent. It might have reflected from the initiatives and programs after the adoption of National Education Policy in 2010.

Table-4

Repetition rate in percentage for year 2014

Gender	Grade I	Grade II	Grade III	Grade IV	Grade V	All grade
Boys	7.5	5.7	6.6	10.4	3	6.9
Girls	6.2	3.1	7.3	10.1	2.5	6
All	6.9	4.4	6.9	10.2	2.8	6.4

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 64)

Table 4 shows that repetition rates are significantly high in grade I and grade IV. Although the average repetition rate has decreased the cross grade unequal distribution of repetition rate seems to be risky for the achievement of desired goals. Those students are at 'zone 3' of non-completion of education cycle which makes them risky towards dropout (Sabates, Hossain & Lewin, 2010; MPME, 2014). The table also shows the increased immunity of girls towards repetition with 0.9 point lower rate than that of boys.

Dropout Rate: It represents the inability of students to continue schooling anymore as well as inefficiency of the education system to make the students sustained.

Table-5

Year Wise Dropout Rate in (%)

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dropout Rate (%)	47.2	50.5	50.5	49.3	45.1	39.8	29.7	26.2	21.4	20.9

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 68)

The table 5 shows that the dropout rate has decreased by more than fifty per cent in last ten years. It shows that the dropout rate decreased from 47.2 per cent in 2005 to 20.9 per cent in 2014. However the grade wise drop rates indicate some inconsistency in the trend.

Table-6
Grade Wise Dropout Rate for 2014 in (%)

Sex	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Boys	2	3.5	7.4	9.4	2.4
Girls	0.4	5.7	2.3	6.8	2.2
All	1.2	4.6	4.8	8.1	2.3

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 65)

The table 6 shows that the dropout rate gradually increased from grade I to grade IV. In grade V the rate sharply dropped to 2.3 per cent which was the highest at 8.1 per cent in grade IV. The possible explanation for this sudden drop might be the strict screening in grade IV before the transition to grade V as the schools might be keen to show better performances in public examination at the end of grade V (MPME, 2014). The gradual increase of dropout rates from grade I to grade IV also indicates the inability of the students and inefficiency of education system in any form which forces the students out of the school. Generally health condition, disability, household characteristics and cost of schooling are known factors behind the dropouts. Moreover, student parents' relationship, availability of assistance within household, financial hardship and cultural exclusion play important role in forcing students to dropout (Sabates, Hossain & Lewin, 2010; MPME, 2014). Study also suggests that careful handing is necessary to identifying the precursors of dropout such as absenteeism, overage and grade repetition in order to prevent dropout and schools do have important role to play (Sabates, Hossain & Lewin, 2010; MPME, 2014).

Survival Rate: It indicates the proportion of students who manage to complete the cycle of the grade entered in the first place. It represents students' ability to progress throughout the grade cycle as well as education cycle up to grade V.

Table 7
Year Wise Survival Rate in Percentage

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Boys	51.7	47.1	48.9	52.9	57.1	65.9	77	73.5	77.7	77.6
Girls	56.1	53.3	54.9	57	62.2	68.6	82.1	77	83.3	84.4
All	53.9	50.2	51.9	55	59.7	67.3	79.6	75.3	80.5	81

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 69)

Table 7 shows that the survival rate increased from 53.9 per cent in 2005 to 81.0 per cent in 2014. It means that the education system as well as students has achieved significant ability in maintaining the

progression from entry to graduation. Moreover the gap between girls and boys indicates that the girls are more successful in surviving up to last grade of school cycle.

Completion Rate: Finally, the students who reach grade V and complete the education cycle by passing the public examination represent the efficiency of the education system and the ability of students to succeed with appropriate access mechanism and enabling environment throughout the schooling years.

Table-8
Year Wise Completion Rate in Percentage

Year	Number of students participated	Absent	Pass Rate (%)	
			Total	Girls
2009	1979895	156,430	88.84	87.51
2010	2156721	216390	92.34	91.98
2011	2316521	130774	97.3	97.08
2012	2481119	160784	97.35	97.19
2013	2519032	120013	98.58	98.52
2014	2683781	1054821	97.93	98.54

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 72)

Table 8 shows that the pass rate in public examination for grade V has increased from 88.84 per cent in 2009 to 97.93 per cent in 2014. Total number of 26, 83,781 students attended the exam in 2014 and 1,05,4821 were absent. Since the public examination has initiated in 2009 the pass of the examination indicates the completion of the five year school cycle.

Coefficient of Efficiency: It is a synthetic indicator which represents the internal efficiency of an education system. It indicates the capability of the education system in producing graduates. It represents the consequences of repetition and dropouts on the efficiency of the education process in making the primary school students graduated.

Table-9
Year Wise Coefficient of Efficiency

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Boys	58	56.6	56.5	57.5	59.1	62.8	67.7	75.6	77.3	77.3
Girls	63.2	61.3	61.1	59.1	62.8	61.8	70.5	79.2	82	82.7
All	60.6	59	58.8	58.3	61	62.3	69.1	77.4	79.7	80

(Source: DPE 2014, p. 70)

Table 9 shows that the ability or in other words efficiency of education system has increased from 60.6 per cent in 2005 to 80 per cent in 2014. The education system also notably more successful in making girl graduates than boys with the indicator of 82.7 per cent whereas the number of boy graduates is lagging behind by 5.4 per cent points.

Infrastructure facilities: Bangladesh has given remarkable efforts in providing necessary infrastructure and facilities to make the access to education easy for children. However the existing status of infrastructure and facilities are no adequate. Only 28 per cent schools meet the student classroom standard of 40. Around 69 per cent schools have facilities for safe water such as functioning tube well. Around 83 per cent of schools have at least one functioning toilet. However the schools with separate functioning toilets for girls are only 64.9 per cent (DPE, 2014). These facts indicate that inadequate classroom facility, water and sanitation facilities are somehow contributing to keep the children out of school or dropout from school due to the inconveniences.

The Special Case of Indigenous Peoples' Access to Education

Bangladesh is quite successful in ensuring the rights and enhancing the ability of children to access to primary education till date. However the education system is still lagging behind in some specific indicators. For instance, the data set used in this analysis do not provide any segregated data on disadvantaged peoples such as ethnic minorities which is an important element to assess the inclusiveness and equality implication of ability part of right to education. It is evident from the questionnaire of the Annual Primary School Census 2014 that the survey collected data on indigenous children or ethnic minority children through the table 1.4 (DPE, 2014). However, the findings have not been reported even though the status of access to education of ethnic minority children is discussed by other researchers with high importance in relation to disparity within the education system. Therefore, this study tries to explore the situation of access to education of ethnic minority children reviewing various studies in the field.

Although the national indicators on access to primary education seem satisfactory, the situation of ethnic minority or indigenous children is not. The ethnic minority or indigenous children are largely lagging behind in education attainment and functional literacy (BBS 2013, p.32). Indigenous populations are largely out of reach in terms of equal access to primary education (Ardt et al, 2005; CAMPE, 2014). A BRAC study in 2005 revealed that 46.4 per cent of ethnic minorities did not have a single year of schooling. The study also shown that only 27.8 per cent ethnic community people have five or more years schooling (Nath, Yasmin & Shahjamal, 2005). The same study also revealed that the literacy rate among ethnic population of age above 7 years was only 42.2 per cent (Nath, Yasmin & Shahjamal, 2005). This scenario gets worse when the data is segregated according to the location i.e. plain land and hill tracts. From a compiled data set it is found that the ethnic minorities from plain land namely Santal, Koch, Mahali, Buno and Rajbongshi had literacy rates of 22, 17, 25, 7 and 14 per cent respectively (AIPP, 2007). The situation of ethnic minorities in CHT is slightly better than that of their plain land counterparts. The estimated literacy rates were Chakma 36.2 per cent, Marma 26.6 per cent, Mro 2.9 per cent and Tripura 18.5 per cent (AIPP, 2007). Overall the literacy situation of indigenous peoples was very low.

It was reported in a daily newspaper the *Daily Prothom Alo* on 1 March 2015 that only 67 per cent children from ethnic minorities are going to school. A Save the Children (2007) study mentioned the enrolment rate for ethnic minority children to be 44.5 per cent (p. 2). In plain land, particularly in north-western part it was found that only 20 per cent students completed a full year of primary schooling in 2004 (Davey & Sarker, 2009). Moreover, this study revealed that the dropout rates were highest in Santal ethnic group at 49 per cent and lowest in Mahalis at 1.44 per cent (Davey & Sarker, 2009). According to a study by Manusher Jonno Foundation in 2012 cited in Alamgir 2015 the average dropout rate in three hill districts was 59 per cent. ADB 2011 reported that around 65 per cent children were leaving school before completing the primary school cycle (p. 20).

In whatever ways these data are analysed it is evident that the enrolment rates for indigenous people are still low comparing to that of national one. The dropout rate is also high enough whereas the national dropout rate is only 20.9 per cent. These low rate of literacy, school attainment and high rate of dropout have been acknowledged by various policy instruments and reports (GED, 2011; CAMPE, 2014). Various policy commitments are also in place to address the issue. National Education Policy, Sixth Five Year Plan and Primary Education Development Program III have explicitly given focus on addressing this issue through multilingual pre-primary and primary education and introduction of textbooks in five languages of ethnic minorities. The PPE is particularly significant for ethnic minorities because a separate project titled Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP) is run in addition to mainstream PPE programs for ethnic minority children which are managed by Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (MPME, 2014). However, government's commitment to implement pre-primary education and provide textbooks in mother language of ethnic minorities is pertinent here to this project which is already overdue in 2014 and targeted to be implemented from 2016 (MPME, 2014; Alamgir, 2015). Moreover, government's commitment for involvement in providing first-language-based multilingual education for indigenous peoples is shadowed with inadequate comprehension and ambiguous policy statements (Rahman, 2010). Although there are certain degree of ambiguity in policy narratives and broken promises in case of indigenous peoples issue Bangladesh is aiming for better achievements beyond 2015 by aligning with global sustainable development goals. It is striving to provide inclusive, equitable and lifelong quality education for all by 2030.

Main Findings & Their Significance

This study has analysed available data from the perspective of the 'right' and 'ability' of children to access education in Bangladesh. The synthesized analytical lens has enabled the study to explore achievements, failures and identify the gaps within the access system. The rights dimension has explored the policy and legislative arrangements, instruments for safeguarding the rights and duty bearers' commitments. Complementing this, the 'ability' dimension has explored the empowerment arrangements and obligation. The rights dimension has revealed that to what extent the policies and programs of Bangladesh accommodate the access the right of access to education. Similarly ability has revealed the capability and efficiency of the education system to embrace the students with easy accessibility, affordability and sustainability.

Bangladesh is quite successful in providing access to education. The study has revealed that its achievement against some indicators such as enrolment rate, gender parity, completion rate and survival rate are remarkable. However in terms of quality education it is still lagging behind. Despite of tremendous policy and programmatic efforts Bangladesh is likely not to achieve the goals of 100 per cent access to education by 2015. It is falling behind in the case of making the education system more enabling and inclusiveness for all irrespective of race, gender, geographic location and socio-economic profile. Moreover, through a special focus on indigenous peoples of Bangladesh the study has revealed that the status of indigenous people is far way behind in all indicators of access to education.

The study is significant in contributing to the growing body of knowledge in the area of access to education. Particularly conceptualization of access to education with the rights and ability dimension will deepen the understanding of access literature. Moreover, the empirical findings contribute to the understanding of implications of access to education indicators in Bangladesh in terms of evaluation of effectiveness. It is a substantial addition to the discourse of policy analysis in Bangladesh with handful imperative recommendations based on empirical findings.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings this study recommends that several policy initiatives be taken by the government.

First, it is essential to enhance the access of children with special needs is necessary. In order to do that government should appoint teachers with special training to all pre-primary and primary schools of Bangladesh. Infrastructure and facility development, equipment supplies are necessary.

Second, the introduction of multilingual pre-primary education for indigenous children is already overdue. It is necessary to implement multilingual pre-primary and primary education for the indigenous children as soon as possible in order to make the education system accessible and easy for indigenous children.

Third, in order to track the progress and evaluate it is necessary to include segregated data against indicators for indigenous students in every census report. The segregated data and report will be useful to understand the inclusiveness and efficiency of the education system in terms of ethnic disparity.
Fourth, in order to address the efficiency of education system the gradual high dropout rate from grade I to V requires special attention. Particular measures are needed to address the issue of high dropout rate in grade V.

Fifth, Government should investigate the situation of dropout rate deeply to address underlying causes for the high repetition rates in grade I and grade IV. If there is any existing institutional or technical barrier, appropriate policy measure is necessary to eliminate or neutralize that.
Finally, the finding suggests that inadequate infrastructures and facilities are major factors acting as barriers for access to education. Increased investment commitments are needed. If necessary, funding arrangement should be done.

Suggested Lines of Future Research

Considering the limited time, scope and methodology this study has exclusively focused on analysing the achievements and failures from the perspective of rights and ability. The study based on empirical findings suggests further research in the area of access to education of special needs children in Bangladesh, underlying causes of cross grade repetition and dropout rates and access to education of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh. With all the positive and negative notes on the findings this study suggests an additional research questions for future 'Do the conventional indicators of achievement reflect the actual degree of access to education in Bangladesh?'

Concluding Observations

The study has used right and ability nations to examine the access to education which is comparatively new contribution to the literature. Apart from literary significance this study explored important findings which have direct or indirect implications on domestic policy discourse in Bangladesh. It has also urged policy initiatives from the part of government to address the issues of access to education in Bangladesh and make it more inclusive, ability enhancing and easily accessible and available for quality education to all children.

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