

Status of Sex Education at Elementary Schools in Bangladesh: A Comparative Study among Few Schools in Dhaka

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Abstract: Education is considered as a backbone of a nation. For sustainable development, education is the first prerequisite. It plays vital role for socioeconomic development of a society. For the last few decades, Government of Bangladesh has tried to ensure maximum number of participant under the light of education. A lot of projects have been initiated for education development of the nation to spade it to reach the mass and root level. The number of participant has been increased a lot, but the problem is that the education system in Bangladesh has been run under different separate streams and mostly is traditional. Nonetheless, the sex education is absent in most of the curriculum, in fact, at all the main streams elementary school levels in Bangladesh but it is considered as a very much essential part of the schooling process in developed nations. This paper had based on primary data collected from several schools under different streams and attempted to have a comparative study among them. Without including sex education at a large scale in the main stream education process of this country, it is impossible to reduce sexual harassment, children abuse, unwanted pregnancy and related difficulties.

Keywords: education system; elementary schooling; sex education; sexual harassment

I. Introduction

Education in Bangladesh is monitored under both the ministry of education and the ministries of primary and mass education on behave of government of the people republic of Bangladesh. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education is responsible for implementing policy for primary education and state-funded schools at a local level. All citizens must undertake ten years of compulsory education in Bangladesh which consists of five years plus five years at primary and high school level respectively. Mostly in the rural areas, the primary and secondary education is financed by the state and free of charge in public schools. In the cities, all education is based on private ownership and non-profit organizational structure.

The education system in Bangladesh is characterized by the co-existence of many streams (WB, 2020). Three separate streams are considered as fundamental system. The first mainstream universal education carried over from the colonial past. Then second separate system is based on religious education. Another one is based on use of English as the medium of instruction, another stream of education, following after the British education system, has rapidly grown in all the metropolitan cities of Bangladesh. However, all the main stream school systems overlooked the sex-education issues considering sex as a taboo, except the English medium schools mostly located in mega-cities.

Bangladesh has a sex education system in schools, though a majority of the teachers teach the subject in a conservative way. Sometimes, they skip the chapters in book which are about sexuality (Rubayet, 2019). However, many female teachers give friendly support to female students' sexual problems. Inter-gender friendship is discouraged/prohibited in the society (Lewis, 2011).

There is gender segregation in so many schools where making inter-gender friendship is very hard. Despite of all these restrictions, moderate and modest friendships have always been accepted and appreciated by some urban societies in the developed nations. The paper has attempted to find out the real scenario of the status of sex education in elementary schooling system in Bangladesh.

II. Review of Literatures

Sabina (2000) studied the contribution of sex education to the adolescence in the rural level in Bangladesh by one of the top NGOs named Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, shortly as only 'BRAC'. It started up an Adolescent Reproductive Health Education (ARHE) programme in the year of 1995 with an aim to provide information about reproductive health to adolescents in rural areas. The program motto was to break the silence and shame about 'sensitive' topics, and share new ideas and information, proves a positive influence on the relationships between adolescents and their parents and teachers, and among adolescents themselves. It played a vital role to have woman empowerment and awareness in rural society.

Bhuiyan (2014) had studied the attitude of school going parents regarding the inclusion of sex education with the school curriculum in Bangladesh. It was trying to find the relationship between the parents' demographic characteristics (residence, gender, religion, occupation, and education level) and their attitude towards sex education. The research had discovered that 48.3 percent supported while 25 percent did not support and rest are found neutral position about sex education among 120 parents as total sampling size. Parents supported value and culture-based lessons rather than the knowledge of sexual intercourse, abortion, contraceptives, etc. The study had found that a significant difference between the attitude of parents towards the inclusion of sex education in elementary school level depending on their residence, occupation, and education qualification.

Islam et. al. (2018) had suggested that evidence-based, scientific, and nonjudgmental information needs to be incorporated into the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) by the Ministry of Education. There is a need to align the curriculum across Bangla, Bangla-English version, English, and religious schools' medium so that uniformity in general education on sexuality is achieved. It found the lack of evidence on rigorous program evaluation and service delivery and suggested for policy advocacy and advocating for change in the current model of education delivery is found critical.

As the issue of sex education inclusion of school lessons is talked for two decades, this paper has attempted to find the recent situation about sex education and awareness among both the teachers and students, and curriculum development with it in the main stream elementary level schools based on Dhaka city in Bangladesh.

III. Research Methods

This study has been carried on to analyze all the ins and outs of sex education in Bangladesh. All data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data collected from few different stream schools (i.e. general, religious, foreign) located in Dhaka using formed questionnaires, group discussion and observation methods. Considering the social norms and Bangladeshi culture, whereas sex is an issue of taboo, all primary data have been collected anonymously. Secondary data had been collected from journal articles, newspaper columns, annual reports published by national and international agencies, etc. A simple excel spreadsheet has been used to analyze and organize data. Simple graph and table are used for easy presentation. It had tried to disclose real condition of sex education in Bangladesh.

IV. Discussion

Bangladesh is one of the developing nations in the world located in South Asia with 166 million of population. Currently per capita GDP of this nation is US \$1965 (WB, 2021). Education is on the paratid list of the Government of Bangladesh and the government has been trying to transform its huge population into human resource. Plan and action has been made for last few decades. Therefore, adult literacy rate of Bangladesh (aged 15+) have increased (see Figure 1) from 46 percent in 2001 to 74.9 percent in 2020 with 99 percent of primary school enrollment (WB, 2021).

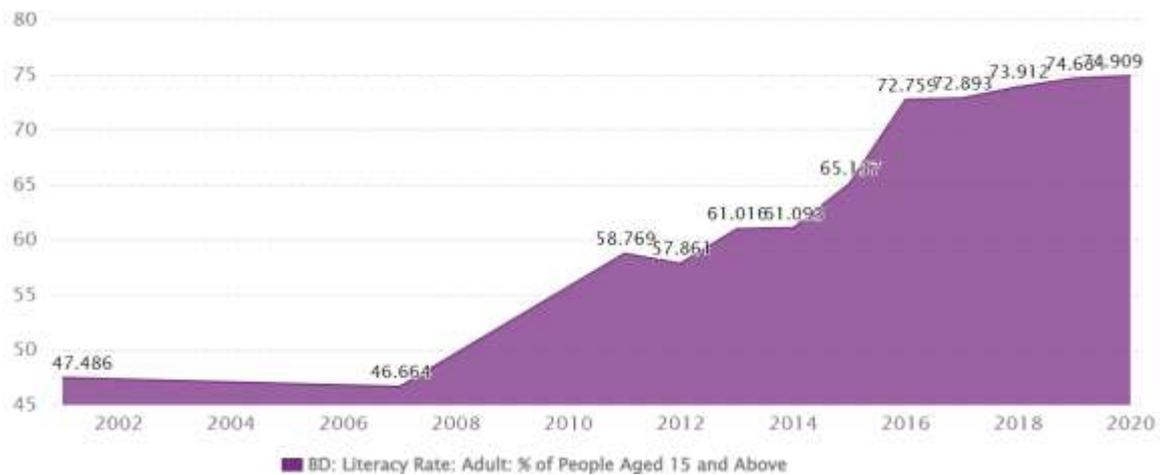


Figure 1. Adult Literacy Rate of Bangladesh

Source: World Bank, 2021

4.1 Status of Sex Education at Elementary School Levels in Bangladesh

Despite of rate of education increasing in Bangladesh, sex education as an essential part of the process is absent. In fact, the culture in Bangladesh is predominantly conservative and patriarchal. Several topics, including sex education, romance, homosexuality, and sexual behavior are considered taboo (GNB, 2018). Sex education is a part of regular education process that develops the young people's skills about the way they behave. Sex defines a person as a males or females, which is very much important for a childhood growth and development.

Sexuality is the entire expression of a person both male and female that have constituted via moral values, mental attitudes, beliefs, emotions, social, and cultural beliefs, etc. The aim of sex education is about reducing the risks resulted from irresponsible sexual

behaviour, as such illegal relationship, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV or AIDs.

Sexuality in Bangladesh is primarily influenced by religion and culture. This also knows as conservative society. General concepts about sex are illegal and the only of it is arranging marriage, which is a common cultural norm in Bangladesh.

Both sex and sexuality are considered as a taboo in Bangladesh. It is a family-oriented country with a strong socioeconomic class structure where majority of Muslim religious. The romance is also considered to be sinful and a social crime. However, there is a pocket of tolerance and acceptance in only certain social classes (Lewis, 2011). At elementary school level, known as primary (5 to 10 years age) and secondary schools (10 to 15 years age), sex education is nearly absent (see Table 01).

Table 1. Topic of Sex Education Covered in Text Books in Bangladesh

<i>Available education streams</i>	<i>Topic related of sex education</i>	
	<i>Primary level</i>	<i>Secondary level</i>
General	00	03
Religious and Others	00	01
Foreign based	01	05

General schools are known as Bangla medium school which is the mainstream schooling system in Bangladesh. Religious schools are known as ‘Madrasa’ where teaching method is different, old and based on Arabic language and culture. Foreign schools are known as English medium schools where exam conduction and evaluation has been done by the foreign body/authority, mostly based in UK. The majority students prefer general schools in Bangladesh and attend the first public exams at the end of elementary schooling (see Table 2).

Table 2. Number of Candidates Registered For Public Exams in Bangladesh

<i>Stream</i>	<i>Equivalent Exam title</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total Students</i>	<i>percentage</i>
General	SSC	7,91,918	8,43,322	16,35,240	79.09
Religious	Dakhil	1,96,700	84,300	2,81,000	13.60
Foreign	O levels (tentative)	10,000	10,000	20,000	0.98
Vocational and Others	SSC/Voc.	1,16,285	15,000	1,31,285	6.35
Total		1,114,903	952,622	2,067,525	100

Source: Ministry of Education, 2021 & British Council, 2021

Table 2 shows that mostly students (80 percent) study at general schools where only one topic related to sex education has been covered during 11 years of schooling period. Religious and other schools do not cover it, whereas English medium schools cover more topics compare to all other streams but the total number of students study in this stream is less than 1 percent only. So, concentration needs to be given on general schools, those are run by private authority or public administration, and both are monitored by government of Bangladesh (two ministries of education).

Table 3. Students Response about School Lessons

<i>Steam</i>	<i>Students know about 'Sex' in school lessons (in percent)</i>	
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
<i>General</i>	10	90
<i>Religious</i>	0	100
<i>Foreign</i>	40	60
<i>Vocational and Others</i>	5	95

Table 3 represent that, mostly students do not get any idea about sex (or sex education) from their lesson provided by the schools. English medium schools are providing better service respect to these criteria.

Table 4. Students Response about Their Discussion with Friends

<i>Steam</i>	<i>Students discusses about 'Sex' with friends in school (in percent)</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
<i>General</i>	90	70
<i>Religious</i>	99	80
<i>Foreign</i>	95	60
<i>Vocational and Others</i>	95	85

Table 4 shows that, most of the students discuss about sex with his friends. Female students are comparatively discussing less to male students. Males feel free to talk to their fiends. Only the female students of religious and vocations institutions talk more to their friends' more than general school going female students.

Table 5. Students Response about Their Discussion with Friends

<i>Steam</i>	<i>Students feel shy to discus about 'Sex' with friends (in percent)</i>		<i>Students feel shy to discus about 'Sex' with teacher (in percent)</i>	
	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
<i>General</i>	20	50	90	50
<i>Religious</i>	10	90	95	80
<i>Foreign</i>	30	40	80	30
<i>Vocational and Others</i>	05	20	85	70

Table 5 shows that 20 to 30 percent male students feel shy to discus about sex with friends and teachers. Most of the female students (50 to 90 percent) feel shy to discuss with friends and teachers.

Table 6. Teachers Response about Their Discussion with Students

<i>Steam</i>	<i>Teachers discusses about 'Sex education' with students in school (in percent)</i>			
	<i>Male teacher with male students</i>	<i>Female teacher with female students</i>	<i>Male teacher with female students</i>	<i>Female teacher with male students</i>
<i>General</i>	70	80	00	05
<i>Religious</i>	75	70	00	00

<i>Foreign</i>	60	60	05	20
<i>Vocational and Others</i>	50	50	00	00

The table 6 had stated that teachers are feeling free to talk to his/her students when student/s is/are from same gender but not more than 80 percent. That means, 20 percent teachers never talk to his/her students about sex even in same gender group. Research also found that only few (20 percent) female teacher may talk to opposite gender student/s in only foreign curriculum based schools. Nonetheless, the tanning facilities for school teachers are not regular or totally absent in main stream schooling process (see Table 07).

Table 7. Teachers Conducted Training about Sex Education

Steam	No. of teachers' training on Sex education	Training Provider
General	10 percent	Govt. and BRAC
Religious	0 percent	None
Foreign	80 percent	School itself
Vocational and Others	0 percent	None

The above table shows that only 80 percent teachers' of English medium schools get training related to sex education, organized by their schools itself but the number of this type of schools, their students and their teacher, all are very small in numbers. Mainstream schools are in very measurable situation in this case. Only ten percent teachers have training on sex education, conducted by government agencies or NGOs including BRAC.

4.2 Importance of Sex Education at Elementary School Level

Today's children are tomorrow's builder of future nation. So childhood as well as school age and elementary learning are very important prerequisite of a better adult-hood. Children observed physical and mental changed at age about ten years old. Teachers having training on sex education would help the students more than non-trained persons. However, parents may play vital role to support children during growing period too.

All school going children have to pass over their teenage-life with friends and teachers in school. The teenage is the phase of biological, psychological, emotional changes and associated with the mastering of certain development tasks including body and mental changes. In this period, the growth of the external and internal genitals of girls and boys, development of breasts in girls and pubic hair in both sexes, increase in facial and body hair, breaking of voices, mood swings, etc. all the behavioral changes are happen.

Khan (2021) stated that 'Sex education is an essential tool to help them learn about a broad range of topics related to biological, psychological and socio-cultural perspectives of individual beings as well as a key intervention to prevent and reduce sexual harassment, assault and abuse. Still, this important subject has been considered as a taboo in our conservative society due to misconceptions or lack of appropriate knowledge on sex education.'

A teacher, trained on sex education may behave friendly with his/her students and help during their mental growth and development process to discover a self-determined identity, personality, sexual identity, self-confidence, independence, self-control etc. In this stage, children learn to build up a circle of friends, relationships with peers of both sexes, express own role as a girl or boy, enter into sexual relationships, deals with different forms of sexual life.

V. Conclusion

Sex education may create awareness among the school-going children as well as in the society in a larger perspective. It provides the information of all about the sex and gender-related issues that are necessary for the trouble-free growth of children. The aim of sex education is to create an abuse-free society having real human beings by spreading social values and cultural norms. It discusses the preventive health care system and proper ways of life to lead. Having a free discussion with teachers in the school, the students may learn about social and family relations clearly. It may prevent any kinds of unwanted situations. Students may learn to avoid all kinds of harassment and abuse-free relationships, and basic ideas of family planning including contraceptive methods, selection, and use. Sex education has been included in all the developed nations for long ago as a result people respect each other forgetting the sex/gender of person. Today it is time to think about it more as it is no more taboo at all. It is a part of the modern education and learning process. So, to avoid all kinds of sexual abuse-related issues including unwanted pregnancies and protection of unborn life, related monitoring agencies may include sex education in all mainstream elementary schools in Bangladesh.

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