



Learning Achievement Disparities among Government and Private Primary School Students: A Comparative Study in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to explore the learning achievement gaps of government and private primary school learners in the subjects of Bangla, English and Mathematics in Bangladesh. A quantitative and descriptive research design was used. This study was targeted Grade 5 students from 20 government and 20 private primary schools in Savar Upazila, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Data were collected from 400 students through purposive sampling, comprising 200 government and 200 private school students. A structured questionnaire was used to collect demographic, socioeconomic and educational information and a 60-mark learning achievement test was also conducted with 20 marks on each subject, Bangla; English; and Mathematics. Data were analyzed in terms of frequencies, percentages and mean scores. The results showed that the mean scores of the private school students were higher than those of government school students in all three subjects. The mean scores of government school students were 13 in Bangla, 10 in English and 11 in Mathematics, while private school students obtained mean scores were 16 in Bangla, 15 in English and 17 in Mathematics. The overall mean achievement score in the government school was 34 out of 60 (56.67%) and in the 48 out of 60 (80%) for private school students. The results indicate that there is a descriptive difference in learning achievement between two groups within the selected sample. The differences between parents' educational levels and the presence or absence of private tutors were also noted and may be used to give context to the achievement patterns noted. The results indicate that there is a need for better teaching quality, sufficient learning resources, corrective assistance and supportive home learning activities especially in English and Mathematics.

Keywords: Learning Achievement; Government Schools; Private Schools; Primary Education; Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

It is well established that education plays an important role in a person's growth and in the development of a nation. But simply going to school does not guarantee that children learn the knowledge and skills required for each level of schooling. In the realm of education, in developing countries there has been a growing focus on the difference between schooling and learning. The World Bank (2018) identified the learning crisis and stressed that education systems should not only pay attention to the time spent in school but also to the learning in school. This is especially important for Bangladesh as primary education has been significantly improved and there are concerns about foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN). So, the direct measurements of students' learning achievement offer a more meaningful measure of educational outcomes than just the number of students enrolled, in attendance, who complete a grade, or take an examination.

Gains in secondary education are significant, but there are still disparities in learning outcomes between student groups and educational contexts in Bangladesh. Previous studies indicate that student, family and school related factors affect learning achievement. This was done by Ahmed and Uddin (2022) who found out that the differences in learning skills are due to family wealth, parental education, parental awareness, and age-for-grade status. They conclude that socioeconomic and family factors may be a source of inequities in



learning in elementary school years. Likewise, Nath (2012) employed the Education Watch data of 7093 grade 5 students from 440 primary schools and found that there were links between the socioeconomic context and learning achievement. The results indicate that school attendance is not enough to account for the differences in learning; students' family circumstances and educational opportunities also play a role.

The effect of school types on learning achievement has also attracted many studies in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. Based on 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2017 National Student Assessment data with national representative samples, generally low and uneven learning outcomes of primary school students were reported, and there were significant differences in learning outcomes between school types, socio-economic groups and geographic areas, in particular, Bhatta and Sharma (2019). They also identified links between school type, teacher quality and achievement, and found that the children in privately managed kindergarten achieve better than those in government primary schools in some assessments. A World Bank study based on national assessment evidence also found that gender gaps in learning outcome in government primary schools and privately managed kindergarten schools in Bangladesh. But the size of these differences also differed among subjects, and therefore, school type should not be looked at separately from student composition and other school characteristics.

The results of Bangladesh also confirm the relevance of direct comparisons of learning achievement between different types of primary schools. In a comparative study of government primary schools and BRAC primary schools in rural Bangladesh, it was observed that there are differences in students' achievement across the types of primary education and that students achieved higher on knowledge-based items as compared to understanding-based items, Nath et al., (2007). In the study of 372 children ages 8–10 years in rural Bangladesh, (Hossain et al. (2021) examined mathematics computation, reading, and spelling achievement and found that school type, parents' education, years of schooling, and cognitive factors all correlate with achievement. Importantly, the scores for children enrolled in private schools are much higher on several achievement measures than are the scores for children in government schools. The results of this study give a solid empirical foundation to consider learning achievement differences among government and private primary school students.

Differences in achievement may also be due to supplementary educational opportunities. Based on data from Education Watch, Nath (2008) explored the prevalence of private tutoring in primary school among children in Bangladesh and concluded that supplementary tutoring was more prevalent for the children of better-off and more educated families and for students living in urban areas. The study also found a positive effect on students' learning achievement when they are getting private tutoring compared with students who are not getting private tutoring. This indicates that inequities in access to further opportunities for learning may help to explain inequities in academic achievement. Thus, the difference between government and private school students should be considered in the context of the use of private tutors and the provision of home-learning support.

There is also international evidence which shows that the link between school type and learning outcomes is complex. For Kenya, Uganda, India, and Pakistan, Gruijters, Alcott, and Rose (2021) employed within-household comparisons to investigate learning outcomes of private-school students and concluded that overall, the performance of private-school students was generally higher, though this difference was significantly smaller when accounting for family and household characteristics. This discovery is a warning to accept increased performance among private school students as proof that attending private school will always lead to improved learning results. Likewise, Alcott and Rose (2017) confirmed that parental educational level and parental wealth were factors that influenced learning in India, and that learning gaps increased during primary-school years. In India, Kumar and Choudhury (2021) also reported better learning outcomes for the private school students and observed that disparity narrowed with improved school attendance and length of study/homework time. These investigations suggest that interactions can occur between student-level and family-level factors and school type on learning outcomes.



School quality and teacher quality are another aspect of learning achievement. Heyneman and Loxley (1983), using data from 29 low- and high-income countries drew some conclusions that conflicted with this notion. They discovered that education quality, at both school and teacher level, may have a relatively bigger impact on the performance of students in low-income countries. Similarly, Glewwe et al. (2011) in a review of the evidence on school resources and educational outcomes in the developing world identified subject knowledge of the teacher, teacher absenteeism and some basic school resources as having been linked to learning outcomes. The results support the notion that looking at achievement gaps between school types should consider the variation in educational quality and learning opportunities.

Evidence from Pakistan is also relevant to provide some comparative insights. Andrabi et al. (2008) reported the swift growth of low-cost private schooling and identified the ability of private schools to deliver relatively low-cost education. Similarly, Andrabi et al. (2011) showed that there is an achievement gap between private and public schools in Pakistan and pointed out that the assessment of learning should not be based on enrollment, grade completion, or exam participation. However, more recently, Andrabi et al. (2025) found significant differences between the quality of public and private schools in Pakistan. Average scores were slightly higher in the private schools, but there was a lot of variation between schools. These results support the view that the sectors and the government and private school categories should not be assumed to be internally homogeneous, and that there can be significant school-level variations between the sectors.

Meanwhile, evidence also provides no guarantees that there is a private-school advantage. Based on an ASER pilot survey of Primary school children in rural Bangladesh, Richards and Islam (2018) examined reading and mathematics skills in government, NGO and privately owned schools. Their results indicated very poor levels of basic preparation, and, in this specific sample, there were no significant differences in achievement between the diverse types of schools. This evidence is significant as it shows that the nature of any differences between school types can be context, subject, location and even the characteristics of the students assessed dependent.

The picture, therefore, that emerges from the existing literature is complex and sometimes confusing as to learning achievement disparities. There are several studies that have shown private-school students score higher than government-school students, and other studies have suggested that the differences are driven in part by the socio-demographic factors, such as parental education, family wealth, private tutoring, attendance, study habits, school resources, teacher quality, and other factors. In addition, some research has indicated that there is little difference between the school types. This variant underscore the importance of making empirical judgments on a case-by-case basis and not simply taking for granted that one kind of school is better than the other.

In this context, the present study aims to investigate the achievement gaps between the students of government and private primary schools of Savar Upazila, Dhaka, Bangladesh. This study is conducted with the study of grade-5 students and directly investigates the achievement level of the selected three core subjects (Bangla, English and Mathematics) using a structured learning achievement test. Selected demographic, socioeconomic, and educational factors, such as gender, age, parents' education, family income, private tutoring, and home-learning support, are also included as context for understanding achievement differences observed. The study aims to offer empirical evidence of the extent and pattern of achievement gaps among the two school types by describing the mean achievement scores of the students from the two school types. The findings are also taken from purposively selected sample from Savar Upazila and can't be generalized as a representative sample of all the primary school students of Bangladesh.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objective

To provide a description of the level of learning of the government and private primary schools students in Bangla, English and Mathematics in Bangladesh.



Specific Objectives

- To evaluate the learning achievement of primary school students in government and private schools in three subjects such as Bangla, English and Mathematics.
- To compare the average scores of governments and private schools' children in Bangla, English and Mathematics in primary education.
- To provide the overall educational attainment of the students in the Government and Private Primary Schools based on their mean scores.
- To explore some of the reasons for the differences in the level of learning achievement between students in government and private primary schools, this might be drawn from their students' family and educational backgrounds.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative and descriptive research design to analyze the differences of learning achievement of grade 5 students in government and private primary schools. The quantitative method was employed with respect to the students' achievement in Bangla, English and Mathematics. The descriptive approach was employed to describe the characteristics of the respondents and describe their learning achievement in terms of frequency, percentage and mean score. The data were collected at one time with a structured questionnaire and a learning achievement test. The following are descriptive reports of the achievement scores for government and private school students.

Population, Study Area and Sample

The study was carried on the Grade 5 students of 20 government and 20 private primary schools in Savar Upazila, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The total number of the students involved in the study was 400 of which 200 students were selected from Government schools and 200 students from Private schools. The sample size of 400 students could not be regarded as representative of all the primary school students in Bangladesh.

Sampling Technique

The participating schools and students are selected using purposive sampling techniques. The schools are chosen because they are accessible, have grade 5 students available, and can commit to the study. Students in the study are those enrolled in Grade 5 and available for data collection during the data collection period.

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data:

- **Structured Questionnaire**
Basic demographic, socioeconomic and educational data such as school type, gender, age, parents' educational qualifications, family income, private tuition, and home-learning support were collected using a structured questionnaire.
- **Learning Achievement Test**
The achievement test is the key tool for measuring academic achievement. It contains 60 marks allotted in Bangla (20), English (20) and Mathematics (20). The test is constructed to the grade 5 curriculum and given to both groups.



Pilot Testing

Small-scale pilot testing is also administered with a small sample of students (not part of the final sample) in Grade 5. The pilot test results are used to make the necessary changes prior to the final data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

Schools will be contacted, and permission sought. The aim of the study and the practices are communicated to the school authorities and the participants. The conditions and procedures used for administering the questionnaire and the achievement test are similar, including the instructions, the items, the time limits, and the scoring methods. Completed answers will be retrieved and validated for completeness.

Data Analysis

Coding, inputting and analysis of data were performed in MS Excel. Demographic, socioeconomic and educational characteristics were presented using frequencies; percentages and achievement scores. The mean scores and percentages were used to summarize students' achievement scores in Bangla, English and Mathematics. The overall achievement score arrived by adding Bangla (20), English (20), and Mathematics (20) which totaled 60 marks. Data were analyzed descriptively to display the achievement pattern of the students from the selected sample.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical guidelines. where relevant, permission is sought from relevant school authorities and participation is voluntary. Participants and their parents or guardians (where applicable) are informed of the reason for the study. Students' identity will never be disclosed and information gathered will only be used for academic research.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

A total of 400 Grade 5 students participated in the study, including 200 students from government primary schools and 200 students from private primary schools. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented below.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Categories	Government 200 (%)	Private 200 (%)	Total n=400(%)
Gender	Male	103 (51.5%)	97 (48.5%)	200 (50.0%)
	Female	97 (48.5%)	103 (51.5%)	200 (50.0%)
Age	10 years	75 (37.5%)	55 (27.5%)	130 (32.5%)
	11 years	89 (44.5%)	107 (53.5%)	196 (49.0%)
	12 years	36 (18.0%)	38 (19.0%)	74 (18.5%)
Total		400 (200%)	400 (200)	400 (200%)

From Table 1, it is seen that there were equal number of government schools and private school students in the sample. 50% of the total respondents were male and 50% were female. Most of the students (49.0%) were 11



years old, while 32.5% were 10 years old and 18.5% were 12 years old. The distribution by gender and age is even, making a descriptive comparison between the two types of schools appropriate.

Socioeconomic and Educational Characteristics

Table 2: Selected Socioeconomic and Educational Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Categories	Government (%)	Private (%)	Total n= 400 (%)
Parents' education	Primary or below	90 (45%)	30 (15%)	120 (60%)
	Secondary	62 (31%)	70 (35%)	132 (66%)
	Higher Secondary	34 (17%)	42 (21%)	76 (38%)
	Bachelor's or above	14 (7%)	58 (29%)	72 (36%)
Private tutoring	Yes	45 (22.5%)	80 (40%)	125 (62.5%)
	No	55 (27.5%)	20 (10%)	75 (37.5%)

The selected socioeconomic and education characteristics are different among the two groups as shown in Table 2. Parents' educational level was more likely to be high among private school students. The same was true of private school students who were more likely to receive private tutoring (40.0%) than government school students (22.5%). The differences indicate that students' educational histories and availability of additional learning opportunities may differ between the two groups and should be considered when analyzing the patterns of learning achievement.

Learning Achievement in Bangla

Table 3: Learning Achievement Scores in Bangla

Maximum score = 20

School Type	N	Mean	Mean Percentage
Government	200	13	65%
Private	200	16	80%
Total	4 00	14.5	72.5%

Table 3 shows that private school students obtained a higher mean score in Bangla ($M = 16$ than government school students $M = 13$). The average difference was 3 marks. On a percentage basis, the mean score for students attending a private school was 80% while the mean score for students attending a government school was 65%.

Learning Achievement in English

Table 4: Learning Achievement Scores in English

Maximum score = 20

School Type	N	Mean	Mean Percentage
Government	200	10	50%
Private	200	15	75%
Total	400	12.5	62.5%



The mean score of the students attending private schools was higher on English than for those attending government schools (see Table 4), $M = 15$ vs. $M = 10$. In this example, the largest difference (for this case) between the three subjects was observed when the mean difference was 5 marks. The results indicate that achievement in English is an area of learning of importance to the disparity of achievement between the two groups.

Learning Achievement in Mathematics

Table 5: Learning Achievement Scores in Mathematics

Maximum score = 20

School Type	N	Mean	Mean Percentage
Government	200	11	55%
Private	200	17	85%
Total	400	14	70%

Table 5 shows that the mean score for Mathematics was higher for the students from private schools ($M = 17$) than for the students from government schools ($M = 11$). The mean difference was observed to be 6 marks. The gap in Mathematics was relatively almost the same in English and double in Bangla as compared to English and Bangla.

Overall Learning Achievement

Table 6: Overall Learning Achievement by School Type

Maximum total score = 60

School Type	N	Mean	Mean Percentage
Government	200	34	56.67%
Private	200	48	80.00%
Total	400	41	68.33%

The overall learning achievement of the respondents is presented in table 6. The mean overall achievement score (M) for the private school students ($M = 48$) was higher than that of the government school students ($M = 33$). There was a difference of 14 marks between two groups out of 60 marks. Private school students had an average score of 80 per cent while government school students scored an average of 56.67 per cent.

The results thus suggest a significant descriptive difference between the two groups in overall achievement in learning. The same pattern (higher mean score among private school students) was seen in all three subjects.

Comparative Summary of Learning Achievement

Table 7: Subject-wise Comparison of Learning Achievement

Learning Area	Government Mean	Private Mean	Mean Difference
Bangla	13	16	3
English	10	15	5
Mathematics	11	17	6



Overall Achievement	34	48	14
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Table 7 makes a direct descriptive comparison of the learning achievement of government school students with that of private school students. The mean scores of students in private schools were higher in all three subjects. The highest difference was found in English (5 marks) and Bangla (3 marks) and Mathematics (6 marks). The mean score of the students from the private schools was higher than the mean score of the students from the government schools overall.

DISCUSSION

The result of this study indicates descriptive difference in students' learning achievement between government schools and private school students of primary education in Savar Upazila, Dhaka. In all three subjects (Bangla, English and Mathematics), the mean scores of private school students were higher than those of the government school students. This suggests that the students in the private school in the sample showed relatively higher academic performance.

In Bangla, the mean score of government school students was 13 out of 20 (65%) while that of the private school students was 16 (80%). It is noticeable that there is a gap of 3 marks between the two groups with respect to Bangla achievement. Bangla was found to be the mother tongue, and it was a core subject in primary curriculum, however, students from both school types did not perform at the same level.

This difference was larger in English. The difference between the mean scores of governments and private school students was five marks (10 for government school and 15 for private school, or 50% and 75%). This one of the major differences between the subjects found in the study. The relatively poor scores for English among government school students could be attributable to variation in exposure to the language of instruction, additional educational support, teaching methods and/or learning materials. The present study is descriptive, however, and does not allow the determination of which specific factors caused the difference.

The subject-wise mean difference was the highest for Mathematics. The private school students had a mean score of 17 (85%), while the government school students' mean score was 11 (55%), resulting in an average mark difference of six. It indicates that there could be a disparity in learning area Mathematics that is important in the selected sample. Access to private tutors, learning materials, teacher support and opportunities for additional practice can be a potential cause of differences.

The overall achievement results confirm the difference. The overall mean score for students in the government school was found to be 34/60 (56.67%) and that of private school students was found to be 48/60 (80%) based on subject-wise mean score. So, the overall mean difference was found to be 14 marks. The observation that the achievement gap was not restricted to one subject is supported by the consistency of the higher mean score in the various subject areas of the private schools.

The socioeconomic and educational factors offer background information to interpret these findings. A relatively higher percentage of students attending private schools indicated that their parents had higher educational levels. The incidence of private tutorial was also higher among the private school students as compared to government school students. The patterns identified indicate that there is a possible relationship between family education and the additional learning opportunities available and the achievement patterns observed. However, these factors are not definitive causal factors because they were not tested in an inferential statistical manner.

In terms of the distribution by school type, there was a relatively even distribution with 200 students in each school, and a near even distribution for males and females overall. This is a balanced sample which allows an easy descriptive comparison of the two school types. The purposive sampling of schools and students,



however, and the focus of the study on Savar Upazila restrict the generalizability of the findings to primary school students in Bangladesh.

In general, the results showed that in the sample test the students at private schools were better than the students at government schools in all three subjects. These differences were most marked in Mathematics and English. The findings indicate that several learning support, teaching quality, educational resources and possibilities of further academic practice require strengthening, especially for students who might not have easy access to learning support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study suggest the following recommendations:

- The observed differences between mean achievement scores in the different subject areas were relatively larger in English and Mathematics; these should be given more attention in the government primary schools.
- Students should have access to books and other learning materials, digital resources, and classroom learning aids that are adequate for their learning.
- Remedial teaching, extra practice and Personal Learning Support may be offered to students who are achieving at a lower level and where needed.
- Increase the quality of primary school teachers' training in terms of professional development and subject training to enhance teaching quality and student learning outcomes.
- To encourage students to study regularly at home, parents/guardians should supervise students' studies and create a positive study atmosphere at home.
- Improve classroom teaching so students will meet the expected learning outcomes and minimize over-reliance on private tutoring.

CONCLUSION

The learning achievement gap between the government and private primary schools in Bangla, English and Mathematics in Grade 5 level of selected government and private primary schools of Savar Upazila, Dhaka has been described in this study. Results show a descriptive difference between the two groups with respect to the mean achievement score. In all three subjects the mean scores of private school students were greater than those of government school students. The mean scores of government school students were 13 in Bangla, 10 in English and 11 in Mathematics, and for private school students, their mean scores were 16 in Bangla, 15 in English, and 17 in Mathematics. The maximum difference in the mean score was Mathematics followed by English and Bangla. Overall, government school students achieved a mean score of 34 out of 60 (56.67%) while the mean score of the private school students was 48 out of 60 (80%). This corresponds to a difference of 14 marks which was observed between the overall means. There were also differences between the two groups regarding selected socioeconomic and educational characteristics. The parents of private school students tended to be better educated in general, and a larger percentage of the private school students were privately tutored. This may be used to provide context reasons for the observed differences regarding learning achievement but does not establish causal explanations or statistical significance in the present descriptive study. The results indicate that attention should be paid to improving the quality of teaching, the provision of learning resources, remedial support, opportunities for private tuition and home learning support, especially for students who need extra support are needed. English and Mathematics mean scores are relatively larger and may be given special attention.

Findings need to be interpreted considering the study. The sample was Grade 5 students of selected primary schools of Savar Upazila and purposive sampling was used to select the sample. Hence, the results are not



necessarily indicative of all primary school students in Bangladesh. This study recommends further investigation with larger and more representative samples and appropriate inferential statistical procedures to investigate the factors associated with differences in learning achievement of government and private primary school students.

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