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Poor performance in secondary school certificate (SSC) and equivalent examinations in Bangladesh: trends and issues

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ABSTRACT: *Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in primary education whereas secondary education is still far from its expected targets. Along with the low level of participation, noticeable incompletion rates, high drop-out and poor performance have remained constant over the years. Among students who manage to complete their secondary school years, a significant portion is unable to pass the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) or equivalent examinations every year. This study, which is a part of a larger-scale study, aims to explore the trends and issues of poor performance in SSC/equivalent examinations. A quantitative approach was employed to explore the research objectives. A total of 3072 students from secondary educational institutes of 8 divisions participated in completing the survey questionnaire. The findings of the study show persistent trends of unsuccessful and poor performance in the examination and the number of students who failed in the SSC/Equivalent examination is considerably large. The study found major issues including family financial and attitudinal support, schools' infrastructural facilities, impacts of classroom teaching-learning styles, values of education, and sense of safety which related to achieving expected outcomes of secondary education. Similar issues were found among the students with ethnicity regarding their poor performance in the examination. The study suggests that along with the financial and policy support, awareness, and attitudinal change through media, the empowerment of the local community in cooperation with non-governmental organizations may remarkably contribute to enhance students' desired academic performance.*

KEYWORDS: **Achievement, failure, trends, secondary education.**

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1. Introduction

Education enables people to flourish their ideas, develop individual intellectualities and pave the way for future learning (Brighouse, 2006). Learners' achievement is one of the important aspects of education that carries their motivations and emotions to improve productivity along with knowledge. Bangladesh acknowledged education as a basic human right and emphasized removing illiteracy right after its glorious independence in 1971. The government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh targeted vision 2041 and working to achieve the principle of 100% literacy for all adult learners. Bangladesh had achieved significant progress both in enrollment (97.81%), and completion rate (82.80%) in primary education (BANBEIS, 2021). With nearly 10 million (51%) in primary and 5.62 million (54.86%) girls in secondary school in 2020 (BANBEIS, 2021), Bangladesh is among the few countries to achieve gender parity in school enrollment and has more girls than boys in the secondary schools (Banerji, 2017; Lourdes Dy, 2020). However, secondary education remains far away from its expected targets in terms of enrollment, completion, and drop-out rate. Secondary data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information Statistics (BANBEIS) shows a very flat development of completion rate (61.7%, 62.19%, 62.38%, 63.27%, and 64.24%) and an almost consistent drop-out rate (38.30%, 37.81%, 37.62%, 36.73%, and 35.76%) across the last five years from 2016 to 2020 (BANBEIS, 2021). Secondary education in Bangladesh consists of three streams including general education, Dakhil madrasah (secondary

religious schools) and technical and vocational education (Rahman et al., 2010). Even though the students who were able to complete their secondary school years, many of them could not pass the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent examinations. In 2020, for example, a total of 1,631,308 students showed up for the SSC examination and 16.25% of them failed. This indicates that a significant number of students, which is around 265,090, could not pass the secondary school certification examination. Similarly, about 48,405 (17.49%) students failed the Dakhil Madrasah Examination (equivalent to SSC), and 36,010 (27.30%) students failed the SSC vocational examination in 2020. These concerning unsuccessful rates have remained consistent among the three streams, general, madrasah (secondary religious schools), and technical and vocational in the last five years.

The consequence of failing in public examinations, for instance, SSC, has a far-reaching impact on young students' life. This failing often leads to two major consequences, such as one, educational discontinuation, and two, not achieving basic competencies of secondary education. Many of the students who failed in the examination may not continue their education further (Barrington & Bryan, 2015). However, parents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are often demotivated to continue their children's education and involve them in the workforce (OECD, 2012). Several studies have found a correlation between discontinuation of schooling and early marriage of the girl students (Patoari, 2020; Sarker, Wu & Hossin, 2019; Schaffnit, Urassa & Lawson, 2019; OECD, 2012).

Further, secondary education is considered to cater to students with foundational occupational skills and competencies to provide skilled manpower to the workforce and livelihood (National Education Policy, 2010). However, failing in secondary education limits students achieving from competencies for occupational activities. This indicated that a large number of young people entered the workforce without minimal educational competencies (Khan, 2019, p.51).

However, there are few literatures available in the context of Bangladesh that explained the cause of unsuccessful or poor results in the SSC public examinations. The present study thus, attempted to explore the trends and issues of poor and unsuccessful performance in the SSC/ equivalent examinations. The study specifically looked at four factors: school, family, gender-specific, and factors related to children with ethnicity concerning students' academic results.

2. Literature review

Literature indicated several factors, including school-related factors (teaching-learning assessment, infrastructural facilities), family-related factors and factors related to gender and ethnicity in connection to students' poor academic performance.

2.1. School factors

A number of studies (Alami, 2016; Karue & Amukowa, 2013) identified major factors that were responsible for students' poor achievements, including student-related components, teacher-related components, and from family-related components to socio-cultural factors. In terms of school-related factors, lack of joyful instructional approach, limited school physical facilities, and struggling relationships between students and teachers and within peer groups prevented optimal academic performance (Alami, 2016; Karue & Amukowa, 2013; Al Zoubi & Younes, 2015). Hasin and Nasir (2021) stated that insufficient technological resources might cause students to fall behind in their academic performance. Hence, the use of ICT in classroom is inevitable in order to maintain students' enthusiasm in studying regardless of limitations and impediments that would prevent them from learning and performing well in examinations (Hasin & Nasir, 2021). Najimi et al. (2013) investigated students' viewpoints in six areas of academic failure. Academic failure was mostly caused by a variety of factors, including student perspectives, the curriculum, the learning environment, and socio-economic issues. In addition, instructional methods, subject understanding, motivation, laboratory use, and failure to finish the syllabus in a year were also

found to directly influence students' academic achievement (Mji & Makgato, 2006).

The study by Pekrun et al. (2022) examined the relationship between academic performance and achievement and emotions among 3,425 German students over the course of five academic years. They found that when students received unfavorable criticism, they experienced unpleasant feelings. On the other hand, students who got direct or guided instructions achieved better in examinations (Black & William, 1998). According to Farooq and Shahzadi (2006) and Ahmed and Kiazi (2022), there is a considerable difference between students' accomplishments when teachers with and without training are responsible for facilitating learning. Students who achieved comparatively low outcomes were taught by teachers with little training. On the other hand, qualified teachers support their students' psychology and assist them in achieving their objectives (Farooq & Shahzadi, 2006).

2.2. Family factors

A study by Karue and Amukowa (2013) indicated unfavorable learning environments at home lack of reading materials and accommodation could have significant effects on students' performance. Many students' poor academic performance resulted from their low socio-economic background (Andersen & Nielsen, 2019). All of these aspects often lead to student absenteeism and absenteeism leading to students' poor performances. Certain subgroups including students from low socio-economic families, students with disabilities and homeless children, were more subject to learning loss compared to other students (Santibañez & Guarino, 2021). Mji and Makgato (2006) identified that parental involvement in children education had an indirect influence in students' academic performance. Alami (2016) further showed that early marriage, students' poor health conditions, and lack of transportation services also accelerated poor performance.

2.3.Gender and low achievement

A study by Anyanwu and Oribhabor (2020) found that gender discrimination also promotes gender gaps in enrolment and academic performance. The main reasons for the gender gap include ignorance and lack of awareness of the value of girls' education, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. Because of society's underrepresentation and negative perception toward girls' education, female students feel low confidence in continuing their studies (Chikuvadze & Matswetu, 2013).

In South Asian countries like India, Nepal, and Pakistan, the reasons for gender-specific low achievement are quite similar. Stereotypical and unequal norms such as early marriage and pregnancy, domestic and sexual violence, and other stigmas of gender inequality are responsible for female students' low achievement in Nepal (UNESCO, 2021). Chauhan and Kumar (2022) mentioned some major problems faced by girl students, including early marriage, financial problems, and household chores that are barriers to getting desired academic performances.

Junlin, McLellan, and Winter's study (2021) found that two-thirds of the boys were motivated, engaged, and performed well in school. In contrast, half of the girls showed patterns of motivation, engagement, and achievement and could be considered academically at risk. By shifting the focus from "boys versus girls" to "which boys and which girls", this study reveals the invisibility of well-performing boys and underachieving girls in educational gender gap research. Hsieh et al. (2021) studied US. high school students where no difference was found in boy and girl students' academic performances, but rather adolescent's math motivational belief patterns were associated with their math achievement and behavioural engagement.

2.4. Ethnicity and low achievement

A study (Burgess & Greaves, 2013) showed that children from ethnicity or minority were often subject to teachers' low expectations as carrying stereotypical attitudes toward ethnicity; some groups were systematically under-assessed. Berkowitz (2022) examined the effect of school climates considering ethnic minorities and socio-economic backgrounds among Arabic-speaking students in Israel. The study found that students

with ethnic minority status, especially those who came from low socio-economic backgrounds, may be more impacted by the internal school climate, including student-teacher relationships, risky peer behaviour and school violence.

3. Methodology

The study was part of a large study and quantitative by nature. The present study used student data and secondary data source to explore the trends and issues of poor performance in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent examinations in Bangladesh. The study collected data from 256 secondary schools in Bangladesh. A multistage sampling technique was used, and data were collected from 4 different geographical areas i.e., Plain Land, Hills, Haor (wetland), and Coastal areas under eight divisions (Barishal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh and Sylhet) of Bangladesh. A total of 3072 (51% girls) students participated in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC)/equivalent public examinations in the last five years, from 2017-2021. Participants were from 3 different streams of secondary education, including secondary schools, madrasahs (secondary religious schools) and secondary-level technical and vocational institutes. Besides, purposive sampling was applied to include students who could not pass SSC or equivalent examinations. About 69.40% of the participants were from secondary schools, 24.20% from madrasahs and 6.40% from technical institutes. A survey questionnaire was developed, piloted, and administrated on the students to collect data.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Trends of poor results in SSC and equivalent examinations

The study found that the unsuccessful rate in the SSC examination is noticeable and remained almost consistent over the last four years, from 2017 to 2020.

The national data showed a flat rate of students who had not completed secondary school certification in general, vocational, and madrasah education (Figure 1). However, the rate was comparatively high in vocational (SSC) than madrasah (Dakhil) and general (SSC) education. Surprisingly, in 2018 the number of unsuccessful students was highest in all streams, and the Dakhil incompletion rate was 29.11%. Nevertheless, the rate declined from 2017 to 2020, yet considerable.

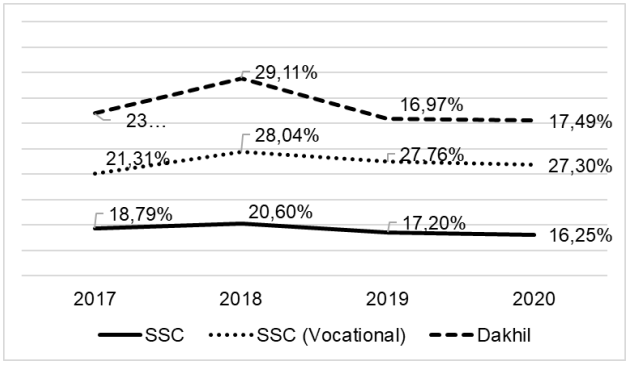

Figure 1. Trends of unsuccessful rate in SSC/ equivalent examinations from 2017 to 2020 by streams

The trends of unsuccessful rate by gender showed that girls students had a comparatively high unsuccessful rate in the earlier years (2017, 2018) than boys (Figure 2). However, girls' students had gradual decrease in unsuccessful rate in consequent years from 22.27% (2017) and 26.18% (2018) to 21.05% (2019) and 20.05% (2020). A sharp fall of poor performance was found for both girls (9.91%) and boys (7.78%) students in 2021. It is to be noted that, due to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2021, the public examination was canceled, and the students were promoted based on their earlier performance.

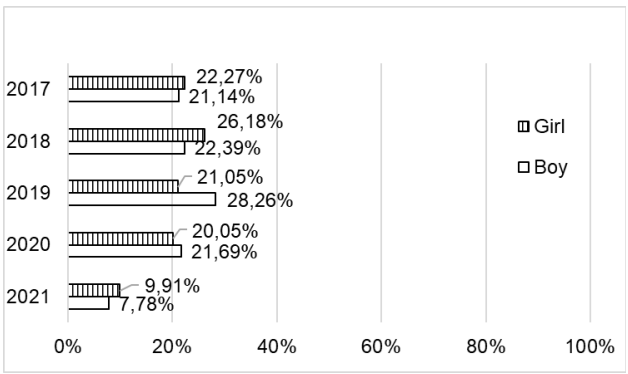

Figure 2. Trends of the unsuccessful rate of SSC/ equivalent examinations by gender

4.1.2. Factors influencing students' exam performances

The study found four major factors that may have influenced students' poor performance in the examination. These include family factors, school factors, gender aspects, and ethnicity. Among these mentioned factors, family factors were found as the most perceived aspects of students' academic achievement.

Most of the students (48.75%) reported that they did not have any home tutors to get support for their studies. Further, about 48.75% of the students indicated that they needed to help with household chores, and 30.25% of the students had to take care of their younger siblings (Table 1). Besides, 35.50% of the students had no study space at home. A notable number of students (27%) also reported struggling with unfavourable learning environments at home, including noise and non-supportive family members.

Financial insufficiency was another highly identified aspect of students' poor academic performance. Approximately more than half (64.20%) of the students considered that their families were financially insolvent to bear their educational expenses in terms of purchasing supportive books, stationaries, additional tutoring, or coaching.

The second most important factor in determining academic outcome was identified as school-related factors. School factors consist of school infrastructural facilities and classroom teaching learning components. In terms of infrastructural facilities, insufficient classrooms, unsafe school routes, and unavailability of electricity were the most identified aspects as perceived by the students (Table 2).

Most of the (30.6%) respondents considered insufficient classrooms for conducting teaching-learning activities as a negative factor impacting students' poor results in the SSC/equivalent examination. About 24.2% of the students considered that their schools had poor facilities of electricity connection and for 20.5% of the students, limited physical facilities of schools such as availability of drinking water, and clean wash block had impact on their teaching-learning. Besides, 21.25% of the students pointed out that the school route was unsafe. Schools were often far away which not only caused additional transport costs but was also identified as unsafe for many students. Around 15.75% of the students also marked external noises from roadside traffic or surrounding Bazar prevented them from taking class lessons attentively. Limited ICT facilities were also identified by the participated (9.75%) students as the reason for poor performance.

These infrastructural facilities were found widely varied across the geographical areas (i.e. plain lands, hills, haors (wetland), and coastal areas). More than half of the participants

Table 1. Percentage of students' perceived family influence on their poor results in SSC/equivalent examinations

No.	Challenges	Percentages	No.	Challenges	Percentages
1.	No study space	35.5	2.	Helping household chores	48.75
3.	Taking care of siblings	30.25	4.	Unfavourable environment	27
5.	Having no home tutor	48.75	6.	Financial insolvency	64.20

Table 2. Percentage of students perceived school-related challenges influencing poor results in SSC/equivalent examinations

No.	Challenges	Percentages	No.	Challenges	Percentages
1.	Insufficient classrooms	30.60	2.	Unsafe school route	21.25
3.	Unavailability of electricity	24.20	4.	Limited ICT facilities	9.75
5.	External noise	15.75	6.	Limited physical facilities	20.5

(64%), from Sylhet (haor areas), found limited infrastructure facilities as the most contributing factor to effective learning at school. More than one-third of the participants from coastal areas, including Barisal (39.50%) and Khulna (37.36%) divisions, identified limited infrastructural facilities were also noticeable. However, except Dhaka division (9.12%), which is the capital of the country, nearly one-third of the other plain lands, including Rajshahi (32.79%), Rangpur (30%), and Mymensingh (35.11%) divisions, were found with limited infrastructural facilities.

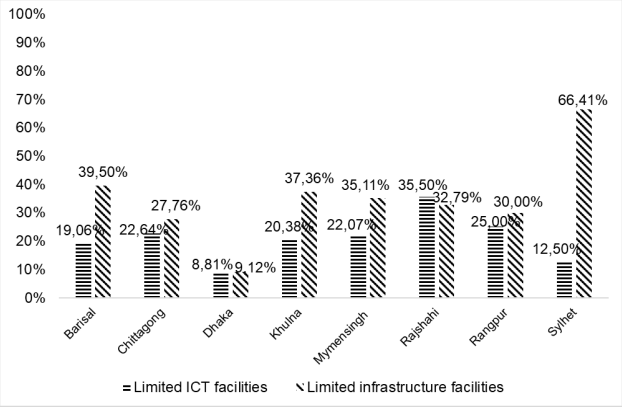

Figure 3. Perceived school factors contributing to poor performances of students by divisions

Though almost all the students identified limited ICT facilities as one of the barriers to obtaining expected learning outcomes, the percentage was far below half (50%), indicating a positive change in ICT facilities in schools. Similar to infrastructural facilities, ICT facilities at schools were also widely varied by geographical location. The rate of ICT-related challenges was found notably high in the Rajshahi division (35.50%). However, ICT as a moderate challenge was identified from the data across Barisal (19.06%), Chittagong (22.64%), Khulna (20.38%), Rangpur (25%), and Mymensingh (22.07%) divisions. Interestingly, Sylhet reported fewer (12.50%) ICT challenges despite having the worst school infrastructural facilities. Not surprisingly, the districts from the Dhaka division (8.81%) were found to be least challenged in terms of both infrastructural and ICT facilities at school.

Along with school infrastructure aspects, students identified a number of teaching-learning activities responsible for their academic performances (Table 3). These included a lack of joyful learning, limited classroom feedback, limited group work and the use of ICT in the classrooms. About 36.50% of the students found that the teaching styles of the teachers were uninteresting for them and 30.50% of the students found that teachers' limited use of ICT in the classes.

Importantly, students pointed out that a lack of teachers' feedback (38.50%) and fewer opportunities for asking questions (27%) prevented effective learning in the classroom environment. Besides, 29.50% of the participants considered that the teachers did not use examples and the teaching materials often make it hard to grasp the learning topics. There were fewer opportunities for 27.50% of students to do group work, and 21.75% of the participants had fewer opportunities for self-assessment.

According to the participating students, three main gender-specific reasons, including the negative perception of girls' education, insecure school route, and early marriage, were responsible for girls' poor performances in SSC/ equivalent examination (Figure 4).

About 40.75% of students responded that they faced obstacles from their families to continue their education for being girls, and 39.50% of students felt insecure (e.g., eve teasing) while

Table 3. Issues of classroom teaching and learning in relation to students' achievement

No.	Issues	Percentages	No.	Issues	Percentages
1.	Lack of joyful learning	36.50	2.	Limited questioning opportunities	27
3.	Lack of teaching aids	29.50	4.	Limited group work	27.50
5.	Limited ICT use	30.50	6.	Lack of feedback	38.50
7.	Lack of Self-Assessment	21.75			

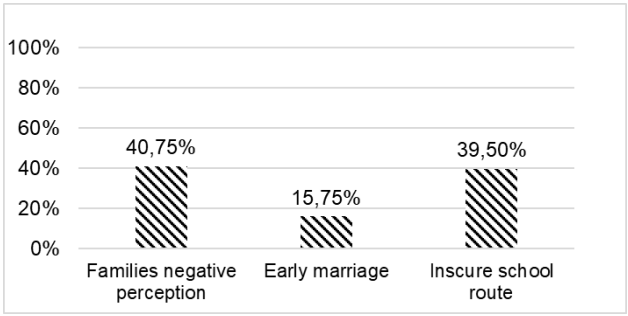

Figure 4. Gender-specific issues in relation to students' achievement

going to school. Early marriage was another factor for 15.75% of students who could not continue studying; therefore they got poor results in SSC/equivalent examinations.

Though the gender-specific challenges were reported across the country, it was highly varied by geographical location. Negative attitudes from family members toward women's education may strongly influence students' academic performance. In hill and coastal areas, which were under Chittagong and Khulna division, students (66.01% and 59.68% respectively) identified the highest rate of negative perception from their family members towards girls' education which had influenced their academic performance. However, this negative perception exists to `some extent in several plain lands as well in Mymensingh (31.48%) and Rangpur division (21.3%). Besides, Rajshahi (15.85%) and Dhaka division (16.95%) had the lowest rate in terms of these obstacles to continuing their education.

Insecure school route (such as eve teasing, and fear of abuse) was frequently marked as a preventive factor to participation in school learning and achieving higher academic outcomes. This issue was particularly found among girls across the country. In some of the divisions, the insecure school route was reported by more than half of the participants including Chittagong (61.76%), Khulna (63.23%), and Barisal (50%) division. However, though reporting rate was comparatively very low in the Dhaka division (6.78%), the high reporting rate on unsafe schools remained high in Mymensingh (44.44%), Rangpur (31.66%), and Rajshahi division (28.96%).

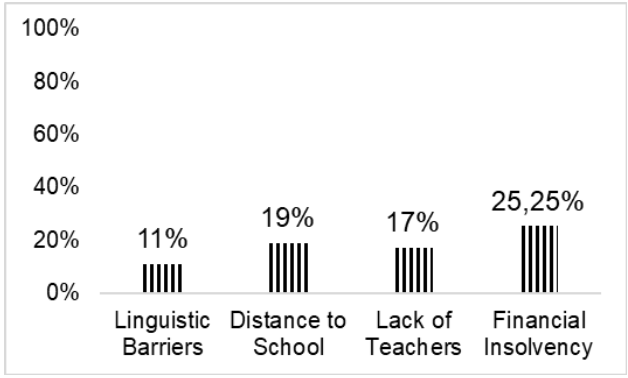

Figure 6. Percentage of students perceived challenges of students with ethnicity for poor performance in SSC/equivalent examinations

The study also found that students from ethnic minorities faced four major issues including financial insolvency, distant school route, lack of

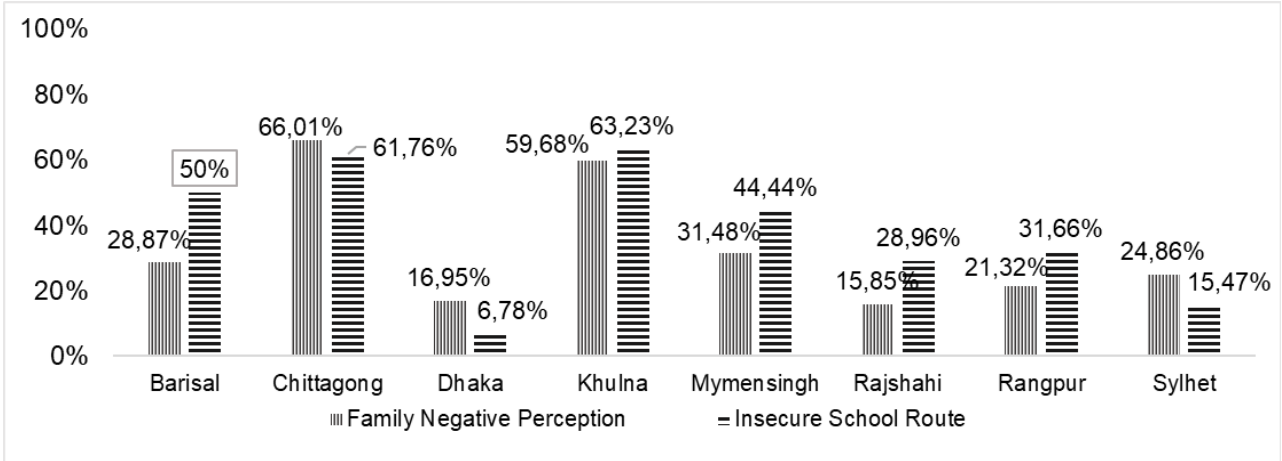

Figure 5. Percentage of participants perceived challenges contributing to girl student's poor performance in SSC/equivalent examinations by division

teachers and linguistic barriers were major factors responsible for their poor performance (Figure 6). Most of the participants (25.25%) pointed out that the financial crisis of their families as one of the major factors for their poor performances in the SSC/ equivalent examination. Besides, 19% of students pointed out that distance between school and their home, lack of teachers for 17% of the students, and linguistic challenges for 11% of the students as the reasons for their poor performances in examinations.

4.2. Discussion

In Bangladesh, students who have managed to complete the secondary schooling cycle, a considerable number of students (16% to 29%) were not being able to pass SSC and equivalent examinations. This trend of unsuccessful rate has remained consistent for the last few years, indicating that a large number of students are not achieving secondary school education competencies every year.

Several issues, such as financial support, school infrastructural facilities, classroom teaching-learning styles, family support, the value of education, and sense of safety indicated responsible for poor participation and achievement of secondary education. From the research results, it appears that the financial insolvency of the family is marked as the major (64.20%) barrier for the student to engage optimally in educational activities at the secondary level. This financial insolvency often prevents students from paying required school fees, additional tutoring support, and transportation costs and makes it challenging for students to continue school regularly and prepare for school examinations. The national survey (BANBEIS, 2021) shows that 64.84% of parents of secondary school students are either cultivators or labourers and thus, they often had hardship to provide educational expenditure for their children. In many cases, even students are to contribute financially to their families, which means that they need to work or participate in family income generation activities along with studies. Further, the share of government schools is only 3.36% (N=679) of 20849 secondary education institutes which cater to only 5.94% of students, and the rest 94% which is around 10 million students have to pay for their education at private secondary schools (BANBEIS, 2021). Thus, secondary education is more expensive than primary education (free) for the parents as parents pay tuition fees along with extra fees, including school development fees, admission fees, examination fees, ICT, laboratories fees, library fees, and other fees. Though the government provides a large amount for teacher salary subvention in non-government educational institutions, students need to pay substantial fees for their educational services at these non-governmental institutions.

Other than expenses for school services, the present study indicated that students need to pay an additional cost for supplementary academic support. Another study (Mahmud, 2021) showed that about 85.1% of students received private tutoring to help them in their learning. However, this study found that approximately half of the students reported that they could not afford home tutors. Besides, students with less affordable families (64.20%) are often deprived of additional opportunities to have learning materials (e.g., supportive books, and stationaries). This supplementary tutoring and learning materials were, to some extent, a financial burden to a large number of families.

The study further found that school route is identified as one of the factors (21.25%) related with students' academic achievements, particularly for the girl students (39.50%). The number of secondary education institutions (20,849) in Bangladesh is distinctly less than primary schools (1,33,002) (BANBEIS, 2021). This causes most of the secondary schools centred around Upazilas Sadar (sub-district). For students who live in the outskirt of the Sadar have to travel a long-distance school route. Many of them cannot attend the classes regularly and experience financial pressure due to additional transportation costs. Santibañez and Guarino (2021) found that absenteeism has large negative potential effects on secondary students' academic outcomes. A similar study (Kabir & Akter, 2014) conducted in Bangladesh found that poor performance is often related to irregular classes. The present study found that this

unavailability of secondary education services within the community or accessible transport services to schools makes education inaccessible to students from ethnic minorities. This perhaps prevents students' regular presence and hampers student learning.

Unfavourable learning environment (27%) and no designated study space at home (35.5%) are also reported by the participants in connection to their academic outcomes. A global study (OECD, 2012) indicated that parents with low education and low income have negative attitudes toward schooling. It is strongly considered that the home environment and parental involvement in children's education significantly affect students' academic progress and success (Kabir & Akter, 2014). Students' poor performance is often related to parents' lack of awareness in educational involvement, such as attending parental meetings or monitoring child study practice on a regular basis (Muhammad et al., 2020). A study (Kabir & Akter, 2014) suggested that as secondary schools have limited facilities including less classrooms, inadequate learning environments and limited teachers, parents need to provide additional support for their children with a favorable learning environment to achieve good social and educational outcomes.

Along with family support, schools play a crucial role in achieving students' expected learning outcomes. The present study found that congested classrooms, limited gender-friendly wash blocks, lack of laboratories, limited electricity and ICT connectivity impacted students' learning participation and achievement. Recent studies (Sumi et al., 2021; Oyshi et al., 2021) indicated that students in small class sizes performed better than students from large class sizes, as teachers can pay more attention to individual students and support them to enhance their academic competencies. Suhi et al. (2020) found that students from well-equipped secondary schools in Bangladesh (particularly government-funded institutions) with modern facilities, including a library and ICT lab, performed better than those from less-facilitated schools. An advantage of laboratory usage is that it helps improve learners' higher-order learning skills such as analysis, problem-solving, and evaluation which will eventually help in students' academic performances (Mji & Makgato, 2006).

The study found that school teaching-learning practices, along with the infrastructural facilities, as influential factors in obtaining higher educational outcomes. Participants of this study considered the lack of joyful and interactive teaching-learning activities (e.g., group work, using ICT) impacted their academic performances. Students may often find no practical use for their academic learning as the teachers do not use related examples and teaching materials while conducting the class. As there are limited practices of students' need-based facilitations from teachers, comparatively weak or slow learners, face challenges in academic performance and examinations. Further limited feedback from teachers was also marked as an impediment for students to improve their learning errors. Pekrun et al. (2022) stated that feedback influences students' achievement, whereas negative feedback influences negative emotions. Lack of effective training for secondary teachers may limit practising students-centred pedagogical approaches in the classroom. Studies (Hafeez, 2021; Theophile et al., 2020) consistently indicated that trained teachers could choose the best method for teaching and improving students' academic achievements and interests. On the other hand, untrained teachers may not be aware of the latest pedagogical strategies and are unable to support the students (Farooq & Shahzadi, 2006). To improve teaching-learning practices at secondary school, further intensive programs should be provided focusing on pedagogy, subject content, especially in science and mathematics, and ICT and technology integration in classroom teaching-learning practices (ADB, 2021).

However, though the classroom teaching-learning process influences students' examination success, the public examinations can also directly influence the teaching and learning styles of the teachers at school (Rind & Mari, 2019). A study showed (Madaus, 1991) that preparation for high-stakes examinations often directed students and teachers to focus more on rote memorization and instrumental drills and practice teaching and

learning culture.

The findings from the study also reveal three core factors behind girl students' poor performances in SSC/equivalent examinations, including obstacles from families, insecure school routes, and early marriage. Despite getting stipends, the drop-out rate of girl students is higher than boy students (Shilpi, Hasnayen, Ilahi, Parvin & Sultana, 2017). According to the child labour survey 2013 (BBS, 2015), most girls had to do domestic chores and support family income generation. These highly found factors are both relatable to family and parents. In addition, girl students face obstacles from their families as many parents are not interested in girls' education, and they believe that girls have to engage in household work. Economic crisis and negligence of girls' education also encourage early marriage (BANBEIS, 2015). Social obstacles such as eve teasing, negligence of girls' education, religious misconceptions, and others are reasons for girl students' poor performance.

Similarly, students from ethnic backgrounds face four factors including the financial crisis of the family, limited trained teachers, distance from home to school and linguistic barriers to get their expected results. According to Eggins and West (2010) the financial crisis of the family is the utmost impediment for ethnic minority students to perform well in the examinations. It had been (Isik et al., 2018) broadly found that the support received from school, teachers, and adults had a positive influence on the motivation of ethnic minority students. Therefore, trained teachers paved the way for the students to achieve their goals (Ahmed & Kiazi, 2022). Another core factor that hampers the academic results of students from ethnic minorities is the distance (19%) from home to school. Students often struggle to participate regularly in classes, resulting in poor academic achievements.

5. Conclusions

Along with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Bangladesh's "Vision-2041" perspective plan emphasizes students' completion rate, ensuring equity and quality, incorporating skills for jobs, and ensuring girls' education (e.g. preventing early marriage) in secondary education. To achieve these goals, secondary education must be ensured both in terms of completion and quality education for all. However, the present trend shows that a considerable number of students are discontinuing education and not achieving the basic competencies of secondary education. To trace the responsible factors, this study identified four major challenges: family financial and attitudinal support, schools' infrastructural facilities, the impact of classroom teaching-learning styles, the value of education, and the sense of safety were obstacles to achieving the expected outcome of secondary education. These challenges remained the same for the ethnic minority students. Thus, these addressed issues should be taken into consideration to achieve the target of Vision-2041. Specifically, more governmental support and investments are needed, and these supports should be allocated equity basis across the country, not only in the capital. Along with the financial and policy support, awareness, and attitudinal change through media, empowering the local community in cooperation with non-governmental organizations may remarkably contribute to curve the trends of unsuccessful rates. In brief, a comprehensive initiative will accelerate the progress and development of secondary education in Bangladesh. However, the study's findings cannot be generalized as the sampling could not cover representative groups of students from different achievement levels. Further, the study could not include the opinions of other important stakeholders, including teachers, parents, educational administrators, and school management committees. Along with this methodological limitation, future studies may look at more domain-based factors (e.g., teaching-learning, family factors) of poor achievement in public examinations.

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