



Research

Language Barrier in Getting Quality Education and Employment for CHT Indigenous People in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Language is considered to be an important medium of communication which helps to connect people and bring them close to one another. Every year a huge number of indigenous people living in Bangladesh who face serious discrimination in getting quality education and employment due to language-based learning difficulty. The objective of the study was to identify how language problem is creating employment disparity between mainstream Bengali people and minority indigenous people. It also sought to find a solution of the issue and reduce discrimination for indigenous people. The research basically was conducted based on secondary literature support. The main reason behind the low literacy is that most of them have to study in Bengali medium rather than their mother tongue. Besides, the schools lack sufficient infrastructure and adequate teachers. It also increases the tendency of high drop out. Moreover, low literacy rate deprived them to enter into a better employment sector. It is suggested that the basic education should be in their mother tongue and quality teachers should be recruited in local level schools.

Keywords: Indigenous people, Quality Education, Employment Opportunity, SDG, Language barrier.

Introduction

Bangladesh gained its independence from the tyrannical rule of Pakistan in 1971 intending to establish an exploitation free society. Still, the post-colonial legacy of socio-economic dominance is very much evident in the social system of Bangladesh (Huque, 1997). Ethnic minorities in Bangladesh face serious discrimination in respect of education, health, economic

services as well as social identity crisis (Chakma & Maitrot, 2016). Mostly they are lagging for an invisible communication barrier with the metro people because of their language.

Language has always played a significant role for the regulation of an individual's access to the production, distribution and consumption of resources and an important medium for economic exchange (Bourdieu, 1977; Gal, 1989). There are at least 50 ethnic communities in Bangladesh of whom at least 35 have their languages, politico-economic-administrative system, ethno-national identity and cultural & religious beliefs (Ahsan & Chakma, 1989). Most of the indigenous population live in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) which is situated in the south-eastern corner of Bangladesh. This constituency covers about 10% of the total land area in Bangladesh comprising 3 administrative districts namely- Rangamati, Bandarban & Khagrachari (Cummins et al., 2012). Around 11 indigenous groups live in the traditional homeland of CHT. Among them, the largest 3 groups the Chakma, the Marma and the Tripura signifies the 90% of the total indigenous population and altogether make up 50% of the overall population of CHT (Rasul & Tripura, 2016).

In any case, the presence of indigenous gatherings and their different social practices has stayed unrecognized both by the State and its standard populace, by virtue of obliviousness, unfair viewpoints or haughty mentalities, or a blend of them. This has brought about the avoidance of indigenous people groups from administration and advancement, besides in an extremely peripheral manner. Although Article 23A of the Constitution of Bangladesh (presented through the fifteenth Amendment), does make explicit references to the indigenous people groups, it alludes to the indigenous people groups in wording that are rejected by them. It alludes to the indigenous people groups as "clans, minor races, ethnic organizations and communities" ("Upajati, Khudrojatishaotta, Nrigoshthi o Shomprodai"), rather than 'indigenous people'. It likewise says that all the people of Bangladesh will be known as Bengalis (Article 6.2). These arrangements have disregarded the privileges of self-assurance and self-recognizable proof. The remains of the indigenous people groups on suitable sacred acknowledgement and acknowledgement of their character and rights is upheld, by the reformist residents of Bangladesh, remembering the Parliamentary Caucus for Indigenous Peoples (Roy & Chakma, 2015).

Most of these ethnic groups remain illiterate and they are about to lose their written scripts or alphabets or even their mother tongues. Roy (2017) claims that around 3 million indigenous people don't use Bangla as their first language. Different studies proved that one of the main reasons for these conditions is their inability to start their initial studies in their mother tongue (Faisal, 2019). As a result, it remains one of the most disadvantaged regions in the country and lags in almost all development indicators (Zohir, 2011; Sen et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the political & social powers including media, jobs and education are mostly limited to metro people. The language of academically educated metro-people of Bangladesh dominates over other languages in Bangladesh (Awal, 2019). For this reason, In CHT region poverty is about 1.6 times higher than other parts of Bangladesh (BBS, 2013). To tackle the situation, A National Education Policy 2010 was approved by the parliament seeking to make the education system more inclusive in respect of their geographic, socio-economic, ethnic, linguistic and other conditions with acceptable learning outcomes. Specific provisions are provided so that indigenous teachers and texts in the mother tongue are to be made available so that the indigenous people can learn their language (Plant & Chakma, 2011). The SDG also promulgate a specific goal in 4.2 which states a similar type of vision statement (Madden & Coleman, 2016).

Based on evidence gathered from secondary literature (research paper, government policy, plan and program documents, technical report), this article attempts to find out how language problem is creating employment disparity between mainstream Bengali people and minority indigenous people. It also endeavours to explore some recommendations on how these language barriers can be reduced and mainstream the indigenous people to fulfil SDG goals by 2030. Hence, this article is organized into two sections- one part reviews the historical evidence and present scenario of CHT indigenous population to find out how language made a huge contribution to spreading inequality in the society. The second part highlights some key issues that needed to be tackled by the government to eradicate all kind of discrimination from CHT and make ways for mainstreaming ethnic people to achieve SDGs by 2030.

Language, Education and Economic Growth

Language is a natural human instrument of conversation, communication, enacting social functions (Holtgraves, 2014; Bradac, 1993). A public marker of ethnolinguistic, national or

religious identity, a 'treasure', a form of wealth Grin (1990), so strong that people are willing to go to violent acts for its defence for instance, in East Pakistan in 1952 (Calvet, 1998; DeVotta, 2004). The concept 'Language economics' is used as an instrument for the selection, design and evaluation of language education policies Cooper (1989) & Vaillancourt (1996) where it has been observed that language is a primary element of human capital in which individuals invest by getting proper education and can enhance their economic status (Crystal, 2012; Grin, 2002, 1994).

Language competency may influence people's socio-economic status (Dustmann 1999; Dustmann & VanSoest 2001; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003) several empirical studies were done to find out the relationship between language and earnings in Canada and the United States (Vaillancourt, 1980; Boulet, 1980; Grenier, 1982, 1984, 1987; Grenier & Vaillancourt, 1983; McManus et al., 1983) which can be described by the human capital theory. The main reasons behind this are, if someone can take education with local or mother language then it might be easier for him to enrol in the educational institutions. Native speakers are more competent in finding quality goods and services and that's why they can ensure themselves with distinct social identity. In this case, human capital theory plays a critical role in the willpower of earnings and social identity theory distinguishes their particular social identity (Shapiro & Stelcner, 1981; Carliner, 1981; Grenier, 1987; Chiswick & Miller, 2007; Trejo, 1997). Lang (1986) argues that minority language groups may be relegated to their language barriers which might impact on their employment and in income. They are to learn non-native language due to hegemony of the influential majority language, e.g., most of the indigenous people in Bangladesh have to take education in non-native language except only five indigenous groups.

In this paper, it has been argued that due to language discrimination, indigenous people are still backwards in terms of getting proper education and they cannot enter into a prestigious job in the employment sectors compared to majority Bengali speaking people. In the next section, we will see the impact of language discrimination on school enrolment in the CHTs.

Indigenous people in Bangladesh: Raising the issue

Bangladesh is home to around 3 million indigenous and tribal people (about 2% of the total population) from 50 or more different indigenous and tribal people (ITPs) with their distinct language, culture and heritage (Toufique et al., 2017). They are spread out across the country

where the largest parts live in Chittogram Hill Tracts (CHT) and others live in the northwest (Rajshahi-Dinajpur), central north (Mymensingh-Tangail), north-east (Greater Sylhet), south-west and south-east (Chittogram, Cox's Bazar, Patuakhali and Barisal) part of Bangladesh (Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2007). There are eleven indigenous ethnic groups in CHTs such as the Chakma, the Marma, the Tripura, the Mro, the Lushai, the Khumi, the Chak, the Bawm, the Tanchangya and the Pankhua. Amongst the groups, the Chakma, the Marma, and the Tripura are the largest one who lives in Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban (also known as CHT). So, this study focuses on these three largest groups to explore the main objectives of it.

From the inception of Bangladesh, there had been a contentious position between the Bangladesh government and Parbatya Chittogram Jana Samhati Samiti- PCJSS (Liberation Fighter of CHT) in this area. The signing of the CHT Peace Accord in 1997 between the Government of Bangladesh and PCJSS created a calm situation in this area. There have been granted some particular privileges for indigenous people by this accord such as quota reservation for them privileges in the local politics and building particular institutions for upholding their culture (Islam, 2013). Moreover, the Accord had been recommended about providing indigenous education through their mother languages (The Bangladesh Gazzate, 2010) and free education to all students up to class X. But till date, only five indigenous groups' children are provided text textbooks in their mother tongue.

In the following discussion, there have been conferred that the language problem of the indigenous people is the prime constraints to their education causing high dropout from school enrolment and resulting low literacy rate and finally swaying their income. This practice, on one side, not only makes them unbenefited but, on the other, the national economic wheel is also losing their economic contribution to it.

Language Impacts on School Enrolment in Bangladesh

Now we could start with the school enrolment rate of the indigenous children in Bangladesh which would help us to understand the language problem for getting primary level education. Though the government of Bangladesh have been taken affirmative measures to engage the tribal people into the mainstream process of the state. But still, now the scenario is not as satisfactory as the SDG goals pledges, 'no one is left behind'. According to Badiuzzaman et al, (2011) the Chittogram Hill Tracts (CHTs) is 'one of the most vulnerable' among the other regions due to its

education, health, water, sanitation, income and employment opportunities and intercommunity confidence. Where Dhamai (2006) says that the major problems of these tribal people are land dispossession, inadequate access to education and other social opportunities. In this research, we found that the indigenous people in Bangladesh are facing low literacy rate and the main impediments behind this are their language problem which is affecting their per capita income and keeping them behind other Bengali people as it happened in East Pakistan, between West and East parts.

The major reason for the low literacy rate among the indigenous people is the language problem in the education curriculum in which they have to study Bengali medium books (Table 1 shows). Bengali is not their mother tongue. Most of the indigenous people in Bangladesh have to learn Bengali besides their mother language which becomes the reason for the high dropout rate from school enrolment. Though the Government of Bangladesh has taken some initiative to start education in their mother language for this group of people at the elementary level education. But it is for only six indigenous languages- the Chakma, Marma, Santali, Kakbarak, Mandi and Sadri (Chowdhury, 2010). We take the three big indigenous group for exploring the effect of such initiative and finds no significant improvement has happened in the education of this group of people. Due to the language barrier, the indigenous children have to face learning problems and in result high dropout rate they experience (Dhamai, 2006, Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2007).

Table 1: Household reported language of book and medium of instruction in schools in the CHTs (BBS, 2013).

Language of Book and Medium of Instruction	Language of book				
	Indigenous People: All indigenous group	Chakma	Marma	Tripura	Bengali
Mother Tongue	1.2	0.7	2.1	1.1	95.5
Other Than Mother Tongue	98.8	99.3	97.9	98.9	4.5
The medium of instruction in school					
Mother Tongue	2.3	3.1	2.1	1.1	95.5
Other Than Mother Tongue	97.7	96.9	97.9	98.9	4.5

The indigenous people live in the remote areas in Bangladesh, where there has been lacking in sufficient infrastructure needed (Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2007). It is found that the literacy rate among the indigenous people in CHTs is only 27% (CO: OPERAID,2020), with a strong differential persevering between male and females (Mullah et al., 2007) whereas the national literacy rate is more than 70% (Dhaka Tribune, 2020). The illiteracy rate of the female indigenous people is more acute where seven out of every ten women in CHT are illiterate (Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, 2007). Though there are relatively adequate primary schools, these schools are not well managed; they suffer from lack of adequate teachers, let alone good teachers (Oxfam, 2014) besides the language problem. As most of the indigenous people live in the hilly areas, the communications system is not good in these areas. The tribal children frequently face communication difficulties because the schools are often far from tribal houses. Barakat, A. opines that financial insolvency constitutes another major factor of high dropouts in the school level and particularly in the tertiary level besides their language problem (Badiuzzaman et al., 2011).

The Asian Development Bank shows the percentage of tribal children's dropout rate is 60% which is higher than that of the children of the mainstream population (ADB, 2008). The children of this ethnic group do not understand the Bengali language and the teaching of their school teachers as they are used to learning in their mother language from childhood. The school enrolment of this ethnic child aged 5-16 years in the CHTs is about 82% but the dropout rate is as high as 65% (Badiuzzaman et al., 2011). If the language barriers could be solved by providing education materials in their mother tongue, the literacy rate among them might be improved. It can be evidenced that Chakma shares a literacy rate of 69.66% who has the better opportunity of education with mother language whereas Murong holds only 41.47% who have not such opportunity (Toufique et al., 2017). In the following discussion, we would see how language barriers influence employment and income compared to mainstream Bengali speaking people in Bangladesh.

Low Literacy Rate Broadening Income Inequality

The prevailing language system indorses social and economic disparity (Chowdhury & Hossain, 2010; Salam et al., 2014; Bourdieu, 1991; Gal, 1989; Kroskirty,2004; Heller, 2010; Fairclough,

2013). Now if we look at Bangladesh and try to explore the influence of language problems of indigenous people on their employment income, we can observe the same scenario exists among these minority groups. The intellectual domination of Bengali and English language over neglected indigenous languages is creating such disparity between Bengali people and the indigenous people. As the indigenous language is different from Bengali, often the indigenous children face difficulties in understanding the school lessons which creates a high dropout rate. Due to their low literacy rate, they cannot enter into a better employment sector as the Bengali mainstream population can. As a result, the indigenous people have still involved in the traditional production process in most of the cases e.g., agriculture; they are set behind national growth (BBS, 2013). As they are cut off from economic gains at the same time the national economy cannot add more value from these large population groups. The following tables show the variation in income of the major indigenous groups compared to national income.

Table 2: Comparison of income of the indigenous communities to the national income of Bangladesh

Community	Occupation and income					
	Agriculture	Off-farm Income	Service	Land Rent	Per Capita income	Household
Chakma	58.9 %	15.20 %	19.5 %	0.9 %	40,470	1,62,835
Marma	61.7 %	13.93 %	19.6 %	2.2 %	37,043	1,62,215
Tripura	53.2 %	19.95 %	24.4 %	0.0 %	26,407	1,38,027
All	76.20%	6.1 %	13.4 %	0.5 %	54,023	2,73,572
National	¹ 45.1 %	¹ 20.8 %	¹ 34.1 %		1,60,356 ²	47,96,623

Source: Nokrel et.al. (2018);¹ BBS, 2011; ² BBS, 2019 per capita GNI 1909 USD (exchange rate 1USD=84 BDT)

We can observe that average per capita income and household income of indigenous groups and national per capita and household income are far different. It is interesting to see that the per capita income and household income between different indigenous groups also fluctuates. It is worth to state why the Chakma indigenous groups play well in all spheres like enrolment in the school, literacy rate and also in per capita as well as in household income. Till date, only six indigenous groups can take education with their mother tongue whereas Chakma indigenous

groups share most. Since they can get a relatively better education than others in their indigenous language, they can contribute more to the national income economically.

An ordinary language could be an extraordinary issue when it influences the economic matters of human life. For instance, East Pakistan in 1952 placed a violent movement to secure language rights. The existing language problem of indigenous people would further influence the existing socio-economic settings and might lead to social unrest in this region. The Sustainable Development Goals also stretches on equality and equity for all sectors of human being where no one could be lagging. Social progress is needed to be harmonious in a sense it is part of a body which is the best fit when all organs develop equally. The development of Bangladesh would be achieved by the inclusive development of all sections of the population.

SDG and Ethnic minority in Bangladesh

The Bangladesh government is trying to build an inclusive and equitable society by reducing inequality and poverty from the society with the help of its fast-growing economy of recent years to become a Middle-Income Country by 2021 and achieve SDGs by 2030 (Rasul et al., 2016). One of the core mottos of SDGs is to leave no one behind in the development process in respect of their gender, race, class, caste, ethnicity (Winkler& Satterthwaite, 2017). The disparity and imbalance of growth among ethnic people in the CHT area and plain land population are quite evidenced in the previous section of the paper. Several other studies also showed that the ethnic minorities and indigenous people in Asia remained backwards and deprived of the fruit of development because of their language difficulties, high poverty, low education and weak economy (McDougall, 2015; Birthal et al., 2006; Mergos, 1994). Localization of SDGs is thought to be the ideal approach to tackle such situations where the central government will delegate substantive power to the local government to ensure specialized growth of a particular region to ensure balanced growth and equitable development (Anderson et al., 2020). Bangladesh Government has already set up a completely separate ministry named Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and specialized local administration system for them from 1996, but still, the local situation in CHT area is not developed as we expected.

The ethnic community is mainly agro-based society where they are traditionally involved in Jhum farming for their existence. Due to ecological imbalance and the adverse effect of climate change, this agricultural pattern of Jhum farming will not sustain in the future (Shelley, 2000).

They either need to upgrade the existing agriculture system with the use of modern techniques of production or switch themselves into non-farming professions like involving in government or private services or business. The number of ethnic people involved in non-farming activities is not quite notable in the past. The main reason behind it is their educational backwardness and networking skills (Chakma & Maitrot, 2016). Without developing these skills, they could not compete with others for any kind of job position or sustain in the business sector as both of them are highly competitive and ever-changing with the demand of the market. There is a huge possibility of the tourism industry in the CHT area because of the scenic beauty, biodiversity and cultural attractions (Lincoln et al., 2019). But due to the lack of promotion of these tourist attractions, they lost a huge chance of earning currency.

Role of learning languages can be crucial in this regard for the ethnic people (Leslie& Lindley, 2001). The language proficiency will help them to connect with new peoples and their ideas to develop their existing pattern of agriculture. It will enable new opportunities for them to get quality education and develop their skills. Advertisement of their culture and heritage in different languages will attract people to visit CHT areas which will open new tourism possibilities for them (Ahmed, 2017). Ultimately, they will get a chance to flourish their capacity like other plain land people and contribute to the national development process. Eradication of language barriers in primary education will encourage them towards quality education which is the 4th goal of SDG. When they will have a quality education, they will involve more and more in non-farming economic activities which will ratify SDG goal 8 titled decent work and economic growth. Their economic power will help them to fight against poverty, hunger and inequality which was consequently 1st, 2nd and 10th goal of SDG. Partnerships with ethnic communities in implementing SDGs will promote greater outcome and sustainable development for all according to the 17th goal of SDG.

If Bangladesh wants to move forward to achieve SDG goals, there is no alternative to ensure all basic and essential amenities of ethnic people in CHT areas to fulfil the motto leaving none behind. Language proficiency and quality education for ethnic communities are the keys to reach the target we all desire to achieve.

Conclusion and Policy implication

Historically language is considered to be an important factor for ensuring quality education and involvement in economic activities. In 1952, East Pakistanis (now Bangladesh) were lagging in education & economic activities than the West Pakistanis because of their language differences and cultural barrier. After the independence of Bangladesh, the same pattern of discrimination is seen on the ethnic people of the CHT region which results in their backwardness in all spheres of life than the mainland population.

For ensuring sustainable and balanced growth for Bangladesh, we cannot ignore the importance of the contribution of ethnic people. To fill up the SDG goals in Quality education for all and reduce inequality, it is very important to address the problem of ethnic people by reforming the current educational system.

The government should formulate long term plans for the development of ethnic people for ensuring their sustainable development. Quality teachers should be recruited in the local level schools and colleges who have good command in the local language and familiar with local cultures. Financial and non-financial incentives should be introduced for the attracting these quality teachers as well as their accommodation facilities so that they can give full concentration on the development of local communities like other government services (Prodhan, 2016). On one side, capacity building policies should be undertaken for the existing local teachers on indigenous culture and pedagogical strategy. On the other side, workshops and other promotional activities should be conducted by the government as a part of community involvement to raise awareness among the parents on the importance of education in day-to-day life (Kabir & Nath, 2005). The government can increase the number and number of scholarships to promote meritorious students. Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA) can introduce scholarship programs for higher education as well to promote education at their community level. The basic education of the indigenous child's should be on their mother tongue and then gradually they will learn Bangla after achieving maturity. A solid foundation on the indigenous language and culture will make the path easier to learn a new language for them and broaden their thought process. To implement this, primary level textbooks should be published in their language and inclusion of local stories and myths will attract the young minds to study more attentively (Chiran, 2020). So, a mother tongue-based primary education system can solve a

major part of the problem. Quality classroom for them and the need-based curricular system should be developed for them keeping in mind the backwardness of their present educational context. This will help them for a better understanding of their lessons and develop a curiosity to learn more. The need-based curriculum will grow them in aligning with the current job market demand. The government should reassert the quota policies for them in the 1st and 2nd class government posts to ensure their participation in the nation's building and government policies (Uddin & Chowdhury, 2016). Another thing that needs to be emphasized is recognizing their identity in the constitution by an amendment act in the parliament. When they get their recognition, all other benefits from the state will be easier to avail (Hossain, 2013).

These initiatives will help to minimize the existing intellectual gap between mainland population and indigenous population & foster their participation in the economic growth of the country. Otherwise, long term deprivation and identity crisis can lead them towards violent movements shortly and that could repeat the incident of the CHT insurgency of 1996 (Zaman, 1982).

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Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts to declare.



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