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An Early Exploration of *Shishu Niketan* Schools of BRAC

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ABSTRACT

Shishu Niketan is a new fee-based primary education initiative of BRAC Education Programme. Aim of this is to create self-sustaining and good quality primary schools in the areas in which non-formal schools have been withdrawn. Analysing input and process factors of *Shishu Niketans*, this study assessed quality of this initiative. Parental perspectives and challenges in driving the initiative towards sustainability were also explored. This is the first research on this initiative. A comparative study was designed. Five *Shishu Niketans* and five nearby Kindergartens were purposively selected from an area located in rural Bangladesh. It applied both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Findings reveal that physical facilities were better in Kindergartens; however, *Shishu Niketans* were superior in terms of teaching-learning provision. Both of these factors influenced parents' school choice. In other opinion, these factors were crucial in ensuring quality of education. Parents of *Shishu Niketans* were found to be satisfied with the teaching quality, teachers' behaviour and the culture of supervision. They had strong objection about the absence of toilets and drinking water facilities. An opposite scenario was observed in Kindergartens. The programme organizers of *Shishu Niketans* experienced operational challenges during school establishment and regular school operation. Collection of tuition fees was the major challenge for both schools but it was found to be more difficult in *Shishu Niketans*. *Shishu Niketans* were established based on BRAC primary schools (BPSs) goodwill and network. Thus, the poorer section of the community who knew BRAC as a free education provider was the main population for *Shishu Niketans*. Poorer admitted their children to *Shishu Niketans* by assuming that these schools were free. On the other hand, parents of Kindergarten children knew from the start that Kindergartens used to be a fee-based system.

Suggestions for overcoming the existing challenges include improvement of infrastructure, creation of new networks with potential households, engagement of fathers along with mothers in school activities, advocacy on curriculum, no attempt to increase school-fees for the first couple of years, appointment of a separate person for collecting tuition fees, and adoption of a slower approach for sustainability.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with some information related to access and quality of primary education in Bangladesh. Then, it moves on to the literature review where the relationship between fee-free and fee-paying systems and access to basic and primary education is analysed. Afterwards, a snapshot of BRAC *Shishu Niketan* was provided. This is followed by rationale and objectives of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND

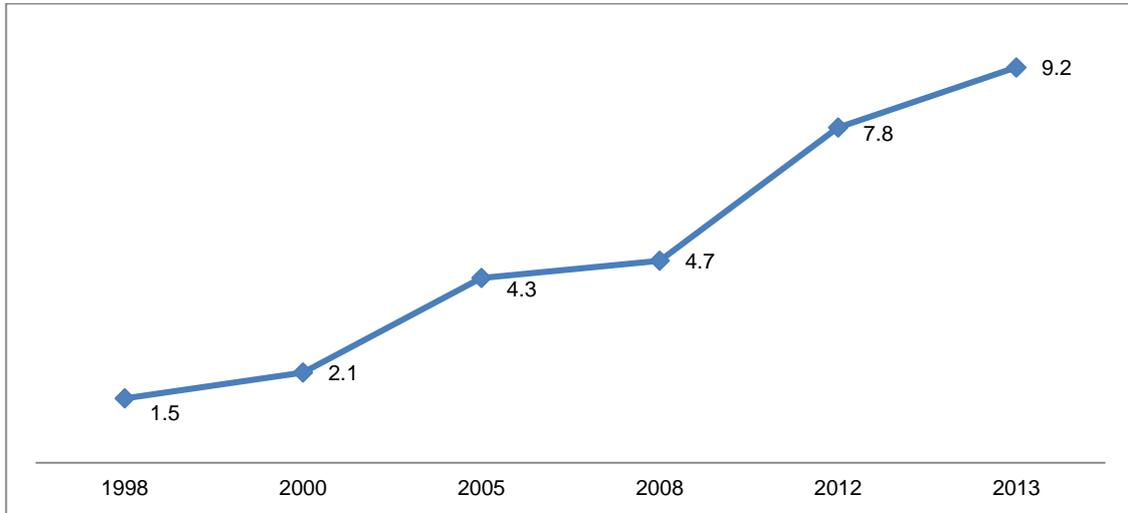
Bangladesh is committed to provide fee-free primary education to all its children. To achieve this, five-year duration of compulsory primary education was enacted in 1990 (GoB 1990). Many affirmative actions were taken afterwards to foster school enrolment of young children. *Upabritti* (stipend) to poorer 40% students in rural schools and free textbooks to all students of both rural and urban schools were two significant initiatives. As a result, the net enrolment rate (NER) at primary level has increased from 60% in 1990 to over 95% in recent years (BBS and UNICEF 2000, DPE 2013). The girls surpassed the boys in enrolment more than one-and-a-half decade ago (Chowdhury *et al.* 1999). Unfortunately, quality of education did not improve in line with impressive improvement in enrolment. A recent study by the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) observed that three-quarters of the fifth graders do not achieve competencies of their grade in the state language of Bangla and two-thirds of the same do so in Mathematics (DPE 2013). Free education did not ensure 'quality education' for the majority students.

Pluralism exists in the provision of primary education in Bangladesh. At least 10 types of primary schools are available in the country. School quality varies substantially in terms of school type and location (rural/urban). Urban schools, especially those are attached to secondary schools, are much better than others (Nath and Chowdhury 2009).

Majority of the primary students enrol in government primary schools followed by newly nationalized primary schools (formerly registered non-government primary schools). *Education Watch* studies reported that the proportion of students in these two types of schools declined over time but it increased in the case of Kindergartens (Nath and Chowdhury 2009). For instance, the share of Kindergartens was 1.5% in 1998 which increased to 2.1% in 2000, 4.3% in 2005 and 4.7% in 2008 (Figure 1.1). DPE publications also recorded an increased share of Kindergartens at primary level (DPE 2006, 2013, 2014). In 2005, proportion of Kindergartens was 2.8% among all primary educational institutions in the country which increased to 12% in 2012 and 13.2% in 2014. Share of Kindergarten students in these years was 1.5, 7.8 and 9.2% respectively. In 2013, nearly 1.8 million students were receiving primary education from 14,100 kindergartens (DPE 2014). Moreover, there are English medium schools in the cities; enrolment in such schools was not taken into account in the above calculation. Kindergartens and the English medium schools are private in nature. They charge higher fees. Overall, there is a growing tendency of parents to admit children to fee-

paying schools at primary level. High private expenditure for schooling is also a hard reality (Chowdhury *et al.* 2002, Ahmad *et al.* 2007).

Figure 1.1 Increase in percentage share of Kindergarten students at primary level, 1998-2013



Sources: Nath and Chowdhury (2009); DPE (2013, 2014)

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Abolishing tuition fees from primary education significantly increased enrolment rate worldwide. National governments, parents, children and international development communities collectively worked for such improvement. Bangladesh is not an exception.

Several studies in other settings however showed that fee-paying private educational institutions have mushroomed in developing countries (Adelabu and Rose 2004, Rose 2002, Tooley 2004, Watkins 2004). Most of these are low cost schools and they serve the need of the poor, as an alternative to state education. In rural Uganda, 40% of primary students are attending private schools. They were previously out-of-school because of inability to pay fees. After abolishing the fee system, Uganda's enrolment rate increased dramatically (Rose 2002). Rose (2002) argued that these schools offer education below a desired level. So, question arose about why poor parents were paying for lower quality education when they could be getting fee-free education under the state. She concluded that provision of low quality private schools is not serving their needs, rather using up their scarce resources with limited benefits.

On the other hand, Tooley *et al.* (2008) emphasised private sector's role in primary education. They saw it as an alternative route to ensure education for all. Their study on slums of Kibera, Kenya was conducted ten months after the introduction of free primary education. They found an initial decrease in enrolment rate and a subsequent increase afterwards. Parental views were explored regarding the quality of public and private schools. The parents showed their dissatisfaction with the quality of public schools because of large class size, irresponsibility of teachers, hidden costs and schools' lack of accountability.

Private schools for the poor charge very low fees in comparison to those for children of wealthy families (Tooley 2007, Rose 2002). An example can be cited from some private schools of urban and sub-urban areas in India. Monthly fees charged by

these schools were about 4–5% of the monthly wage of a breadwinner who was receiving a typical minimum wage (Tooley 2007). Despite charging low costs these private schools were reported to be offering low quality services. Watkins (2004) noted that 'private schools for the poor are of inferior quality and low quality service of these schools will restrict children's future opportunity'. Adelabu and Rose (2004) also called these private schools 'low cost, low quality substitutes for public education'.

However, Tooley (2007) argued that such concerns were misplaced in comparison to the quality of public education. He found that in terms of inputs, such as provision of drinking water, toilets, desks, chairs, electric fans, lighting and libraries, private schools for the poor were superior to public schools. In terms of process, teacher absenteeism was lower and teacher commitment was higher in private schools. On the other hand, students of private schools performed significantly better than those in public schools in English and mathematics tests.

Alderman *et al.* (2003) evaluated two pilot programmes which were initiated in Balochistan Province of Pakistan. The programmes were designed to build private schools for poor girls in urban and rural areas. They found that all urban schools were self-sustaining because of larger supplies of children, better availability of teachers and more educated parents with higher income levels. However, none of the rural private schools (except one) would potentially survive. These pilots showed that private schools may offer an alternative supply of educational services to poor urban neighbourhoods in developing countries. However, they are not likely to offer solutions for the lack of sufficient educational services in rural areas.

Available research in Bangladesh showed that in rural areas, children from better-off families have access to schools those operate on fee-based system. Sommers (2013) found that parents who can afford tuition fees are willing to send their children to private schools. However, 90% of households make some direct payment to schools in the forms of examination fees, transportation costs, cost of materials etc. (Ahmed *et al.* 2007). Private tuition is also a large source of expenditure in education. Nath (2008) found that around 38% of primary students pay for private tuition.

1.3 SHISHU NIKETAN INITIATIVE OF BRAC

BRAC, the largest non-government organization (NGO) in the globe started free primary education in Bangladesh five years earlier than that of the government. BRAC aimed to expand educational opportunities to underprivileged children, specifically to those who dropped out of the formal system before completion of primary schooling. Such schools, titled BRAC Primary Schools or BPS, are still functional in many parts of the country. No fees are taken from students. Books, stationery and other educational materials are provided free of cost. All these are single classroom and single teacher schools. BRAC started with only 20 schools; however, the number went up to over 34,000 in some point on time before declining. At present, 22,546 such schools are in operation. Over 4.9 million children have completed their primary schooling through BPS.

Studies found that the number of children from disadvantageous family backgrounds were declining in BPSs in the areas where BRAC had long presence (Nath 2003, 2006; Afroze 2012). The state's capacity of taking care of all children's primary education has also increased in these areas. In such circumstances, BRAC did not see any justification in continuing non-formal schools there. Subsequently, BRAC moved to the marginalized geographical locations to serve the disadvantaged communities. However, demand for quality education still exists in those areas where BRAC has

withdrawn its non-formal school programme. Overcrowded classrooms, high student-teacher ratio, poor interaction between students and teachers, one-way delivery mechanism, lack of assessment and feedback system, etc. were the factors responsible for poor quality education. Therefore, a large number of students became dependent on supplementary private tuition after school. Many parents send their children to private schools with the hope of better education. However, they were also subjected to private tuition (Nath 2008).

Upon considering the above mentioned factors, BRAC has decided to establish a new type of school in areas where non-formal schools were withdrawn. This new type of school is a semi-formal school called *Shishu Niketan*. Some characteristics of these schools were borrowed from BRAC's non-formal schools (i.e., BPSs) while some were borrowed from Kindergartens and government schools. These include: single room one teacher school, students' seat on chair, class size of 30 students, full set of NCTB textbooks are used, purchase of stationeries and other education materials by parents, course duration of five calendar years and monthly tuition fee of Tk. 200 per student. *Shishu Niketan* was initiated in 2012 with 60 schools. It started to scale up from the following year. Currently, there are around 4,000 *Shishu Niketans* all over Bangladesh.

1.4 RATIONALE

Shishu Niketan can be considered to be a new pathway for BRAC in terms of its contribution to primary education in areas where non-formal primary schools are no longer needed but where quality education is required. Ensuring quality of schools, understanding communities' needs and perspectives as well as identification of the programme's operational challenges are important for expansion and sustainability of this new initiative. As a result, a study is required to help BEP understand the present quality standard of *Shishu Niketan* schools and to enable them to take necessary steps for improvement. This study will also give an insight of parents' perspectives and explore the challenges of making this initiative sustainable.

1.5 STUDY OBJECTIVE

This study broadly aims to understand children's access to *Shishu Niketans* and various aspects of quality of education provided through these schools. Following are the specific research questions.

1. Who are the students of *Shishu Niketans* in terms of parental background and household socioeconomic status?
2. What factors have influenced parents of rural Bangladesh in choosing *Shishu Niketans* for their children?
3. How do these schools perform in terms of input and process indicators of quality measures? How do the parents see quality of these schools?
4. What are the challenges that the schools are facing in terms of sustainability and how can these be overcome?

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

A small scale study was designed. It was thought that consideration of a comparison group would help understand the issues related to *Shishu Niketan* much better. Kindergartens, which are also fee-paying and privately managed institutions, were considered as comparison group. Thus, it is a comparative study concerning *Shishu Niketan* and Kindergarten with respect to students' background, parental choice, quality of education, sustainability, challenges, and coping mechanism.

2.1. STUDY SAMPLE

Five *Shishu Niketans* and five Kindergartens were selected for the study. Firstly, five *Shishu Niketans* were purposively selected from three *upazilas* of Natore district. These are Bonpara, Boraigram and Bagatipara. In selecting *Shishu Niketans*, emphasis was given on those schools which were established in 2013 and the students were in grade II during conduct of the study. Secondly, to create a comparison group, Kindergartens nearest to the selected *Shishu Niketans* were selected. Each of the 10 educational institutions was situated in rural areas.

Thirty students from each of the selected schools were planned for the collection of background information. It was not possible mainly for two reasons. Firstly, number of students in grade II of most Kindergartens and some *Shishu Niketans* was less than 30. Grade II was specifically chosen so that better comparisons could be made between Kindergartens and *Shishu Niketans*. Secondly, some parents were not available at home during visits. Finally, the student sample for background information included 144 from *Shishu Niketans* and 108 from Kindergartens; totalling 252 instead of 300.

2.2 FIELD OPERATION

The study was conducted in June 2014, by a team composed of two researchers of the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC. Five research assistants who were graduates of anthropology from different public universities of Bangladesh, extensively assisted the research team in fieldwork. The fieldwork was done mainly by the assistants; however, the first author visited schools and conducted some interviews with teachers, parents and field officers. The second author also provided field visits.

The researchers first developed a questionnaire for household survey and checklists for interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). These were then piloted and necessary changes were made afterwards. The assistants were trained for five days. The training also included field practice. During fieldwork, each assistant was given responsibility of a *Shishu Niketan* and a Kindergarten. All activities like collection of information through in-depth interviews, FGDs, classroom observations and household survey in each of the *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens were done by an assistant.

2.3 QUALITATIVE INSTRUMENTS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A variety of qualitative research techniques were used. These included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and classroom observations. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with class teachers of grade II, head teachers of Kindergartens and programme organizers (POs) of *Shishu Niketan*s. Four FGDs were conducted with parents, two with the parents of *Shishu Niketan* students and two with those of Kindergartens. Eight to ten parents participated in each FGD. They were selected during household survey. Parents who were willing to attend and seemed more familiar with their children's school and education were the ones who were invited. It was found in other studies that fathers only provide tuition fees and have no other involvement in school functions and some mothers also do not have any idea about their children's schooling and education. All interviews and FGDs were tape recorded and transcribed. Each lasted for approximately an hour.

Following issues were discussed in interviews and FGDs.

- Interviews with teachers covered their educational background, experiences in respective schools, concepts about quality of education, teaching approach, nature and extent of difficulties face in schools and need of professional development.
- Interviews with head teachers and POs covered the challenges they faced during school establishment and operation, strategies that were considered to overcome those challenges, perception about quality of education and roles and actions to maintain quality in schools.
- FGDs with parents covered the factors that influenced them in choosing schools, their observation about school quality, expectation from school, and satisfaction levels.

Classroom observations (that of grade II) were used to assess quality of education. Each educational institution was brought under observation for three consecutive days. Observation of each day continued for the whole contact hour. Approximately 12 hours were spent in each classroom. Non-participant observation was done and the observers introduced themselves as researchers. Some issues which came from observations were needed to be cross-checked with parents, teachers, head teachers or POs.

The checklist for observation was prepared following the input–process–output framework of quality assessment. It is a popular and easy model for assessing quality of education. A number of studies conducted in the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC also used this model (Nath *et al.* 2004, Nath 2006, Nath and Chowdhury 2009). The framework has four broad components. These are: programme input, process in practice, immediate output and expanded output. For valid reason, this study considered only the first two. Table 2.1 shows the issues considered for classroom observation.

Table 2.1 Input and process indicators of school quality assessment

Input	Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vision and policy• Students background• Financing• Curriculum and textbooks• Contact time• Teachers and their quality• Management and supervision• Physical facilities• Teacher-student ratio• Teaching-learning materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching-learning process• Students' attendance• Co-curricular activities• Community involvement• Academic leadership and role of Programme Organizer• Quality of in-service training of teachers• School evaluation mechanism

All qualitative data were analysed by the researchers. Assistants transcribed all the observations, interviews and FGDs. The researchers first read all the transcripts and coded the data drawn from research questions. Data were then categorised under three main and several sub-categories. The team met regularly to discuss and refine the analyses throughout the process.

2.4 QUANTITATIVE INSTRUMENTS, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Students' background characteristics and educational expenditure were collected from parents, interviewing them at home using a short survey questionnaire. Factors that influenced school choice process, satisfaction level regarding various aspects of quality of schools and recommendations to improve learning environment in school were also the issues which were brought up in these interviews.

Interviews were held at the premises of the households. The household heads or their spouses or any adult members of households were considered as respondents. Researchers and the field management staff were present in the study villages for supervising field activities. Post-enumeration checks were also done. Field monitoring was done to find out whether the assistants collected data in the way that they were trained. Along with this, five per cent of interviews were re-interviewed to check quality of data. After comparing the data collected through interviews and re-interviews, it was found that the overall quality of data was satisfactory.

Data were then fed into computers and analysed using SPSS after adequate cleaning and cross-checking. The quantitative data properly matched with qualitative data. Appropriate statistical tools were used in data analysis.

2.5 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

A mixed method was applied to strengthen the arguments of this study. Application of different qualitative techniques helped in triangulation of data and to ensure validity. Each school was observed for three consecutive days; so, a more realistic school scenario was obtained. This study, for the first time, explored the reasons for choosing fee-paying primary schools by low-income parents. This is also the first study which focused on quality and operational challenges of BRAC's very new initiative, *Shishu Niketan*. We took nearby Kindergartens as comparison group. So, the cultural context did not influence any critical differences.

According to the study design, 300 households were to be chosen for surveys; however, it was not possible due to small class size in some schools. Government primary schools were also beyond the scope of this study. If the government schools could be brought under study it would have helped understanding the reasons behind avoiding public schools by the parents. Comparisons could have been stronger and arguments could have been deeper if these limitations could have been avoided.

Chapter 3

HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS

This chapter provides general information about household demography, socioeconomic characteristics and educational profile. Household level data of the students admitted in BRAC *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens were analysed separately to see if there was any difference. Demographic composition of household members included age and gender distribution as well as dependency and child-women ratios. Household economic status was explored through a number of relevant indicators. Education included years of schooling and literacy status.

3.1 HOUSEHOLD DEMOGRAPHY

Age and gender distribution of population: Mostly a similar age-distribution was observed among the population of households of both types of schools (*Shishu Niketan* and Kindergarten). On an average, two-fifth of the population was below 15 years, little less than a fifth belonged to age group 15–29 years, 35–36% belonged to age group 30–59 years and about 6% were 60 years and above (Table 3.1). Male-female ratios were also similar for both groups. The gender-ratio was found to be 100 in both. However, the ratio varied in terms of age. For instance, proportion of males was slightly higher than that of the females in the 0–14 age group and much higher in 30–59 age group. On the contrary, females of age 15–29 years constituted over a quarter of total population whereas, similar aged males constituted 11% or below.

Table 3.1 Percentage distribution of household population by school type and gender

Age (in years)	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>			Kindergarten		
	Males	Females	Both	Males	Females	Both
0–14	41.6	39.1	40.3	43.9	34.5	39.2
15–29	10.9	26.6	18.8	9.2	28.2	18.7
30–59	41.9	28.1	35.0	41.0	30.7	35.8
60+	5.6	6.3	5.9	5.9	6.7	6.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Dependency and child-women ratios: Dependency ratio is a summary measure of age composition of population. It is a ratio of population age 0–14 years and 60 years and above to the population aged 15–59 years expressed in percentage. It is divided into two parts: child dependency ratio and elderly dependency ratio. Dependency ratio was found 86 in the households of *Shishu Niketan* students and 84 in the households of Kindergarten students. Child dependency ratio was higher in the households of *Shishu Niketan* students (75 vs. 72) and elderly dependency ratio was higher in the households of Kindergarten students. The child-women ratio was 26 in the households of *Shishu Niketan* students and 24 in the households of Kindergarten students.

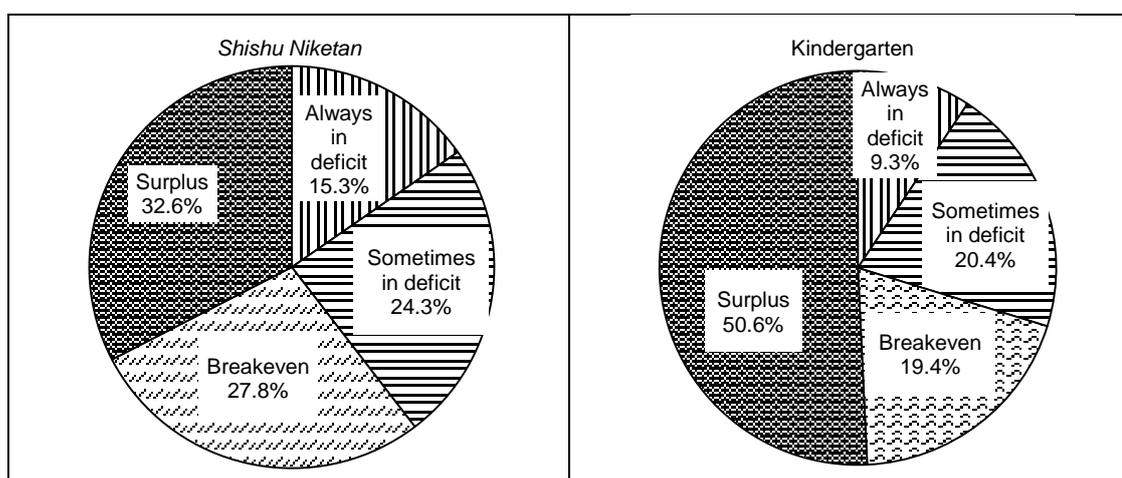
Proportion of children eligible for primary schooling (6–10 years) was mostly equal in both types of households; 24.2% for *Shishu Niketans* and 25.4% for Kindergartens.

3.2 HOUSEHOLD SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Three indicators were used to understand household economy of the students of both types of schools. It was observed that Kindergarten students, in general, came from well-off households than those of BRAC *Shishu Niketans*. Monthly household income ranged from Tk. 1,500 to Tk. 80,000. Average monthly income was significantly higher for the households of Kindergartens than that for *Shishu Niketans* (Tk. 13,282 vs. Tk. 9,098; $p < 0.001$). A quarter of the households of *Shishu Niketan* students earned Tk. 4,500 or below. It was Tk. 6,000 or below for half of the households and Tk. 10,000 or below for three-quarters of the households. These figures were respectively Tk. 6,000, Tk. 10,000 and Tk. 15,000 for the households of Kindergarten students.

Self-perceived yearly food security status of the households was collected. The household heads rated their households using a four point scale considering total income and expenditure of the past year. The points in the scale were *always in deficit*, *sometimes in deficit*, *breakeven* and *surplus*. Proportion of households belonging to each of the first three categories was higher for *Shishu Niketans* in comparison to those of Kindergartens. An opposite scenario was observed in the case of the fourth category. Out of every 10 households of *Shishu Niketan* students four were *always* or *sometimes in deficit*; it was three households in the case of Kindergarten students. On the other hand, a third of the households of *Shishu Niketan* students and half of those of Kindergartens rated their food security status as *surplus*.

Figure 3.1 Percentage distribution of households by food security status and school type



More students of Kindergartens enjoyed electricity facilities at home in comparison to their counterparts in *Shishu Niketans*. On an average, 74% of the students of Kindergartens and 52% of those of *Shishu Niketans* had electricity facilities at home ($p < 0.001$). All students of both types of schools were Bangali in terms of ethnic identity. On the other hand, 99.3% of the students of *Shishu Niketans* and 93.5% of those of Kindergartens were Muslims. The others were Hindus or Christians.

3.3 EDUCATION AND LITERACY OF POPULATION

Percentage distribution of population aged six years and above by years of schooling, school type and gender is provided in Table 3.2. In general, household members of Kindergarten students were more educated than those of *Shishu Niketans*. Among the

household members of *Shishu Niketan* students, 23.3% never enrolled in schools, 36.7% enrolled but did not complete primary education, 31.6% completed primary education but kept secondary education incomplete and 8.3% completed secondary education or more. These figures were respectively 16.4, 32.7, 31.4 and 19.5% among the members of the households of Kindergarten students. More males than females had 10 or more years of schooling in both the groups (10.5% vs. 6.1% for *Shishu Niketan* households and 23.4% vs. 15.8% for Kindergarten households).

Table 3.2 Percentage distribution of population (6y+) by years of schooling and gender

Years of schooling	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>			Kindergarten		
	Males	Females	Both	Males	Females	Both
Nil	24.5	22.1	23.3	15.6	17.1	16.4
1–4 years	40.5	33.0	36.7	38.5	27.0	32.7
5–9 years	24.5	38.8	31.6	22.5	40.1	31.4
10 years+	10.5	6.1	8.3	23.4	15.8	19.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3.3 provides more information on education of household population. Little more than three-quarter of the household members (aged six years or more) of *Shishu Niketan* students ever enrolled in school which was 83.6% among those of Kindergartens. Kindergarten students' households were ahead of those of *Shishu Niketan* students in terms of completing primary and secondary education. For instance, among the population aged 11 years or more, 54.3% of those of *Shishu Niketans* and 70.3% of those of Kindergartens completed primary education. Among the population aged 17 years or more, these figures were respectively 13.1 and 30.2%. Males were ahead of females in ever enrolment and completing secondary education; however, an opposite scenario was observed in the completion of primary education. All these information clearly show that Kindergarten students came from more educated households in comparison to those of *Shishu Niketans*.

Table 3.3 Percentage of population by various educational indicators and gender

Indicators	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>			Kindergarten		
	Males	Females	Both	Males	Females	Both
Ever enrolled (6y+)	75.5	77.9	76.7	84.4	82.9	83.6
Primary completers (11y+)	48.4	60.0	54.3	68.5	71.6	70.3
Secondary completers (17y+)	17.8	8.6	13.1	38.8	22.8	30.2
Literacy rate (7y+)	32.2	35.9	34.0	42.5	54.1	48.4
Adult literacy rate (15y+)	42.2	42.6	42.4	62.4	64.5	63.5

Literacy rates were also found to be higher among the household members of Kindergarten students than those of *Shishu Niketan* students (Table 3.3). Thirty-four per cent of the household members of *Shishu Niketan* students, aged seven years and above, were literate which was 48.4% among those of Kindergarten students ($p < 0.001$). Adult literacy rate was 42.4% in *Shishu Niketan* students' households and 63.5% in Kindergarten students' households ($p < 0.001$). If at least one person of a household was found literate the household was called as 'literate household'. Three-quarter of the households of *Shishu Niketan* students and 89.8% of those of Kindergartens were literate households ($p < 0.001$).

Enrolment: Net enrolment rates of children aged 6–10 years and 11–15 years were calculated for both types of households. Ninety-eight per cent of children aged 6–10 years of *Shishu Niketan* students' households were currently enrolled in school which was 99% among those in Kindergartens. These figures were respectively 89.9 and 100% among those aged 11–15 years.

3.4 STUDENTS' BACKGROUND

Age and gender distribution: Age of students varied from 6–12 years in both types of schools (Table 3.4). A greater portion of students of BRAC *Shishu Niketans* (41.7%) was of age nine years it was eight years in the case of Kindergartens (42.6%). The majority of students of *Shishu Niketans* was 7–10 years but it was 7–9 years for Kindergartens. *Shishu Niketans* were ahead of Kindergartens in terms of mean age of students (8.7 vs. 8.1 years; $p < 0.001$). Proportion of girls was 48.6% in *Shishu Niketans* and 38% in Kindergartens ($p < 0.001$).

Parental education of students: Over a fifth of the mothers and about two-fifth of the fathers of *Shishu Niketan* students had no schooling (Table 3.5). These figures were 9.3% and 18.5% respectively for the students of Kindergartens. On the other hand, 14.7% of the fathers and 7% of the mothers of *Shishu Niketan* students completed secondary education or more which was 39.8% and 21.3% respectively for Kindergarten students.

Table 3.4 Age distribution of students by school type

Age (in years)	School type	
	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten
6y	2.8	3.7
7y	11.1	23.1
8y	25.0	42.6
9y	41.7	21.3
10y	11.1	6.5
11y	7.6	0.9
12y	0.7	1.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 3.5 Percentage distribution of students by years of schooling completed by parents and school type

Years of schooling	Fathers education		Mothers education	
	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten
Nil	39.2	18.5	20.4	9.3
1–4 years	19.6	10.2	13.4	11.1
5–9 years	26.6	31.5	59.2	58.3
10years+	14.7	39.8	7.0	21.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Proportion of first generation learners was 2% in Kindergartens and 15.6% in *Shishu Niketans*. None of the parents of these students had never been to school. Parents of *Shishu Niketan* students were more educated than those of Kindergartens.

Pre-primary experience: A good portion of students of both *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens received pre-primary education. They were respectively 48.9 and 83.3% of all students ($p < 0.001$). Proportion of boys and girls of *Shishu Niketans* with pre-primary experience was mostly equal. On the other hand, 80.6% of boys and 87.8% of girls of Kindergartens had such experience.

Chapter 4

QUALITY OF EDUCATION: INPUT AND PROCESS

Some of the issues related to inputs have already been presented in previous chapter. This chapter provides the rest. These are mostly related to educational institutions. Physical facilities, curriculum, textbooks and teaching-learning process are the major issues discussed in this chapter. Private expenditure for education was also discussed here. Likely to the earlier chapter differentiations between *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens were explored.

4.1 SCHOOLS AND THE TEACHERS

The schools: All BRAC *Shishu Niketans* were established in 2013 but the Kindergartens were established between 2005 and 2011. Schools start time varied from 8.00–10.30am. Whenever it started, the *Shishu Niketans* continued for four hours daily. Otherwise, there was no homogeneity in the duration of contact hours between *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens. Kindergartens contact hours ranged from 2–5 hours. In grade II, four Kindergartens had one section each and one had two sections. Each *Shishu Niketan* had one section.

Number of students in grade II varied from one school to another, especially in the Kindergartens. There were 30 students in each of the four *Shishu Niketans* and 27 in another. Otherwise, it varied from 15 to 32 in the Kindergartens. On average, the *Shishu Niketans* had 29 students and the Kindergartens had 21. Half of *Shishu Niketan* students and 37.3% of Kindergartens were girls. No child with special needs was found in the Kindergartens but it was present in four *Shishu Niketans*. Number of such children varied from 1–4 in these schools.

On an average, 27 students could sit with ease in *Shishu Niketans*. Out of 29 registered students in grade II, 28 attended in classes. This indicates some shortage of space in the classrooms. On the other hand, in Kindergartens, with a capacity of 24 students in the classrooms 21 registered and 17 attended. Average attendance rate was 96.5% in *Shishu Niketans* against 81% in Kindergartens. Two different but opposite scenarios were observed in two Kindergartens. In one of them, the classroom could accommodate 36 students with ease but only 15 registered. In other Kindergarten, 28 students registered against an accommodation of 16 students.

Sitting arrangement also varied by school type. Plastic chairs and tables were arranged for the students of *Shishu Niketans* but benches for those of Kindergartens. Students of four *Shishu Niketans* sat in small groups and in rest, they sat in rows. However, an opposite scenario was observed in Kindergartens. Boys and girls sat together in the *Shishu Niketans*; they sat together in some Kindergartens and separately in others.

The teachers: *Shishu Niketans* had one teacher each and all of them were females. On the other hand, a total of 30 teachers taught in grade II of five Kindergartens; ranging from 4–8. On an average, there were six teachers in each. A third of them were females.

Of the *Shishu Niketan* teachers, one completed secondary education, three higher secondary and the other had bachelor's degree. Three of the Kindergarten teachers completed secondary education and 17 completed higher secondary education (more than half). Seven teachers of Kindergartens had bachelor's degree and three were educated in madrasas. Majority of the teachers studied humanities at secondary and higher secondary levels.

Shishu Niketan teachers were more experienced than those of Kindergartens because all of them taught in BRAC's non-formal primary schools prior to joining *Shishu Niketans*. On an average, each *Shishu Niketan* teacher had 13 years of experience and Kindergarten teachers had 4 years and 4 months of experience. *Shishu Niketan* teachers received basic teachers' training from BRAC and also participated in monthly refreshers' training. On the other hand, majority of Kindergarten teachers had no training and a few received a variety of courses. Some of the Kindergarten teachers were former teachers of BRAC non-formal primary schools.

4.2 PHYSICAL FACILITIES

School location: It was expected that schools would be situated in calm, quiet and safe places, so that teaching-learning activities could be carried out in an uninterrupted and comfortable environment. In order to meet the above demands, all five *Shishu Niketans* were situated inside villages far from local markets or busy roads. They were situated in the rented houses of inhabitants of villages. Crop fields were found around schools and neighbouring houses were close to schools. Contrary to this, most of the Kindergartens were located near local markets and adjacent to busy roads. Four of them were situated in their own land and only one was situated in the compound of a Union Parishad. An old abandoned building was dedicated for this purpose by the local government. Kindergartens were not only located in crowded places; there was also a high possibility of being interrupted by activities of the other classes. All Kindergartens had students from grade I to V and their classes were held at the same time in the same building.

Infrastructure: Most of the schools had semi-*pacca* building. Only one *Shishu Niketan* was fully made of tin sheets. Most Kindergartens had *pacca* floors but *kancha* floors were common in *Shishu Niketans*.

In general, classrooms of *Shishu Niketans* were more spacious than those of Kindergartens. *Shishu Niketan* classrooms were 25-35 feet in length and 10-13 feet in width; on the other hand, Kindergartens were 14-22 feet in length and 10-14 feet in width. Sufficient number of windows and doors were found in most of the schools, but inadequate light and ventilation were noticed in some *Shishu Niketans* due to small size of windows and their wrong placement or large trees around schools. For instance, five tiny windows were seen in a *Shishu Niketan* but none of them were on the south side. Large trees were found surrounding other *Shishu Niketans*; as a result, the classrooms were cool even in summer but had inadequate lighting facilities. In cloudy days, the classrooms became so dark that candle lights were needed. Most of the Kindergartens had electricity facilities but only two *Shishu Niketans* had this facility. Parents of these two *Shishu Niketans* were satisfied but others complained that the organizers promised to provide them with electric fans and lights at the time of school establishment. They demanded electrical fans because classrooms become uncomfortable during summer.

One of the Kindergartens was found with safety threats. It was established in an abandoned building of a local Union Parishad. Of the two rooms in the building, one was

used as an office and the larger one was used as a classroom. For accommodating the students of various grades, the room was partitioned into four with hardboards. Construction of partition was very poor and this poses a risk for students. No other school had such safety threats.

Furnishing and sitting arrangements: Different types of furnishing and sitting arrangements were found in these two types of schools. *Shishu Niketans* had plastic made tables and chairs; five tables for students and one for the teacher. There were thirty chairs for students and one for the teacher. This means that six students sat around a table. In each classroom, there was a trunk and a rack for keeping learning materials and books. A game corner was found in some schools with some handmade play materials. Classrooms were well decorated with wallpapers, paper made flowers, posters, charts and students' own writing and art works. On the other hand, all five Kindergartens had benches for students as well as chairs and tables for teachers. One Kindergarten had inadequate number of benches.

Gender wise differentiation in sitting was found in Kindergartens; girls and boys sat in separate rows. Otherwise, no such differentiation was found in any of the *Shishu Niketans*; girls and boys sat together around each table.

Drinking water and toilet facilities: No tube-well was found in four *Shishu Niketans*. One shared a tube-well with the landlord but the water of that tube-well smelled bad. Most of the students used to go to neighbours' houses to drink water. All *Shishu Niketans* had shared toilet facilities with landlords but their conditions were very poor. Toilets were not usable in most cases. Thus, the students were seen to use open spaces for toilets. However, girls and boys used different places for this purpose.

On the other hand, all the Kindergartens had their own toilet and drinking water facilities. Only one of them had a separate toilet facility for boys and girls. In most cases, the facility was insufficient. More toilets were required considering the number of students. Queues in front of toilets were a common scenario there. Students were not seen to use open spaces.

Playground: Small or large playgrounds were found in each of the Kindergartens along with well protected boundary walls. Students were found playing there during recess period. On the other hand, small yards in front of *Shishu Niketans* were found, most of which were shared with landlords. In some cases, the yard was so tiny that hardly any activities could be carried out over there. However, morning assembly took place where yards were wider.

4.3 CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOK

Both types of school mainly used textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Text book Board (NCTB); however, some additional books of varying numbers were also used in Kindergartens. Grade-wise competencies prescribed in national curriculum were covered through the NCTB textbooks. However, the teachers or head teachers/POs of both types of schools had no clear idea about the curriculum or the competencies. Nor did they know about achieving these competencies through these textbooks.

Shishu Niketans used three books published by NCTB (for English, Bangla and mathematics), a book for natural science and some story books published by BRAC. On the other hand, the number of books used in Kindergartens ranged from 6-11. In addition

to NCTB published textbooks, they used many other books published by various private publishers. Some of these books included English and Bangla grammar, general knowledge, Arabic, drawing and geometry. Head teachers, local Kindergarten school committee or the heads along with the school management committee selected the additional books. Guidebooks were used in Kindergartens which contained the answers to the questions given in the textbooks.

It was known that use of additional books was very important for these fee-paying schools. Kindergartens often prescribed more books in response to parental demand. Parental understanding was that reading more books from the very beginning would benefit their children by advancing their learning. One major complaints of the parents of *Shishu Niketan* students was that unlike Kindergartens, not many books were used in *Shishu Niketans*. Some parents, in FGDs, admitted that they sent their children to such schools instead of public schools because of the introduction of many books.

In FGDs, parents said that 'BRAC runs private schools like Kindergartens, takes tuition and other fees like them but wants to teach using only government books! What is our benefit then?' One of the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* informed that she took a measure in response to parental demand. She said, 'I added a general knowledge book without taking any consent from our head office because the parents wanted to do so.' Otherwise, the parents of Kindergarten students were satisfied with the number of books used in schools. One of them said, 'My daughter's Kindergarten offers lessons from lots of books. This helps her to learn many issues that I do not even know! I think this will strengthen her base.'

A syllabus was provided to Kindergarten students at the beginning of each academic year. In general, there was a provision for three examinations in a year; so the syllabus was divided into three parts. The number of lessons that would be covered before each examination was described in the syllabus. On the other hand, no such provision for formal examination or syllabus was present in *Shishu Niketans*. In the monthly refreshers' training, the *Shishu Niketan* teachers got instruction from programme organizers about the lessons or topics to be taught in the following month.

Teaching learning materials: No use of learning aids was observed in any of the school types. Among learning materials, NCTB published books were free. Kindergarten parents bore the cost of all other learning materials like additional books, note books, pencils and other stationery. In *Shishu Niketan*, BRAC provided story books, slates and chalks. However, parents had to buy notebooks and other stationery. Kindergarten students had adequate learning materials but some of the students of *Shishu Niketans* did not have adequate notebooks.

4.4 TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

Contact hours: Officially, *Shishu Niketans* were supposed to operate for four hours a day and six days a week. In practice, contact time was more than this because teachers spent additional time there. It was observed that in most of the cases, schools started timely but ended 30 to 60 minutes late. Teachers came to school on time. Class routine was flexible; teachers used time for the subjects as per students' needs. In most of the cases, English classes took more time than other subjects. One of the teacher said, 'English is a foreign language and it is relatively hard for students. So, I spend more time behind English.' Another teacher said that Bangla and mathematics also required more time if a new lesson was started. Most of the teachers felt that four hours were not sufficient enough to attend every student in each class. Different techniques were

applied by the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* to attend every student while dealing with previous lessons. This included checking previous homework or class work and asking students to read sentences from a passage that was already taught. A teacher said, 'As I cannot reach every student in every period, I try to reach the weaker students first and then I go to the better students.' The other teacher said, 'In order to manage time, I go to some of my students with writing and to others with reading. It is not a big deal because I know my students, especially who is weak in what.'

On the other hand, Kindergartens varied in terms of contact hours. Three of them operated for three hours a day, one for two hours a day and the rest for four hours and 45 minutes a day. All of them were opened for six days a week. A fixed class routine was seen to be followed; starting and finishing time were fixed and they were similar in each day. Teachers were seen to come to classes five to ten minutes late. Teachers attended every student when class size was small but in most cases teachers did not check every students' work. Teachers in most cases were in a hurry because of short contact hours. They were not flexible enough to extend time.

Students' attendance: Students' attendance was very important in both types of school. Both discouraged absence. On an average, two students were found absent in each day of our observation. Sickness or visiting relatives were the main reasons for absence. We checked students' register and found that the majority students were regularly present. *Shishu Niketan* teachers were found to keep students and their parents aware about the importance of regular school attendance. They used monthly parents' meeting for this and also provided home visits, if required.

On the other hand, Kindergartens had specific strategies to reduce absence. For instance, in one Kindergarten, the class teacher reported to the school office about absentees. The head teacher called up the parents of those students who were absent for two consecutive days over telephone. However, an unusual scenario was also noticed; during a heavy rainy day, half of the students were absent in a Kindergarten and the teachers only took one period. Some co-curricular activities were done and the school ended earlier on that day. The head teacher said if they took the class seriously, most of the students would miss some lessons.

Classroom teaching: Most of the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* had pleasant voices and they used soft words while talking with students. The teacher and the students greeted each other at the beginning of classroom activities. Teachers called students by their names and made eye contact with them. Teaching method was mostly similar in each day. It started by the assessment of students through the review of previous day's lesson; oral or written tasks or both were given. New lesson was started afterwards. Teachers read new lessons carefully and students listened to them. Students had to learn to read a specific topic. Teachers sometimes attempted to make students understand the content. Upon completing reading, teachers asked students to read from text individually or in groups. Teachers then saw whether students did their tasks in the right manner. At this stage they were seen helping slow learners with their difficulties. Students were also allowed to ask questions. While reciting a rhyme a student was stuck; the teacher gave him time and provided little help. As a result, the student could do it nicely. The teacher praised the student by saying, 'very good, you can do it!' At the end of the period, the teacher asked the students to practice the lessons at home as homework.

Teachers also tried to ensure every student's participation in classroom activities. While reading a story from a Bangla book, the teacher asked every student to read few

sentences one by one, thus the story was read for three times collectively by all students. In another school, the teacher wrote some words and their meanings on the board; then she asked every student to come to the board one by one and read them.

Teachers were found to encourage students by helping them in reading and writing. They also praised them whenever they did things correctly. In a *Shishu Niketan*, when students provided correct answers to questions asked by teacher, she admired it by asking the students to clap. In another *Shishu Niketan*, teacher gave some two digits numbers (such as 23, 27, 29, etc.) to students and asked them to write them in words. A student did all tasks very quickly and showed those to the teacher. The teacher found them to be correct and praised the student by saying 'you did very well, my sweetheart'. Teacher-students relationships in *Shishu Niketans* were quite friendly. Students asked for teachers help as per their needs. They also shared their feelings with the teachers.

On the other hand, most Kindergarten teachers had loud and unpleasant voices. Students showed respect to teachers when they entered classrooms but most of the teachers did not respond properly.

A stereotypical process was followed. Checking of homework, asking few questions on previous day's lesson, discussing new lesson, offering some class work and checking some of them randomly as well as providing new homework were common to each class in each Kindergarten. Students seemed to be used to rote learning. Teachers had no tendency to encourage every student's participation. A few students were asked questions to understand whether everybody had learned. No extra time was spent for slow learners. For instance, in a classroom a teacher was asking meanings of some selected Bangla words. If any student failed to provide any answer or had a wrong answer, the teacher passed the question to the next student without saying anything to the previous one.

Praising or using inspiring words to encourage students were also absent in Kindergartens. Relationship between teacher and students was cold. Interaction between teachers and students was limited. Students were not seen to ask questions to teachers or to share their feelings. Rather, complaining against peers was a common scenario.

Kindergartens were, in general, less interactive than *Shishu Niketans*. Few Kindergarten students were found talking to their teachers and the teachers did not take any attempt to make classroom interactive. In a Kindergarten, a teacher wrote a Bangla word *Haaten* on blackboard. One of the students said, 'Sir, please put a *Chandrabinu* on *Haa*. In one class, the teacher forgot to check class work and then one student reminded her about the task. When a teacher forgot to give his signature a student said, 'Sir you forgot to sign.' In some cases, teachers were found to be friendly and affectionate to their students in one Kindergarten.

Feedback mechanism: Provision of feedback to students was common in *Shishu Niketans*; both in groups and one-to-one. After checking homework or class work, the teacher provided prompt feedback to those who needed it. If a good number of students did their work wrongly and the mistake was of a similar kind, feedback was provided collectively to the students. Otherwise, a one-to-one feedback mechanism was chosen. In these cases, the teachers discussed issues and finally provided the correct answers. The other way of doing the same could be explained through an example from a school. In a mathematics class, the teacher found that some of the students made a mistake in their homework. She asked them to stand up and called them one by one to do math on

the blackboard. She was explaining the process of doing maths, whenever required. In another mathematics class, three students were facing problems with multiplication. Teachers called them to the blackboard and showed them how to do it. She explained it by drawing flowers and using sticks.

In contrast, there was little or no practice of giving feedback to students' work in most Kindergartens. Teachers gave feedback only where there were fewer students. Teachers, in general, checked students' homework and put a correct sign if the work was correct or a cross sign if the work was wrong. If students failed to provide correct answers to the questions asked to them by teachers, they asked the students to keep standing and to try to think of the answer. Students were allowed to take seat only if they could provide the correct answers. In a Kindergarten, a teacher could not check homework due to shortage of time; he left that work behind without checking. The other teacher gave some class work but did not check them or asked the students if they had understood those.

Co-curricular activities: Co-curricular activities were an entangled part of curricular activities in *Shishu Niketans*. No separate time was allocated for co-curricular activities but these were done each day for several times at the middle of curricular activities and also at the end of school hours. According to a teacher, to break monotony of classroom activities, co-curricular activities were very fruitful. She added, 'generally, when I feel that the students are getting bored, I do some co-curricular activities to reenergize them. They also love this.' Sometimes teachers were found checking homework or class work while students were busy in dancing, singing or acting. The teachers informed that 20-25 minutes were spent each day for co-curricular activities. This was also confirmed through classroom observations.

Teachers learned some songs, dance and drama in training. In addition, there is also a guide for such activities called *Dipshikha*. It was observed that students learnt songs and dances from Indian Bangla films and sometimes demonstrated them to the class. Most of these were gender insensitive and unsuitable for children. It was also observed that some students actively participated in these and others enjoyed just through watching. Girls' participation was higher than boys. Parents showed their satisfaction with co-curricular activities in *Shishu Niketans*. According to them, 'Students found school more interesting because of co-curricular activities.'

Other than art classes once a week, the Kindergartens had no other activities which could be called as co-curricular activity. When the issue was raised to head teachers it was found that they did not think about introducing any other co-curricular activity in their schools. Some of them stated that 'parents did not place demand for any co-curricular activities'. Generally, the teachers drew some objects on the blackboard (such as flowers, leaves, fruits, etc.) and asked students to draw and colour them in their notebooks.

Corporal punishment: Corporal punishment of any kind was not seen in any of the *Shishu Niketans*. These schools maintained discipline in a reasonable way. Teachers sometimes scolded students if they lost their control because of students' naughty behaviour. To such a student a teacher once said, 'Who did this? Be careful! I'll punish you.' However, she did not go beyond this. At least two teachers were found in *Shishu Niketans* who never lost their control nor showed anger to students nor used any harsh words in the name of maintaining discipline.

The scenario in Kindergartens was not like as that in *Shishu Niketans*. Teachers often used corporal punishment in order to discipline students. Teachers struck students with their hands, canes or wooden scales if they lost their attention during lessons. Teachers also used physical punishment when students gave wrong answers or could not give any answer. For instance, in a kindergarten, two students were talking loudly when a teacher was checking home work. The teacher then moved towards the students and hit them with a wooden scale. Even in an art class, a teacher beat a student with a cane because the student could not draw a leaf. While beating the student, the teacher said, 'Is this a leaf? Do you not have eyes?' Actually, the student was not able to copy the picture of the leaf from the blackboard.

Other kinds of punishment in Kindergartens involved making students stand on the bench as they held their ears or asking them to memorize lessons in standing position. Most of the teachers carried a cane or a wooden scale in classrooms. Shouting, scolding and threats were the various ways in which classrooms were controlled. When interviewed, a teacher said, 'The students will not learn anything if we do not beat them.' He was proud of the act of punishing students. He also added, 'I am the teacher who beat them.' However, head teachers claimed that they discouraged any kind of punishment on students. One of the head teachers said, "I always request my teachers to not punish students physically; however, some of my teachers are not patient.' Only one Kindergarten was different; there the teachers tried to maintain discipline in a reasonable way.

4.5 PRIVATE EXPENDITURE FOR SCHOOLING

Private expenditure for schooling was collected for a period of first five months, January to May 2014. Nine different purposes for private expenditure were identified. These included admission fees, monthly tuition fees, books, stationery, school bags, school uniforms, private tuition, examination fees and transportation costs. There was no student in any of the school types who had no private expenditure for schooling during the reference period (Table 4.1). All students of both types of schools had to pay monthly tuition fees and buy their own stationery. All students of Kindergartens also had to buy textbooks. Mostly all students of the same institutions had to pay for admission and examination fees. On the other hand, a small portion of *Shishu Niketan* students had to pay admission fees and buy textbooks; however, over three-fifth of them had to pay examination fees. About two-third of Kindergarten students spent money for buying

Table 4.1 Percentage of students with private expenditure for schooling from January–May 2014 by heads of expenditure and school type

Heads of expenditure	School type		Level of significance
	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten	
Admission fees	11.8	98.1	p<0.001
Monthly tuition fees	100.0	100.0	na
Buying books	2.1	100.0	p<0.001
Stationeries	100.0	100.0	na
School bag	34.0	64.8	p<0.001
School uniform	19.4	64.8	p<0.001
Private tuition	4.2	65.7	p<0.001
Examination fees	61.1	99.1	p<0.001
Transportation	0.7	21.3	p<0.001
Any	100.0	100.0	na

Na = Not applicable

school bags and school uniforms and for private tuition. On the other hand, 34% of *Shishu Niketan* students bought school bags, 19.4% bought school uniforms and 4.2% received private tuition. Over a fifth of Kindergarten students paid for their own transportation; however, it was less than 1% for *Shishu Niketan* students.

Table 4.2 provides mean expenditure for schooling against various heads of expenditure as well as aggregated expenditure by school type. Total expenditure for schooling was Tk. 1,278 for the students of *Shishu Niketans* and Tk. 3,622 for those of Kindergartens (Table 4.2). The latter was about three times of the former. Monthly tuition fee was the biggest expenditure heads for students of both types of schools. Other than monthly tuition fees, *Shishu Niketan* students spent much less than their Kindergarten counterparts in all other heads of expenditure. Monthly tuition fees were almost equal in both types of schools. *Shishu Niketan* students spent 58.6% of total expenditure for monthly tuition fees. However, 20.7% of the students did so in Kindergartens. The second highest head of expenditure for *Shishu Niketan* students was 'purchase of stationery'. On an average, they spent Tk. 291 for this purpose which was about half of the cost borne by Kindergarten students. Average expenditure for *Shishu Niketan* students for other heads was much lower than that of Kindergarten students.

Table 4.2 Mean private expenditure (in Taka) for schooling from January–May 2014 by heads of expenditure and school type

Heads of expenditure	School type		Level of significance
	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten	
Admission fees	48	294	p<0.001
Monthly tuition fees	749	748	ns
Buying books	3	525	p<0.001
Stationeries	291	592	p<0.001
School bag	77	232	p<0.001
School uniform	78	395	p<0.001
Private tuition	19	588	p<0.001
Examination fees	9	89	p<0.001
Transportation	5	159	p<0.001
Any	1,278	3,622	p<0.001

Chapter 5

SCHOOL CHOICE AND QUALITY: PARENTAL PERCEPTION

Parental perception of quality of schools, factors influencing school choice, parents' expectations from schools and satisfaction about quality of education are presented in this chapter. Findings of this chapter came from both Focus Group Discussions and household survey.

5.1 FACTORS INFLUENCING SCHOOL CHOICE

Factors that influenced the parents' choice of school were explored through focus group discussions. Some similarities and differences were found between parents of two types of educational institutions. A single reason was rarely found. In most cases, multiple reasons influenced parents in taking decision.

Perceived quality of education was high: Parents of students of *Shishu Niketans* and those of Kindergartens believed that quality of education was high in the respective schools. However, both groups of parents compared their schools with neighbouring government primary schools. No comparison was made between *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens. A mother of a student of *Shishu Niketans* noted the pass rate in primary school certificate examination and said, 'Only a half of the students from government primary schools passed the PSC examination but all 30 students of BRAC primary school passed with grade A.' It should be noted that there is no relationship of the first part of the statement with reality. Pass rate of government school students is much higher than this. Noting the overall environment of government schools and Kindergartens, Kindergarten parents concluded that 'government schools do not offer expected level of education'. They pointed out that 'government schools do not teach students; they are overcrowded, have chaotic environment, teachers are not committed to their duties and students move around randomly. Teachers themselves were not concerned about students' undisciplined behaviour or moving around.'

Some parents of both types of schools disclosed that they had withdrawn their children from government primary schools and admitted them to schools of their choice (*Shishu Niketans* or Kindergartens). All parents had one common reason - government schools offered poor quality of education. One of the parents of a *Shishu Niketan* said, 'My son was in a government primary school. He got stipend but was not learning anything. That is why I took him out of that school.' A similar comment was made by the parent of a Kindergarten student. He said, 'My son did not learn anything in his first year of government primary school. He learned many things in his new school. That is why I admitted my son here. I did not think about money.'

Some parents informed that their children were in a higher grade in government primary schools. To provide better education they admitted them to the first grade of fee-paying schools. So, a major factor that influenced parents to admit their children to fee-paying schools was the substandard quality of education in government primary schools.

Good reputation of BRAC primary school and teachers: Good reputation of BRAC education programme was found to be another factor. Parents who participated in FGDs pointed out that BRAC Primary School was operational in their villages. So, they already knew about the quality of BRAC schools. According to them, *Shishu Niketans* were established by BRAC and hence would also provide good quality education. Some of the FGD participants were previous students of BRAC Primary Schools. While discussing their lives in BRAC schools they said, 'We studied in BRAC schools; we know how BRAC school teachers teach and what kind of education they offer. Now we have become mothers and want our children to get high quality education like us.' One of them pointed out the better results obtained by BRAC school students in PSC examination. A mother informed the group by stating that 'My brother-in-law studied in a BRAC School at his young age, he is now a university student.'

Instead of school itself, some parents highlighted the quality of BRAC school teachers. Most of the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* previously taught in BRAC Primary Schools. They were highly experienced and popular in their community. Parents were convinced about their teaching capacity. One of the mothers said, 'I do not know any staff members of BRAC, but I know our teacher; she is from our village. We know very well about how she teaches, how committed she is to her job and how fond of she is of her students. I was not convinced by the words of BRAC staff members but I was convinced by the performance of the teacher.' Another mother said, 'When the PO informed us about *Shishu Niketans* and requested me to admit my daughter to one that is near to my home, I inquired about teacher and quality of her teaching before taking a decision.'

Kindergarten head teachers played a great role: Heads of the Kindergartens played a great role in admitting students. They had meeting with community members before starting a school. They also requested parents to send their children to their Kindergartens by visiting their homes. One of the parents said, 'The head teacher visited every students' house in the community and requested us to admit our children to his school.' 'Moreover, he often visits students' homes to inquire about their studies at home', added another mother. Some parents were influenced by other parents who had already admitted their children to Kindergartens.

Co-curricular activities attracted parents: Some of the parents mention in FGDs that in *Shishu Niketans*, the students not only learnt curricular activities but also co-curricular activities. According to them, this helped them to develop their mental faculties. Some of these parents already knew this from BPSs and some others from *Shishu Niketans*. They said that BRAC schools offer joyful education, which other schools do not. Such activities make students more interested about school. One mother commented, 'BRAC schools teach students dancing, singing and rhymes. These activities inspire students' learning; they become more attentive about learning.' However, parents of Kindergartens did not mention such factors.

School is located near home: In choosing schools for their children, parents also considered the distance from home to school. They preferred schools which were closer to home. Parents of Kindergartens said that urban schools offer better education than those in rural areas. However, sending children to those schools was not only problematic due to safety reasons but also costly. Pointing out to one of the Kindergartens under study, they said, 'This is the only Kindergarten in our village. Urban schools may be better for good quality education but getting there will require a big sum of money. Here, we only pay monthly fees.' During household survey, 91.7% of parents

of *Shishu Niketans* and 83.3% of those of Kindergartens mentioned that 'shorter distance from home to school' was one of the major considerations for choosing school.

5.2 PARENTAL PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL QUALITY

In FGDs, parents of both types of schools highlighted the quality of education while discussing school choice. They compared *Shishu Niketans* or Kindergartens with local government primary schools. At a certain point, the discussion moved to their perception of the quality of school. Majority stressed on issues related to teaching and learning. Teachers' quality and infrastructure of schools were also discussed.

While stressing on the teaching-learning process, the parents of *Shishu Niketan* students said that 'teachers of these schools are careful about students' needs'. Teachers also tried their best to take care of each student. As a result, students learnt the most in schools. They did not need to study much at home; they only did homework and reviewed the lessons that they had already learned in school. No new tasks were given for home.

Regarding private tutors, the parents strongly stated that their children did not need a private tutor because teachers taught them very well in school. One mother said, 'If you send your children to other schools then you will have to send them to private tutors as well. However, here we do not need private tutors because the teachers teach them very well in classrooms.' Another mother who took out her daughter from a government primary school and admitted her to a *Shishu Niketan* shared her experience:

Government schools may be fee-free but they involve many other types of costs. My elder daughter studies in a government primary school. Aside from study, I need to send her to private tutors because teachers in government primary schools do not teach in classrooms. So, I have decided to send my younger daughter to BRAC School. I did it. Here I spend half the amount that I spend behind my elder daughter.

In household survey, only 4.2% of parents of *Shishu Niketan* students reported that they sent their children for private tutoring (Table 4.1).

On the other hand, parents of Kindergarten students emphasised how Kindergartens provide children with a strong educational foundation. One of the parents said, 'This Kindergarten will provide my child with a strong base and so he will get good grades in the future.' Comparing Kindergartens with government schools another parent said, 'A grade II student of a government school will fail to a first grader in Kindergartens.'

A good number of parents of Kindergartens informed that private tutors were required for their children. Most of them saw it as a supplement to school education and hence thought that it was beneficial for students. Some of the parents did not have time to help their children at home and some did not do it because of their lower educational background. Lack of proper guidance in school was also mentioned by some parents. One of them commented, 'It is not possible to learn everything within school hours. Students need to practice at home. So, they need private tutors.' Some of the parents disclosed that they send their children to school teachers for private tuition; however, others preferred college students or teachers of other schools. Note that 65% of parents of Kindergarten students availed private tuition during the first five months of grade II academic calendar (Table 4.1).

Teachers' approach to students, teaching quality and the ways in which students were tended to in schools were also mentioned by parents of *Shishu Niketan* students. Most of the mothers who participated in FGDs said that they often visited schools and stayed in the classrooms for sometimes to see how teacher conducted class and how their children responded to teacher. Following is a statement of a parent about a *Shishu Niketan* teacher:

She is an excellent teacher. I do not know how much she has studied though. She may not be much educated but I found her to be a very skilled teacher. Later, I came to know that she has had a long experience with BRAC schools. I can assure you that even a graduate will not have the skill as her. She is very conscious about punctuality. She regularly comes before school starts and teaches one or one-and-a-half hour more. She gives extra effort to ensure that all students understand lessons. Students also like her a lot.

On the other hand, most of the parents of Kindergartens who participated in FGDs said that they only went to school to pick up and drop off their children. They do not know much about teachers, their teaching approaches or skills. Only a third of Kindergarten parents claimed that they discussed their children's education with teachers whereas 71.5% of parents did so in *Shishu Niketans*. They, however, pointed out that the Kindergartens took complaints about teachers if parents were not satisfied with their performance. One of the fathers informed that 'my child was having trouble with mathematics. I complained to the head teacher saying that the respective teacher does not give much effort in the classroom. The head teacher changed the teacher.'

Parents of *Shishu Niketan* students also stated that facilities for drinking water, toilets and electricity were components of school quality. They stated that these facilities were not adequately provided in *Shishu Niketans*. However, they strongly mentioned that these were connected to quality of education. A mother said, 'Children go to neighbours' houses to drink water. Although they keep water in classroom but it becomes warm in summer and children do not want to drink it. Sometimes they come back home to use the toilet.' Another mother said, 'When BRAC operated free schools we did not complain about these facilities but now fees are charged. Thus, we demand these basic facilities. Classroom becomes hot in summer and children suffer; electric fans should be provided immediately.' Most of the Kindergarten parents were satisfied with the infrastructure. When classroom floors were not plastered, parents demanded for it. Some parents also demanded higher boundary walls so that their children were secure in school. These parents also demanded for quality monitoring.

During household survey, parents were asked to rate 10 different but interrelated quality indicators on a three-point scale. The indicators included school location, infrastructure, toilet facilities, drinking water facilities, teaching quality, teachers' behaviour, teachers' supervision of pupils, teaching materials including books, fees and other expenditure and security in school. The points in the scale were *satisfied*, *average* and *dissatisfied*. There was also an option titled 'don't know'. Over a quarter of the parents did not know about 'toilet facilities' in schools and 17.1% had the same answer for 'drinking water facilities'. This means that a good portion of the parents were unaware about these facilities. All parents knew the school location, infrastructure and fee related issues. Below than 5% of the parents did not provide any answer to the remaining five issues.

Table 5.1 presents the percentage of parents satisfied in each of the indicators, segregated by school type. School type-wise statistically significant difference was observed in each of the indicators. Of the 10 indicators, more parents of *Shishu Niketans*

were satisfied than those of Kindergartens in seven indicators. The indicators were school location, infrastructure, teaching quality, teachers' behaviour, teachers' supervision of pupils, teaching materials including books and security in school. However, more parents of *Shishu Niketan* students were dissatisfied with toilet and drinking water facilities as well as with fees and other expenditure for schooling. Percentages of parents who were satisfied in these three areas was very low in comparison to the other indicators.

Table 5.1 Percentage of 'satisfied' parents in terms of various school-quality indicators by school type

Indicators	School type		Level of significance
	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten	
Location of school	93.1	78.7	p<0.001
School infrastructure	71.5	50.9	p<0.001
Toilet facilities	39.4	57.3	p<0.02
Drinking water facilities	42.6	68.1	p<0.001
Teaching quality	100.0	75.0	p<0.001
Teachers behaviour	97.9	91.0	p<0.02
Teachers' supervision of pupils	95.2	73.2	p<0.001
Teaching materials including books	82.2	67.3	p<0.001
Fees and other expenditure	22.2	63.0	p<0.001
Security in school	90.8	64.4	p<0.001

5.3 PARENTAL SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOL QUALITY

Parents were asked to provide suggestions for improvement of overall school quality. Each respondents could give four suggestions at most. Thus, multiple responses were counted in analysis. Overall, a quarter of parents of Kindergarten students and 15.3% of those of *Shishu Niketans* did not provide any suggestions. Demand was more among the parents of *Shishu Niketan* students than those with children in Kindergartens. For *Shishu Niketans*, the most frequent was the provision of toilet facilities and tube wells in each school. Each of these suggestions came from 46.7% of parents. These were followed by 'provision of electric fans in classrooms' and 'electrical connections in schools'. Respectively 40.2% and 33.6% of the parents suggested these. Other suggestions of parents included 'provision of stationery' (10.7%) and 'improvement of school infrastructure' (16.4%). Improvement of school infrastructure was the most frequently cited suggestion of parents of Kindergartens; 61.7% of parents made this suggestion. Over a quarter of parents of Kindergarten students suggested 'playgrounds', 18.5% suggested for 'provision of electric fans' and the same proportion suggested for 'need of teacher training', 13.6% suggested the provision of toilet facilities in school and 11.1% suggested a separate tube well in schools. Table 5.2 presents parental suggestions for improvement of school quality.

Table 5.2 Percentage of parents by suggestions for school improvement and school type

Suggestions	School type	
	<i>Shishu Niketan</i>	Kindergarten
Reduce tuition fees	25.4	4.6
Provision of electric fans	40.2	18.5
Provision of electricity	33.6	0.0
Provide toilet facility	46.7	13.6
Separate tube well in school	46.7	11.1
Introduce computers	9.0	2.5
Increase number of teachers	6.6	1.2
Arrange teachers' training	2.5	18.5
Introduce school vans	0.8	7.4
Provide stationery	10.7	2.5
Improve school infrastructure	16.4	61.7
Decorate classrooms	0.8	2.5
Introduce sports materials	4.6	7.4
Provide security guard in schools	0.0	6.2
Waiting room for guardians	0.0	6.2
Play grounds	0.0	22.2

Note: Multiple responses counted

Chapter 6

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

Operational challenges and coping strategies of the study schools are discussed in this chapter. It has two sections: the challenges faced at the time of school establishment and day-to-day operational challenges.

6.1 DURING SCHOOL ESTABLISHMENT

BRAC has been working in the field of primary education since 1985 with its non-formal primary education model. BRAC Primary Schools (BPS) were established in the community. No fees were charged and textbooks as well as stationeries were provided to students for free. *Shishu Niketans* were established in the old BPS areas. Thus, the communities already knew BRAC and the characteristics of BRAC schools. When people came to know that study in *Shishu Niketans* was not free, they could not take it easily. Many parents did not want to admit their children to these schools. Following is a statement of a programme organizer:

When we wanted to start a *Shishu Niketan* in this village, several small meetings as well as a big meeting with guardians were arranged. We told them the differences between BRAC Primary School and *Shishu Niketan*. Although they appreciated the greater facilities that were available in *Shishu Niketan*, they were not happy about the school fees. They could not understand just why they would have to pay tuition fees for *Shishu Niketans* when BRAC used to provide fee-free education. Due to BRAC's fame, a large number of parents attended big meetings but many went away when they heard about tuition fees.

At this point the POs tried to convince parents by telling them that *Shishu Niketans* were not the BRAC schools which were familiar to them. They added that these were a new kind of schools which were similar to Kindergartens. They also pointed out that the new system of schools was better than former BRAC schools. They also committed to provide certain things, which they could not provide later on. Following is a statement of another PO.

In our discussion with parents, we tried to highlight differentiated features of BPSs and *Shishu Niketans*. Our aim was to convince them about tuition fees. When it did not work, we promised to not increase tuition fees with students' promotion to higher grades. We also promised to charge session fees only once at the time of admission. We promised that BRAC would provide a major portion of stationeries like notebooks and pencils.

No other problems like development of infrastructure or land procurement were faced during school establishment. In this context, a PO said, 'In a village, if you pay the right price, you can get a house for establishing a school without any hardship.' In most of the cases, the rent of the school house had to be paid in advance and the owner of the house either built or renovated the house according to BRAC's requirement.

In contrast, Kindergartens did not face such problems during school establishment. The head teachers initially mentioned that they were worried about whether the villagers

would send their children to a school with a fee-based system as opposed to a free public school. Moreover, there was a provision of *upabrittis* (stipends) for 40% of students in public schools. Before starting school, they held general meetings with local people to get their consent. A head teacher mentioned the following:

At first, we sent letters to the influential people of this village. We invited them to a meeting and told them of our intention of establishing a new school. We sought their help. We sent letters to about 600 people and over 200 showed up in the meeting. Everybody supported us.

Kindergartens faced constraints in land procurement and in the construction of school building. When they wanted to buy land the land sellers demanded high prices because they thought that the buyers were rich. Thus, they had to buy land at a high price. A head teacher informed that they had to spend about double the money for this. Some of them took loans from friends and relatives and some used their savings. Some applied both strategies for land procurement. Some of them got help from local people for construction work. For instance, some of them paid for doors and windows by instalments. Similar arrangements were made for buying bricks and other construction materials. Even then, all the Kindergartens under study were found to have incomplete infrastructure.

6.2 DAY-TO-DAY SCHOOL OPERATION

Collecting monthly tuition fees was the major challenge: Before establishing *Shishu Niketans*, the programme organizers told the parents that Tk. 150 would be taken as monthly tuition fees and it would be same for each grade. Moreover, it was also promised that session charge would be taken only once at the time of admission. Due to poor economic condition of households, parents were unable to pay tuition fees regularly. Majority of the parents were day labourers with an average monthly household income of Taka 10,000. Tuition fees were often overdue for a good number of students. Moreover, at the beginning of the second year, the POs demanded a session charge for grade II and informed the parents that the tuition fee has been increased to Tk. 250 for grade II and Tk. 450 for grades IV and V.

The parents who were unable to pay higher tuition fees refused to pay. They described it as 'too high' and also did not pay the session charge for the second year. Kindergartens charged the same fees but faced no difficulty in collecting fees; this was because the parents of *Shishu Niketans* were relatively poor. In FGDs, some of the parents' groups said that 'We can at most pay the session fee but we will not be able to pay additional tuition fees.' During household survey, 78% of the parents of *Shishu Niketan* showed their dissatisfaction with the tuition fees (Table 5.1).

Asking students for tuition fees embarrassed them: The POs were responsible for collecting tuition fees from the parents. However, they did it along with the teachers. Parents had to pay fees to the respective PO or the teacher. Sometimes the POs visited students' homes to collect fees. They also used monthly parents' meetings for this purpose. The parents who had overdue payments were due to pay were requested to pay fees in these meetings. Even though it was totally prohibited to ask students for tuition fees, the teachers sometimes did so at times. The POs also knew this. However, since both parties were eager to collect fees, they did not think of the consequence of their actions on young children. When teacher asked a particular student to tell his/her parents to pay tuition fees in front of other students it was embarrassing for the student in question.

Tuition fees were asked from the wrong person: A common issue for discussion in each monthly parents meeting was payment of tuition fees. Discussion of fee related issues in such meetings was not always affective. In most cases, mothers were the participants of monthly parents' meetings. They had to ask for money from their husbands. A mother said, 'When we ask our husbands for tuition fees they scold us. They do not give us money. What can we do?' The POs and the teachers knew this but they said, 'We have no other alternative because we cannot get a hold of the fathers of our students.' Both of them however realized that some meetings could be done exclusively with fathers or with both the parents. At the same time, they had a fear that 'fathers might not attend meetings.'

Use of old network and wrong selection of place were barriers to attracting wealthy people: The initial plan was to establish schools near common places like bazaars or beside main roads and to admit students of economically solvent families. This could not be done because of two reasons. The first reason was a high ambition regarding the number of schools to be established and the second reason was the use of the old BEP networks. In practice, most of the schools were established in villages far from the market places or from the main roads and thus, economically solvent families were not attracted to such schools. Following is a statement of the Area Manager under study:

If I follow the programme criteria for establishing schools I could hardly open 50 schools in my area. However, my target was much higher. I targeted to establish more than 100 schools. To fulfil the target, we established schools wherever we got a place. On the other hand, we have been working with poor people for a long time and hence, our network was centred upon them. So, we also used that network for *Shishu Niketans*. Networking channels for prospective families for *Shishu Niketans* could not be done as expected.

Teachers played an important role in establishing Shishu Niketans: Most of the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* were previous teachers of BPSs. They had been teaching for many years. They also had very good connections with local communities. They convinced parents to send their children to this school. A teacher commented, 'I have been teaching in BRAC school for twenty years. Everybody in the village knows me and also I am respected to them. I helped to establish two *Shishu Niketans* in this village.' However, their role was not just limited to establishing schools; rather they collected tuition fees as well. Some of the teachers said that they had handed over their salaries to BRAC as fees of students when they could not pay. Such overdue payments had to be collected later on by collecting the fees from parents. In a school, 33 students were found to be present in the classroom even though 30 students were officially admitted. When the teacher was asked about the reason behind this, she said that some extra students were kept so that at least fees of 30 students could be collected every month.

Changed responsibility of Programme Organizers: Programme Organizers, who were supposed to monitor and supervise *Shishu Niketans* were found busy collecting tuition fees. One of the POs made the following statement:

Although my job title is the same as before, my responsibility has changed. Earlier when I visited students' homes, I used to tell parents to send their children regularly to school and to take care of their studies at home. In most cases, I do not do this nowadays. When I see any parent, I remind them about their overdue payments. I visit homes for collecting tuition fees. You see, the microfinance POs also collect money. They ask for the money that they have lent to them. But what I'm asking for? I feel so shy. Now, my job has no honour. Earlier, I used to assess quality of schools

and provide feedback but now I turned into a 'money collector'. I do not do much for quality improvement of my schools.'

When the issue was discussed with others they iterated the same and said, it was not the fault of the POs but of the system that has developed in recent years.

Parents of Shishu Niketan students think that they do not get as much as what they had expected from a fee-paying school: Parents of the students of *Shishu Niketans* believe that they pay fees like as the parents of Kindergarten students but return on their payment is lower than expected. Two major issues emerged during discussion. The first is related to facilities while the second issue is related to the use of books. According to POs, they were often criticized by parents, who stated that *Shishu Niketans* did not have buildings or school vans like Kindergartens. They also complained about the number of teachers. Parents were not happy with NCTB books along with some additional reading materials. They wanted to see the use of many books like as in Kindergartens. The POs also found this as a problem and suggested to increase number of books for the sake of parental satisfaction. However, they did not see any problems related to infrastructure or teachers' performance. The research team found that toilet and drinking water facilities were very poor in most *Shishu Niketans*.

Major challenges of Kindergartens lie with teachers' dropouts, physical punishment and irregular payment of tuition fees: Kindergarten head teachers identified that teachers' dropouts, physical punishment and irregular collection of tuition fees were major challenges for them. Most teachers in Kindergartens were college students. Their salaries were very low and irregular. So they dropped out frequently; recruitment of new teachers and grooming of them were time consuming. According to head teachers, 'this hampers quality classroom teaching.'

Similar to *Shishu Niketans* the parents of Kindergarten students were also irregular in paying tuition fees. A head teacher stated it to be the biggest challenge and gave the following statement.

Monthly expenditure in my school is about Tk. 35,000. The only source of earning this money is tuition fees from students. If the parents do not pay tuition fees on time, I can't pay teachers' salaries. I decided on a strategy. At the end of each month, I write a note to parents in students' diaries for the clearance of payment the 5th day of the month. However, only a half of parents pay fees by that day. Then, I go to classrooms and ask students with overdue payment to tell their parents to pay their tuition fees. I know it is awful to tell students about their overdue fees. But I am helpless.

Some head teachers identified that recruitment of college students as teachers caused frequent dropout of teachers. According to them, 'some students move from one place to another for educational reasons and sometimes they get married and move to husbands' houses.' In response, a head teacher adopted the strategy of recruiting married women who have completed their education and live with their husbands in the same village.

Some head teachers agreed that corporal punishment is another problem in Kindergartens and they are also concerned about this. One of them said, 'My teachers are intolerant, they punish students physically and I always request them not to punish students physically. They are young children and we should convince them to not be disobedient.'

Financial constraints on Kindergartens to improve infrastructure: The major problem was incomplete construction. In most cases, the floors were not plastered and classrooms were dusty. In some cases, there were not enough toilets in schools. The head teachers admitted that all these were serious problems and agreed that these should be in good condition in every school. Some heads raised the issue of the difficulty in improving facilities when regular salary payments to teachers is a big problem.

Kindergartens had limited provision for teachers' development: Most of the Kindergarten teachers had no training. In this situation, junior teachers took advice from senior teachers whenever they faced difficulty. No other training opportunity was available in Kindergartens and head teachers as well as other teachers acknowledged that they should have training facilities for their professional development. An exception was found in a Kindergarten. A former BRAC school teacher who had long experience in teaching was a relative of a Kindergarten head teacher. The head made this BRAC school teacher his advisor for teachers' development. The advisor conducts training for the teachers of this Kindergarten at the beginning of each year. It is done once a year.

Chapter 7

DISCUSSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter discusses the findings of this study as presented in the previous chapters. Conclusions were drawn from the findings and discussions. Finally, a set of recommendations were given for further improvement of *Shishu Niketans* and for overcoming the challenges related to the sustainability of this new initiative of BEP.

7.1 DISCUSSIONS

BRAC has been known to poor, rural mothers as fee-free primary education provider at their doorsteps. *Education Watch* studies showed that private expenditure for education was also much lower than that of others for those who studied in BRAC Primary Schools (BPS) because BRAC provided free textbooks, supplementary reading materials and stationeries to each student (Chowdhury *et al.* 2002). Quality of education was also better in BPS in comparison to government primary schools in terms of classroom teaching-learning provision and students learning achievements (Hossain *et al.* 2010, Nath and Shahjamal 2010, Nath and Chowdhury 2001, 2009, Nath 2012). However, note that BPSs were behind the government primary schools in terms of infrastructure (Nath and Chowdhury 2009). With all these characteristics, BPSs were very popular in rural communities, especially among the poor masses and to some extent among the middle-income group.

Shishu Niketans were introduced under a cost recovery policy. It has not been designed to fulfil profit motives but it is expected to be self-sustaining in due course. The vision was to continue the provision of quality primary education in those areas where non-formal primary schools were no longer needed and also to enable experienced BRAC teachers to continue their jobs. BRAC thought that if a chair-table was introduced for sitting and quality of education could be maintained, parents would cordially accept the change and be willing to pay fees for primary education.

While introducing *Shishu Niketan* to the parents of primary school aged children, BRAC programme organizers (PO) had to convince parents by comparing the features of *Shishu Niketans* with those of others and by capitalizing the quality of education provided in BPSs. Government primary schools were not a good comparison for them because of their fee-free characteristics. The only fee-paying schools they got were Kindergartens which were spreading fast throughout the country (Nath and Chowdhury 2009, DPE 2013, 2014). Thus, the reference of Kindergartens came up several times while talking to parents in order to encourage them to admit their children to *Shishu Niketans*.

Shishu Niketans were mostly established in remote locations, preferably in those areas where BPSs were located. However, initially it was thought that these will be established near common places like bazaars or near the road sides. This was not possible because the programme organizers were too ambitious in establishing schools. They established more schools than feasible. On the other hand, the Kindergartens were mostly located near local bazaars or beside main roads. Due to the shorter distance from home to school and the ease of road communication, economically better-

off families admitted their children to Kindergartens but not to *Shishu Niketans*. There were other reasons too. Historically, BRAC POs were used to dealing with poor households but not with wealthy people. The same was applicable to former teachers of BPSs. These two collectively worked in establishing *Shishu Niketans* by communicating with the parents and admitting students. As the former BPS teachers were from the communities their networks within the communities as well as their names and popularity (that they earned their BPS days) used to attract the parents. It was observed that Kindergarten students were ahead of those in *Shishu Niketans* in terms of household food security status, years of schooling completed by household members and their literacy status, parental education and electricity facility at home. All these indicate that Kindergarten students were much ahead of those of *Shishu Niketans* in terms of the ability to afford fee-paying primary education.

Ability of parents in paying costs for schooling for their children can also be understood from costs of schooling for the first five months of the year. Although there was no difference between *Shishu Niketans* and the Kindergartens in terms of monthly tuition fees, other costs for schooling was much higher for Kindergarten students than that of *Shishu Niketans*. Overall cost for a Kindergarten student was three times of that a *Shishu Niketan* student. Excluding monthly tuition fees, it was 5.4 times for Kindergartens to *Shishu Niketans*. This can also be a point for discussion with the parents of *Shishu Niketans*. It would be easier to convince them when they are already happy with the quality of education provided in *Shishu Niketans*.

Both *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens had to face irregularity in payment of monthly tuition fees; however, the level of irregularity was lower in Kindergartens than in *Shishu Niketans*. A number of reasons could be identified for this. Firstly, the parents did not like BRAC's shift from fee-free school to fee-paying school. Some of them were shocked at this because they were not used to see BRAC schools charging tuition fees. Secondly, they saw that in return for tuition fees, the only visible addition was tables and chairs for their children instead of mats. Free stationeries were taken off from them and there was no change in teachers (since former BPS teachers were appointed in *Shishu Niketans*). Instead of comparing nearby schools like as Kindergartens or government primary schools with *Shishu Niketans*, they often compared *Shishu Niketans* with BPSs. Thirdly, parents of *Shishu Niketan* students were less capable of paying fees in comparison to those in Kindergartens. Thus, the POs had to face a difficult situation during the collection of tuition fees.

The programme organizers and the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* who played a key role in establishing schools, promised the parents to provide better infrastructure than that in BPSs. However, the parents did not see much change between the two types except introduction of tables and chairs in *Shishu Niketans*. Like BPSs, the *Shishu Niketan* school-houses were rented from local landlords and construction materials were also similar for both types of schools. Moreover, there was no electricity in many cases. However, the classrooms were spacious and adequate number of tables and chairs were found in all the study schools. On the other hand, in most cases, lighting and ventilation condition was below the expectation of parents. Drinking water and toilet facilities in *Shishu Niketans* were also similar to those in BPSs. The students had to depend on the facilities of the landlords. The parents also showed their dissatisfaction about lack of adequate facilities; they wanted a better facilities in *Shishu Niketans* than those previously provided in BPSs. On the other hand, infrastructure and the above mentioned facilities were better in Kindergartens than in *Shishu Niketans*. Kindergartens had toilets and drinking water facilities. School-houses were made of bricks. Even though construction was incomplete in most cases and classrooms were small in size

as well as noisy, the majority of parents had no such complaints about Kindergartens (60% showed their satisfaction).

Parents of *Shishu Niketan* students were not satisfied with the books used. They strongly raised the issue in FGDs. They stated that 5-6 additional books are used in Kindergartens other than NCTB textbooks. *Shishu Niketans* in comparison only used NCTB textbooks along with some supplementary reading materials. However, in household survey, over 82% of parents showed their satisfaction with textbooks and other materials used in *Shishu Niketans*. There is no reason to believe that these parents had enough idea about school curriculum but their understanding was that more books means more learning and hence strong foundation of their children. During discussion, some parents linked usage of greater number of books with increased private expenditure for education. As they were not economically well-off, they showed their satisfaction with the existing arrangement. The programme organizers and the teachers of *Shishu Niketans* were also aware of parental dissatisfaction regarding the use of books. They had nothing to do for this matter because of BEP's policy direction regarding curriculum. However, in a few cases, the teachers/POs introduced an additional book on 'general knowledge' in order to meet parents' demands.

Kindergarten teachers were in general more educated in terms of years of schooling completed than those of *Shishu Niketans*. However, in terms of length of teaching and receipt of training, *Shishu Niketan* teachers were much ahead of their counterparts in Kindergartens. Actually, there was no provision of training for Kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, *Shishu Niketan* teachers not only served for a long time in BPSs but also had BRAC's basic teachers' training and monthly refreshers' training. All these actually made them more competent in comparison to Kindergarten teachers. Classroom observations for this study clearly demonstrated that the teaching-learning provision in *Shishu Niketans* was much better in comparison to that in Kindergartens. Teaching in *Shishu Niketans* kept students at the centre of all classroom activities, ensured every student's participation and resulted in adequate feedback. Moreover, teachers were affectionate to students and avoided corporal punishment. On the other hand, most of the Kindergarten teachers were unfriendly and punished students very often. Provision of feedback, assessing students' learning and taking care of slow learners were all rare in Kindergartens. There was also greater supervision of classroom teaching in *Shishu Niketans*. The parents also knew this. In household survey, all parents of *Shishu Niketans* showed their satisfaction in teachers' quality and classrooms teaching. As a result, dependency on private tuition was much less among these students. Compared to two-third of the students in Kindergartens, only 4.2% of *Shishu Niketan* students had private tutors. However, it is also plausible that the poor economic condition of households resulted in a smaller portion of *Shishu Niketan* students availing private tuition.

Parental involvement, especially the mothers, was more in *Shishu Niketans* than in Kindergartens. Parents of *Shishu Niketan* students visited schools and talked to teachers about their children's progress whenever they wanted to. In all schools, parents met once a month to discuss about their respective schools and other related issues. None of these arrangements were present in Kindergartens. Parents of Kindergarten students mostly went to schools to pick up and drop off their children. This was reflected in the FGDs with parents. During discussion on teachers' quality and classroom teaching, the parents of *Shishu Niketan* students had plenty of observations to offer but the Kindergarten parents could not talk about these topics in details.

Collection of monthly tuition fees became one of the main tasks of POs. In general, parents were supposed to go to school on a certain day to give tuition fee to POs. It did not happen so easily. Majority of parents did not pay fees on due dates. Overdue tuition fees was a regular phenomenon. Overdue tuition fees were a regular phenomenon in Kindergartens too but it was not as high as *Shishu Niketans*. Thus, the POs and teachers attempted to collect tuition fees on the day of monthly parents' meeting. Sometimes, they had to go on home visits of students to collect tuition fees. In some cases, the teachers asked money from students in classrooms even though, doing so was totally prohibited by BRAC management. Such an attempt on the teachers' part may have negative impact on students; thus, it should be stopped. On the other hand, POs felt that they were collecting money like microfinance POs; as they said, this deteriorated their prestige in communities. It seems that the education POs failed to articulate their tasks to the masses. Microfinance POs have to lend out money and take it back whereas *Shishu Niketan* POs have to provide quality education to children and take tuition fees in return. However, the failure to fulfil this task was not the sole failure of POs, society was also not ready to understand POs.

Respondents related to both types of schools and participants of FGDs compared their schools with the nearby government primary schools of their own villages. Since *Shishu Niketans* under study were located in villages where there were no Kindergartens, Kindergartens for the study were selected from nearby villages. As a result, it was not possible for parents of any school type to compare quality of *Shishu Niketans* with that of Kindergartens. Substandard quality of education in government primary schools was one of the major reasons that influenced both types of parents to send their children to these fee-paying schools. If *Shishu Niketans* and Kindergartens were located in the same villages, the parents would have had a chance to compare them. The POs and teachers can ask the parents to visit nearby Kindergartens and talk to their parents in order for better comparison between the two.

Operational challenges were more complex for *Shishu Niketans* than Kindergartens. The main challenge was related to collection of tuition fees. Household economy of Kindergarten students was much better than that of *Shishu Niketan* students. Even though BRAC's reputation in primary education through BPSs helped in establishing *Shishu Niketans*, simultaneously it worked as hindrance because of BPSs free provision of education. Increase of monthly tuition fees was another issue. The parents were promised that tuition fees would be the same in every grade but when it was increased, all of them refused to pay the additional amount. It was not clear whether the POs hide the information from parents or whether BRAC management suddenly decided to increase tuition fees. It is now a question of ethics. It would be ethically sound if POs promises can be honoured for at least this batch of students.

In contrast, Kindergartens did not have to face such a situation because the parents knew that Kindergartens were fee paying schools and that tuition fees increased with promotion to higher grades. However, overdue tuition fees was also a problem. As its consequence, teachers' were either unpaid or did not receive full salaries each month. Hence, teachers' dropout rate was high in most Kindergartens. Parents also enjoyed some flexibility in paying tuition fees in Kindergartens which was not the case in *Shishu Niketans*. They could negotiate with head teachers to reduce fees. So, some parents, who were less capable of paying fees, negotiated with teachers and paid relatively fewer fees.

In *Shishu Niketans*, there was no connection between the payment of teachers and POs salaries with the collection of monthly tuition fees. All of them received monthly

salaries on time. However, in order to demonstrate good performance, POs and teachers deposited a portion of their salaries every month to the BRAC offices stating that they had collected tuition fees on time. The fact was that they collected tuition fees later from parents. This is a serious issue and it penalizes teachers as well as the POs despite absence of any offensive action on their parts. Such actions need to be stopped immediately.

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The above discussion clearly shows that BRAC has moved from the provision of fee-free primary education to fee-paying primary education in areas where it had previously operated fee-free non-formal education programme for a long time. BRAC stopped operating fee-free schools because studies found that students from relatively better-off families had started to admit in BRAC schools. The other reason was that there was a need for fee-free schools in other areas of the country. Following are some recommendations for BEP based on study findings.

1. Infrastructure of *Shishu Niketans* need to be improved up to such a standard so that people can differentiate them from BRAC Primary Schools (BPS), Kindergartens as well as other schools in the communities. A portion of the school-house, say up to window level, can be made of bricks and other part by tin, strong leaves, straw, etc. Both inside and outside of school houses should be colourful. Inner decoration should include colourful walls with lots of educational materials such as charts, maps and photos. The outer colour should be similar in all schools which may be a combination of colours from the national flag of Bangladesh and the BRAC logo. Playground, electricity and drinking water facilities should be made compulsory. An arrangement can be made with local schools (government or non-government) who have their own playgrounds, so, that *Shishu Niketan* students can use their playgrounds at least 2/3 days a week. Cost of construction of school houses should be higher than the current cost but it should be lower than that of Kindergartens.
2. It is necessary to make parents understand the importance of the national curriculum. Upon observing various types of disorder with curriculum as well as use of books in various Kindergartens, wrong idea developed among parents on this. Strong advocacy is required regarding this issue. The main message should be as follows: purpose of education is not to overload students with books but to help them understand nature and society through a joyful and interactive manner. *Shishu Niketan's* strength is its qualified teaching staff as well as its joyful and interactive classrooms. BEP POs and *Shishu Niketan* teachers also need training on this issue, especially on how to promote this idea. Formal and informal meetings with the parents (both mothers and fathers) can be arranged regarding this matter.
3. Advocacy may also include overall cost of schooling. Taking evidences from this study or from any two local schools (one *Shishu Niketan* and another Kindergarten) one can easily show that although the monthly tuition fee is the same in both types of school but the other costs are much higher in Kindergartens. As the parents of *Shishu Niketans* already know that quality of *Shishu Niketans* are better than any other schools in the community, the point for discussion may be 'quality of education in relation to costs for schooling'.
4. Everything related to school fees should be disclosed to parents beforehand. There should not be any mechanism by which new fee paying rules are incorporated that

break previous promises. Instead of POs and teachers, a separate person should be appointed as a cashier to deal with fees related issues. This will help teachers and POs to concentrate more on academic issues and maintain a certain standard of quality. It is also necessary to bring fathers on board because in most cases, the mothers pay fees after taking the money from fathers. Quarterly meetings with the fathers may be considered on a trial basis.

5. A slower approach may be more realistic way of making *Shishu Niketans* self-sustaining. Parents need time to understand the opportunity cost of their expenditure. The number of schools that are to be opened in any area should be based on a feasibility/viability check. Existence of former BPS teachers should not be the main criterion for establishing *Shishu Niketans*. Community members' ability to pay tuition and other fees should be of the first priority. Emphasis should be placed on networking with economically better-off households. In other words, targeted students for *Shishu Niketans* should be from middle income groups where parents have some years of schooling. However, in order to make the initiative accessible to the children of poor families, a portion of students (say 25%) can be from poor households and they should obtain subsidized education.

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