

Traditional and Cultural Barrier of Female Education in Secondary Schools

Background of the study

The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (Tembon& Fort, 2008). In addition, education imparts skills and competencies that are central to human development and enhanced quality of life, bringing wide-ranging benefits to both individuals and societies. Investing in girls' and women's education in particular produces exceptionally high social and economic returns. Educated women invest more in their children and contribute to the welfare of the next generation (United Nations, 2010). Education is essential for empowering women and for closing the gap between women and men in respect of socio-economic opportunities; it can reduce inequalities based on gender and alter the historical legacy of disadvantage faced by women (United Nations, 2010).

Bangladesh has addressed girls' education primarily as a means of preparing girls for *enlightened motherhood* or to prepare women for entering professions. In 1974, The Qudrat-E-Khuda Education Commission Report asserted that women's education should be such as to be of help to them in their domestic life and stressed that subjects such as 'child-care, the nursing of the sick, preservation of health, food and nutrition' must be included (Raynor, Wesson, & Keynes 2006).

On the global perspective, enrolment of girls is increasing across all over the world. Outstanding gains have been registered in several less developed regions of the world, particularly Africa and South-Central Asia. Gender differences in primary, secondary and tertiary participation are apparent throughout the world, with women in the fields of education (United Nations, 2010). In some Western countries, women have surpassed men at many levels of education. For example, in the United States in 2005-06, women earned 62% of Associate's degrees, 58% of Bachelor's degrees, 60% of Master's degrees, and 50% of Doctorates (NCES: Digest of Education Statistics, 2013).

To look back to statistical data, in such developing overpopulated country like ours the literacy rate is not really satisfactory. Roughly, the number of female citizens is almost equal to that of the male citizens, but unfortunately less than half (49%) female is literate (Population Census,

2011). This gives an intuition towards more degeneration of the society day by day. But we cannot let it happen. That's why we have grown in ourselves the perception that our women should be educated if we want to make better the next generation (Female Education in Bangladesh, n. d.). Consequently, now government has taken necessary initiatives for Female Education which is so far effective. For example, allowances, stipend, and free education facilities have inspired many poor parents to send their daughters for studying. As a result, the number of female students is increasing gradually.

Therefor the secondary female students faced traditional and cultural barriers inside and outside the classroom. For example, traditional beliefs cause parents to value sons more than daughters (Bardley, 2000). Furthermore, many girls engage in extensive household chores, work in the markets alongside their mothers, and care for younger siblings, while their brothers attend school study, and play (Bardley, 2000). As a result, if parents have to choose between educating their daughter or son, they will more than likely chose their son who will have access civil service work compared to the agricultural and informal economy work of his sister. Moreover, Evans (1995) illustrated some barriers in Africa. He mentioned that obstacles of secondary female education are:

- lack of female teachers/assumptions and attitudes of male teachers;
- male orientation in courses publicity/male "image";
- inflexible selection and entry requirements;
- often has large attendance requirement for practicalskills/laboratory based work;
- male oriented language and male images in teachingmaterials;
- instrumental pedagogies and curriculum content whichignores the social context of technology.

Williams (1987) identifies the barriers as follows:

- relegation of women to the home;
- parental perceptions of costs/benefits of educating girls,affecting low income families particularly
- patriarchy, female seclusion practices and early marriage;
- fear of cultural loss on emancipation;

- double/conflicting demands on girls of traditional and school learning;
- discriminatory labour market practices;
- irrelevance of curricular presentation in STM to girls' views and experiences of the world;
- masculine image of science projected in text books, media and popular assumptions;
- poor facilities, including teacher-supply, teacher quality and equipment;
- nature of STM occupations which are not easily combined with child-rearing and child-care;
- lack of role models and career counselling.

Finally, somehow we have to educate our female citizens and building up an educated new generation. To do that, we have to not only create good mothers but also make our women a qualified Human Resource for developing our country.

Rationale of the study

At present about half (49.94%) of the population of Bangladesh is women (BBS, 2011). However, More than half students are female; they are studying in primary, secondary and madrasa education in Bangladesh. Majority female teachers are working at primary level. Furthermore, more than one-fifth female teachers are working at college education, university and teacher education. Female literacy rate has improved at least 12%, enrollment rate at primary level has improved 1.4% and Female enrollment rate at secondary level has improved 5.73% in last decade. In addition, female students pass rate have increased 42.9% at SSC level and 41.1% at HSC level in last decade (BANBEIS, 2013). We achieved this result due to female students are getting various opportunities from different educational projects. For example, 57% girls have benefited from the SEQAEP project. On the other hand, Government provides tuition free education and books for every female student up to XII and also prepared gender friendly Curriculum and Textbooks (Salahuddin, Khatun & Bilkis, 2014). The secondary female education situation is quite good because of female students faced traditional and cultural barriers each and every time inside and outside the school. According to Salahuddin and others (2014) the result of social and economic problem female education faced lots of difficulties in every step so we should take more initiatives to create awareness for female education. Finally,

to improve the secondary female education situation we should know traditional and cultural barriers of female education at secondary level specifically.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the traditional and cultural obstacles of female education at secondary level in Bangladesh. The major objectives are:

1. What are the traditional and cultural barriers faced by the female students at secondary level?
2. What are the reasons behind those barriers faced by the female students?
3. How traditional and cultural obstacles affect the female education at secondary level in Bangladesh?

Scope and limitation of the Study

This study focused on the barriers the female students face considering the social culture and traditions. Only the secondary students' contexts have been considered in this regards through different stakeholders related to and well known to this issue. Only eight districts have been identified although these are not fully representative for Bangladesh. However, considering the limitations of a research study, different data sources have been utilized from the selected areas.

Methodology

Nature of the study

This study is mainly qualitative with some quantitative evidences. It is an empirical study based on data collection from primary and secondary sources. A multiple instrumental approach has been adopted for this study. The primary data has been collected through semi-structured interview and FGD guidelines.

In order to ensure the effectiveness and feasibility of the study, the data has been collected from randomly selected 30 secondary schools in Bangladesh. One the other hand, some local representatives, government officials, school head teachers and school managing committee

members and students of secondary level have been selected for both types of data. The data has been analyzed in both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Study Area

This section presents the study areas from where the data has been collected using different instruments and processes.

Population of the study

The populations of this study are:

- All the secondary schools located in different geographical locations such as plain land, hilly areas and coastal areas.
- All Head teacher of secondary schools
- All the students of secondary schools
- Government officials such as DEO's, USEO.
- SMC Member/Guardians of secondary schools
- Local government representative (Female vice-chairman)

Sample and Sampling

This study has been covered all types of districts namely plain land, hilly and coastal areas considering the geographical locations in Bangladesh. Thus, the sample categories are:

- Seven districts have been selected purposively from different geographical locations in Bangladesh. Among the 7 districts, 1 district has been selected randomly from the hilly areas and 1 district has been selected from coastal areas while the rest 5 have been selected from plain land areas. In selecting the districts from the hilly areas, the districts where the ethnic minority people are living have been included purposively.
- A total of 7 upazilas have been selected randomly from 7 districts.

- A total of 30 secondary schools have been selected randomly taking minimum 4 schools select from each upazila. In selecting the schools, location of the schools namely urban and rural have been considered to maintain (2 from urban and another 2 from rural).
- A total of 30 Head Teachers have been selected purposively to collect their opinion in this regard.
- A total of 7 local government representatives (Female upazila vice-chairman) have been selected purposively to explore the traditional and cultural barriers for secondary female students within their upazilas.
- A total of 7 DEOs have been selected purposively to find out what type of obstacles are now facing the secondary female students in their working upazilas.
- A total of 7 USEOs have been selected purposively to collect their opinion on the obstacles are now facing the secondary female students.
- A total of 132 guardians (81 general guardians & 31 guardian dropout students) have been selected randomly considering their engagement with schools.
- A total of 20 groups of female students of grade IX and X have been selected randomly to search their opinion on traditional and cultural barriers of secondary female students. Each group has been consisted 6-8 of students which cover 120 to 160 students of grade IX and X.

Discussion of the findings

The major findings are discussed here according to the objectives of this study.

1 Traditional and cultural barriers faced by the female students at secondary level

Female students of secondary level in Bangladesh faced various traditional and cultural barriers in their education. These barriers were identified by the female students themselves, their guardians, different educational administrative personnel such as head teachers, SMC members, Upazila Female Vice Chairman, Upazila Secondary Education Officer and District Education Officer.

Most of the female students of secondary level in Bangladesh informed that they faced obstacles both inside and outside the schools. Majority of the rural areas guardians agreed those female students' faced obstacles on their way to school whereas most of the guardians of urban areas did not agree with them. Guardians of dropped out children of urban and rural areas, majority of the USEOs and more than half of the DEOs also agree with the female students that there were barriers to female education.

It was found from the study that economic crisis was a major barrier to female education. Most of the rural areas guardians and more than half of the urban areas guardians and most of the guardians of dropout children of both urban and rural areas, all the USEOs, SMC members, DEOs and most of the head teachers, majority UFVCs also agreed with them. Other obstacles identified by the respondents were early marriage, eve teasing, area based, social barriers etc.

Three categorical traditional and cultural barriers were found from the study. First one was the barriers faced from family. Secondly, female students faced obstacles from society. And third one was the obstacles faced by the female students from their school. These three categorical barriers were sometimes interrelated like as family problems initiated from the social barriers.

Female students mainly faced problems from their own family. Parents were not interested to girls' education and girls' had to engaged in household work. Female students, their guardians and educational administrative personnel also informed that economic crisis and improper reading environment at home were barriers of female education in family. Guardians of female students also believe in their early marriage. Economic crisis and negligence of female education encourages early marriage.

Traditional and cultural barrier from society was another obstacle of female education in Bangladesh. From the very beginning of schooling female students mainly faced obstacles from the community. Eve teasing, negligence of girls' education from community leader, social superstitions, religious misconceptions were the obstacles mentioned by the female students. Other respondents also supported them. Lack of suitable working environment and early marriage were also the problems for female students informed by guardians. All these barriers from society makes female students feel unsafe which created security problem. So, security problem was one of the major obstacles for female education.

According to all types of respondent, security problems was one of the major obstacles in school for female education. Scarcity of girls' common room in school and discrimination between boys and girls were the major problems in rural areas mentioned by guardians. Lack of separate girls' toilet was also an obstacle faced by female students which created inconvenience as well as insecurity.

2 Reasons behind the barriers faced by the female students

There were reasons behind the three categorical barriers faced by the female students. The causes of family problems faced by female students were unconsciousness of guardians, economic crisis of family, illiterate parents, thinks female as burden etc. which were identified by guardians of rural areas. Guardians of urban areas and educational administrative personnel also agree with them. Another cause of family related barriers was negligence towards female child mentioned by Upazila Female Vice Chairmen.

Social obstacles faced by female students were caused for moral depreciation, lack of values, unprivileged social system, lack of consciousness, try to hinder female progress etc. These major causes were identified by majority of the respondents. Social barriers mainly originated by moral depreciation, lack of values and lack of consciousness.

In schools, infrastructural weakness was one of the major causes mentioned by the guardians and educational administrative personnel. It was found from the study that financial crisis, noncooperation of local people, noncooperation of SMC members were also the major causes of obstacles faced by female students in schools. These obstacles make girls students feel unsafe and at the end increased dropout rate.

3 How traditional and cultural obstacles affect the female education at secondary level in Bangladesh

Traditional and cultural obstacles faced by female students which were initiated from family, society and schools had a significant effect on female education at secondary level in Bangladesh. Increase of dropout rate was one of the major impacts on female education for these traditional and cultural barriers. Increase of dropout rate reduced the literacy rate which negatively effects on Education for All (EFA) as well as Millennium Development Goal (MDG).

Recommendations

To improve the situation of girls' secondary education we should do the followings:

- Increase consciousness of parents first about girls' education and then take initiatives to develop awareness of the community people on it. This will help to initiate every girl's secondary education and eventually ensure it. In this regard campaign through print and electronic media could be more effective.
- The secondary schools might take initiatives for developing community awareness to ensure girl's secondary education within the schools catchments. The local govt. bodies along with the local public representatives might come forward through the educational institutions available in the respective areas.
- Increasing of girls' stipend can reduce economic crisis in school and also in family which could decrease girls' dropout rate and could also decrease social obstacles.
- Early marriage must be stopped by social awareness building, arranging rally and other social movement or activities. The local govt. administration could focus on early marriage through arranging different programmes on it along with the local representatives and educational institutions.
- The social awareness programmes should be strengthening focusing on eve teasing in the local community. The secondary schools can take initiatives along with the local govt. personnel so that the secondary level girls could feel safe on their way to attending their schools.
- The religious leaders of all religions could be involved in different awareness programs for developing awareness of the local community especially in the rural areas.
- The secondary school authority should take initiatives for improving the facilities for the girls at school premises. They should ensure the common room facilities, separate sanitation facilities, indoor games and sports facilities for the girls so can use those facilities when required.
- Gender discrimination either by teachers or by students should not be allowed in the schools. The school authority could take initiatives to eradicate this type of disparity through awareness building among the students and teachers.