

## The Primary Education of Ethnic Minority Children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

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### **Abstract**

The study deals with ethnic minority children's primary education and intends to study the bottlenecks of dropout from their education and what the major reasons are for demanding to initiate the mother tongue-based education system. The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh have not been touched with development and have remained exclusion from attention and discussion by the majority population of the national and international arena. This region, however, came to the attention of national and international institutions and communities when the historical *Peace Accord* between PCJSS (Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti) and the government of Bangladesh was signed on December 2, 1997. This accord brings an end to a two-decade-long bloody war in the CHTs between indigenous people and the government of Bangladesh, and hence, it opens the door for the development of the entire Jummo nation in the CHTs. In this agreement, Article 33, Section B of Sub-Section 3, emphasized three types of education systems: "(1) vocational education, (2) primary education through mother tongue, and (3) secondary education" in order to attain the academic advancement of the indigenous community in CHTs, and this activity was vested to be undertaken by the District Council (PCJSS, 1997). Therefore, the mother tongue-based education system in CHT is an effective result of the Peace Accord. In addition to that, the Constitution of Bangladesh also made provision for compulsory education for all children, irrespective of their ethnicity, race, or religion. Article 17 of the Constitution states that (a) "establishing a uniform, mass-oriented, and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law". However, this study focuses on ethnic education incorporating with the mother tongue-based education system at the pre-primary and primary levels.

**Keywords:** *Ethnic minority, primary education, mother tongue, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.*

## **Introduction**

The mother tongue is a crucial asset for any community or nation. Based on the mother tongue, one identity passes from one generation to another. To acquire the mother tongue, many wars broke out in the world, many lives were sacrificed, and many are still fighting. Indigenous people in Bangladesh are among them. Bangladesh is a burning example of a country that fought for the right to its mother tongue. However, February 21, 1952, has been marked as International Mother Language Day by UNESCO since 1999 in order to pay homage to the fighters who fought and sacrificed their lives for their mother tongue. Many indigenous people from plain land as well as hill districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts have also joined in the liberation war and bravely fought for the emancipation of the nation. But unfortunately, the state has not given the constitutional right to the minorities as indigenous people and is similarly deprived of the right to their mother tongue. As a result, they had to adopt the Bengali language in respect of educational and institutional language, though Bengali is not their mother tongue, which poses a linguistic problem for them. Therefore, most of the indigenous people in Bangladesh, particularly the Chittagong Hill Tracts, are suffering from language problems from the marketplace to the office. Hence, the indigenous people's education ratio in Bangladesh is disproportionately lower. It is, however, seen that the dropout rate of primary school students is higher in CHT than the national average. In this respect, an international organization called Save the Children estimated that 55.5 percent of the indigenous children aged 6–10 were enrolled in school, but the dropout rate was higher than the enrolment rate, which was approximately 60 percent, which is remarkably higher than the national average (Preetha, 2016). Almost the same finding has been revealed by the national NGO Manusher Jonno Foundation, estimated at around 59 percent in 2012. Barkat et al. (2009) found that the primary enrolment rate in CHT is 82 percent for 5–16-year-old children, and 65 percent are dropouts. However, poverty, insufficient infrastructure, unskilled teachers, a lack of awareness, and proper monitoring are the major hindrances to dropout identified by Mallick et al. (2022). Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2011) estimated the literacy rate in CHT is 43.9 percent compared to the 51.8 percent national average, and likewise, Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS, 2016) identified the primary school enrolment rate in CHT as 95 percent, but the dropout rate was found to be 59 percent, which is significantly higher than the national average of 19.2 percent (Rashid, 2020).

## **Objectives**

***The objectives of the study are as follows:***

To understand the ratio of children's primary school enrolment

To find out the reasons that affect the dropout of ethnic children from the primary school level.

To study the bottlenecks and challenges faced by the indigenous children in school.

## **Research methodology**

Primary education for all children is compulsory in Bangladesh, and according to the National Education Policy of 2010, it aims to provide free Education for All (EFA) and ensure ethnic education in the mother tongue. The data for the study is collected from government reports such as the education census (national, regional, and district education census), non-government organizations, and published books. The aim of the study is to discuss the ethnic educational assessment in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Due to the backward region, the CHTs located in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh are

inhibited by the 11 distinct ethnic minority groups whose language, religion, history, culture, belief, and way of life are distinct from the majority population.

### **National status**

Bangladesh is a democratic country by nature and homogenous because 98 percent of the population belongs to the Bengali community, which consists mainly of Muslims and Hindus (Rahman, 2010). Muslims are the majority, while Hindus are the second largest community in the state. They usually speak the Bengali language, as it is their mother tongue, through which they are thought, taught, dreamed, felt, expressed, read, and wrote, and so on. It is, moreover, the national language as well as the official language of Bangladesh. Apart from the Bengali population, according to the national census of 2022, there are 50 indigenous tribal communities that are staying in different districts of Bangladesh and prefer to identify themselves as indigenous people or communities, which represented around half of the national census of 2011. An international agency, IWGIA (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs), urged that there are 54 indigenous tribal communities spoken in 34 distinct languages that represent around five million of the total population of Bangladesh (IWGIA, 2023), but the census represents only 1 percent of the 50 tribal groups. Therefore, it is perceivable that Bangladesh is a multilanguage and multi-ethnic state where more than one language is being spoken, and similarly, more than one community is dwelling in Bangladesh. But according to the Constitution of Bangladesh, formed after the independence of Bangladesh, it has only recognized the Bengali (Hindu and Muslim) community. However, it declared that "The people of Bangladesh shall be known as Bengalis as a nation, and the citizens of Bangladesh shall be known as Bangladeshis" (Article 6 Clause 2). In the Constitution, other communities that formed about 54 tribal communities were denied abruptly. It indicates that the culture, customs, religion, tradition, history, ritual, and way of life of the minority group's existence in Bangladesh were denied and established in one community-represented country. Similarly, though there are various languages spoken by the various communities, Article 3 of the Constitution recognizes the Bengali language as only the state language. However, it stated that "The state language of the Republic is Bangla". The tribal communities in Bangladesh are deprived and denied the language they speak.

### **Regional status**

The first language of Bangladesh is Bengali, spoken by the majority of people; similarly, it is the medium of instruction in academic institutions, and English is taught as a compulsory subject from pre-primary level to tertiary level. In the case of tribal communities, Bengali is the second language of the minority people. Bengali for the children of tribal groups is like an obscure language because they are accustomed to speaking in their mother tongue. Therefore, it creates barriers to adopting this language and discourages them from continuing their education, which causes a high dropout rate. Some of the indigenous communities have entirely lost their script forever due to lack of use and negligence either by the concerned community themselves or the state, such as Mro, Khumi, Khyang, Santal, and so on. Therefore, many researchers, academicians, and activists suggested introducing a mother tongue-based education system. Amit Chakma, Vice Chancellor of the University of Western Australia and former Vice-Chancellor and 10<sup>th</sup> president of the University of Western Ontario (2009–2019), suggested initiating a mother tongue-based education system side by side with nation language. He opined that "to prosper in Bangladesh and in the world, adibashis (indigenous people) need to master Bangla and English first. Native languages can be taught separately through cultural institutes and other organizations" (Ahmed 2009). So, to revitalize the ethnic language, many opined that government provision is essential and a mother tongue-based education system should be initiated. Hence, Sanjeeb Drong, the general secretary of the Indigenous Forum of Bangladesh, emphasized that "primary education for indigenous children should be in our mother tongue. We have been demanding it for a long time. Without it, you cannot expect to reduce the dropout rate in CHT". In that case, Gaganath Tripura (10) said that "I was a student of class IV at

Kalapara Government Primary School in Thanchi upazial. I lost interest in going to school because there was no opportunity for me to learn my mother tongue" (Deabnath 2008). In order to save the ethnic language, IUB (Independent University of Bangladesh) came forward and established the Centre for Endangered Language under the Sasheen Centre for Multilingual Excellence of IUB in order to research the endangered language. Therefore, Bir Bahadur Ushwe Sing, MP and Minister of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, said that "young men and women from the hill tracts region are very keen about education. But sometimes it is difficult for their family to back them up financially. Bandarban University was established with the aim of bringing affordable education to their doorsteps. However, those of us who are involved with the operation of this university do not have too much experience in this field. That is why we believe it would make a world of difference if renowned universities like IUB came forward and shared their experiences with us". Hence, in order to save the ethnic language, the Bangladesh government started a mother tongue education-based system and distributed books in the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, and Sadri communities of 2,13,288 copies in 2021 and 2,19,364 copies in 2022 at the pre-primary level.

### **Why ethnic education is essential?**

Education is the root of any community, through which they can learn how to read and write. Educating in our own mother tongue is crucial for all. Education and language collectively play a noteworthy role that is directly linked to culture, history, society, emotion, thought, values, and beliefs in the concerned community. Hence, Rashid (2020) opined that "loss of language means loss of culture, history, knowledge, and experience that have been accumulated by the concerned community for thousands of years. Therefore, loss of language leads to loss of essential information about the history and pre-history of a culture". Accordingly, in the same vein, Sanjeeb Drong said that "when a language is lost, a civilization is lost. Indigenous knowledge and wisdom are lost; a culture's value is lost" (Preetha 2016). However, though Bengali is the mother tongue for the Bengali community in Bangladesh, unfortunately not for the ethnic community. In the connection, at the initial stage, ethnic children in educational institutions faced language barriers. Hence, Gaganath Tripura (10) further said that "it's very difficult for me to remember school education. I couldn't practice my language at school, while Bangla taught by school teachers couldn't be studied at home."

To overcome this problem, the Bangladeshi government has taken the initiative to give education to ethnic children in their own mother tongue, and provisions like the Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institution Act 2010 and the National Education Policy 2010 have been adopted. The aim of these policies is to enhance the participation rate of ethnic children in school and reduce the dropout rate. In order to achieve this goal, the Bangladesh government started distributing books in ethnic languages in Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, and Sadri in 2017. Therefore, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), Directorate of Primary Education, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), Hill District Council (HDC), Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council (CHTRC), National Steering Committee on Multilingual Education, and the Multilingual Education Technical Committee are working together for the development of ethnic education. Besides, many NGOs—national and international—are working in Bangladesh to provide education to children in the remote area. Such as Save the Children, UNDP, Caritas, UNICEF, BRAC, Zabarang Kalyan Samiti, Rakhain Development Foundation, Ashiks Manobik Unnyan Kendra, Shishur Khamatayan (Child Empowerment), etc.

## What affects most dropouts?

The economy of the indigenous community in Bangladesh is agricultural, and natural forest is the major source of subsistence livelihood in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh (Khisha et al. 2012). The natural forest as well as the VCF (Village Common Forest) are considered to be the social capital (Nath et al., 2010) and are managed collectively by the community (Baten et al., 2010). However, Barkat et al. (2008) identified that field cropping contributes to one-third of the household, while one-fifth are engaged in jhum farming, and around 9 percent are involved in both jhum and field agriculture. They also found that 62 percent of households are below the absolute poverty line (below 2,122 kcal), while 36% are hardcore poor (below 1,805 kcal). The majority of the people are living in rural areas where education and medical facilities are scarce, infrastructure such as roads has not covered the entire region, and electricity has not been reached yet for more than 80 percent of the population households. Though the largest hydroelectric plant was constructed on the land of indigenous people in 1960, thereby uprooting more than 100,000 people from their land in order to generate electricity. At present, this plant generates 135 MW of electricity by operating five units of the centre. Hence, the indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts still remain deprived of state facilities. Poverty is prominent in the region. Research conducted by Mondal et al. (2009) in the rural areas of Khagrachari and Rangamati districts found that the per-head monthly income in the study area is only 709 takas. Therefore, it can be assumed that the socioeconomic situation of the indigenous community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh is the worst. During the pandemic time of COVID-19, food scarcity levels mounted to an extreme level reported by Chakma and Chakma (2020).

As CHT is a poverty-stricken area and geographically inaccessible, it poses a severe threat to ethnic children's education. Indigenous children, in respect of education, faced problems caused by both artificial and natural. The remote location of the house from the school, the mountainous road, and the rugged and hilly terrain are considered to be the natural bottlenecks for the ethnic children. On the other hand, language barriers, mediums of instruction, and negligence by the teacher toward the ethnic children may be considered an artificial problem. However, the decision of the government to provide education to ethnic children in pre-primary education is significant progress for the ethnic minorities in Bangladesh. But, furthermore, the government should have made much progress in this endeavour in order to provide education for all ethnic communities and foster the skills of the teachers by providing adequate training. Hence "Most of my students are happy with the books being in their mother tongue," shares Jonaki Tripura, "and being able to use the language they speak at home in their daily lives at school as well, not just in speaking but in learning, also gives them the confidence to do better in their exams." Ranjan Tanchangya, the headmaster at Dighalchhari Government Primary School in Belaichhari upazila, Rangamati, emphasized "While we have textbooks in the students' mother tongues, a lack of training for our teachers can often get in the way of our teaching".

## Results and discussion

### *Enrolment status of primary students*

Since the British colonial period, the education system has been formulated at three levels: primary, secondary, and higher secondary. Primary and secondary education are compulsory for students. The primary level is considered from class 1 to class 5. In Bangladesh, the primary level is the foundation for the student, from which a journey of student life begins. Apparently, in every class of primary education in Bangladesh, girls' enrolment in primary school is dominant. Table number 1 mentioned below showed that the total number of primary students was around 2,15,51,691, both girls and boys. Fortunately, the number of girls enrolled in school is higher than the number of boys. Therefore, girls represent around

1,09,91,451 (51.00%) over boys 1,05,60,240 (49.00%) at the national level. It indicates that girls' enrolment rate in school proportionately increased compared to earlier days.

**Table no 1.**  
***Student enrolment in pre-primary to class five (2020)***

Category	Pre-primary	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Total
Boys	1963960	1854990	1810411	1772149	1718713	1440017	10560240
Girls	1983892	1854060	1833010	1843272	1848210	1629007	10991451
Total	3987852	3709050	3643421	3615421	3566923	3069024	21551691

Source: Ministry of Primary and Mass Education 2020-2021

### Annual improvement

A survey was conducted by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in Bangladesh in 2020–2021 in order to measure the quality of primary education. However, the highest number of schools covered in the 2018 Annual Primary School Census represented around 1,34,147, followed by 1,29,258 (2019), 1,33,002 (2020), and 1,18,891 (2021), respectively. The number of male teachers was 2,58,751 in 2018, while the number of female teachers was 4,26,649 in 2018. The student enrolment rate was also higher in 2018 (1,73,38,100). Similarly, the highest dropout rate was found in 2018 (18.6 percent). The boys' dropout rate is around 21.44 percent, and the girls' dropout rate is 15.70 percent. In terms of survival and repetition rate, it was estimated at 5.10 percent, with boys contributing the highest at 5.10 percent in 2019 and girls contributing 5.0 percent in 2018. But the repetition rate has significantly decreased since 2021 (0.95 to 0.75). In the context of survival rate, boys contribute 85.25 percent in 2021, while girls contribute 87.1 percent, respectively. Moreover, the gross enrolment rate was 105.32 percent for boys and 106.14 percent for girls in 2021. The girls' enrolment rate is significantly higher than the boys.

**Table no 2.**  
***Annual improvement rate (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)***

No. of schools covered by APSC		APSC (Annual Primary School Census)			
		2018	2019	2020	2021
		134147	129258	133002	118891
Total teachers	Male	258751	239129	131569	127809
	Female	426649	115593	235991	231286
	Total	685400	354722	367480	359095
Enrolled students (I-V)	Boy	8539067	8075892	8596820	8583323
	Girl	8799033	8260204	9007559	8381644
	Total	17338100	16336096	17603839	16964967
Pre-primary enrolment	Boy	1792559	1893734	1963960	1559175

	Girl	1785825	1892507	1983892	1576830
	Total	3578384	3786241	3947825	3136005
Total enrolment (all grades)	Boy	10331626	9969626	10560240	10142498
	Girl	10584858	10152711	10991451	9958474
	Total	20916484	20122337	21551691	20100972
Net intake rate (%)	Boy	109.07	107.62	105.95	96.15
	Girl	115.57	112.80	109.91	96.21
	Total	112.32	110.51	107.86	96.18
Gross enrolment rate (%)	Boy	110.32	106.15	100.1	105.32
	Girl	118.30	113.20	108.9	106.14
	Total	114.23	109.49	104.90	105.72
Dropout rate (%)	Boy	21.44	19.20	19.0	15.05
	Girl	15.69	15.70	15.5	13.25
	Total	18.6	17.90	17.2	14.15
Survival rate (%)	Boy	80.93	84.10	83.3	85.25
	Girl	87.73	86.10	85.9	87.1
	Total	83.53	85.20	87.7	86.2
Repetition rate (%)	Boy	5.8	5.10	5.0	0.95
	Girl	5.0	4.90	4.9	0.75
	Total	5.4	5.10	5.0	0.85

Source: Ministry of Primary and Mass Education 2020-2021

### Books distribution

Primary education in Bangladesh has been given freely for a long time in order to decrease the illiteracy rate. Another objective is to increase the children's enrolment rate in primary school. The National Curriculum and Text Book Board is responsible for the distribution of the books to students. However, at the pre-primary level, the highest number of books were distributed in 2019—around 6,85,620 copies. In addition to that, it was found that 1,36,48,816 copies of books were distributed to class I (one) students, followed by 1,31,62,371 (class II), 2,54,82,956 (class III), 2,44,35,935 (class IV), and 2,21,51,822 (class V) in the four consecutive years 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, respectively, totalling 10,60,14,988 books. In addition to that, tribal students have also been distributed books in five languages: Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, and Sardi. Three communities have been selected from Chittagong Hill Tracts (Chakma, Marma, and Tripura) and two communities from plain districts (Garo and Sadri). However, it was found

that the highest number of books were distributed in 2019—around 2,77,068 copies in five communities—Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Garo, and Sadri communities, followed by 2,30,103 copies in 2020, 2,13,288 copies in 2021, and 2,19,364 copies in 2022, respectively. See Table No. 3.

**Table no 3.**  
**Books distribution in 2019-2021**

SL. no.	Class	Academic year			
		2019	2020	2021	2022
1	Pre-primary	6856020	6675276	6679222	6605480
2	Class 1	13648816	13543743	13222953	12496494
3	Class 2	13162371	13077814	12764342	12143309
4	Class 3	25482956	25294043	24688668	23605186
5	Class 4	24435935	24511992	23802289	22945997
6	Class 5	22151822	22068580	21158139	21024523
7	Tribal student	277068	230103	213288	219364
	Total	106014988	105401551	102528901	99040353

Source: Ministry of Primary and Mass Education 2020-2021 and 2021-2022

### Literacy rate in CHTs

The literacy rate of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh always remains lower than that of the other districts. However, the 2022 preliminary Population and Housing Census report showed that the average literacy rate is 74.66 percent for the age of seven and above in Bangladesh. In 2011, the ratio was around 51.77 percent, which has increased by 22.89 percent within 10 years. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the highest literacy rate was occupied by the Rangamati district (43.6 percent) in 2001, while the lowest was in the Bandarban district (31.7 percent) and Khagarachari district (41.8 percent), respectively, both male and female. Moreover, in 2011, the literacy ratio increased by 6.1 percent to 49.7 percent in Rangamati, followed by 46.1 percent in Khagrachari and 35.9 percent in Bandarban district. See table no. 4.

**Table no 4.**  
**Literacy (7+) rate if 2001 & 2011**

District	2001			2011		
	Male	Female	Both	Male	female	Both
Bandorban	38.2	23.7	31.7	40.3	30.9	35.9
Khagrachari	49.9	32.7	41.8	51.9	40.1	46.1
Rangamati	51.5	43.2	43.6	56.4	42.3	49.7

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011)



### Primary school, teacher, and student

In Bangladesh, there are around 65,566 government primary schools, 4,799 private schools, and 3,753 NGOs. However, APSC 2021 covered a total of 1,18,891 primary schools, including religious schools, pre-primary schools, and kindergarten schools. In respect of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, it was found that the highest number of primary schools established in Rangamati was around 393, followed by 320 in Khagrachari and 219 in Bandarban district. A total of 1738 primary school teachers are appointed in Rangamati district, followed by 1635 in Khagrachari and 956 in Bandarban district, but the female teachers are highest in Khagrachari (887), followed by Rangamati (847), and 362 in Bandarban. In the case of students, the highest number of boys are found in Khagrachari (32,085), followed by Rangamati (29,478), and Bandarban (19,107). The highest number of girls is also occupied by Khagrachari, 32,568; followed by 28,298 in Rangamati; and Bandarban, 17,951. Miraculously, the girls are the highest in Khagrachari. However, the distribution of students per teacher is 40, which is the highest number occupied by Khagrachari district, followed by 39 in Bandarban and 33 in Rangamati. See Table No. 5.

**Table no 5**

***Number of government primary school (class I-V), teachers and student of 2011***

Districts	Number of government primary school	Number of teachers			Number of students			Student per teacher
		Male	Female	Total	Boy	Girl	Total	
Bandarban	219	594	362	956	19107	17951	37082	39
Khagrachari	320	752	887	1635	32085	32568	64653	40
Rangamati	393	891	847	1738	29478	28298	57776	33

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2011)

### NGO's school

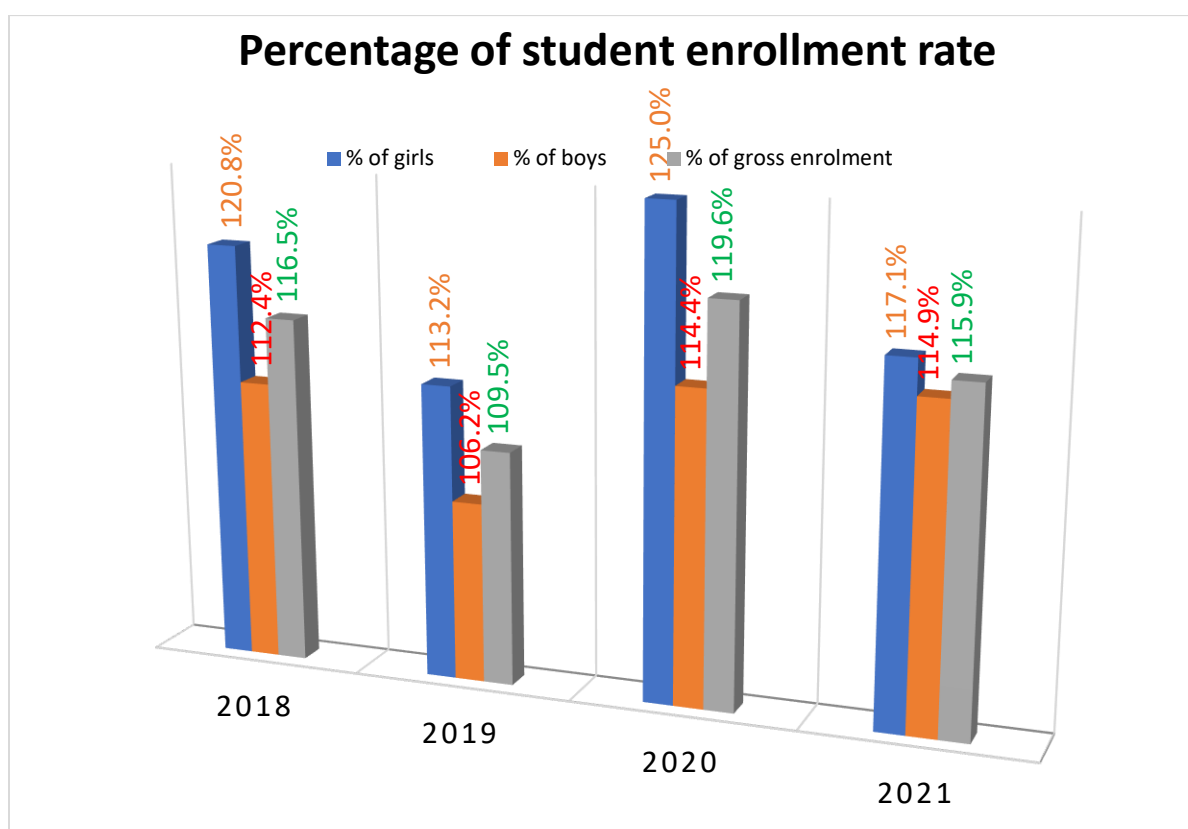
In order to decrease the illiteracy rate and increase enrolment in pre-primary and primary-level schools, NGOs are playing a crucial role. They are actively moving from plain districts to hilly regions in Bangladesh. Therefore, the number of schools administered by NGOs is significantly visible in rural to urban areas side by side with the government schools. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the highest number of NGOs schools are found in Rangamati (1777), followed by Bandarban (746), and Khagrachari (370). The teacher of the male is found highest in Bandarban at 955, followed by Rangamati at 374 and Khagrachari at 211. On the other hand, the number of female teachers is also highest in Bandarban district, around 1127, followed by Rangamati (1519) and Khagrachari (327). Students are highest in Rangamati 31,451 (boys 15,507 and girls 15,744), followed by Bandarban 19,909 (boys 12,839 and girls 7,070), and Khagrachari 11,949 (boys 5,873 and girls 6,076). The distribution of students per head of the teacher is found to be highest in Khagrachari (22), followed by Rangamati (17), and Bandarban (10). See table no. 6.

**Table no 6.**

**Number of NGO school, teacher and student 2011**

District	Number of NGO school	Number of teachers			Number of students			Students per teacher
		Male	Female	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Bandorban	746	955	1127	2072	12839	7070	19909	10
Khagrachari	370	211	327	538	5873	6076	11949	22
Rangamati	1777	374	1519	1888	15507	15744	31451	17

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 2011



Source: World Bank

**Figure 1:**

Boys and girls enrolment rate

**Percentage of student enrolment scenario**

The student enrolment rate of boys and girls in Bangladesh at the primary level is important. Therefore, government and non-government organizations are working collaboratively in order to provide qualified education and increase the enrolment rate. However, students are the future assets of the nation, and

taking care of them and raising them in a quality environment is on the prominent agenda of the government. Girls have been seen to participate in the education process lower in the last century, and even in some respects, they don't have the right to achieve an education, but fortunately, their enrolment and participation have increased dramatically in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, the figure 1 shows that the number of girls enrolled is significantly higher in four consecutive years, from 2018 to 2021. In 2018, the participation rate of girls was 120.8 percent, whereas boys' enrolment was significantly lower, representing around 112.4 percent, and the gross enrolment rate was around 116.5 percent. In 2020, the highest ratio of girls' enrolment in primary school was seen, which represents the highest at around 25.0 percent, and the least number of boys enrolment was seen in 2019 at around 106.2 percent. However, in 2021, boys' and girls' enrolment are almost equal, as boys represent around 114.9 percent while girls represent 117.1 percent, which is significantly higher than boys, and this year's gross enrolment rate was 115.9 percent. See Figure 1.

### Conclusion

Primary education for children is the first step in formal academic life. Though the education of children actually starts at home, formal education starts to be received by children in primary school, which is considered the second institution for children. Having primary education is a basic right for children, and it is also mandatory for all. Ethnic children in plain districts or hilly regions are not exceptional. But the lives of ethnic children somehow varied from region to region, district to district, and community to community. Therefore, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, some of the community literacy rates are remarkably lower, for example, in Mro, Khumi, Khyang, Lusai, and Pankhyo. They are not only backward in academic aspects but also socio-economically and geographically because they are residing in remote areas where the accessibility of government facilities is poor. NGOs are the major source for them to provide the facilities. There are very few governments primary schools established in remote areas where the majority of the teachers remain absent from duty. In addition to that, poverty, language barriers, distance, an unstable political situation, the absence of teachers from school, inadequate institutions, poor communication, and a lack of parental awareness are the major factors in illiteracy. Therefore, to overcome the language barriers, the government started distributing ethnic language books in pre-primary schools in 2017.

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