

Education Watch 2014

WHITHER GRADE V EXAMINATION?

An Assessment of Primary Education Completion Examination in Bangladesh



Overview



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Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)
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Overview of the Main Report

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Overview

A. Introduction and Background

Examination and testing are integral parts of education systems. Interestingly, these were developed outside of educational institutions long ago but education systems gradually adopted them to meet their own needs. Examinations are not only organized at school or national levels, these are increasingly becoming an important practice internationally. Starting from the time of Han Dynasty in China (206 BC-220 AD), the assessment systems and methods have developed over time, with significant advancements happening in the 20th century. Internationally, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are two of the most influential assessment systems supported by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in which more than 75 countries are participating.

In a school system, parents are in general interested in the learning achievement of their children. There are other stakeholders including educationists, policy-makers, civil society and the mass media who are concerned about education quality and outcomes which are also gauged by examinations. Education outcomes are seen as critical in different quality assessment frameworks as part of education reform efforts, though, indicators related to input and process are also given much importance.

There are debates on both the positive and negative aspects of examinations and tests whether these are held nationally or internationally. A major question among educationists in this regard the age at which students should be exposed to mandatory public examinations. Most education systems in the world do not prescribe any type of public examination external

to the school before 10 years of schooling. Countries have moved away from high-stake public examinations at early ages considering them as more harmful than beneficial.

Historically, Bangladesh had two public examinations, one after completion of 10 years of schooling and the other at the end of 12 years. Two new public examinations were introduced in 2009 one at the end of grade V and the other at the end of grade VIII. Although most examinees pass in these examinations, educationists question their justification and added value. Most reservations and concerns have, however, been raised about the examination that happens at the end of grade V for children aged 10 years. The way this examination is conducted, the use made of it, and its consequences for children are parts of the concerns.

So far, no serious research has been conducted in Bangladesh on public examinations. The Education Watch is committed to analyses of educational issues in Bangladesh based on scientific inquiries and to publishing annual reports with policy recommendations for improvement of educational delivery and outcome. Considering the concerns raised by educationists, the interest of the public and the media, and its importance for building the foundation of children's educational development, the *Education Watch* group decided to take the Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE), or Samapani Parikksha as the theme for *Education Watch 2014 report*.

Direction on student assessment in National Education Policy 2010

In Classes I & II, there will be continuous assessments, while from Class III onwards, quarterly, half-yearly & yearly examination systems will be in place. On the completion of Class V, a terminal examination with identical set of questions will take place at Upazila/Paurasava/ Thana levels (of big cities). On the completion of Class VIII, a public examination will take place to be initially known as Junior School Certificate Examination. The Education Boards concerned with examination will conduct this public examination.

Source: National Education Policy 2010, Ministry of Education

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) administers PECE through its upazila/thana and district offices on behalf of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) is responsible for preparation of question papers, assessment procedure and norms of grading. Six subjects in the primary curriculum covering all the subjects taught in primary school are tested over six examination days. Examinees are given raw scores (marks) which are converted into seven letter grades and grade points. Grade points are then used to calculate Grade Point Average (GPA). PECE is generally held at the fourth week of November and results are announced at the end of the year.

DPE records show a continuous increase in the number of candidates for PECE over time. In 2009, the number of students registered for examination was 1.98 million which has increased to 2.79 million within six years by 2014. Not all registered students actually appear in examination; whereas 1.82 million took the tests in 2009, it increased to 2.68 million in 2014. During this period, a total of 14.52 million students registered for the examination but 13.63 million of them actually appeared. Pass rates have also registered continuous rise - from 88.8% in 2009 to 97.9% in 2014. On average, 95.8% of the candidates passed during 2009-2014.

Grades at which public examinations are held in South Asian countries

Countries	Grades			
	Grade V	Grade VIII	Grade X	Grade XII
Afghanistan				✓
Bangladesh	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bhutan			✓	✓
India			✓	✓
Maldives			✓	✓
Nepal		✓	✓	✓
Pakistan			✓	✓
Sri Lanka	Scholarship		(XI)	(XIII)

Sources: Websites of the concerned ministries of the countries and UNESCO 2012

PECE is the largest public examination in the country. The number of PECE examinees in 2014, was 1.55 times of the examinees of Junior Secondary Completion Examination (JSCE), 2.47 times of those participated in Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and 2.93 times of those participated in Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations held in the same year.

B. Objectives and Methodology

This is an in-depth exploration of Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE). The study identifies and discusses the pros and cons of PECE and suggests policy recommendations for the future. The study is explored by examining a number of separate but inter-linked topics as follows:

- The arguments in favour and against the PECE
- Completion examination in the eyes of various stakeholders
- Media reporting on the examination
- School's initiatives to prepare students for the examination
- Family responses to the completion examination
- Process of administering the examination
- Private expenditure for schooling and additional tutoring in grade V
- Students' performance in examination and its link with achievement of competencies

In addressing the above topics, the study covered five types of primary educational institutions which are: government primary schools, newly nationalized primary schools, kindergartens, non-formal primary schools and ebtedayee madrasas. These together represent about 90% of the students attending primary education in the country. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Offices of the Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNO) and NGOs working in study areas provided lists of schools from which samples were drawn.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data for the study. For the quantitative part, the country was divided into two parts rural and urban. In rural areas, 75 upazilas were selected following a systematic random sampling method and in urban areas, the same number of thanas/paurasavas were selected in the same manner. A total of 150 upazilas/thanas/paurasavas were thus included in the study. The total number of educational institutions sampled was 578 - 326 in rural and 252 in urban areas. Head teachers of these institutions were interviewed through a structured questionnaire to know about schools' initiatives.

To interview PECE candidates, a sub-sample of 309 were selected from the above selected schools, 180 rural and 129 urban; and 20 candidates (10 boys and 10 girls) were randomly selected from each of these schools. They were interviewed through a structured questionnaire on their studies, preparation for examination, expenditure for education and their socio-economic background. Their parents complemented on some specific information. The same students were also subjected to a competency-based test developed by the *Education Watch* group. The total number of sampled students was 5,375, equally distributed by gender.

The qualitative part of the study was carried out on a smaller sample of three upazilas and one thana. A number of checklists was used for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). In-depth interviews were carried out with upazila education officers and their assistants, head teachers and class teachers. FGDs were conducted with current year's examinees, past year's examinees and parents of current year's examinees. Besides, classroom observation was carried out with a separate checklist.

Head teachers were interviewed in their offices, tests of the students were conducted in their classrooms but they were interviewed at home. Trained research assistants collected all

data under supervision and monitoring of the study team. Fieldwork for the study was carried out during October 24 to December 22, 2014.

C. Major Findings

1. Process of administering the examination

The way PECE is administered in the field is important for better understanding of its contribution to the education system. This section narrates this process of conducting the examination.

- The registration process starts in March-April each year and completed by August-September. Schools as well as upazila and district level education offices are engaged in it. Official fee for registration is Tk. 60 but not all students paid the same amount. Sixty four percent of examinees paid the exact amount, 34.3% paid more (which went up to Tk. 600 in a few cases) and a very small proportion paid less than this amount. Proportionately, examinees of kindergartens paid more.
- One examination centre is set up in each union, preferably in a primary school attached to a high school. The invigilators were mostly from government primary schools. No invigilator was engaged from his/her own union. Briefing sessions were arranged at upazila level to orient them. Three levels of examiners were appointed for each subject: head examiner, assistant head examiner and examiner. The number of examiners was fixed in such a way that each can assess a maximum of 200 answer scripts. A week-long training was arranged for examiners. Some invigilators and examiners expressed their dissatisfaction regarding workload and remuneration.
- The process leave room for schools to influence seating plan for the examination. While sending in the registration of the examinees, the schools sometime put 'weak' students in between 'good' students. The upazila offices did not change

it and the centre officials also followed them. This created opportunity for 'weak' one to take help from the 'good' ones during examination. Hall super and upazila officials knew this but chose to ignore it. Boys and girls sat separately. School and madrasa students sat in separate rooms.

- In the examination hall, the majority of examinees wrote on their own without help from any others. However, support was available to those who needed it. Invigilators carried mobile phones to examination halls and received answers through short message service (SMS) from outside. They supplied the answers orally or by writing them on blackboards and created opportunity for copying and to see other's answer scripts. Examinees who did not require any help themselves but shared answer scripts with peers. A chaotic situation prevailed during final 40 minutes to one hour of examination time, when many examinees scrambled to check and copy answers from each other.
- As per orientation and instruction of NAPE, the examiners assessed answer scripts loosely and too generously. Many of the examiners were not happy with this and showed their dissatisfaction, but they had to do it following NAPE instruction. Additional marks were given to examinees to increase pass rate. The assessment was a struggle for examiners due to shortage of time.
- The upazila education officials claimed that there was no opportunity for question paper leakage from their end. They blamed NAPE and Bangladesh Government Printing Press (BG Press) who prepared and printed question papers, respectively for this.

2. School initiatives to prepare examinees

The steps and activities undertaken by schools to help prepare their PECE candidates are described below.

- Selection of examinees was the first step through which the schools started preparing for PECE. Schools actually started

preparing when the students were in grade IV. However, performance in annual examination of grade IV was the determinant for majority of students to be promoted to grade V and be examinees for PECE. Those who did not do well in annual examination, schools demanded extra and special parental care such as sending for school-arranged coaching and engaging private tutors. Ultimately, most students in grade V moved towards PECE.

- Coaching was the main tool for the schools to prepare PECE examinees. Overall, 86.3% of schools arranged coaching - 86.8% rural and 82.4% urban schools. It was over 85% in four types of schools, viz., government, newly nationalized, kindergarten and non-formal; and below 75% in ebtedayee madrasas. Coaching was not mandatory for all. It was optional in 12.8% of all schools; 11.4% of rural and 22.1% of urban schools. It was not mandatory in a quarter of kindergartens and 7.3% of government primary schools.

Percentage distribution of schools by status of coaching and school type

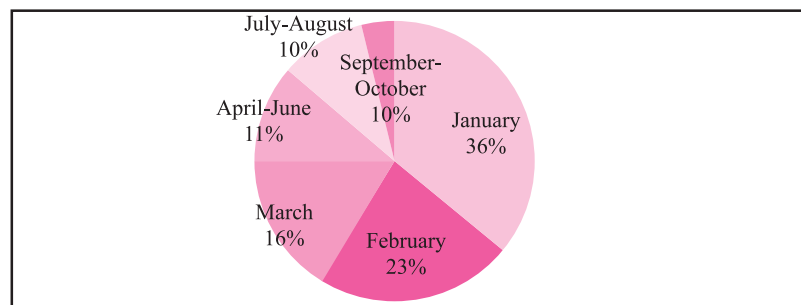
Coaching status	School type				
	Gover nment	Newly nation.	Kinder garten	Non- formal	Ebtedayee madrasa
Mandatory	78.0	76.0	61.3	71.2	62.7
Not mandatory	7.3	12.0	25.5	15.2	12.0
Did not arrange	14.7	12.0	13.1	13.6	25.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Education Watch Head Teachers Interview, 2014

- Most schools initiated coaching at the beginning of academic year. It happened before, after or outside school hours or a combination of them. Coaching started in 89% of government and 77.2% of newly nationalized schools and 65.6% of kindergartens sometime in January to March. On the other hand, it started in 68.5% of non-formal schools and 91.5% of ebtedayee madrasas in June to October. On average, school coaching was held for 7.3 months; it was 7.4 months in rural schools and 6.8 months in urban schools.

- Schools, on average, provided coaching for 412 hours throughout the year. It was 416 hours in rural schools and 382 hours in urban schools. School type-wise, 440 hours of coaching was offered in newly nationalized primary schools, 423 hours in government primary schools, 416 hours in kindergartens, 266 hours in non-formal primary schools and 221 hours in ebtedayee madrasas.

Percentage distribution of schools starting coaching by month

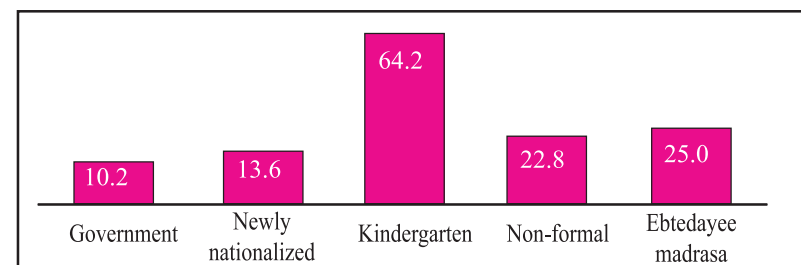


Source: Education Watch Head Teachers Interview, 2014

- All teachers of 44% of schools taught in coaching classes. This was the case for 47% of rural and 25.6% of urban schools. Other schools engaged most skilful teachers or those experienced in coaching or private tutoring. One percent of schools did not engage own teachers but 6.3% of schools engaged outsiders. Outsiders included good students of colleges and universities, retired teachers and reputed private tutors. Two-thirds of male teachers and about half of female teachers of the surveyed schools were engaged in coaching.
- Head teachers of 22.7% of schools claimed that they charged fees to their students for coaching. A fifth of rural and over two-fifths of urban schools charged fees for coaching. This was highest in the kindergartens (64.2%) and lowest in government primary schools (10.2%). Average monthly fees for school-arranged coaching was Tk. 206 - Tk. 180 for rural schools and Tk. 290 for urban schools. School type-wise, kindergartens charged Tk. 274, ebtedayee madrasas Tk. 170,

non-formal schools Tk. 150, government schools Tk. 140 and newly nationalized schools Tk. 93 as monthly fees for coaching classes.

Percentage of schools charging fees for coaching by school type



Source: Education Watch Head Teachers Interview, 2014

- Model test was a new addition in primary schools in preparation for PECE. Individual schools, clusters of schools or Upazila Education Offices organized model tests. They were intended as practice and helped examinees to be aware of plausible questions for the main examination. Overall, 63% of schools offered model tests of their own and 88.9% of schools participated in it arranged by outside authorities. Over 54% of schools did so from both the sources. No school type-wise variation was observed in this. The first such test was open book examination and afterwards supposed to be closed books.
- School coaching and model test as tools of preparing students for PECE were not always utilized by schools seriously; lack of innovation was there and mode of 'business as usual' was high. Schools could not make any difference between everyday teaching and coaching except increase of duration of period from 35-40 minutes to one hour. Guidebooks were the main learning aid and textbooks were rarely used. Similar to regular classes, group teaching was offered in coaching; almost no provision of one-to-one care of students for majority. Some schools provided separate treatment to a section of 'good' students to ensure perfect score (GPA 5).

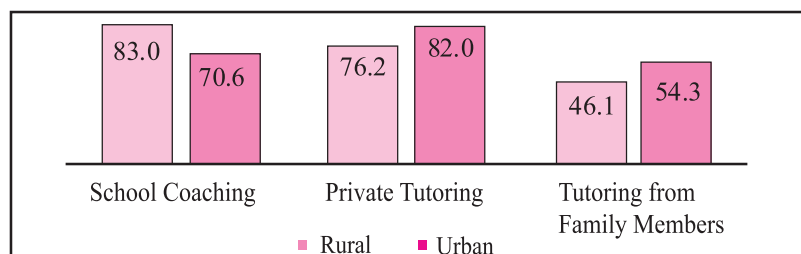
- In model tests, students copied from books and peers and the teachers did not object. Teachers did not assess the answer scripts seriously, and, instead, took a general view of those and provided solutions to a few. One-to-one care of students was rare. Such acts raises a question about the value of such schools activities for PECE preparation.

3. Family responses to completion examination

Family responses to school initiatives as well as their own initiatives regarding preparation for PECE were explored through this study. Socio-economic differentials were also examined.

- Families responded in three ways to help prepare the examinees, which included: allowing examinees to participate in school-arranged coaching, paying for private tutoring and providing assistance by family members. On average, 81.1% of examinees participated in school-arranged coaching, 77.1% received private tutoring, and 47.4% got tutoring help from family members.

Percentage of schools charging fees for coaching by school type



Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- No gender difference was observed in participation of examinees' in school-arranged coaching and private tutoring; however, boys received significantly more help from family members compared to girls (49.9% vs. 45%; $p < 0.001$). Rural examinees were ahead of their urban counterparts in respect of school-based coaching (83% vs. 70.6%; $p < 0.001$) but an

opposite direction was observed in the other two. Eighty-two percent of urban and 76.2% of rural examinees received private tutoring ($p < 0.001$) and 54.3% of urban and 46.1% of rural examinees got tutoring from family members ($p < 0.001$).

- School type-wise variation was observed in all three types of tutoring. The highest proportion of kindergarten examinees received school-arranged coaching (93.3%) and tutoring from family members (64.1%) but examinees of government primary schools topped in receiving private tutoring (80.3%). On the other hand, lowest proportion of examinees of non-formal schools availed *private tutoring* (51.1%) and *tutoring from family members* (38.9%) but examinees of ebtedayee madrasas had such situation in school-based coaching (64.1%).

Percentage of examinees receiving various types of tutoring by school type

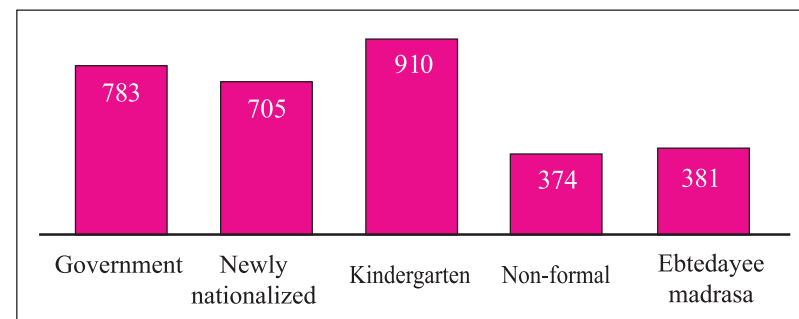
Tutoring type	School type				
	Govern ment	Newly nation.	Kinder garten	Non- formal	Ebtedayee madrasa
School coaching	79.8	81.3	93.2	74.2	64.1
Private tutoring	80.3	78.5	68.8	51.1	56.8
Family members help	46.1	45.7	64.2	38.9	42.6

Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- Those who received school-arranged coaching, half of them received it free. Majority of each of three groups of examinees in terms of school-based coaching (free, on payment and non-recipient) received private tutoring on payment. Examinees who received school-arranged coaching without payment, 83% of them received private tutoring. Those who paid for school-arranged coaching 69% of them received private tutoring and those who did not receive school-based coaching 82% of them received private tutoring.

- A third of the examinees received both school-arranged coaching and private tutoring and another 28.8% received tutoring from family members along with school-based coaching and private tutoring. Along with school-based coaching, 11.7% of examinees received tutoring from family members. Private tutoring and tutoring from family members were availed by 5.7% of examinees. Among others, 9.8% of examinees received only private tutoring, 7.8% only school-arranged coaching, 1.2% only tutoring from family members and 2.1% none.
- Non-professional teachers including college/university students, educated job seekers, job holders, retired teachers, etc. were the major private tutors (40.3%), closely followed by examinees' own school teachers (39.8%). Other school teachers (14.6%), coaching centres (12.1%), relatives (2.9%) and neighbours (4.6%) also provided private tutoring. Mothers, sisters, brothers, relatives and fathers provided tutoring at home to respectively 37.7, 24.9, 20.4, 15.7 and 12.3% of examinees. Urban parents were ahead of rural parents in providing tutoring. However, brothers, sisters and relatives were ahead in rural areas.
- Examinees, on average, received 754 hours of tutoring per year from the above three sources. Although no gender difference was found in this, urban examinees received more hours of tutoring than their rural counterparts (775 vs. 749; $p < 0.02$). School type-wise, it was highest in kindergartens (910 hours) and lowest in non-formal schools (374 hours). The figures were 783, 705 and 381 hours, respectively for the examinees of government and newly nationalized schools and ebtedayee madrasas.
- Of the total tutoring time, 53.2% was spent for school-arranged coaching, 41% for private tutoring and 5.8% for help from family members. This distribution was mostly similar for boys and girls. Whereas, rural examinees spent 55.8% of

Mean duration (in hours) of tutoring receiving by examinees in three sources by school type



Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

time for school-based coaching and 38.6% for private tutoring, the urban examinees spent 40.3% of time for school-based coaching and 53.7% for private tutoring. Amount of time spent for school-based coaching was more than that of private tutoring among the examinees of each type of school. Duration of school-arranged coaching was more than double that of private tutoring among the examinees of kindergartens.

Percentage distribution of total tutoring time by category of tutoring

Examinees groups	Category of tutoring			Total
	School coaching	Family members	Private tutoring	
All	53.2	5.8	41.0	100.0
Boys	53.5	6.0	40.5	100.0
Girls	53.1	5.6	41.3	100.0
Rural schools	55.8	5.7	38.6	100.0
Urban schools	40.3	6.1	53.7	100.0
Government	51.1	5.6	43.3	100.0
Newly nationalized	53.8	5.7	40.5	100.0
Kindergarten	62.9	6.7	30.4	100.0
Non-formal	57.5	7.2	35.3	100.0
Ebtedayee madrasa	47.5	10.0	42.5	100.0

Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- On the whole, socioeconomic background of examinees gave an advantage to examinees from households with higher income level and higher levels of parents' education, though it was not a strictly linear relationship.

4. Completion examination in the eyes of various stakeholders

The stakeholders of primary education had a mixed experience and opinion about Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE). The following paragraphs summarize the findings in this respect.

- PECE increased pride and awareness among the students and parents about education. They as well as the school teachers became more serious about studying more. This examination also reduced students' fear about examination. Certification of students at the end of grade V was seen as inspiring to young learners.
- Stakeholders observed various types of pressure on examinees which has specifically arisen and grown due to PECE. These were related to the curriculum burden, the burden of school-based coaching and private tutoring, several types of preparatory examinations in schools and in coaching centres, and high expectations from parents.
- The stakeholders criticized increased dependency on guidebooks and suggestions about test questions as well as rote memorization by students instead of creative learning. They complained that fifth graders did not have any leisure time. On the other hand, students of other grades often were deprived in schools in respect of attention from their teachers. Teachers, on the other hand, pointed to increase in their workload.
- A mixed reaction was found regarding the effect of PECE on quality of education, PECE marking system and accountability of teachers and schools. A de facto state recognition of the kindergartens and NGO-operated non-

formal schools in primary education through this examination was seen as a positive development.

- Stakeholders raised their concern about the increase of private expenditure for education due to PECE and the implications for equity and right to education.

5. Media reporting on the examination

Newspaper reporting on various events during and around completion examination including editorials, op-eds, expert opinions etc. were reviewed. The following presents the highlights.

- Leakage of question papers was a hot topic for the newspapers during the examination week in 2014. The main message was that the question papers of all six subjects were leaked in various parts of the country. Facebook and E-mail were found to be the means of spreading leaked question papers. Moreover, involvement of coaching centres in leakage was also reported widely.
- Newspapers also reported the mobile court and law enforcing agencies activities in catching those who were involved in this malpractice. The reporters found teachers writing in students answer scripts and existence of fake examinees in examination halls. It was reported that a number of teachers, fake examinees and coaching centre people were caught red handed, sentenced and fined.
- A number of news items questioned the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry, NAPE and BG Press. Most news reports placed the blame on these authorities for question paper leakage and raised question about their capability for smooth implementation of such a gigantic national event.
- The media noted that the ministry officials including the ministers denied allegations of question paper leakage. A legalistic position was taken by the Ministry claiming that

action was not taken because formal complaints or reports from the district authorities were not received. Some argued that questions available publicly before the examination were only suggestions from experienced teachers and incidentally matched those with actual questions. It appears that there was an official position not to give credence to reports that might discredit the government decision to hold the national public examination at the end of grade V.

- Newspapers published editorials and op-eds urging for the protection of sanctity of the public examination and government action to catch the responsible persons for question leakage and other malpractices and place them before law. Some made the point that the mishandling of the question papers and the examination process caused damage to the nation's education system and sent wrong messages to children about honesty and integrity.
- Newspapers prominently featured the examination and publication of results. Newspapers also published various analyses on results including identifying top schools, top performers, urban-rural difference, etc. as well as joyful scenes of celebration by children who performed well.
- Although initially, when PECE was started, media coverage referred to debate about the need and value of a public examination at such an early age, such questions received less and less attention as the novelty of the examination wore off. The motivation and the reasons for question paper leakage and other malpractices, and the perception and reality of high stakes in the examination which might have caused desperate and unlawful activities, appear to have been neglected in the media coverage about the examination.

6. Student's performance in examination and its link with competency achievement

PECE examinees' overall performance in the 2014 examination along with differentials in terms of gender, area of residence, school type and other socioeconomic characteristics were analysed. We also tried to find the ability of the PECE in predicting achievement of competencies. Following are the salient findings from this analysis.

- Overall, 10.6% of the examinees achieved GPA 5, 43.3% achieved GPA 4 or more, 75.5% achieved GPA 3 or more, 93.5% achieved GPA 2 or more and 99.1% achieved GPA 1 or more. About a third of the examinees achieved GPA 4-<5 and another one-third achieved GPA 3-<4; they together constituted 64.8% of all examinees.

Cumulative percentage distribution of examinees by GPA, gender and residence

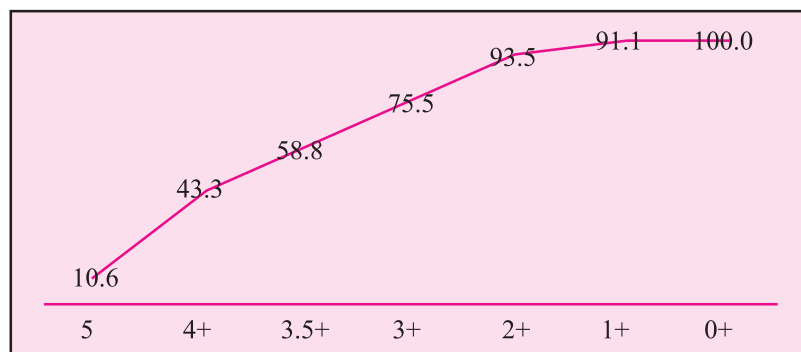
GPA	Gender		Residence		All
	Boys	Girls	Rural	Urban	
5	9.5	11.7	8.1	23.3	10.6
4+	41.8	44.6	39.0	64.9	43.3
3+	71.5	79.4	73.1	87.3	75.5
2+	92.4	94.6	92.7	97.4	93.5
1+	98.8	99.4	99.0	99.5	99.1
0+	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- No difference was observed in achievement in terms of gender, area of residence or school type if only the basic passing score was considered (GPA 1 or more), as an overwhelming majority passed. The differences became visible as the cut-off point was raised higher. For instance, in achieving GPA 5, 4+ or 3+, girls were ahead of boys and urban examinees outperformed their rural counterparts. The gap lessened for GPA 2+ and became non-existent for GPA 1+. The same was observed for different types of schools

too. Overall, kindergartens did best followed by non-formal schools, government schools, ebtedayee madrasas and newly nationalized schools, respectively.

Cumulative percentage distribution of examinees by GPA



Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

Cumulative percentage distribution of examinees by GPA and school type

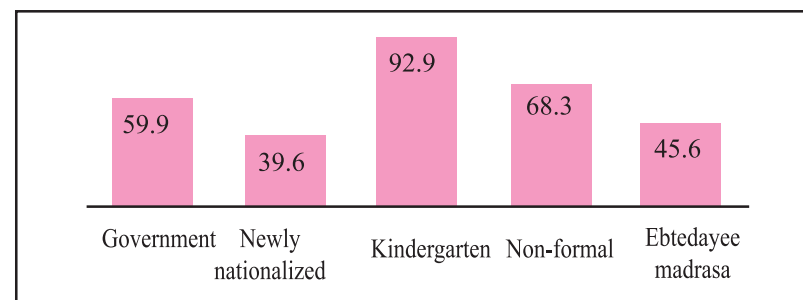
GPA	School type				
	Government	Newly nation.	Kinder-garten	Non-formal	Ebtedayee madrasa
5	9.1	3.0	40.6	4.1	0.7
4+	44.0	22.8	84.8	49.2	20.1
3+	77.0	60.9	97.0	83.0	65.4
2+	95.1	86.4	98.8	97.2	89.9
1+	99.6	97.9	99.6	99.2	95.5
0+	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- On the whole, performance of the examinees' in languages (English and Bangla) was significantly worse than in other subjects. In English, 42.8% of the examinees got letter grade C or D. The madrasa students also performed very poorly in Arabic. Highest proportion of examinees got the highest letter grade (A+ or grade point 5) in all subjects except English. Separately, 27.9% of examinees got the highest grade in Bangla, 41% in Mathematics, 35.5% in Bangladesh & Global Studies, 38.8% in Primary Science

and 57.4% in Religion & Moral Education. For madrasa students, performance in Tazbeed & Aakaid Fikkah was better than English but poorer than Bangla.

Percentage of examinees achieving GPA 3.5 or more by school type

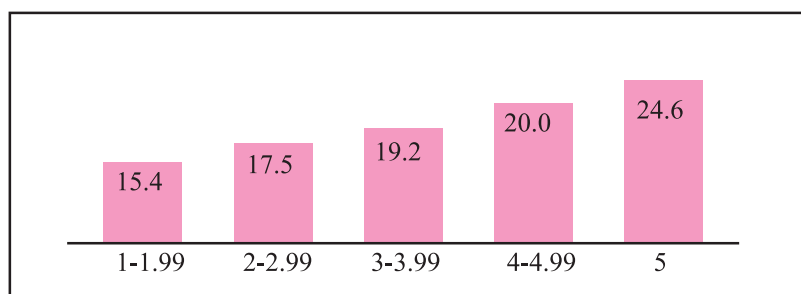


Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- Socio-economic background was a strong factor in performance. The most important predictor of performance in PECE was private expenditure for education. Other influencers in order of importance were school category, fathers' education, duration of private tutoring, gender, area of residence, duration of school-based coaching and duration of family members tutoring, respectively.
- Examinees performance in PECE significantly increased with the increase in private expenditure for education as well as years of schooling completed by their fathers. Girls and urban examinees showed better performance than their respective counterparts (boys and rural examinees).
- Performance in PECE significantly increased with the increase in duration of private tutoring (in hours). Examinees belonging to the fourth quartile of duration of school-based coaching showed significantly better performance than those belonging to the first three quartiles. The first three groups showed equal performance. Tutoring by family members negatively affected performance; meaning that those who received such tutoring did poorly than those who did not receive it.

- A positive and moderate level of relationship existed between examinees' performance in PECE and their achievement of competencies based on an Education Watch designed competency test. Based on official listing of curricular competencies, the correlation coefficient was 0.60, meaning a somewhat modest relationship. The mean number of achieved competencies significantly increased with the increase in GPA score in PECE, which is a good sign.

Percentage of examinees achieving GPA 3.5 or more by school type



Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

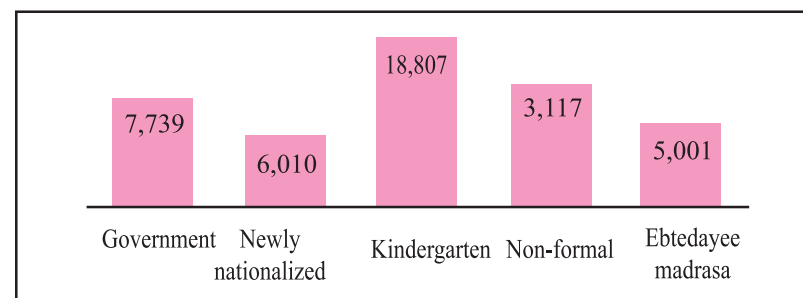
7. Private expenditure for schooling and additional tutoring

Private expenditure for education is common in the fee-free primary education system in Bangladesh. Along with overall private expenditure this study looked at household costs related to PECE.

- On average, Tk. 8,212 was spent by households for each examinee of PECE in grade V which varied from Tk. 50 to Tk. 77,450. Although no gender variation was observed in private expenditure for education, it was significantly higher for urban examinees. Average private cost for education for an urban examinee was 1.68 times that of a rural examinee.
- School type-wise variation persisted in private expenditure for education. It was highest among the examinees of kindergartens and lowest among the examinees of non-formal schools. The former was more than six times the

latter. Average expenditure for the examinees of kindergartens was more than three times that of newly nationalized primary schools and 2.43 times that of government primary schools. Expenditure for a government primary school examinee was 2.48 times that of a non-formal primary school examinee.

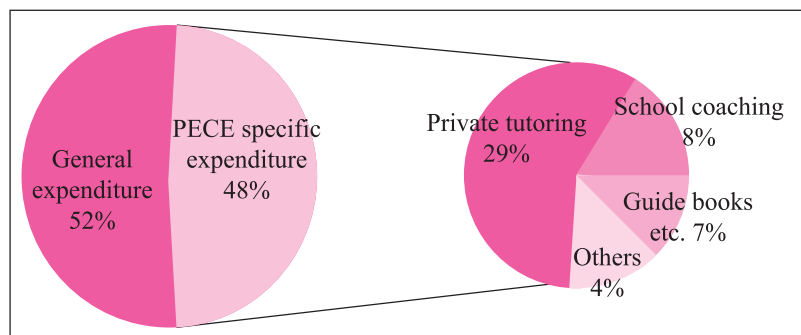
Mean annual private expenditure for education (in Taka) of completion examinees by school type



Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- Private expenditure for the urban examinees of government and newly nationalized primary schools and kindergartens were higher than their respective rural counterparts. However, no urban-rural variation was observed in non-formal primary schools.
- Average private expenditure related to PECE was Tk. 3,970 per student which was 48.3% of the total annual expenditure in grade V. Over 37% of total private cost was incurred for school coaching, private tutoring and related transportation. As above, no gender difference was observed in PECE related expenditure but expenditure for urban examinees was much higher than for their rural counterparts. It was the highest for the examinees of kindergartens and lowest for those of non-formal schools. Average quartile distribution of expenditure per examinee specific to PECE was 9.63 times higher for the fourth quartile compared to expenditure for the poorest first quartile.

Percentage distribution of private expenditure for education in terms of expenditure specific to PECE

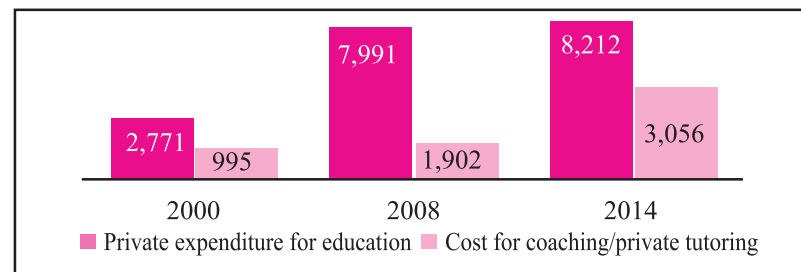


Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

- Of the total expenditure specific to PECE, 58.7% was incurred for private tutoring, 17.4% for school-arranged coaching, 15% for guidebooks, suggestions and hand books, 3.2% for transportation for examination, 2.1% for model tests, 1.9% for registration, 0.9% for transportation for coaching/private tutoring, and 0.8% for photo for registration. Although less time was spent for private tutoring than school-based coaching but expenditure for private tutoring was substantially higher. The former was 3.4 times of the later.
- Secondary or higher educated parents and households with better economic situation reflected in surplus food security status spent a much higher amount of money for completion examination of their children compared to all others.
- Overall, 96.4% of examinees bought guidebooks, suggestions or hand notes to support their primary completion examination. They, on average, spent Tk. 594 for this. This was 7.2% of total private expenditure for education in grade V and 15% of expenditure specific to completion examination. School type-wise as well as urban-rural variation was observed in this case too.
- Private expenditure for education as well as cost for coaching/private tutoring increased over time. Private expenditure for education increased 2.96 times from 2000 to

2008 but expenditure for coaching/private tutoring increased 3.07 times during the same period. These figures were respectively 1.03 and 1.61 for the period of 2008-2014.

Trends in private expenditure for education and cost for coaching/private tutoring (in Taka)



Source: Education Watch Primary Completion Examinees Survey, 2014

D. Key messages

The following are the key messages emanating from the Education Watch 2014 study.

- *Exam-centric school education and rote memorization a reality:* After introduction of PECE, education in primary schools became exam-centric, specifically at grade V. Group coaching and model tests with encouragement to drilling and memorization were found to be the main activities of schools to prepare students for examination. Upazila education offices have become promoters of this approach. Less emphasis on one-to-one contact kept student-specific needs unaddressed. Memorization became synonymous to study; understanding of contents had very little or no space.
- *Increasing dependency on private tutoring:* Students and their families did not rely only on classroom teaching or even school-based coaching. Private tutoring has spread to all types of primary educational institutions and socio-economic groups both in urban and rural areas. Own school teachers catered a significant portion of private tutoring, with negative effects on classroom teaching. Examinees who received free school-arranged coaching also spent money for private tutoring. Expenditure for private tutoring was much

higher than that of school coaching, with major implications for equity and right to education at primary level.

- *Guidebooks replaced textbooks*: Guidebooks became principal instrument for most students, school teachers and private tutors. The attraction of guidebook is in its ready-made answers to likely exam questions, which can be memorized and drilled without the trouble of reading textbooks and supplementary materials, learning about the content and figuring out own answers. A good proportion of students and teachers had more than one guidebook for each subject. The pattern of questions and lack of research and critical analysis of questions and students' answers have strengthened this tendency. This situation questions the value of the much lauded 'free textbook for all' policy and their proper use in school.
- *Students tend to adopt to learn malpractice and unethical behaviour*: Despite the preparation process and hype about scoring well at any cost, the majority of examinees appear to be prepared for an undisturbed and fair examination. However, a proportion of examinees, supported directly or indirectly by teachers and examination organizers were intent on scoring high marks at any cost. They engaged in malpractices and inappropriate behaviour in and outside examination halls, including leakage of question papers. Education offices, schools, examination hall supervisors and coaching centre owners were involved in this practice. Not enough preventive and punitive measures have been taken against these practices, which set bad examples for students.
- *PECE showed a moderate measurement capability*: A moderately positive correlation between PECE results and independent student achievement of competencies indicates capability of PECE to measure student learning at a moderate level. However, a higher level of positive relationship should be expected and desirable.
- *Primary education is not free, rather costly*: Private expenditure for primary education increased immensely over

time. A major portion of it went for private tutoring, school-based coaching and buying guidebooks, suggestions and hand notes. This situation raises question about the quality of classroom teaching, fee-free primary education policy and subsidy policy in primary education.

- *Inequality existed throughout the system*: It was a reality in terms of school type, urban-rural dichotomy, gender, pupils' background and private expenditure for education. Newly nationalized primary schools performed badly as did the ebtedayee madrasas. Private expenditure for education influenced learning achievement the most. Household level inequality affected school level inequality.

E. Conclusions

The conclusions from this study are two-fold:

- The introduction of PECE at the end of the primary cycle has made some observable positive changes such as forcing students, parents and teachers to give more attention to students' study. Unfortunately, this was achieved at certain costs. This study has documented how primary education has been made more 'exam-centric' rather than 'learning-centric' and has deprived young children of the joy of learning and to be creative. It is difficult to agree with the official position that PECE has been a major step in assessment of student learning and improvement of quality of primary education. It is equally difficult to agree with the claim that PECE results of successive years indicate an improvement in the quality of teaching-learning at primary level.
- The introduction of PECE has brought assessment of students' learning to the forefront of the debate and discourse and creates an opportunity for necessary reforms and changes in learning assessment and related issues in primary education. Whether this can happen will depend on the willingness of the policy-makers to be open-minded about the issues and their interest to make use of research, technical know-how and professional advice in initiating reforms.

F. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings presented, conclusions drawn and the key messages extracted from this study, the Education Watch group recommends reform of primary education in Bangladesh with specific reference to assessment of students' learning including PECE. These reforms, putting learning at the centre of the education system, need to be carried out in the context of empowerment of teachers, emphasis on classroom teaching, decentralization of educational governance and ensuring adequate resources for education.

1. *Emphasise quality classroom teaching and formative assessment:* Schools should be obliged to follow regular class routine in each grade throughout the year. School-based coaching should be for remedial purposes only - rather than for drilling and memorising answers for completion examination. The mechanical routine of 35-40 minute class periods and equal emphasis on all subjects instead of more time and effort for foundational skills of reading, writing and mathematics should be re-examined. Preparation and training of teachers and school routine need to be reconsidered accordingly. Contact hours need to be increased and learning time (effective contact hours) should be brought to international level of approximately a thousand hours per school year. Class sizes should be brought to a level manageable for effective teaching-learning.
2. *Change high stake nature of completion examination:* Character and nature of current PECE is high stake. Intentional or incidental, it has become a source of anxiety and grief of students, parents, teachers, schools and upazila education authorities. In fact, it is a matter of concern in most countries and there is no simple solution. The current provision of PECE is grading of individual students, a diagnostic assessment of system performance and discrimination within may help better to improve quality of primary education. Experiences of other countries and

national student assessment in Bangladesh may help in redesigning PECE. Completion examination at this early stage of life (only 10 years) is a rare practice internationally. As the primary system in Bangladesh moves to an 8-year cycle, as per directions of National Education Policy 2010, the aim should be to hold it the end of grade VIII.

3. *Stop malpractice in school and in examination halls:* This is related to the high stake nature of the examination and lack of sensitivity of policy-makers to the detrimental effect of this phenomenon on children, their development as ideal citizens, and the education system as a whole. In addition to re-considering the nature of the examination, the rules and procedures should be clearly and unambiguously stated and should be enforced transparently and without discrimination. Readiness of authorities, concerned to PECE, to accept students' real performance is also important. Moral Education was introduced along with Religious Studies after adoption of Education Policy 2010 but not paying head to malpractices involving young students only goes against it.
4. *Emphasise on support and respect to teachers and their empowerment:* Teachers should be at the centre of any education system along with students. The education system has to help teachers understand their duties, enable them to develop and apply their professional skills, guide and assist their students and take responsibility for what they do. Assessment of student's learning, both formative and summative, is a key part of that responsibility. The approach to assessment has to create the space and the conditions for teachers to play their role in classroom with their students, rather than only follow instruction rules passed on from central and distant authorities. Roles of teachers can be enhanced through involving them in setting standards and norms of the examination as well as in preparation of assessment tools and question papers. It is important that society at large can rely on teachers' skills and competencies in teaching and assessment in order to enhance learning.

5. *Give the national assessment a local face:* At present, DPE with its limited human resource conducts the largest public examination in Bangladesh. In order to make PECE manageable it can be decentralized to upazila level including preparation of question papers, administration of examination, answer scripts assessment and publication of results. There were examples of such local managed primary cycle completion exams in some upazilas before the introduction of PECE. As the first step of decentralization, the assessment instruments, in multiple sets, should be prepared at the national level to serve the objective of promoting and applying national benchmarks of achievement. These can be distributed randomly to the upazila level just prior to the examination to ensure test security and confidentiality. Such a move would be consistent with the National Education Policy recommendation of upazila-based examination at grade V level. Ultimately, the upazila education offices would have to be adequately equipped and skilled human resources would have to be developed there to do all functions of PECE. However, supportive, supervisory and monitoring roles of DPE, NAPE and DPEO would be required for the foreseeable future.
6. *Ensure PECE fully competency-based:* Competency-based primary education was introduced about two-and-a-half decades ago but the assessment system remained traditional. The third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP 3) has an objective to gradually improve PECE by making an increasing percentage of questions competency-based each year. Work has started and it should be completed soon. Decentralization of PECE at upazila level should not be an obstacle to this because all upazilas would work closely with DPE, NAPE and DPEOs. Innovations in question paper preparation can also help reducing dependency on guidebooks.

7. *Accommodate experiences of all stakeholders:* During the six years since it was introduced, six PECE have been held. Stakeholders of primary education which include students, teachers, parents, education officials at various levels, management of NAPE, NCTB, DPE, and MoPME as well as academics, researchers, concerned citizens and the mass media have specific views and perceptions regarding PECE. Many ideas and informed judgements have been expressed. There are also relevant international experiences and lessons as reviewed in this study. Full advantage of these should be taken and valued in a reform process and in charting the future course. This study provides a gist of these experiences and lessons which can be a starting point for change. A collective effort can not only smoothen the reform process but also help build a broader consensus which is much needed for effective change in primary education delivery in Bangladesh.

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