



Students at school in Chittagong, Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2019



Adolescent education and learning in Chittagong, Bangladesh

Policy and programming implications from the GAGE baseline findings¹

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Introduction

Bangladesh has made remarkable gains in the past 20 years in increasing access to education, especially at the primary level and for girls. The country's net enrolment rate at the primary school level increased from 80% in 2000 to 95% in 2017, and secondary school net enrolment is 62%, up from 45% in 2000 (UNESCO, 2018). The percentage of children completing primary school is 80%, and Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in access. A number of challenges remain, however, relating to the quality of education provided. National learning assessments conducted by the government of Bangladesh show poor literacy and numeracy skills among students in Grades 5 and 8. The curriculum focuses more on rote learning than on competencies, critical thinking and analytical skills, reducing the government's ability to attract higher-paying employers by providing highly skilled workers. According to the 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report (ibid.), educational provision has failed to match the massive expansion of slums, and only a quarter of slums have a government school.

This brief draws on evidence from Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) – a unique longitudinal mixed-methods research and impact evaluation study focused on what works to support the development of adolescents' capabilities during the second decade of life (10–19 years) (GAGE consortium, 2019 forthcoming).

Research methodology

GAGE employs a mixed-methods research approach in order to explore its research questions. In Chittagong, the quantitative sample focused primarily on in-school adolescents in Grade 6, making the sample almost entirely adolescents aged 10–12. A small sample of out-of-school adolescents and adolescents with disabilities were also surveyed. Overall, 1,769 quantitative interviews were conducted, alongside qualitative interviews with 36 adolescents and their families (parents

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and older siblings, to capture age-related differences) and communities. Baseline data collection took place in March to June 2018.

Research sites

Quantitative research sites in Chittagong were based on the locations of 39 government schools that were selected for inclusion in the approved World Bank/government of Bangladesh Health Support Project, and covered the districts of Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Rangamati.

In Chittagong Division, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Rangamati districts were selected for the conduct of surveys at private schools and *madrasas* nearby the targeted government schools, to enable a comparative study of school types. In addition, three sites were chosen for the qualitative research: one in Cox's Bazar district (Community A), one in Chittagong district (Community B, in the district capital) and the other in Rangamati Hill district (Community C, also in the district capital). These were chosen to capture different kinds of locations (urban/peri-urban), school types and access to services and NGO programming.

Educational aspirations

Educational aspirations by and for girls have changed over the past 10–15 years as employment opportunities have increased in the garments sector, increasing the economic value of education (Schuler, 2007; Heath and Mobarak, 2012). Even girls who were married as adolescents want their children to pursue an education and get a job (Khosla, 2009; Kabeer et al., 2011). Unmarried girls articulate similar aspirations for themselves (CARE International, 2016; see also Das, 2007 and Del Franco, 2010).

Our study captured educational aspirations by asking adolescents when they planned to leave their studies and how much education they hoped to attain in the future. Adolescents and their parents are aware of the competitive nature of the education system in Bangladesh and want to enrol in 'good schools/colleges' that are government-run and

have well-trained teachers, textbooks and IT resources. Our data shows that adolescent boys and girls want to continue their education to the point where they can qualify as teachers, showing the link between education and achieving a particular social status in the community.

Overall, 94% of adolescents aspire to at least some vocational/teacher/religious training and 87% aspire to attain at least some university education. Of in-school respondents, 88% aspire to at least some university education, and this is not differentiated by gender.

According to the survey data, female caregivers of students in government schools have the highest educational aspirations for their children. This group is 16% more likely to aspire for them to complete at least some university than caregivers of adolescents in private schools, and 23% more likely than caregivers of adolescents in *madrasas*. Female caregivers of adolescents in government schools have the most egalitarian aspirations for adolescents in terms of gender, followed by female primary caregivers of adolescents in private schools. Female caregivers of adolescents in *madrasas* have the most gendered aspirations for adolescents. While female caregivers in Chittagong of adolescents attending government schools have similar education aspirations for female and male children, female caregivers of female children in *madrasas* are 15% less likely than male children in *madrasas* to say they aspire for the adolescent to complete at least vocational training. Similarly, female caregivers of adolescents in private schools are 11% less likely to aspire for girls to attain at least some university education than female primary caregivers of boys, and female primary caregivers of female adolescents in *madrasas* are 20% less likely.

Aspirations in rural areas are lower: female caregivers are 16% less likely to aspire for some university education for their child, although this aspiration does not differ according to whether their child is a girl or a boy. Female adolescents in rural areas are 14% more likely than male adolescents to aspire to at least some university education. This is a larger differential than in urban areas, suggesting that gender gaps

Table 1: Research sites

Name	Location	Households	Social and physical infrastructure	Access to services
Community A	Cox's Bazar, peri-urban	88,391	48 km from division capital, vulnerable to cyclones and tidal bores, some migrants	Reasonable access to educational and health institutions, NGO services
Community B	Chittagong urban centre	65,671	District capital	Excellent access to educational and health institutions, NGO services
Community C	Rangamati, peri-urban	26,872	District headquarters, mixed Bengali settlers and indigenous people (Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Pangkhao, Lushai)	Good access to educational and health institutions, NGO services

Education [will] solve their financial problems when they will grow up.

(An older adolescent girl in Community A)

in engagement with education are even more pronounced in rural areas.

The survey data suggests there are no significant differences between girls and boys, or adolescents with and without disabilities, in terms of their desire to continue to secondary school, as all percentages were in the high 90s. There are also few significant differences in the level of schooling that mothers hope their daughters and sons will attain, apart from those related to school type, described earlier. While the gender differences are minimal, in Chittagong, female caregivers of adolescents without disabilities are 21% more likely to aspire for some university education for these adolescents than female caregivers of adolescents with disabilities. Among those currently enrolled in school in Chittagong, girls are significantly more likely to have university aspirations: 66% of girls vs. only 57% of boys.

Our qualitative data suggests that, in all sites, adolescents aspire to high-status and well-paid jobs. They see these as enabling them to lead a better life, be a respected person and earn money to support their family. As one older girl in Community A explained, they think *'Education [will] solve their financial problems when they will grow up.'* The quantitative data shows that 93% of adolescents aspire to have professional careers, such as teacher or doctor. This is fairly consistent across males (88%) and females (98%). In qualitative interviews, jobs mentioned included teacher, doctor, engineer, government officer, journalist, banker, police officer and cricketer, although, as discussed below, there were some gender differences. Adolescents said the people surrounding them, particularly those they considered role models, had influenced their aspirations – for example parents, siblings, teachers, neighbours and, in some cases, celebrities. Influences come from such models' activities, achievements, social position and behaviour. One older boy from Community B aspired to be a doctor because he had been very impressed by his doctor's behaviour when he was ill and thought the doctor had saved his life. Similarly, an adolescent girl from Community A wanted to be a doctor because of the good service she had received from one.

Within our qualitative sample, adolescent girls' aspirations were different from those of boys. Across the three sites and school types, the majority of adolescent girls aspired to become teachers or doctors. Teaching was also a common aspiration for boys in Communities A and C, but in Community B this was rare: boys wanted to be doctors and engineers. Other girls wanted to be journalists or police

officers, whereas boys wanted to be government officers, engineers, cricketers or army officers. There were also differences by type of school: most male *madrassa* students across the sites wanted to be teachers or Islamic scholars. Only one girl from the government school in Community A wanted to be an Islamic scholar. Adolescent girls in *madrassas* in Communities A and B wanted to be doctors.

Students' choice of subjects related to their aspirations. Many students had chosen English in order to get a job more easily and to get a better job in the future, as private corporations look for English and computer skills when they are recruiting. Competitive tests and exams such as admissions tests to university and medical and English language schools require high scores in English. A boy from Community A said during a focus group discussion at a government school, *'If you want to be something big in your life, you'll need English.'* Another boy in the group said, *'They want to speak in English, they all want to do lot of things in their future that's why they want to be good in speaking English.'* This puts tremendous pressure on young children to learn English. However, English teaching methods are not of a high standard in every school and most students have private coaching or a home tutor in this subject. Young adolescent boys in *madrassas* in Community A and Community B said they found English very hard and went to an after-school coaching centre to learn it better. A boy in a government school in Community C said he went to an English language club. A government school teacher in Community A said they arranged English language camps and offered a special English course so students could learn English better, recognising that this was a difficult subject for non-English-medium students.

Parents of adolescents also believe that if their children study well they will find a good job in the future, and this is why parents are conscientious regarding their children's education. The father of one girl from Community B had said to her, 'If you don't study, you would not find you in a good position in future.' The father of a boy from Community B said, 'Our girls will be educated in the future then join the job sectors and earn money to support the family.'

Parental support for education

In every site, our qualitative data shows that most parents are concerned about their children's education, and are more involved with this than in the past. They pay a great deal of attention to their children's school-related tasks and

If you want to be something big in your life, you'll need English.

(An adolescent boy in Community A)

Every mother has concerns about their children if they go to school daily and prepare their homework ... I have only one son and I have to nurture him properly.

(A mother in Community C)

are supported in doing this by their older children. One mother participating in a parents' focus group discussion in Community C said:

Parents help the children in their studies by checking their homework copies, like what homework has been given and checking the signature of the teachers daily. I insist my son to complete the school homework at first. Every mother has concerns about their children if they go to school daily and prepare their homework... I have only one son and I have to nurture him properly to make a good human being.'

A mother from Community B described how her belief in her daughter's ability had enabled her to overcome the effect of being labelled 'average'. She said:

A teacher gives a speech in primary school. He guaranteed that group A's students will get A+; Group B, C and D's students won't get A+. I told him, "Sir, you

shouldn't give that speech. Because, if you tell this in front of all students, they can get demotivated. It totally depends on luck. If I am really a mother of her, I show you A+, though my daughter is from group B." When my daughter's result was published, her she got Golden A+.

Sometimes, parents transfer their children to a *madrasa*, either because they want them to pursue a religious career or because such education is usually free and includes food, board and books. The quality of *madrasas* is variable, however, and has been highlighted as concerning by a number of studies (according to BANBIES, 2015, Chittagong has the second highest proportion of *madrasa* schools in Bangladesh, at 17.75%). While our survey does not provide a great deal of evidence as to quality, our analyses in Chittagong suggest that caregivers who send their children to *madrasas* tend to have lower aspirations for them, and children are likely to be brought up in more traditional environments (e.g. with higher levels of physical punishment) and have fewer resources at school and at home. Our data suggests that many *madrasa* students' parents are more focused on their learning the Quran, the Hadith and religious books than excelling in exams. According to the head of the Community A *madrasa*, one rationale parents and *madrasa* teachers have for sending



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At one time, it was impossible for girls to go [out of town] for study or work, but now girls are also going [out of town] for their education and it is very common.

(A mother in Community B)

children to *madradas* is that their children are more polite, respectful and likely to lead their life on the right path.

All the parents we interviewed said they gave material and emotional support to their children's education, and adolescents confirmed this. However, while discussing early marriage, key informants and other adults reported that, in rural areas in particular, some parents married their daughters off at an early age because of poverty and illiteracy. A *madrada* teacher in Community A said, '*In rural areas, parents don't want to educate their girls, they arrange early marriage for their daughters. Whereas there are many institutions in urban areas. The numbers of schools have also increased. Travelling to school is a lot easier. And the rural people are also in a poor economic state.*'

Poverty is recognised as the main reason for early marriage as well as school dropout and is not confined to rural areas. One mother of a boy in Community B said of parents in a poor neighbourhood that they married their girls off at an early age and put their sons to work. Mothers in a focus group in Community B said poor parents sent their boys abroad and girls to garment factories or arranged marriages. One explained:

At one time, it was impossible for girls to go [out of town] for study or work, but now girls are also going [out of town] for their education and it is very common. Even my parents were also scared to send me to Dhaka for study. But my brothers went abroad to pursue their study. Many of our relatives and the colleagues of my father told my father not to send me outside Chittagong.

Attitudes to education are changing. For example, the head of the *madrada* in Community C said, '*I think 80% of people are interested in education. They try to give their children education as much as they can. It's now very much changed from earlier.*' School teachers from the two government schools in Community A said similarly that poor parents now realised the importance of education and tried to continue their children's schooling. A female teacher from a government said, '*A rickshaw puller sees daily my daughter is engaged in study. So he can realise the importance of it. Even in the rural areas, I also live in village, many bright*

students are daughters of rickshaw pullers. As society is changing they have interests in study.'

As discussed in the accompanying brief on bodily integrity and freedom from violence, marriage continues to be appealing where parents feel they cannot keep their daughters safe. For example, in Community A, a mother told us that, because a girl was very beautiful, her family had arranged her marriage, to keep her away from people's attention. A mother of a young boy in Community B studying at the *madrada* said that sometimes parents wanted their children to be educated but children did not want to study; this was particularly common among boys. A mother of a boy at the government high school in Community C gave a similar example of her sister's daughter passing the High School Certificate (Grade 12) but her two sons being unable to. One dropped out in Grade 6 and the other in Grade 8. A government boys' school teacher in Community A said that if boys did not get good grades and failed repeatedly, parents might stop their education and make them find a job or send them abroad to work.

Educational access

Enrolment, attendance and literacy rates in Bangladesh have increased considerably since the 1990s (BBS, 2017). In Chittagong, for example, the net enrolment rate for all schools in 2015 is 99.6% for boys and 97.9% for girls (MoPME, 2015). While there is still a gender gap – for example, the literacy rate among men is 4% higher (BBS, 2017) – gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary education, although not yet in completion of upper secondary (in 2017 the adjusted gender parity rate was 0.82; UNESCO, 2018). Recent data suggests more girls are enrolling in school than boys (*ibid.*), and our survey data suggests girls are significantly younger at enrolment than boys.

While the number of boys who fail to enrol, enrol late or drop out is higher at primary level, only 54% of enrolled girls complete secondary school, compared with 66% of boys (BANBEIS, 2015; BBS, 2017). Having said that, dropout rates have been continuously decreasing in Bangladesh, and Chittagong has the lowest rates of all the regions (8.6% for boys and 7.6% for girls) (MoPME, 2015).

Few young people are enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) following completion of their lower secondary schooling: only 6% of boys and 3% of girls (*ibid.*). The lower enrolment for girls is attributed to stereotypes about suitable occupations for females, distance to training institutes, lack of secure residential facilities and limited economic resources (ADB, 2017).

Looking at Bangladesh as a whole, two-thirds of those who have never enrolled in primary school are from ultra-poor and poor households, and more than half of children

At my time, we had to buy books. Even when I was in class 6/7, I had to buy board books. But now, books are given for free.

(A mother in Community A)

dropping out come from these households, although they represent only 45% of the population (MoPME, 2015). Chittagong has the lowest school enrolment for poor households (67.8%) in Bangladesh; non-poor households have an enrolment rate of 86.2% (BBS, 2017). Our survey data from Chittagong suggests out-of-school respondents are on average half a year older when they start school and have left school by Grade 3.

Educational opportunities for other marginalised groups, such as working children (particularly domestic workers), married adolescents and those with disabilities, are still limited (UNICEF, 2009). Having said that, our survey data shows little evidence of discrimination against adolescents with disabilities, which may relate to the low severity of the disabilities within our survey. For example, the survey data suggests 98% of students with disabilities are enrolled, versus 99% of those without disabilities (the difference is significant but small), with no difference in age of enrolment. The qualitative data presents a different picture, as it identifies two challenges for adolescents with disabilities: not being considered worthy of investment by their parents, especially where families are poor and this may be seen as a 'luxury'; and experiencing physical or social barriers to schooling. The school survey data provides supporting evidence for this: only one in 10 schools provides support for students with special needs, although this increases to two in 10 in Community B.

Students at government schools are enrolled at younger ages than those at private schools and *madrasas*: aged 5.7 years as opposed to 6 years (private) and 6.1 years (*madrasas*). In relation to attendance, students at government schools had missed on average 10% of the days that school was in session in the previous two weeks whereas students at private schools and *madrasas* had missed 7% (there were no other significant differences).

In qualitative interviews, teachers, parents and community members reported that access to education had increased markedly across the sites, as had attendance and literacy rates. Teachers said this was because the government had given considerable support to students through modalities such as stipends, free books and, in some cases, a full free education based on results in primary and junior school certificate exams.

All types of schools receive free books from the government's education office. However, private schools

sometimes add more books to their own curricula, which students have to buy. Parents commented that, when they were younger, they did not have this level of support. One mother of a boy studying at the government high school in Community A said, *'At my time, we had to buy books. Even when I was in class 6/7, I had to buy board books. But now, books are given for free. Then there is a scholarship system now. At present, different type of banking organisations, such as Grameen bank, Islami bank are giving money to the students. But we didn't get these opportunities.'* For example, BRAC gives scholarships to high-performing adolescents in Community A (it does not operate in Communities B or C). According to the BRAC programme manager in Community A, *'If any disadvantaged child gets A+ on exam, BRAC gives a scholarship to him/her. If they pass the Junior School Certificate exam [in Grade 8], BRAC gives them a scholarship until Secondary School Certificate examination [in Grade 10].'*

Some parents from Community C suggested that the process whereby poor students are nominated by their schools to get stipends from the government and other organisations was not always fair. This is because people in school management committees give scholarships to students with whom they have good relationships (apparently this is less common for scholarships that depend on the students' exam results, as that is decided by the government rather than the school). Criticising the expense of education, a father of a female *madrasa* student in Community B said, *'The government is giving nothing without the books, we have to buy guides and we have to pay their fees in madrasa. When she got admitted in class six I had to give 1,000 BDT as admission fee.'* A father of a boy studying at the government high school in Community C who thinks boys should also get stipends said, *'Government is giving stipend to girls but no stipend for boys. They should start stipend programme for boys too. You need the same expenses for boys' education.'*

In our qualitative data, we have found any differences between girls and boys in terms of educational access. The father of a boy studying at the government high school in Community B said, *'When we were in Grade 5, the number of girls were 50 but when we were in class 10, there were only nine girls left in the class. But now, in the time of our children the number of girls participating in exam is higher than boys... [as] parents don't need to be worried now for*

Government is giving stipend to girls but no stipend for boys. They should start stipend programme for boys too.

(A father in Community C)

I visited eight schools in Community C. Here I saw there was a student who spends two hours daily for coming to his school from home. He comes here by own small boat.

(A *madrasa* teacher in Community A)

their girl's educational expenses.' Nonetheless, according to a government health officer from Community A, fewer girls are attending higher education and a mother from Community B said in the focus group that this was because parents were afraid of sending their daughters outside the area.

Another difference, according to a *madrasa* teacher from Community C, is that *madrasa* students are now more ready to enter mainstream education, participate in politics and look for a government job. They are also performing better in exams: '*Madrasa students are placing themselves on the top list [in the university admission test]. By seeing this output other adolescent students of the madrasa get encouraged and progress more.*' This can be attributed to the various initiatives taken by the Bangladesh government since the 1980s to support the modernisation of *madrasa*

education. Now graduates of recognised *madraras* are eligible to seek admission to secular universities, as well as employment in public office.

While in Community C most students face long journeys from remote areas, including by boat, this was not the case in our sample, although some needed to be accompanied by their parents. Nonetheless, these problems are so widely known that one of the *madrasa* teachers from Community A said, 'I visited eight schools in Community C. Here I saw there was a student who spends two hours daily for coming to his school from home. He comes here by own small boat. Maybe his parents work in the field. They were very much poor, even they starve sometimes.' Students in other sites are near enough to cycle, walk or take a motorised rickshaw. In a focus group with mothers from Community C, one mother said that many students in the community were very motivated to get educated. She said, 'The students from Community C go to Dhaka or Chittagong and the students of the rural area come to Community C.' Educational quality

Academic curriculum/quality of school

In interviews, men in Community C commented on the changes in the academic curriculum, which now includes information and communication technology (ICT) and



Students in a school in Chittagong, Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2019

home economics (many teachers also commented on the addition of ICT). Other adult respondents observed the ways in which ICT supported adolescents' education through enabling them to gather educational materials, which were not available in the past. One government school teacher from Community A said, *'When we read the drama "kobor", it took us one month to read the entire drama. But now we can watch it with less time in multimedia classes, so students don't need much time to read it.'* Another government school teacher, in Community C, said:

Education is very much more complicated than before. Children are very good in their study now. Very much progressed. They can know a lot by using technology. They try to gather knowledge by using internet. They try to maintain themselves in different competitive test. They are going towards development day by day by using technology. Though they are here [in Community C] they participate in world competitions.

Despite this potential, he adds that, *'The alarming thing is that only 20% of adolescents use ICT in the right way. Most of them abuse it.'* While talking about the internet and mobile phones, a principal of the girls' high school in Community C said, similarly, *'Mobile gives us everything just in one click. But the problem is, they are not accepting the good ones [accessing good sources to support their education].'*

While talking about the quality of education, adolescents and key informants expressed their concerns regarding the 'creative education system' (*srijonshil shikkha*). A government education officer from Community C said that the creative system was an improvement because before this the student would just memorise the answers to a few questions and not read the entire textbook. However, he said, *'The creative system has yet to be implemented properly. There are shortages of teachers in the schools. Class sizes are big. Teachers are not trained properly and it is almost impossible to teach the creative system lesson in a class with more than 100 students in it.'* For these reasons, the head of a government girls' school in Community B considered this a significant change in the education system. A 17-year-old boy from the government high school in Community B expressed concern about the number of multiple choice questions being reduced. While these are easier for students, they are more vulnerable to exam paper leaks and there was a rumour that they would be stopped altogether, which he and his peers found very worrying.

Quality of teaching

Our qualitative data reflects diverse responses regarding the quality of schools, as parents and teachers expressed

But now students need tutors for all subjects. The teaching method at schools is now going below the standard. For this reason coaching centre is mandatory now.

(A man in Community B)

mixed opinions. Across the sites, adults talked about positive changes in the overall education system and access to education in the country; however, many parents were unhappy about the quality of teaching and the increasing commercialisation of education. They felt that the quality of teaching methods and teachers' enthusiasm had fallen over time. A father of a male student from Community B said, *'In our time teaching methods of school teacher was better because teachers were able to make us understand our lessons and we didn't need any tutor outside of school. The teachers taught us properly in the classroom with a responsibility, and with cordial and friendly behaviour. But nowadays the teachers don't have these qualities.'*

Coaching centres are prevalent across the sites and adolescents from all school types mentioned going to these after school. In addition, some adolescents have private tutors coming to their home to teach them. Parents mentioned the irresponsibility of school teachers, reduced quality of teaching and the commercial mentality of some teachers as major reasons for the increased number of coaching centres. Men in a community norms exercise in Community B acknowledged that children's education nowadays depends on such centres. One man said, *'In our time, we only took private tuitions for two subjects – math and English. But now students need tutors for all subjects. The teaching method at schools is now going below the standard. For this reason coaching centre is mandatory now.'* In a group exercise in Community B, a man said, *'Schools are commercial now. They don't teach appropriately in schools and colleges. For this reason, guardians have to depend on coaching centres.'* In a group activity with adolescent girls in Community B, many complained that some teachers involved in coaching centres gave good grades only to students attending theirs. Men in a focus group in Community A also claimed that, *'If our children don't go to a particular teacher's coaching, they fail in the exam. Those teachers get upset about it. They don't give good grades.'*

Adolescents from the Community B *madrassa* said teachers at their school did not complete the lessons in the syllabus on time, hence their need to go to coaching centres. However, this perception may vary according to the type of school: a group of young adolescent boys from the government school in Community A said, *'We don't go to the coaching centre, our teachers are experienced, they teach us well.'* Some teachers not involved in coaching

Case study: Mamun's story – study pressures on children

Mamun is a 12-year-old boy living in the district town of Community C with his parents, older brother and younger sister. He is in Grade 6 at the government high school. Like most school-going adolescents in the area, Mamun feels tremendous pressure to study and worries about getting good grades in his examinations. He described his daily routine:

'I get up at 6 o'clock in the morning and pray the morning prayer. Then I prepare my lessons. After taking my breakfast, I go to school. My school finishes at 11 o'clock. Then I come back home, take some rest and go to private tuition. That ends at 2 o'clock. After coming back from the tuition I pray, have lunch and take a nap. Then I do either maths or English lessons. Then I go out for playing. In the evening, a private tutor comes home and I study English, Bengali and other subjects. After I am done preparing my school lessons I take dinner, and go to bed.'

Mamun likes to study English and gets good grades in that subject. As he is good at English, two children come to his home for English tuition. Mamun does not know how much money he earns from this because his mother does not tell him. She gives him a little money only when he goes to the local fair. His best friend also likes English and together they discuss their lessons. Mamun shares all his worries with his older brother, who provides him with moral support. His brother goes to the vocational school. Mamun seeks support from his mother when he faces any problems regarding his study. He wants to be like his maternal uncle who is an army officer and is very nice to everyone.

centres identified these as a major problem in the education system. For example, the head of a government girls' school in Community B said, *'Guardians submit applications to me mentioning illness of their children. For this reason, they are granted three days leave of absence per week. Three days they go to school and three days they go to coaching centre. So coaching centre is a major problem. This system should be closed.'* Coaching centres are expensive: a 16-year-old boy at the government high school in Community A who already works three days a week said, *'Now I am going to coaching centre [to catch up]. But I don't know if I will be able to pay the fee or not.'*

During a school-based focus group discussion with boys in a government school in Community B, a boy commented that teachers were friendlier than those in the private schools he used to attend. A boy in the same group said, *'Teachers in private schools are very serious; they strictly maintain the rules and those schools are expensive as well. But government schools are not like that. Teachers here are friendly and don't control us strictly. Private school teachers are so grumpy, adolescents can't say a single word. But in a government school, adolescents can talk to their teacher.'*


Study pressure

In all sites, most adolescents and their parents said adolescents were continually studying and had pressure from their class teacher, private tutor, coaching teacher and parents. Adolescent girls from a government school in Community B said that if sometimes they failed to manage their homework because they had to do several sets (for school, the coaching centre and their home tutor), they did not go to school as the teachers would scold them. This phenomenon is not confined to government schools in wealthier areas; a group of adolescent girls from a *madrassa* in Community C experienced similar pressures. A father of an adolescent girl in Community B said:

They [his daughters] go to the tuition for Arabic at 6 am and come back at 8 am, they have only one hour for breakfast and all preparation before classes in madrasa that start at 9 am. They come back from madrasa in the afternoon, they get only one and half hour before they go again for tuition. After tuition they come back and sit for study in the home again, so where is time for playing around?

Girls in a government school in Community B said their experience of schooling would be better if teachers reduced the length of their lessons, gave less homework and took a more forgiving attitude to any mistakes.

The schools in every site arrange extracurricular activities for their students, such as cultural activities, science projects, sports, debates and scouting, which adolescents enjoy. Activities differ slightly according to the type of school. *Madrassa* administrations arrange recital competitions for *hamd* (songs praising Allah), *naat* (songs praising the prophet Mohammad) and *kerat* (the Quran), as well as sport. This reflects the interests of parents rather than girls. Parents said that it was a matter of pride that their daughters did not go outside or watch TV but rather stayed home doing household work, praying and crafting. Girls participating in the focus group at Community B *madrassa* said, *'We cannot play. It makes us unhappy.'* They said that there were other gender divisions in that boys attended clubs for sports such as football and cricket, whereas girls did these only informally, and mainly played

 *Now I am going to coaching centre [to catch up]. But I don't know if I will be able to pay the fee or not.'*

(A 16-year-old boy at the government high school in Community A)

indoor games such as carom, chess, singing and drawing. During the annual sports events in the schools, adolescent girls participate in some outdoor sports (at a *madrasa* in Community C they do 'cricket, football, running, cycling and skipping rope'. However, in general, girls' events are different from boys', as they are selected to require less physical effort (e.g. thread-and-needle races, marble-on-the-spoon races, skipping and memory and maths games).

The findings imply that schools for adolescents with disabilities do not have sufficient resources. A male participant in the community norms group in Community C said, 'An important thing about the school of disabled children is that they represent the disabled child in national programme to show their performance but their education condition is so poor in the school.' The key informant interviews show that the government schools are instructed to take special care of disabled children but this is often hard to do. A teacher from the government school in Community A said, 'The disabled students are

told to be taught in special scope by the government. We specially take care of them. All schools can't provide special care for them. We have one student in class 10 who is almost blind. So we take his examinations in special care.' However, the government education officer in Chittagong said that the arrangements in the government schools were not adequate for the needs of students with all types of disabilities. He said:

Generally, it is tough to communicate with the children who are deaf and dumb; there are no teachers for doing that. There should be special teachers for them. Because, if I admit a dumb boy, I will not understand his language. So, a skilled teacher is a must who can understand and communicate with those children. The government can set up special school for them. As Chittagong is a big city, it has to have some facilities. Because, if there is a blind or deaf student, they can still communicate, but the dumb can't..'



Students at school in Chittagong, Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2019

Key actions to accelerate progress

1. Improve vocational training opportunities and gender-neutral careers advice.

Government policies on education, teachers' development and skills development encourage improved vocational training and counselling of students on future careers, especially for marginalised groups. Unfortunately, currently, little weight is given to this aspect.

Government and non-government vocational training should be made more attractive and accessible for girls and boys by lowering entry requirements, becoming more localised and arranging secure accommodation. Stereotyping of skills for girls and boys should be avoided and efforts made to encourage parents, students and potential employers to take girls into trades traditionally considered male and vice versa.

2. Support children from poorer families to attain better results and life skills.

Although government policy emphasises inclusive education, formal exams at the end of Grades 5 and 8 put pressure on schools, students and parents. Overall, the grade-dependent education system encourages rote learning at the cost of quality. Many education experts and policymakers are advocating against formal examination systems. However, although 'creative education' is included in the curriculum, it is not always implemented properly, because there is a lack of trained teachers, and this has created extra anxiety among children and parents. Children from poorer families in particular need additional support from schools and teachers to ensure their educational results are good. If they do well, their parents will be more inclined to continue their schooling. Extracurricular activities and computer education in schools need to be ramped up to provide poorer children with better life skills and thus opportunities.

3. Allow girls to continue education after marriage or childbirth and boys to combine work with schooling.

School dropout is mainly caused by poverty and, relatedly, internal migration and paid work. Girls are more likely to marry early and take on significant domestic responsibilities, whereas boys are more likely to enter into full-time paid work, so levels of dropout are similar.

Secondary schools should be encouraged to allow girls to continue education after marriage or childbirth. Boys would also benefit from being able to return to school after a break to work, or to combine work with schooling. Increased childcare facilities would free up older siblings.

Providing vocational and skills training education for girls may delay early marriage as families would feel that

their adolescent daughters had other options beside marriage or formal schooling.

4. Increase availability of government schools and stipends for secondary education.

Slum areas lack government schools, and the costs of private schools are one of the reasons for adolescents having to drop out. Urban areas need greater coverage of stipends for secondary education.

Movement between schools and *madrasas* is common for poorer children as the latter are cheaper and provide food and accommodation. *Madrasas* are being increasingly brought under a uniform curriculum and stronger monitoring, which is likely to address issues of quality.

5. Increase availability of institutions catering to adolescents with disabilities.

There is a need to increase the availability of educational institutions catering to the special needs of those with disabilities, and to equip general schools and their teachers to better respond to the needs of such children. This requires teacher training as well as infrastructural investments.

6. Improve the quality of general education overall.

Quality control in schools, monitoring and evaluation and holding teachers accountable is crucial to ensure education is of good quality covers learners' needs. This would reduce the use of private coaching, which is in fact banned, and regular leaking of exam papers. School management committees are currently dysfunctional and politicised and need to be improved. This is also true of the student cabinets; while potentially these are a good initiative for leadership training, the process has become highly politicised and under the control of local chapter of the ruling political party. Quality of education is not only a technical issue but also a governance issue. Strong relationships between schools and communities are an integral part of school management policy but implementation of this is weak.

7. Pay greater attention to parity of education completion.

Teachers, administrators and parents need to emphasise the needs and aspirations of young male and female adolescents to ensure parity of completion as with enrolment. Quality education with adequate stimulation through sports or cultural activities can increase boys' motivation to complete their schooling. Government policy is now being changed so poor boys in secondary school will also receive stipends.

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