

## **Determinants of High Enrollment and School Dropouts IN Primary and Lower Secondary Schools: A Comparative Educational Appraisal among South Asian Countries**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research is to discern the identical issues that work behind high enrollment in primary schools followed by uncontrolled dropouts in Bangladesh like many other countries in South Asia. The study also probes to identify some possible interventions that may play a vital role in reducing educational exclusion. It is believed that comparative education with its rapidly increasing resources and its hope for better methods seem admirably suited to provide a more rational basis for the planning of education (Jones, 1971). The research data primarily depends on various reports published by the govt. offices and ministries that demonstrate educational situation in current period. Besides, many educators and specialists in the related field are interviewed to get a clearer insight into the matter. The data establishes that not the economic background only, rather, enrollment age, parents' education, location, school mechanisms and many other factors are liable for the misfit of many prospective students in the institutions. It is also clear that dropouts transpire in a specific pattern in different grades of school hierarchy. Similar data from other countries of South Asia like India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is presented to show whether Bangladesh is the worst sufferer of this mishap. Govt. appraisals adopted by these countries are screened in this study to test any positive contribution to come out of this hiccup.

**Keywords:** School enrolment, School dropouts, Gender parity, Primary schooling, out-of-school children, Socio-economic problem,

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Date of Submission: 01-05-2018

Date of acceptance: 17-05-2018

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

At present, comparative education has become a complete field of educational research which studies the educational pattern of any particular country or region and matches with another to get insights about the practices and reasons of success or failure of a curriculum. It tries to probe into the societal matrix that shape up the educational dimension of a society and tries to fix another system by applying the knowledge of the study. Comparative education is in practice in many a project of UNESCO and ministries of education of many countries. Bangladesh has experienced various academic transitions over time to fit the needs and demand of the society and equip the students with the best possible education. Though various measures of the govt. have ensured a high rate of enrollment in the elementary schools, the dropout issue has always been a prime concern for the govt. as well as agencies related to education. The similar issue could be identified in many other countries of South Asia who share a more or less common socio-economic setup. A comparative educational study of the scenario of these countries can be useful for revising the current teaching methodology and formulating new policy to fight against all the odds of current situation.

### **II. COMPARATIVE EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

According to Getao (1996), Comparative education is a discipline which studies the educational systems by means of a parallel study of similarities and dissimilarities among educational systems of various countries. Noah and Eckstein (1969) defines comparative education in a broader way. Their demarcation goes as: "Comparative Education is potentially more than a collection of data and perspectives from social science applied to education in different countries. Neither the topic of education nor the cross-national dimension is central to any of the social sciences; nor are the social science concerns and the cross-national dimension central to the works of educators. The field of comparative education is best defined as an intersection of the social sciences, education and cross-national study."

2.1 Objective of the study:

The main objective of the study is to identify the key factors that determine the rate of school enrollment and dropout rate of students in Bangladesh and other neighboring countries. The set of objective that will govern this particular study is stated below:

- i.** To identify the rate of enrollment and dropout in Bangladesh and other neighboring countries
- ii.** To define the key features that work behind school dropout
- iii.** To identify whether there is any positive correlation between economic advancement and school enrollment.
- iv.** To prove policy recommendation for lessening dropouts.
- v.** To identify what measures Bangladeshi and other nation's govt. are taking for eradicating dropouts and how far these are effective
- vi.** To identify whether the dropout is a phenomenon of any particular stage or it happens in any level of education.

2.2 Hypothesis:

Analyzing various socio-economic factors that affect school enrollment and dropout, certain hypothesis has been formulated to find out the answer of the research questions:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Economic solvency and well-being is the most important determinant for school enrollment and subsequent dropout

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Parents' education influences the schooling issue of children

**H<sub>3</sub>:** School dropout is a higher phenomenon in elementary secondary schools than in primary schools.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Govt. initiatives can lower dropout rate while the success of govt. policies are conditioned by regional differences.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a comparative analysis of educational statistics of five South Asian countries. The major part of the data is collected from secondary sources. The main sources of the secondary data used in this study are the educational statistics published by the statistical and educational ministries of the concerned countries. In addition, information from relevant websites, newspapers, magazines, and published and unpublished articles are used to get a clearer insight into the matter. Some primary data has been collected by taking interview of persons involved in this sector. The study will include a comparison of all the data and information to create a pattern of enrollment and dropout frequency in South Asia.

### IV. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Literacy is one of those prominent determiners that accelerates the socio-economic condition of any state. The power of education can reinforce labor market and generate efficient workforce. Though literacy merely means the capacity to read and write only, educating the nation signifies much more than that. It implies the capacity building of a higher level of communication, professionalism, and social skills. Education has always been considered as a pivotal factor for economic development. It enhances the level of the standard of living, per capita income, the growth of GDP, human development index, industrialization, and the modernization of the infrastructures of any country.

	Population	GDP Growth	Per Capita Income	Literacy Rate	HDI
<b>Bangladesh</b>	162,951,560	7.1	1,531\$	61.5%	0.579
<b>India</b>	1,324,171,354	6.7	1,852\$	72.2%	0.624
<b>Pakistan</b>	193,560,000	5.3	1,441\$	60%	0.550
<b>Nepal</b>	28,982,771	7.5	824\$	48.6%	0.558
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	21,203,000	4.7	3,905\$	92.6%	0.766

**Table 01:** Socio economic condition of South Asian Countries

In many researches, assess or advancement of education has been linked to financial benefits of individuals. Blundell et al. (1999) and Oxaal (1997) has researched in the same issue and they propose a positive correlation between the wage and the level of education of an individual.

According to Acemoglu and Angrist (1999), many empirical studies have shown that education is the prime means to enhance productivity and earning and eventually an additional year of schooling increases

individual earnings by 6–10%. It is clearly evident that education, an important factor of human capital, is one of the major determinants of social and economic well-being at individual as well as national level. On the other hand, factors that standardize the economic completions are also regulated by the level of education of the target individual. Oxaal further finds that people of low income regions or less developed states tend to be more reluctant towards schooling and even their educational attainments also get a negative vibe.

Empirical data validates the significant relationship between per capita income and school enrollment rate in the primary level bi-directionally. The same aspect is found accountable in the secondary level too while the factors work in one direction only, from the per capita income to the secondary school enrollment rate. The data collected from various international agencies prove that the GDP per capita has increased considerably since the last twelve years and as expected, the school enrollment rate has augmented over this period. Though the rate of increase of GDP and the school enrollment were not the same for all the five concerned countries, they have experienced the hike of literacy rate during this epoch.

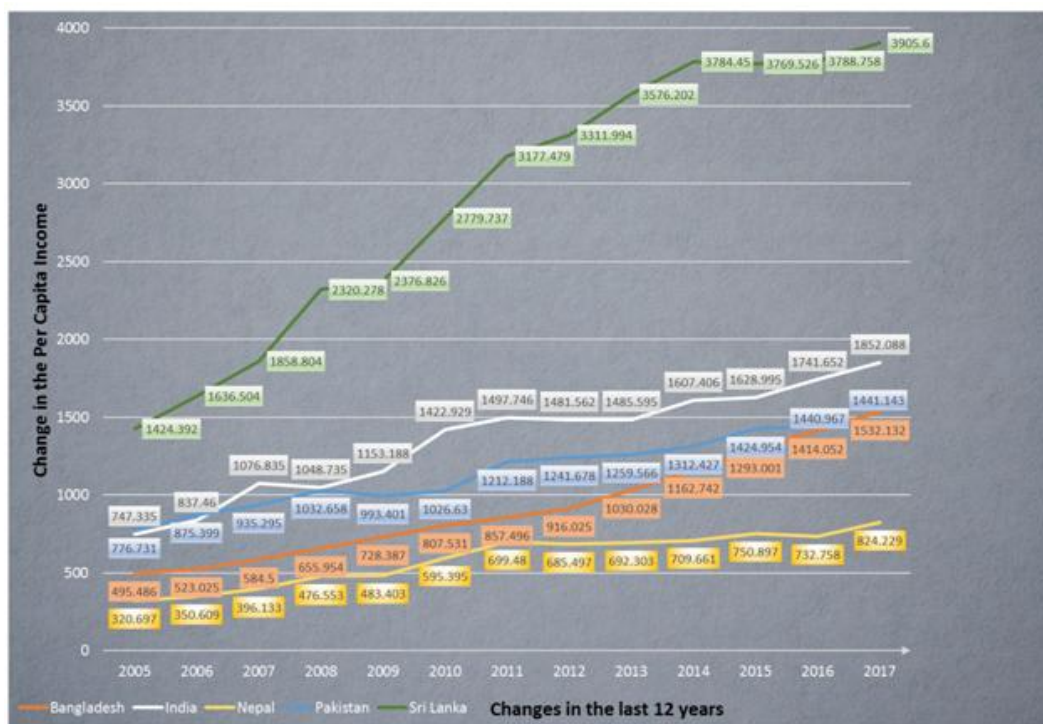


Fig 01: Per capita income of the concerned South Asian Countries

Ozsoy (2010) scrutinized the connection between school enrollment rates and economic growth during the period of 1923–2005 in Turkey. In her research, a bi-directional relationship between the variables at the primary level was identified, but there was no relationship at the tertiary level. Erdogan and Yildirim (2009) also found a positive correlation between economic growth and primary schooling, but it was uni-directional, running from economic growth to primary schooling. Yaylalar and Lebe (2010) branded the same connection but the direction of causality is running from primary schooling to economic growth.

Institutional education is governed by three basic principles which are, (i) Education is predominantly a facility offered by govt. to its citizens. (ii) Comparatively developed countries can get an exposure to spend much more for arranging teaching and learning resources for their pupils; for example, United States usually is said to spend 200 times more resources per student annually than the average of five enlisted LDCs and (iii) Schooling attainments also increases with income and differ substantially across countries.

There is a closer relationship between educational attainment and economic growth at the primary school level as compared to the secondary and higher levels of education. This interpretation also aligns with Psacharopoulos’s (1994) findings about social returns to different levels of education in developing countries. His research indicates that the social return to primary education (27%) in the developing countries is significantly higher when compared with the returns to secondary (16%) and higher education (13%). These results may imply that pushing everyone into higher education would not directly results in economic well-being at the national level, while having more people receive at least a basic education supports economic development.



The Global Economy, The Indian Express, UNESCO, BANBEIS

Figure 02: Public Investment for education

Many studies indicate that children from low socio-economic mobility background tend to have no or less schooling while a child from better-off household is more likely to enroll and continue his studies (Brown & Park, 2002; Hunt, 2008). Brown identifies that children from low income households have little chance to attend school and even if they do, they have higher chance of dropout. In some cases, the decision of school dropout comes from the parents in those households as many low income families put emphasis on instant earning to investment for future attainment. As Akresh (2008) mentions, parents' beliefs and expectations about the value of schooling is a considerable factor for the students' decision of enrollment or retention in school.

In short, most families tend to send their children to primary schools if only the economic condition of these families is moderate to bear the cost. To accelerate the enrolment in primary schools, govt. of many countries has already introduced public as well as non-govt. funding. They provide education materials, nutritious food items, and even cash incentives to attract children and their parents for schooling. (Gumus and Chudgar, 2015) All these evidences testifies the prevalence of  $H_1$ .

To ensure gender equality and women empowerment in the society, education can have no other alternative. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) shows the ratio of the number of girls enrolled in primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary level institutions with comparison to the number of boys enrolled in the same level in the same time period. The following GPI, retrieved from the GER, provides a clear picture of gender equality in education sector. Most surprisingly, a radical change is noticed towards gender parity during 2005-2006 to 2015-2016. It is evident that more girls have enrolled in primary school compared to the number of boys since 2011, but the number unexpectedly falls down in secondary level schools.

Though the enrollment rate in the primary and secondary level school has greatly increased, there have still been many issues to lag behind. The govt. of the concerned countries, especially the govt. of Bangladesh is found to fight against bringing the working and disabled children into education. Besides, including indigenous children and those who live in extreme remote parts of the country with minimal govt. and non-govt. facilities, in the mainstream education is another big challenge. The UNICEF 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey that only about half of the children living in urban slums attend school compared to a national average of 81% net attendance ratio, and about 24% of slum girls never enroll in any form of formal or non-formal school. Furthermore, the most critical challenge starts just after their enrollment- to continue their education. Studies of 2009 Annual Sector Performance Report of UNICEF says that only 55% of these children reach "Grade-five" in the school.

Apart from the economic well-being and gender parity in the society, many other factors also determine the enrollment and school dropout in countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. New school environment, Gender security, competency of the teachers and motivation for education are also determinants of school enrollment and retention.

One of the major problem as identified in many studies is that the teaching methodology in the govt. or even the non-govt. schools is not interesting to the students. As a result, they lose motivation to attend classes. Lack of innovative teaching learning approaches add to the dropout rate in the elementary levels. Poor qualification and lack of teachers' motivation for teaching is thus another cause for low enrollment and dropout from schools. A study shows that approximately 24% teachers from govt. and non-govt. primary schools have never received any training on teaching methodology or professional development.

One of the major challenges of increasing the enrollment rate to meet the goal – 04 of SDG is the inclusion of the indigenous children into mainstream education. Because of some contradictory education

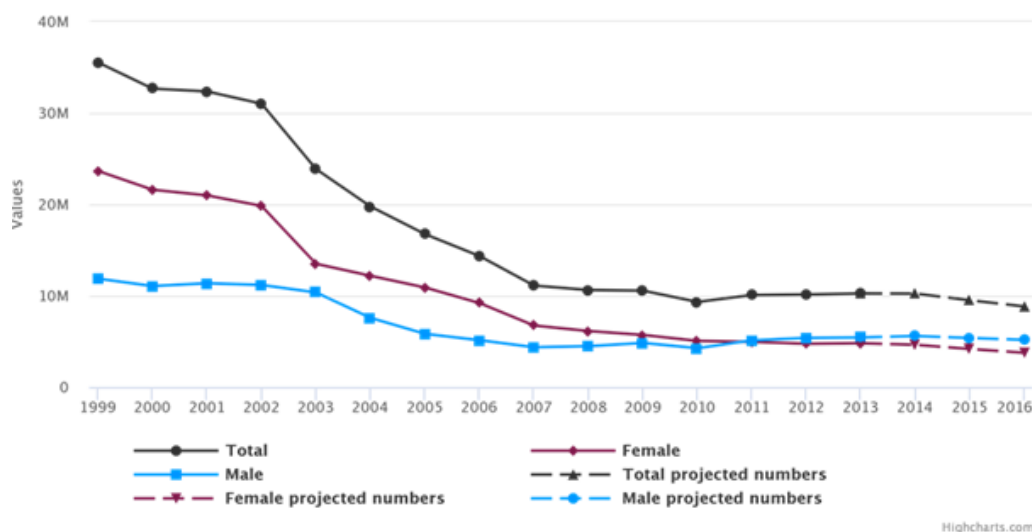


Figure 04: Gender Parity Index (GPI) of enrollment in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Levels in South Asian Countries

and language policy in the country, Bangladesh has not been much successful in this arena. Profulla and Gareth (2009) conducted a research in the north eastern part of Bangladesh in 2004 and found that only 22% of the indigenous children ends up their schooling by one yer of enrollment while 18% more dropout takes places even earlier.

Maslow (1943) identifies another socio-economic factor namely the environmental catalyst to work behind school dropout. He argues that limited livelihood option and disasters like feminine, flood, and draught make survival the crucial in some regions and there education may be considered relatively luxury. Therefore he demonstrates that in places where people strive to satisfy their immediate needs first may experience low rate of school enrollment and high rate of school dropouts.

**Education System in Bangladesh and Compulsory Free Primary Education (CFPE)**

The education system of Bangladesh is divided into three levels. The primary level includes five years of schooling ranging from grade 1 to grade 5. A public examination is to be attended as the certificate of completion of the first level. The second level, namely the Secondary School is of five years of schooling which starts from grade 6 to grade 10 and the completion exam after this level is taken publicly. Meanwhile, the completion exam of Junior Secondary school or grade 8 also agars the opportunity of sitting in JSC (Junior School Certificate) exam. The third level of public education ends at grade twelve with the public exam named HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate). The higher education is done by many public and private colleges and universities which offer tertiary level education of varied interests.

Bangladesh has one of the largest primary education systems in the world with an estimated 16.4 million primary school aged children (6 to10 years). Approximately 365,925 teachers are working in primary schools of which 53% teachers and 23% headmasters of these primary schools are female. The number of total formal primary schools is no less than 82,218 schools (with ten different types of schools, including Madrasahs). The Compulsory Primary Education Act was passed in 1990 which legalizes primary education free and compulsory for all children up to Grade 5.

The Government of Bangladesh recognizes education as a means of reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for children. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Bangladesh, with assistance from development partners, has made positive steps towards fulfilling children's rights to education, according to the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals. As a result, the country has made significant progress towards achieving universal primary education and gender parity in schools.

In a study of UNICEF (2006), it comes out that in spite of the full free primary education policy in the country, over 30% orphans are kept out of the school. Even if they enroll, a significant number of them dropout before reaching grade 7. Moreover, to reach grade 7, they usually spend more than the expected time.

**Measures taken by the Governments of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**

In respect of the number of out-of-school children in the world, South Asia currently holds the most alarming situation. Governments of these respective countries have taken different measures to ensure cent percent school enrolment even in the remote areas and significant interest has also been put down on their completion of studies. Governments have also offered various schemes to grow enthusiasm among parents to send their children to schools. After quite a satisfactory achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the govt. of Bangladesh is planning its strategies for meeting the Goal 4 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). However, within South Asia, Bangladesh has exhibited a much satisfactory performance than India, Pakistan and Nepal. Especially, in case of reducing gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment, Bangladesh is ahead of any other countries in this region (Asadullah, Savoia and Mahmud, 2013). Even amongst the school going children aged 15-19 years, primary schooling completion rate of girls in Bangladesh is way higher than boys and moreover, the number is higher than that of India and Pakistan (Riboud, Yevgeniya and Hong; 2007). The recent education statistics of Bangladesh is surely a reflection for hope and optimism.

Worldwide, the number of children of school age who were out of school fell from 103 million in 1999 to 73 million in 2006. This advancement was brought about by the implementation of govt. policies in the concerned countries. Some major strategies taken by the governments of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are as follows:

<b>Incentives and Opportunities offered by Govt.</b>	<b>Banglades h</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>Nepal</b>	<b>Sri Lanka</b>
1. Free education	✓	✓		✓	✓
2. Compulsory education by act	✓	✓			✓
3. Establishing new Schools in remote places	✓	✓	✓		✓
4. Safety measures for girls	✓	✓			
5. Delivering free Uniform		✓			✓
6. Offering scholarships	✓	✓			✓
7. Mid-day meal scheme		✓			
8. Distributing textbooks and other study materials for free	✓	✓			✓
9. Subsidizing public transport for students	✓				✓
10. Introducing vocational trainings		✓	✓		
11. Community School Support Project				✓	
12. Award to School Management Committee (SMC) for 100% enrollment and retainment		✓			
13. National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE)	✓	✓			
14. Free boarding and Lodging facilities for poor students			✓		
15. Incentives to teachers who teach in rural areas				✓	
16. Continuous improvement of curricula	✓		✓		✓
17. Teacher education and training, and professional development	✓		✓		
18. Establishment of National Educational Assessment System (NEAS)			✓		
19. Public-private partnership and community participation	✓		✓		✓
20. Arranging public exams after completion of primary schooling	✓				

**V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Economic growth, more precisely, the increase of GDP indicates the individual economic power which lead the way to the resources and opportunities of education (OECD, 2010a). Since the World War II, the economy of the South Asian countries has experienced an upward drift and during the last half century, reached nearly double of its economic strength. To meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), which demanded to

“Achieve Universal Primary Education”, countries took initiatives for higher rate of enrollment in elementary schools while investing significant amount of GDP for educational purposes. Studies ensure that the economic uptrend has aided the countries to spend more for the educational purposes and thus, though not fully completed, yet some significant improvements were achieved. This again attests the mechanism of H1 behind school enrolment and subsequent dropouts.

The education system in our country, like the other concerned countries in this study, is mainly theoretical and schools focus on the materials in the textbook more than the practical knowledge and intellectual nourishment. The quality education, which has become a buzzword since the targets of SDG, is quite impossible without connecting the curricula to the real life experiences. A new curriculum is to be developed which will create possibilities to allow students to leave the rote learning behind and manage real-world challenges and find solutions for them. Many countries in our study were found to applying this techniques and incorporating vocational trainings for the students. For example, the new educational reform in Nepal differentiates the basic education and the vocational training in two different levels so that the students learn various skills for their life. In Bangladesh, the vocational training institutes work separately, but they don't still have any connection with the elementary, primary or lower secondary level institutions.

“Poverty, availability, and accessibility are three big reasons why children drop out of school,” says Soha Moitra of Child Rights and You (CRY). “When a family is not financially secure, prioritising a child's education takes a backseat. Post-Class V, distance to school also tends to increase, and parents deem it unsafe for a child, especially girls, to travel far. You see this validated in dropout rates as well, which rise sharply after Class V.”

Another vital reason of dropout of children at 10-11 years old is that they become suitable to join workforce. Girls of this age could be sent for working as housemaids while boys work for different small and medium enterprises. Many insolvent parents get their child out of the school at this age only to assist them in earning livelihood. Another important determinant could be the nature of the teachers in the schools. Complaints against teachers are abundant where teachers are held responsible for accelerating dropouts as they are found rude and impatient to the needs of the students and they are often found insincere in teaching with interest.

Data collected by UNDP verifies the testimony that there are an estimated 11.3 million primary school age students who are out of school, and 20.6 million lower secondary out-of-school children in South Asia. The number significantly changes in case of secondary or lower secondary level schooling which attests H3. The main reasons as identified responsible for the dropout issue in the context of Bangladesh are as follows:

- Physical fitness of the students is one of the important issue for school dropouts and even non-enrollment. Lack of nutrition, special needs child and any sort of disability adds to the number of dropouts.
- Various social issues, especially religious beliefs hinder the parents from sending their daughters to school. Furthermore, early marriage, child slavery, child fostering, trafficking, and multiple household duties for girls add up to the number.
- Lack of quality education: Having no connection between the school curricula and job responsibilities is another big problem to tackle with dropout rates. Teacher absenteeism, school location and poor quality educational provision is a common scenario in Bangladeshi primary level education scenario.
- Immediate income of the children seems more profitable to the parents. When the child becomes old enough to join workforce, the parents take them out of the school and make them join somewhere to earn. They do not feel interested in investing money or time for getting fruits in future. Most of the parents of the working class families put emphasis on immediate income of their children.
- Geographic location is another big factor for low enrollment rate in primary or elementary schools. In some remote places like in the hill tracts, the education facilities do not reach fully and teachers are not willing to be very regular which render to high school dropouts.
- Some other Studies from Bangladesh suggest that when there is lack of parental interest and engagement with schooling it is often the case that parents lack the ability to understand school related work; so parents are unable to support their children (Ahmed et al., 2005).
- About 31.5% people live below the poverty line in Bangladesh and economic hardship is another force to keep children away from schools.
- The population in Bangladesh is booming every single day but govt. and non govt. assistance is found insufficient to accommodate all these ever increasing demand of infrastructural development for education.

Though the reasons are vivid and hard to fight against, as a third world country, Bangladesh has brought about significant positive changes throughout across the country. According to recent statistics, the total number of out-of-school children numbers to no less than 11.3 million in primary levels and out of those who enroll into school 13.4 million don't complete their primary education even. This number increases to 20.6 million in secondary level school dropouts in South Asia because of various infrastructural and policy related



dilemmas. But over time, Bangladesh has been fighting all these odd to maximize not only the participation but also the completion of students' education in both primary and secondary levels. The dropout rate has been dwindled down from 47.2% in 2005 to 19.2% in 2016 in primary level while the dropout rate for secondary level students has been abridged approximately to 37.39% in 2016. This rate quite satisfactory as compared to the rates of India and Pakistan.

## VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up, as an emerging developing country in the South Asia, Bangladesh has taken many praiseworthy steps to eradicate illiteracy from the country. Bangladesh was accredited for its tremendous success to meet the targets of MDG and our country is on the way to fulfilling the Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), goal 4. Recent data of BANBEIS show that the current enrollment rate of students in pre-primary and primary institutions is 97.3% while the rate is much lower in the other countries of South Asia. Bangladesh has also been successful in retaining students in classes and the rate of dropout has subsequently been reduced to 19% only. Our country has also been successful in reducing gender parity from the field of education. It is openly evident that Bangladesh is clearly ahead of its neighboring countries in the field of creating assessable primary education and controlling dropout rates. Hopefully the day is not far when we will celebrate the day for fulfilling all the targets of SDG- 04.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

Most of the data, as stated earlier, is collected from various paper based or online sources. Appropriate citation is used in required cases. Some educationalists who work for the betterment of the education field in the country and abroad helped me a lot with their knowledge. In this respect I must mention the name of the honorable Vice Chancellor of Notre Dame University Bangladesh, Prof. Fr. Patrick D. Gaffney and two more faculty members namely SM Feroj Mahmood and MD Mustakimur Rahman. The data and information collected were insufficient in many cases and because of the shortage of the information from various government and non-government offices, it was hard for the researcher to draw a more definite and precise updated findings.

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Sk. Rezwan Shihab1, Determinants of High Enrollment And School Dropouts IN Primary And Lower Secondary Schools: A Comparative Educational Appraisal Among South Asian Countries.” *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 23 no. 05, 2018, pp. 72-81