

EFFECTUALITY OF COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL IN REDUCING DROPOUT IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

With a literacy rate of mere 59 percent, the government of Bangladesh is very keen to achieve universal primary education in line with Millennium Development Goals by 2015. National Action Plan (NPA) has been formulated as to earn this goal. With the slogan -Education For All (EFA)-the country set target to ensure 100% primary enrollment by 2011. Subsequently, the incisive effort from the part of government has greatly attributed as we see a phenomenal progress in enrollment in the last few years. Yet, the high dropout rate of the enrolled students has been a grievous concern that is denting the laudable achievement to a greater extent. Numerous attempts have been approached to rein this tendency with little success. In such a backdrop, the present study intends to show the efficacy of 'Community Social Capital' in reducing dropout rate. It would like to deduce the fact that communities which are more participatory, friendly, possess a high level of trust and are civic oriented has lower dropout rate than the communities that lacks those features. It addressed the question; does 'Community Social Capital' have significant role in reducing the dropout rate of primary education in Bangladesh? To investigate this question, four variables such as: 'networks and relationships', 'organizational density and participation', 'trust' and 'mutual cooperation' were assessed using both primary and secondary data. The findings of the research have proved the main argument: if the level of social capital becomes high then the school dropout rate becomes low.

Keywords: Primary enrollment, dropout, community, social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh achieved a significant success in primary enrollment as it has seen an increase from 87.2% in 2005 to 98.7% enrollment in 2011 (4-Year Success, Directorate of Primary Education 2012). A concerted effort from the part of government has acted behind this attainment. However, almost one-third of the total enrolled students still leave school before completing the five-year cycle. Numerous efforts from the part of the government have been flunked to keep them in school. In most cases early-school dropouts cannot re-enter formal schooling and thus remain locked into the closed world of illiteracy. In order to overcome this problem, the Bangladesh government individually and with the collaboration of development partners had instituted several measures, including the free and compulsory primary education program ¹ (1993), providing the free books program, the food for education program (1993), the special school Tiffin program (2001), and the scholarship program (2002) and so on. However, those programs have not successfully encouraged children to stay in school, at least up until now. Many scholars indicate that weak social cohesion, lack of community participation, vertical social relationship and the traditional social structure are responsible for this acute problem. A review of the recent study (Israel et al., 2001; Dika & Sing, 2002; Israel & Beaulieu, 2004) reveals that researchers are becoming increasingly aware that rural children's

educational outcomes are shaped not only by the structural elements of their rural communities, but also importantly by the dynamics of the social interactive processes taking place within the community such as parent-teacher relationships, relationships among parents, parent-child relationships. On the basis of this premise, the main argument of this study proposes that children's educational performance is better in those communities where social capital is strong. Through this study, the author wants to check whether 'Community Social Capital' could decrease the dropout rate of the primary education sector in rural Bangladesh?

METHODOLOGY

In this study, multiple methods were used for data collection-from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary data was collected through questionnaire survey and interviews with the stakeholders of school. Secondary data was collected from official records, previously conducted studies, books, publications, journal articles, reports, the internet, and other relevant documents. The field survey of the present research was conducted within the catchment area of two schools situated under two *Union*² of two *Upazilas*³. These two *Upazilas* have been selected purposefully so that the environment, population, rate of literacy, per capita income, and lifestyle, remain almost the same. Two school catchments areas from these two *Upazilas* have randomly been selected for conducting the survey to measure the level of community social capital of these areas. One set of questionnaire has been used to conduct the survey among 40 (total 80 from two areas) randomly selected parents of each area. The questionnaire on social capital was formulated using 'Integrated Questionnaires for the Measurement of Social Capital' (World Bank SCTG, 2002). Two primary schools had been taken as the case study. The first one is Ashraf Gonj Govt. Primary School with the catchment area in Ramanathpur Union under Badorgonj *Upazila* and the second one is Rampur Govt. Primary School with the catchment area in Asujia Union under Kanduya *Upazila*. Forty parents of the students of grade-4 (2009, grade-4) of each catchment area were interviewed. In each case the community social capital was measured. To measure the community social capital, both primary and secondary data with four variables such as (i) networks and relationships (ii) organizational density and participation; (iii) trust; and (iv) mutual cooperation among parents have been used.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 1988, James Coleman contributed the first evidence of a relationship between social capital and school dropout rates indicating that social capital was a critical input of education. He and his associates demonstrate that students attending private religious schools, notably Catholic schools, are less likely to drop out than students attending public high schools. The main argument in Coleman's analysis lies in the

¹ Bangladesh government enacted Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1990. It expanded the program all over the country in 1993.

² Union Parishad is the basic tier of local government in Bangladesh that has three tiers: *Zela Parishod*, *Upazila Porishod* and *Union Parishod*.

³ *Upazila* is the second tier of local government in Bangladesh.

church/school nexus, the interaction of parents with one another, in the schools and in their distinct community (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Another scholar naming Halsey argued, “the major determinants of education attainments were not schoolmasters but social situation, not curriculum but motivation, not formal access to the school but support in the family and the community” (Halsey, 1972). On the other hand, Putnam (2000) stresses the overriding importance of trust in a sample of American communities, noting that even communities with many material and cultural advantages do a poor job of educating their kids if the adults in those communities do not connect with one another.

The present study concentrates on three basic terms: community, community social capital and dropout. In this study, a community is defined as residential neighborhoods who live within particular school catchment areas and where children go to the same school. The notion of social capital is said to have first appeared in Lyda Judson Hanifan’s discussions of school community centers (Halpern, 2005). However, the concept of social capital to study everyday practices of individuals was first used by Pierre Bourdieu, when he drew on the Marxist theoretical framework, to study social developments (Bourdieu, 1983). In the last two decades of twentieth century the concept was greatly stimulated by the writings of James Coleman (1988, 1994) and Robert Putnam (1993). Coleman (1994) depicted that, “social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure.” Social capital is defined by Putnam (1995) as ‘features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’. International organizations like the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development have also given definitions of social capital. The World Bank has given an extensive definition of social capital. According to the WB, “social capital is a combination of norms, institutions, networks etc. that can positively influence the standard and density of social interactions. Studying different definitions from different scholars this study refers community social capital to networks and relationships, organizational density, trust, and mutual cooperation, of those neighborhoods that are shared by individuals or groups within and outside of that community. The notion dropout refers to a student who leaves school before completing the primary cycle, particularly grade IV and a student who is absent from school for two consecutive months.

In this study four variables of social capital such as: ‘(i) networks and relationship’, ‘(ii) organizational density and participation’, ‘(iii) trust’ and ‘(iv) mutual cooperation’ was measured to know the level of community social capital. The first variable ‘networks and relationship’ was explained based on some relationships such as: parent-teacher relationship, relationship among parents, parental participation in school activities and parent-child relationship. A strong relationship between parents and teachers is very effective in the case of primary school students (ages 6-11), because at this stage students cannot concentrate their mind fully on academic activities. So, a good relationship between parents and teachers is very crucial to know the daily performances and progress of students. In addition, this relationship facilitates common pooling of resources by parents and teachers to increase school enrollment, and reduce the number of dropouts. The relationship among parents means the degree to which parents know the parents of their child’s closest friends. This indicator is intended to measure the breadth of ties existing among these adults. It is important that parents can monitor their children through these links, and can ensure that norms are mutually understood and enforced (Coleman, 1988a; Lee 1993). Parental participation in school activities refers to the active engagement of parents in sharing ideas, contributing time and resources, making decisions and taking action for the wellbeing of schools as well as students. This indicator will help to develop a sense of ownership among the parents. Finally, the parent-child relationship refers to the depth of relationship between parents and children. This relationship depends on how frequently parents discuss with their children about their academic activities.

The variable, ‘organizational density and participation’, means the number of formal and informal organizations exist in a community. Having a large number of organizations and spontaneous participation by community members in the organizations certainly develop some networks which work as an information link among the community members. The next variable ‘trust’ was explained by James Coleman (1988). He argued that communities rich in trust and social connections achieved low rates of high school drop outs. High level of trust among community members inspires parents to send their child to school. More recently,

Putnam (2000) stresses the overriding importance of trust in a sample of American communities, noting that “even communities with many material and cultural advantages do a poor job of educating their kids if the adults in those communities don’t connect with one another”. The fourth variable “mutual cooperation” was measured by the indicators of people’s attitudes or responding tendency to help each other in emergency or normal period of time.

Primary Education and its Present Scenario in Bangladesh

The education system of Bangladesh is divided into three separate streams, namely: (a) Main stream, (b) Islam based stream, and (c) English medium stream (BANBEIS, 2005). The main stream of the education system is structured into six steps; primary education is one of them. Before primary education there is a system of early childhood education for the children of 3-5 years age group. It is not a fully organized through. Primary education is for the children of 6-10 years age group, and is imparted mainly in government and non-government schools. In urban areas, particularly metropolitan cities, children from middle and lower income families normally study in government and non-government primary schools. Children from higher middle and high income groups generally study in highly ranked private/missionary schools. Children of rich and solvent families normally study at English medium schools in big cities. Apart from government and non-government schools there is a good number of NGOs that run non-formal schools catering mainly to dropouts of the government and non-government primary schools.

Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) is the main authority in primary education in Bangladesh. Bangladesh government passed the Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1990 which made the five year primary education program free in all government schools. It declared education for girls in rural areas free through grade eight. With the view to ensuring universal primary education, MoPME has introduced the Food for Education (FFE) program (1993), the special school Tiffin program (2002), the stipend program for poor students (2002), Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II, 2004). These measures have resulted in impressive gains in primary enrollment. However, Bangladesh still faces obstacles towards the long-term success because of dropout before finishing the study. Study showed that dropout rate of the enrolled students was 29.7% in the year of 2011, which is about one-third of the total enrollment (4-Year Success, MoPME, 2012). The primary enrollment and dropout rate from 2005 to 2011 is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Primary Enrollment and Dropout Rate from year 2005 to 2011

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Primary Enrollment	87.	90.90	91.10	91.90	93.90	94.80	98.70
Dropout Rate	47.2	50.5	50.5	49.3	45.1	39.8	29.7

Source: 4 Year Success Report, Directorate of Primary Education 2012

Case Study-I: Ramanathpur Union (Ashraf Gonj Govt. Primary School) Background Information

Case Study-I works with the catchment area of Ashraf Gonj Government Primary School which was located at Ramanathpur union of Badargonj upazila under Rangpur district. According to the school survey report of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME, 2005), Badargonj Upazila had 81 government primary schools. The literacy rate of this Upazila was 38.2%. Data of Ramanathpur Union shows that only 45% of mothers in this area were literate. Most of the people of this area were farmers and agri-laborers. The monthly average income of 72.5% of the people was less than US\$115. In the case of family structure, most of the families were traditional⁴ in nature and only 12.5% of families were non-traditional. The number of siblings was two or less in 50% of families. In the year 2004 the total number of primary students of this Upazila was 182,460 and in grade 4 it was 31,346. Regarding school facilities, 59.17% of parents⁵ of that area reported that they were satisfied with school facilities. According to the Official record of District Primary Education, Rangpur (2010), the dropout rate in the year of 2009 in that area was 15%.

Community Social Capital

Forty (40) parents of the students in grade 4 of Ashraf Gonj Government Primary School were interviewed, out of which thirty-six (36) reported they did not have children who dropped out of school, and only four (4) parents reported they did. So the community social capital was measured in two stages, social capital of community (40 parents), and social capital of parents (4) with children who dropped out of school. Regarding networks and relationships, response from parents showed that 38.33% had very strong relationship between parents and teachers where 8.33% had weaker. About, “relationship among parents” data showed 61.25% of parents possessed a very strong relationship among themselves where 5.00% of parents lacked. Regarding, “parental participation in school activities” 37.50% of parents of that area had been taking part in school activities and 26.25% did not. About “parent child relationship” parents were asked about how much care parents were taking about the academic activities of their child, 60% of parents reported that they were always careful about their children academic activities. Finally, 49.28% of parents agreed that their networks and relationships were very strong and 12.60% parents reported it was weak.

Regarding organizational density and participation, 53.34% of parents agreed that ‘organizational density and participation’ among community members was very high where 12.60% of parents disagreed. Regarding trust, 36.25% of parents reported their community possessed very strong social trust among themselves, and 16.25% of parents reported that it was weak. About mutual cooperation, 55% of parents reported that their sense of mutual cooperation was very strong where 18.75% of lacking.

⁴ In a traditional family, children live with a father and mother, and in a non-traditional family, children live with a single parent.

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Table 2: Level of Social Capital

Variables	Social Capital of the Community			Social Capital of the Parents with Dropped out Children		
	Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Weak	Strong	Very Strong
Networks and relationships	12.60%	38.12%	49.28%	68.75%	31.25%	00.00%
Organizational density and participation	8.33%	47.50%	44.16%	58.33%	33.33%	08.33%
Trust	16.25%	47.50%	36.25%	50.00%	37.50%	12.50%
Mutual Cooperation	18.75%	40.00%	41.25%	25.00%	62.50%	12.50%
Average %	13.98%	43.28%	42.73%	52.08%	42.70%	08.33%

Source: Prepared by authors on the basis of survey

Case Study-II: Asujia Union (Rampur Govt. Primary School)**Background Information**

Case Study-II works with the catchment area of Rampur Govt. Primary School which was located at Asujia union of Kanduya upazila under Netrokona district. School survey report of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education shows that there were 87 government primary schools in Kanduya upazila 2005 (MoPME, 2005). The literacy rate of this upazila was 34%. Data showed that only 40% of mothers in Asujia union were literate. Most of the people of this area were farmers and agri-laborers. The monthly average income of 80% of the people was less than \$115 USD. In the case of family structure, most families were traditional in nature, and only 15% of families were non-traditional. The number of siblings was two or less in 52.5% of families. In the year 2003, the total number of primary students of this upazila was 165,009, and in grade 4 it was 26,758. Regarding school facilities, parents were asked same set of question. 55.83% of parents of that area reported that they were satisfied with school facilities. According to the Official record of District Primary Education, Netrokona (2010), the dropout rate in the year of 2009 in that area was 30%.

Community Social Capital

Forty (40) parents of the students in grade 4 of Rampur Government Primary School were interviewed, out of which thirty-three (33) reported they did not have children who dropped out of school, and seven (7) parents reported they did. So the community social capital was measured in two stages, social capital of community (40 parents), and social capital of parents (7) with children who dropped out of school.

Regarding networks and relationships, response from parents showed that 29.17% had very strong relationship between parents and teachers where 34.17% had week relationship. 36.25% of parents agreed that they possess very strong relationships among themselves, and 30.00% parents disagreed; 17.50% of parents reported that they always take part in school activities, but 53.75% of parents reported that they never did; and data of 28.33% of parents showed that they possessed very good relationships with their children; but 39.17% of parents did not. Finally 27.81% of parents agreed that the networks and relationships of their community were very strong and 39.27% of parents disagreed.

Regarding organizational density and participation, only 32.50% of parents agreed that organizational density and participation among community members was very strong and same percentages of parents disagreed. Regarding trust, 26.25% of parents reported their community possesses very strong social trust among themselves and 47.50% of parents reported that it was strong. About mutual cooperation, 27.50% of parents reported that their sense of mutual cooperation was very strong, but 27.50% of parents did not agree.

⁵ Parents were asked the following questions: ‘Are you satisfied with the facilities from school (free books, free schooling)?’; ‘Are you satisfied with the stipend program of schools?’ And ‘Are you satisfied with the other facilities from school (class room, water sanitation, play ground)?’ Parents could respond ‘not satisfied’, ‘partially satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’.

Table 3: Level of Social Capital

Variables	Social Capital of the Community			Social Capital of the Parents with Dropped out Children		
	Weak	Strong	Very Strong	Weak	Strong	Very Strong
Networks and relationships	39.27%	32.91%	27.81%	75.00%	24.56%	00.44
Organizational density and participation	32.50%	35.00%	32.50%	57.14%	38.09%	04.77%
Trust	26.25%	47.50%	26.25%	35.71%	50.00%	14.28%
Mutual Cooperation	27.5%	45.00%	27.50%	57.14%	35.71%	07.14%
Average %	31.38%	40.10%	28.52%	56.24%	37.10%	06.66%

Source: Prepared by authors on the basis of survey.

Comparative Discussion Between Two Cases

Though Ramanathpur Union and Asujia Union were situated in different districts, there were some similarities in the socio-economic life of the people of these two. They had almost the same land area (8.35 square kilometers and 6.45 square kilometers, respectively) population (27,550 persons and 24,104 persons, respectively), and literacy rate (38.2% and 34.0%, respectively). Most of the people from both the areas were farmers with a per-capita income of US\$970 and US\$910 respectively. They had a similar distance from District headquarters of 24 km for Ramanathpur and 21 km for Asujia. In respect to higher educational institutions, both Unions possessed almost the same number of high schools which were 09 for Ramanathpur and 08 for Asujia.

Comparison between Socio-economic and Household Characteristics

The following Table-4 shows the comparative data between socio-economic and household characteristics of communities and parents of dropouts for both Case-I and Case-II.

Table 4: Socio-economic and Household Characteristics

Socio-economic and household characteristics		Case One		Case Two	
		Community	Parents of SDO	Community	Parents of SDO
Mother's Education	Literacy	45.00%	50.00%	40.00%	42.86%
Family Income	US \$56- 113	72.50%	75.00%	80.00%	71.42%
Family Structure	Traditional	87.50%	75.00%	85.00%	85.71%
Number of siblings	Two and < two	50.00%	50.00%	52.50%	57.15%
Facilities of school	Satisfied	59.17%	75.00%	55.83%	61.90%

Source: Prepared by authors SDO refers to Student Dropouts

Although data of the above table shows an equal level of socio-economic and household characteristics of both Ramanathpur Union and Asujia Union, there is a great difference in the dropout rate; it was 16% and 33% respectively. This evidence shows that socio-economic and household characteristics of the community were not the reason for the difference in dropout rates between the two areas.

Comparison between Social Capital of the two Communities

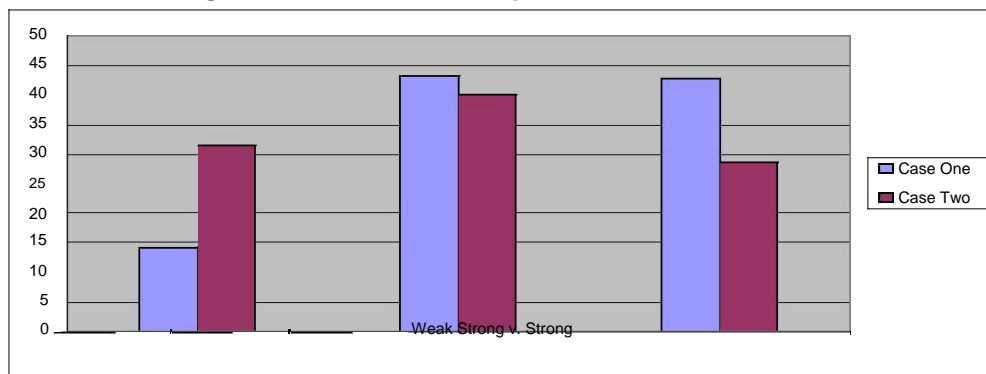
The following Table-5 and Figure-1 showed the level of community social capital and the dropout rate of Ramanathpur Union (Case-I) and Asujia Union (Case-II). The level of social capital of Ramanathpur was higher but the dropout rate was lower than in Asujia.

Table 5: Level of Social Capital and Dropouts

Level	Case One (Ramanathpur)		Case Two (Asujia)	
	%	Dropouts	%	Dropouts
V. Strong	42.73	10%	28.52	17.5%
Strong	43.28		40.10	
Weak	13.98		31.38	

Source: Prepared by authors

Figure 1: Level of Social Capital between Case-I and Case-II



Source: Prepared by authors

Comparison between Social Capital of Parents of Student Dropouts

The following Table-6 shows the level of community social capital of the parents of student dropouts of Ramanathpur Union (Case-I) and Asujia Union (Case-II).

Table 6: Level of Social Capital amongst the parents of the dropouts

Level	Case-I	Case-II
Very Strong	08.34%	06.66%
Strong	41.14%	37.10%
Weak	50.52%	56.28%

Source: Prepared by authors

FINDINGS

Analysis of the survey data showed that the high level of social networks and relationships such as: parent-teacher relationship, relationship among parents, parental participation in school activities, and parent-child relationship; organizational density and participation; high level of trust; and mutual cooperation among the people of Ramanathpur (Case-I) significantly contributed to reducing dropouts. For Case-I, parents obtained direct information regarding the attendance and performance of their children from possessing a good relationship with teachers. Frequent school visits by parents to inquire about the progress of their children created more obligations for the teachers and the School Managing Committee members. The parents became more aware as teachers visited the houses of absentee students and discussed the student's irregular attendance in school. Parents made contributions in the yearly school planning session which ultimately developed an inclusive feeling that the school was not owned by the government alone but also by them. Density of organization and spontaneous participation of community members allowed them to be more familiar with each other which made some strong networks and relationships. People knowing each other also facilitated parents in feeling safe to send their daughters to school. In this way, the link of mutual cooperation, relationships and trust promoted the overall quality of education and decrease the dropout tendency of children in Ramanathpur.

The question the author sought to examine in this paper was: *does 'Community Social Capital' have*

significant role in decreasing the dropout rate of primary education in Bangladesh? Table-4,

5 and 6 successively showed the comparative study of the socio-economic and household characteristics of communities; the community social capital; and social capital amongst parents of dropouts between Case-I and Case-II. The level of socio-economic and household characteristics of communities was almost equal between Case-I (Ramanathpur) and Case-II (Asujia). In the same way, the level of social capital of the parents of student dropouts was more or less equal between the two cases. But the level of community social capital in Case-I was higher (Very Strong + Strong = 86.01%) and the dropout rate was lower (10%) than Case-II where social capital was 68.62% and the dropout rate was 17.5%. It was not the socio-economic and household characteristics of community but the existence of social capital of community, which was responsible for the lower dropout rate in Case-I (Ramanathpur). On the other hand, social capital was lower in Case-II (Asujia), so the dropout rate was higher in this area. Finally, the findings of the research have proved the main argument: if the level of social capital becomes high then the school dropout rate becomes low.

CONCLUSION

Rural people in Bangladesh are disadvantaged in education not only because of their low levels of economic or human capital that are essential in educational processes, but also because of the low levels of resources that are available to promote education through the social networks, organizational density, trust, mutual cooperation in the communities where they live. The two case studies (Ramanathpur and Asujia) show almost the same level of socio-economic and household characteristics, yet the dropout rate of Ramanathpur is lesser than that of Asujia. From the government side, various initiatives have been instituted in both the case areas such as: free books, free schooling, monthly stipends, classroom facilities, play grounds, well trained teachers etc. Even with these efforts, a large difference has appeared in the dropout rate between Ramanathpur and Asujia. The findings of the present research show that the people of Ramanathpur are more civic oriented, maintain a higher level of networks and relationships among communities. Their level of participation with various organizations is higher and their sense of mutual cooperation is higher than the people of Asujia. In other words, the people of Ramanathpur possess a higher level of social capital than the people of Asujia. The finding of the present study reinforces Coleman's (1988) argument that the communities rich in trust and social connections achieved low rates dropouts.

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