

Material fees in the BRAC operated community schools: Should it be reviewed?

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining whether the rate of material fees that is charged to the students in the BRAC-run community schools should be reviewed. Information was collected from guardians of 550 students of 11 BRAC-run community schools. Some qualitative information was also gathered from the guardians, teachers of the concerned community schools, the members of School Management Committees, community people and concerned BRAC staff. Data show that a large proportion of the students came from extremely poor and socioeconomically backward households. Majority schools were located in the socioeconomically backward and coastal areas. Majority of the household heads were engaged in such occupations that yield very low income and had no education. Majority of them had no arable land. Thus, they were not in position to pay the material fees regularly. The findings suggest to reduce the amount of fees to an extent the service receivers will be able to pay. At the same time the existing system of fees realisation may be reviewed since it was not effective enough.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The concept of "Community school" was developed and implemented by the General Education Project (GEP) of the government of Bangladesh between 1990 and 1996. The objectives were to: (1) increase equitable access to primary and secondary schooling; (2) improve the quality of education at primary and secondary levels; (3) strengthen the management capacity of the primary and secondary sub-sectors; and (4) prepare future policies and programmes to reform the structure and financing of higher secondary and post-secondary education (Kalam and Hadi 1999).

To ensure the equitable access to primary education, in light of the high cost to meeting such objective, the GEP agreed to develop and construct lower-cost classrooms that would be of simpler construction. Communities lacking schools where literacy rate is low, the density of population is high, and where a large number of children, particularly girls do not have access the existing schools, were to receive low cost building of minimum two classrooms (World Bank, 1997, BRAC, 1998). Initially, the project was to finance 12,000 such classrooms, and 2,800 communities were chosen to implement the programme.

The communities were organized and trained to formulate School Management Committee (SMC) who would manage these community schools. SMCs together with community people arranged land for the school and also provided Tk. 10,000 as a deposit to the government. The SMCs were responsible to appoint teachers, motivate parents to send their children to schools, handle all administrative matters, and maintain the educational standard.

The government provided cost for building construction and furniture including a lump sum money for teachers' salary (Tk. 500 per teacher/month for a maximum of four teachers). In addition, the government provided teaching-learning materials, carried out school supervision; arranged training for teachers, assessed operational status and performance of the schools with the help of the SMCs, the teachers and the parents.

In the beginning of the programme, there were some problems in the project component. For example, low-cost buildings were considered to be high-cost in the long run because the foundations were not strong enough to support a second floor. In addition, some communities were unable to provide money or land. Primarily 2,800 communities were chosen to receive community schools, of which 636 communities could not afford cash or land. Thus, these communities were left without schools. As a result, although the project was to finance 12,000 classrooms, only 5,350 classrooms were built by the end of the project implementation (World Bank, 1997). However, the project continued to develop community schools and established 3,259 schools by mid 1998 (BRAC, 1998). The project in its second phase, planned to raise the number of community schools to about 5,500 by the year 2002 (PEDP, 1995).

As has been mentioned earlier that the communities would make decisions about school construction, maintenance, and teacher appointments, many of them fulfilled their tasks satisfactorily. But some communities could not provide much support in the process. Some communities that obtained lower-cost community schools faced difficulty in appointing teachers. The community was expected to propose qualified local residents for teaching positions and the *upazila* education authority had to approve the appointments. But there were several disagreements among the communities and the *upazila* education authorities. As a result, the appointments were delayed. Some communities, who contributed for their schools, remained without benefit from their contribution.

These problems made many schools non-functional. The government assessed an operational status of the schools and identified some 194 schools as non-functional. Thus, the government, through newspaper advertisement, appealed to the established and interested NGOs to run these non-functional community schools, initially without government finance. In response, BRAC showed interest to takeover some of these schools and the government agreed to hand over 73 non-functioning community schools to BRAC.

The government ordered its local authority to make all necessary arrangements to hand over these schools with building, furniture, materials etc. to BRAC by 30 November

1998. However, until June 2002 BRAC got possession of 45 schools. Due to non co-operation of the local school authority, BRAC did not get possession of the remaining schools. In majority of the schools BRAC had been operating from pre-primary to grade V. In these schools BRAC targets mainly the children of poor and illiterate families. The number of learners in the classes is kept around 40 to ensure learner-centered teaching.

BRAC supplies books and necessary educational materials to the students and provides teachers' salaries. BRAC charges fees at different rate for different classes against material cost. The rate was Tk. 10 for pre-primary, Tk. 15 for class I, and Tk. 20 for class II – class V. The government supplied textbooks free of cost. The government also agreed that if the NGOs are able to run these schools successfully, the government would provide the teachers' salaries, after initial two years.

Research problem and issue

The material fees that BRAC charged to the students of the community schools is payable on a monthly basis. BRAC Education Programme (BEP) reported that from January 2002 to August 2002, more than Tk. 1,20,000 (about 15% of the total realisable amount) remained unpaid (BEP, 2002). Through a preliminary field visit, it was observed that majority of the students did not pay the fees regularly that hamper smooth operation of the programme. Table 3 in Appendix shows that during the nine months duration of school operation, 15% of the students did not pay the fees for a single month.

The programme management, thus, was keen to know why the students did not pay the material fees regularly, the views of the guardians as well as the community about the amount of material fees, and what measures could be taken so that the students pay the fees regularly. Thus, this study was undertaken to meet the following objectives.

The objectives

The study aimed to

- know the socioeconomic characteristics of the learners' households;
- identify who pay the material fees regularly and who do not;
- why the students of the community schools did not pay the fees regularly;

- to know the views of the guardians and concern of the community members about the amount of fees that is charged to the students; and
- to determine what measure(s) could be taken so that the students would be able to pay the material fees regularly.

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to use both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Data were collected from the BRAC-run community schools located in nine districts of Bangladesh, i.e., Bhola, Brahmanbaria, Munshiganj, Narayanganj Pirozpur, Patuakhali, Sariatpur, Sherpur and Tangail. Although, students of the community schools were selected, information was gathered from their guardians. This is because of the nature of the research question, which is an about materiel fee. The guardians of the students decide about the payment of fees. Besides, some qualitative information were gathered from the guardians of the students, concerned BRAC staff, teachers of concerned community schools, the members of the SMCs, and the community people.

Sample size and sampling procedure

Eleven out of 45 schools were selected randomly. All the classes of the selected schools were covered. Since all the classes did not exist in all the selected schools, equal number of classes could not be selected. However, from each class, 10 students (5 regular payees and 5 irregular payees) were chosen randomly. Prior to sampling, two lists were prepared; one for regular payees and the other for irregular payees (the terms are explained below). The students (both regular and irregular payees) were selected from the collection registers of the selected schools. Table 1 gives a distribution of sample population by class.

In addition, five of the selected schools from four different teams were chosen at random for qualitative information. From these selected schools, 86 guardians of the students, 17 teachers, 22 members of SMCs, and 42 community people were interviewed. Besides, 9 concerned BRAC staff were also interviewed. The guardians were chosen at random and

the community people were chosen based on their availability at home and interest regarding the community schools as well as issues of education.

Table 1. Proportion of sample population by sex and class

Class	Number of class	% of selected learners		
		Boys (244)	Girls (306)	All (550)
Pre-primary	9	43.3	56.7	100.0
Class I	9	42.2	57.8	100.0
Class II	11	38.2	61.8	100.0
Class III	10	44.0	56.0	100.0
Class IV	8	53.8	46.3	100.0
Class V	8	47.5	52.5	100.0
Total	55	44.4	55.6	100.0

Data collection techniques and instruments

The guardians of the selected students were interviewed individually using a structured pre-coded questionnaire. The questionnaire mainly contained questions related to socioeconomic background of the households and views of the guardians regarding material fees. The guardians, chosen for qualitative information, were interviewed in-groups (two group meetings were held in each school - one with regular payees and the other with irregular payees). The teachers of the selected community schools, members of the SMCs, and the community people were also interviewed in-groups using checklists. The concerned BRAC staff were interviewed individually through informal discussions.

Field activities and quality control

Ten experienced field investigators and two field supervisors were involved in collecting data. The field investigators as well as the supervisors were given a three-day orientation on the data collection and supervision techniques. During the training, one-day was allocated for field-test to provide practical exposure to the data collection techniques.

The field investigators were responsible for conducting the individual interviews and the supervisors were responsible to assist the field investigators at the field level in collecting data. The field supervisors were also responsible to re-interview at least 10% of the respondents and scrutinize the questionnaires instantly. The researcher himself visited four of the data collection spots during the data collection to ensure quality of the data and conducted the discussions with the selected groups.

Explanation of the terms "regular and irregular payees"

The 'regular payees' were those students, who paid the material fees in advance or on a monthly basis. The 'irregular payees' were those who did not pay the material fees in advance or on a monthly basis, but paid the fees through different modes of payment such as twice a year, thrice a year, at the end of a certain period, or as and when they could. It should be mentioned here that the students who paid the material fees in advance or on a monthly basis but had one or two months due were considered as the regular payees. The time frame that was considered for assessing the payment status was January - September 2002, because, the data of this study was collected in October 2002.

FINDINGS

Socioeconomic characteristics of the households

Household head's occupation: Table 1 in Appendix shows that household head's occupation of more than 31% of the students was farming, which was higher than day labourers (16.7%), traders (16.2%), rickshaw pullers (8.9%), and service holders (8.4%). Amongst the farmers, 52% were mid level, 42.2% small, and the remaining 5.8% were big farmers. Amongst the traders, 63% were small, 25.8% mid level, and 11.2% were big traders. Amongst the service holders, 54.3% were small, 43.5% marginal, and the remaining 2.2% were big service holders. Level of farmers, traders and service holders was assessed through a self assessment system. The farmers were asked to assess their level based on the amount of land they cultivated. The traders were asked to assess their level based on the amount of capital they invested in their trade and nature of trading. The service holders were asked to assess their level based on the amount of monthly salary they received and nature of their job. The Table also shows that household heads of 4.4% of the students were unemployed, retired or disabled, followed by 3.6% fishermen, 3.5%

skilled labours, and 2% drivers. The findings indicate that majority children of the community schools came from the households engaged in such occupations that yield limited income.

Parent's year of schooling: Table 2 in Appendix gives a distribution of students by their parents' year of schooling, household's land size and economic status. The Table shows that fathers of about 52% of the students had no schooling, followed by about 28% had 1-5 years of schooling, and 17.5% had 6-10 years of schooling. Similarly, mothers of 58% of the students had no schooling, followed by 30.2% had 1-5 years of schooling, and 11.6% had 6-10 years of schooling. The mean year of schooling of fathers was 2.9 years, it was 2.0 years for mothers. Thus, the results indicate that majority of the students of the community schools came from the households having no education or lower level education.

Household's land size: Table 2 in Appendix shows that households of about 52% of the students had no arable land, 12.5% had 50-99 decimal of land, 12.2 had 1-49 decimal, and 12.2% had 150-199 decimal of land. The mean land of all the student's households was 78.5 decimal (Table 2 & Appendix Table 2). Table 2 shows that the mean land of the selected households in some areas was far lower than the average of all the selected households, i.e. 31.4 decimal in Bezgaon in Munshiganj district, 34.8 decimal in Telikhali in Patuakhali district, 40.2 decimal in Doctorkhali in Narayanganj district and 42.3 decimal in Dhalikandi in Sariatpur district. Although, average land size in majority of the selected areas was less than the average of all the selected areas, it was far higher in some areas, i.e., 196.7 decimal in Juganiakanda village in Shergpur district, followed by 173.2 decimal in Putkakhali village in Zhalokathi district and in Beltoli village in Tangail district. The Table further shows that the proportion of landless was much higher in some of the selected areas such as 81.7% in Bezgaon in Munshiganj district, 73.3% in Shibpur in Bhola district, 58% in Dhalikandi in Sariatpur district, etc. These findings indicate that intra-household and intra-area land distribution was unequal.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by location of school and socioeconomic factors of concerned households

Name of school	District	Land size (decimal) (mean)	% of landless
Telikhali	Patuakhali	34.8	52.0
Shehakathi	Patuakhali	90.4	40.0
Doctorkhali	Narayanganj	40.2	57.5
Bezgaon	Munshiganj	31.4	81.7
Telinagor	Brahmanbaria	36.0	52.5
Maniknagar	Sariatpur	87.4	41.7
Dhalikandi	Sariatpur	42.3	58.0
Shibpur Mowlabhi bari	Bhola	45.0	73.3
Putkakhali	Zhalokathi	173.2	28.0
Juganiakanda	Sherpur	196.7	36.7
Beltoli	Tangail	122.3	36.7
All		78.55	51.6

Household's economic status: The Table 2 in Appendix further distributes the students by their household's economic status. The economic status of the households was also assessed by self-assessment of the respondents. The respondents were asked to evaluate their economic status based on their income and expenditure for the last one year (October 2002 - September 2003). The Table shows that majority (55.8%) households of the students fell in deficit category, followed by 30.5% balance and 13.6% in surplus category. The household's economic status deteriorated more in some selected locations.

Table 3 shows that there were no surplus category households in Telikhali village in Patuakhali district. On the other hand, 80% households in the village Shibpur Mowlavi bari in Bhola district were found of deficit category, followed by about 73% households in the Juganiakanda village in Sherpur district, 72% households in Dhalikandi village in Sariatpur district, 60% households in the village Maniknagar in Sariatpur district. About 56% of the selected households were in deficit category that indicates that households' socioeconomic status of majority of the students was poor. It means that major service

receivers of BRAC-run community schools were the children of socioeconomically backward households.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by location of school and their economic status

Name of school	District	Economic status		
		Surplus (75)	Balance (168)	Deficit (307)
Telikhali	Patuakhali	-	44.0	56.0
Shehakathi	Patuakhali	8.0	36.0	56.0
Doctorkhali	Narayanganj	27.5	35.0	37.5
Bezgaon	Munshiganj	11.7	33.3	55.0
Telinagar	Brahmanbaria	12.5	37.5	50.0
Maniknagar	Sariatpur	11.7	28.3	60.0
Dhalikandi	Sariatpur	6.0	22.0	72.0
Shibpur Mowlavi bari	Bhola	5.0	15.0	80.0
Putkakhali	Zhalokathi	32.0	34.0	34.0
Juganiakanda	Sherpur	3.3	23.3	73.3
Beltoli	Tangail	30.0	30.0	40.0
All		13.6	30.5	55.8

Status of payment of material fees by socioeconomic factors and areas

The following part of this paper highlights payment status of material fees in BRAC-run community schools. It also presents payment status of material fees by socioeconomic variables of the households, that enables to understand who pay the material fees regularly and who do not.

Table 4 shows that about 23% of the students paid the fees regularly and 76.5% of the students paid irregularly and the remaining less than 1% were not charged the fees.

Table 4. Distribution of students by status of payment of material fees

Status of payment	Number of students	%
Regular	125	22.7
Irregular	421	76.5
Free (were not charged material fees)	4	0.8
Total	550	100.0

Table 5 distributes the students by status of payment of material fees and occupation of the household's heads. The Table shows that 30.4% of the service holders, followed by 27.8% of the farmers, 26.1% of the unemployed, disabled and unemployed, and 5.8% of the traders paid the material fees regularly.

Table 5. Distribution of students by household head's occupation and status of payment of material fees.

Socioeconomic factors	Regular payees		Irregular payees	
	Number	%	Number	%
<u>Farmer</u>	47	27.8	122	77.2
<i>Small farmer</i>	14	20.0	56	80.0
<i>Mid level farmer</i>	28	31.5	61	68.5
<i>Big farmer</i>	5	50.0	5	50.0
<u>Trader</u>	23	25.8	66	74.2
<i>Small trader</i>	13	23.2	43	76.8
<i>Mid level trader</i>	8	34.8	15	65.2
<i>Big trader</i>	2	20.0	8	80.0
<u>Service holder</u>	14	30.4	32	69.6
<i>Small service</i>	4	16.0	21	84.0
<i>Mid level service holder</i>	10	50.0	10	50.0
<i>Big service holder</i>	-	-	1	100.0
Teacher	2	50.0	2	50.0
Driver	2	18.2	9	81.8
Rickshaw/Van pullar	11	22.9	37	77.1
Day labour / Factory labour	14	15.2	78	84.8
Handicrafts	-	-	7	100.0
Fisherman	2	10.0	18	90.0
Unemployed, disabled and unemployed	6	26.1	17	73.9
Skilled labour	-	-	19	100.0
Foreign job	2	22.2	7	77.8
Others	2	22.2	7	77.8
Total	125	22.9	421	77.1

Note: As four of the total sample students were not charged material fees, they have not been included in the related tables showing payment status of material fees.

The Table more specifically reveals that 20% of the small farmers paid the material fees regularly, which was 31% for marginal farmers and 50% for big farmers. Of all the traders, 23.2% of the small traders paid the material fees regularly, which was 34.8% for mid level traders and 20% for big traders. Of all the service holders, 16% of the small service holders paid the fees regularly, which was 50% for mid level service holders. The

above findings reveal that well-of households were more regular in paying the fees than those of backward households.

Table 6 depicts that payment status of material fees had a correlation with fathers' year of schooling of the students but it had no correlation with mothers' year of schooling. The Table shows that 37.5% of the students whose fathers had schooling of 11 years or more paid the material fees regularly. The proportion was higher than the students (26.0%) whose fathers had 6-10 years of schooling, followed by no schooling (24.8%). On the other hand, 17.2% of the students whose mothers had 6-10 years of schooling paid the fees regularly which was lower than the mothers of the students (23.6%) who had 1-5 years of schooling.

Table 6. Distribution of students by father and mother's year of schooling and status of payment of material fees

Fathers and mothers education	Regular payees		Irregular payees	
	Number	%	Number	%
<u>Father's year of schooling</u>				
Nil	70	24.8	212	75.2
1-5 years	24	15.8	128	84.2
6-10 years	25	26.0	71	74.0
11+	6	37.5	10	62.5
All	125	22.9	421	77.1
<u>Mother's year of schooling</u>				
Nil	75	23.7	241	76.3
1-5 years	39	23.6	126	76.4
6-10 years	11	17.2	53	82.8
11+	-	-	1	100.0
All	125	22.9	421	77.1

Table 7 depicts that proportion of regular payees of material fees gradually increased with increasing household's land-size. The Table shows that the households which had 200 decimal of land or more, about 41% of them paid the material fees regularly, which was higher than the households which had 100–149 decimal of land and 150 – 199 decimal of land (29.4%).

On the other hand, less than 16% of the students who had no arable land paid the fees regularly, which was lower than the students who had less than 50 decimal of land (20.9%), followed by 50-99 decimal of land (27.9%). The mean land of the regular payees was significantly ($p < 0.001$ level) higher (121.3 decimal) than mean land of the irregular payees (66.3 decimal).

The table (Table 7) also shows that 41.3% of the students paid the material fees regularly who fell in surplus category in economic status, followed by 25.9% in balance and 16.7% in deficit category. The finding also indicates that payment status of material fees was correlated to economic status of the concerned households.

Table 7. Distribution of students by household land size, economic status and status of payment of material fees

Household land size and economic Status	Regular payees		Irregular payees	
	Number	%	Number	%
<u>Land size (decimal)</u>				
Nil	44	15.7	237	84.3
1- 49	14	20.9	53	79.1
50 – 99	19	27.9	49	72.1
100 - 149	11	36.7	19	63.3
150 - 199	10	29.4	24	70.6
200+	27	40.9	39	59.1
All	125	22.9	421	77.1
Mean land (decimal)	121.5		66.3**	
<u>Economic status</u>				
Deficit	51	16.7	254	83.3
Balance	43	25.9	123	74.1
Surplus	31	41.3	44	58.7***
All	125	22.9	421	77.1
<u>Eligibility for BRAC membership</u>				
TG	46	16.5	278	83.5
NTG	79	29.5	189	70.5

** Significant at $p < 0.001$, *** Significant at $p < 0.0001$ level.

The proportion of regular payment was higher among the NTG (non-target group) (29.5%) than TG (target group) (16.6%). BRAC defines those households as TG who have less than 50 decimal of land and sell manual labour for minimum 100 days a year. The NTG are those who do not fulfil the above criteria. The findings however, indicate

that fees payment status was correlated to land-size of the concerned households (Table 7).

Table 8 shows association of fee payment status with two major economic variables (proportion of landless and proportion of deficit category) by area. A higher proportion (81.7%) of the selected households in Bezgaon village in Munshiganj district had no arable land, 55% of them fell in deficit category - cent percent of them paid the fees irregularly, and 90.7% of the payable amount remained unpaid during the time (January - September 2002). Similarly, 58% of the households in the Dhalikandi village in Sariatpur district had no arable land, 72% of them fell in deficit category - 91.8% of them paid the fees irregularly, more than 69% of the payable amount remained unpaid. On the other hand, 57.5% of the households in Doctorkhali village in Narayanganj district had no arable land, 37.5% of them fell in deficit category - cent percent of them paid the fees irregularly, but only 10.1% of the payable amount remained unpaid. The proportion of unpaid amount in Doctorkhali village was far lower compared to the other areas. Similarly, 36.7% of the households in Juganiakanda village in Sherpur district had no arable land, 73.3% of the households fell in deficit category - 65.5% of the households paid the fees irregularly and only 17.2% of the payable amount remained unpaid. Finally, 36.7% of the households in Beltoli village in Tangail district had no arable land, 40% of them fell in deficit category - 11.7% of them paid the fees irregularly and only 4.9% of the payable amount remained unpaid. The Table indicates that status of payment and amount paid by the households in a certain period were closely associated with major economic indicators of the households (Chart 1 in Appendix) but in some areas such as Doctorkhali village in Narayanganj district and Juganiakanda village in Sherpur district show a different picture. It means that along with economic factors, payment of fees depends on some other factors that has been shown in the following Table (Table 9). It was observed that although economic status in some areas was adversely poor, scope of earning liquid money was higher due to employment opportunity. It was further observed that initiatives taken by the concerned teachers of the community schools, school management committees and BRAC staff were the most influential factor for the realisation of fees.

Table 8. Distribution of respondents by location of school and socioeconomic factors of the concerned households

Name of school	District	% of land less	% of deficit economic status	% of irregular payees	Payment due (%)
Telikhali	Patuakhali	52.0	56.0	79.6	61.7
Shehakathi	Patuakhali	40.0	56.0	94.0	67.8
Doctorkhali	Narayanganj	57.5	37.5	100.0	10.1
Bezgaon	Munshiganj	81.7	55.0	100.0	90.7
Telinagor	Brahmanbaria	52.5	50.0	45.0	30.8
Maniknagar	Sariatpur	41.7	60.0	91.7	32.0
Dhalikandi	Sariatpur	58.0	72.0	91.8	69.1
Shibpur	Bhola	73.3	80.0	85.0	37.6
Putkakhali	Zhalokathi	28.0	34.0	81.6	23.1
Juganiakanda	Sherpur	36.7	73.3	65.5	17.2
Beltoli	Tangail	36.7	40.0	11.7	4.9
All		51.6	55.9	77.1	32.8

Reasons for irregular payment

Of the guardians who were irregular in paying the fees, 49% expressed poverty was one of the reasons for their irregular payment (Table 9). The proportion was much higher than the proportions for those who mentioned some other reasons. They added that level of income of their households was such lower that they often faced difficulties in meeting their daily family requirements. Twenty percent of the guardians did not pay the fees regularly due to idleness although they had ability to pay. Some guardians (11.6%) told that they felt disturbance in paying the fees on a monthly basis – thus they paid the fees through different modes of payment (Table 3 in Appendix). Table 3 in Appendix shows that 40% of the households paid the fees every two or three months, followed by 12.7% paid the fees as and when they could, 13.3 paid in advance. Some 13.5% of the guardians of the students mentioned that the amount of material fee was higher than their ability to pay (Table 9).

On the same question, 8.9% of the guardians informed that as they had to pay educational expenditure for their other children, they faced difficulty to pay the fees regularly for the

children studying in community schools. More than 8.0% of the respondents expressed that the concerned BRAC authority did not pay careful attention in realising the fees. In this regard, they added that the initiatives taking for fees realisation were not effective enough to realise full amount of fees regularly. The findings also came out from the in-depth interviews with the guardians as well as the members of the management committees. Majority of the respondents of different groups placed various suggestions such as strengthening motivational activity, building personal relationship with the guardians, giving more responsibility to the management committee to realise the fees etc. The respondents also mentioned that nobody should be exempted from paying the fees because other guardians would seek the same opportunity.

Table 9. Distribution of students by reasons for not paying the material fees on a regular basis

Reasons for irregular payment	Number (421)	%
Poverty, could not pay regularly	206	48.9
Idleness	82	19.5
Amount of fees is higher	57	13.5
We feel disturbing in paying on monthly basis	49	11.6
Had to pay educational cost for other children	44	10.5
Education is free in government school why will pay ?	37	8.9
Inadequate pressure for realization from school	34	8.1
Pay after harvesting of seasonal crops	24	5.7
Income was seasonal	8	1.9
Due to loss in business	8	1.9
For illness of household members	8	1.9
We had to pay installment of loan	3	1.0
Others	7	1.7

Multiple responses considered

Besides, the respondents mentioned some other reasons for irregular payment of material fees such as they paid the fees after harvesting of seasonal crops (5.7%), income was seasonal (1.9%), loss in business (1.9%), illness of household members, etc. (Table 9). Similar findings came out from the in-depth interviews with the guardians of the students, school teachers, and members of the management committees.

Comment on the amount of fees

The guardians of the students studying in different classes were asked to make a comment about the amount of the material fees charged in different classes. Table 10 shows, 80% of the guardians of the students studying in pre-primary class mentioned that amount of material fees was Okay. The guardians of 73.7% of the students studying in class II, followed by 62.5% of the guardians of the students studying in class V, 62% of the guardians of the students studying in class III, 57.5% of the guardians of the students studying in class IV and the guardians of 56.7% of the students studying in class I expressed a similar view. Amongst all the respondents, 65.8% mentioned that the amount was Okay, 2.5% mentioned that the amount was low, and the remaining 31.6% mentioned that it was higher. These findings seemed to be contradictory to the findings of the Table 9. The contradiction was that although 206 (48.9%) guardians of the students mentioned that they could not pay the fees due to poverty (Table 9), 362 (65.8%) and 14 (2.5%) guardians of the students mentioned that the amount of material fees was okay and low (Table 10). Findings and analysis of the table 11 in the following resolve the contradiction.

Table 10. Distribution of households by comments about the amount of material fees charged in schools- in different classes

Class	Number of students	Comment about material fees		
		Amount was okay (362)	Amount was low (14)	Amount was high (174)
Pre-primary	90	80.0	-	20.0
Class I	90	56.7	3.3	40.0
Class II	110	73.7	4.5	21.8
Class III	100	62.0	2.0	36.0
Class IV	80	57.5	2.5	40.0
Class V	80	62.5	2.5	35.0
All	550	65.8	2.5	31.6

Attempt was made to explore what the respondents considered in giving answer of the above question. Most of the respondents (97.5%) who commented that the amount was okay (362) and who told that the amount was low (14), mentioned that the price of the materials that BRAC supplied might be higher than that they paid as material fees. They also mentioned that they had intention to pay such amount of material fees because the quality of teaching in the community schools was satisfactory. Table 6 in Appendix

supported the comment. The Table (Appendix 6) depicts that most of the guardians (96%) mentioned that quality of teaching in community school was good or very good, and for the same reason they enrolled their children in community schools. The findings indicate that majority of the guardians were satisfied with the quality of teaching in the community schools, but the findings do not mean that all of them were able to pay the fees regularly. Rather, they realised that since BRAC provided materials that priced higher than they were charged for. Thus, BRAC might charge such amount as material fees to the students.

On the other hand, 174 (31.6%) of the guardians felt that the material fees that BRAC charged was higher, of them 92% mentioned that they were unable to pay the fees due to poverty. Some 24% of the guardians mentioned that stipends were paid in government schools, but they had to pay in community schools. Some 13% mentioned that other schools did not charge any material fees but BRAC charged.

Similar findings came out from the group discussions with the guardians of the students. Majority, of the guardians of the students informed that as BRAC provides quality education and educational materials that priced higher than they pay as material fees, BRAC could charge such amount as material fee, but it was beyond their ability to pay. They also urged to reduce the amount of fee in an extent in which they could able to pay the fee regularly.

Table 11. Proportion of respondents by comments about the amount of material fees and logic behind their comment

Opinion	Comment about amount fees		
	Okay (362)	Low (14)	Higher (174)
The cost of materials that BRAC supplied, was higher than that we pay	97.5	100.0	-
The cost of materials that BRAC supplied was less than that we pay	-	-	1.1
We could not pay due to poverty	-	-	92.0
Material fees was higher than other schools	.3	-	4.6
Other schools do not charge material fees	-	-	12.6
Money is paid in other schools but we had to pay in community school	-	-	23.7
We have ability to pay	1.1	7.1	-
Others	1.1	-	-

Multiple responses considered

The guardians (174), who commented that the amount of material fees was higher, were asked how much amount should be charged as material fees in different classes. In response, 80.6% of the guardians of the students studying in class I told that BRAC should not charge material fees. The proportion of the guardians was higher than the guardians of the students of other classes, i.e. 67% guardians of the students studying in class II, 63.9% guardians of the students studying in Class III, 59% guardians of the students studying in class IV and 57.1% guardians of the students studying in class V, 38.9% guardians of the student studying in pre-primary class. As the students of pre-primary class were charged the lowest amount of material fees (Tk.10), only 38.9% of the guardians of the students studying in this class expressed not to charge material fees in class I (Table 12).

Table 12. Distribution of respondents (who commented that material fees was higher) by their proposed amount of material fees in different classes

Class	Number of respondents	Amount of proposed material fees			
		Should be made free	Tk. 5	Tk.10	Tk.15
Pre-primary	18	38.9	61.1	-	-
Class I	36	80.6	13.9	5.6	-
Class II	24	66.7	4.2	16.7	12.5
Class III	36	63.9	11.1	19.4	5.6
Class IV	32	59.4	18.8	21.9	-
Class V	28	57.1	3.6	39.3	-
All	174	63.2	16.1	17.8	2.9

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has been operating a large number of non-formal, formal and some community schools. Although BRAC initially did not charge any fees to the students in NFPE schools, in recent years it has introduced material fees at the rate of Tk. 5 in all the classes. In the community schools, material fee was introduced from the beginning (1995) of the programme but the rate was not similar to NFPE schools. This study was undertaken based on a determined problem that a large amount of material fees in different community schools remained unpaid.

The aim of this study was to examine whether the rate of material fees that is charged to the students in the BRAC-run community schools should be reviewed and to determine measures that can be taken so that the students pay the fees regularly. To meet the objectives, this study analysed the socioeconomic characteristics of the households of the students that indicate that a large number of students of the community schools came from extremely poor and socioeconomically backward households. A vast majority of the household heads of the students were engaged in such occupations that yield very low income such as small farmer, small trader, small service holder, rickshaw/van puller, fishermen, boatmen, day labourer, etc. Some of them were disabled, retired and unemployed. Similarly, majority of the household heads of the students of the community schools had no education or very low education. About 60-65% of the households had no arable land. The findings related to socioeconomic characteristics match with the findings of a previous study conducted on the community schools (Kalam and Hadi, 1999).

The household characteristics of the students of the BRAC-run community schools seemed to be similar to the characteristics of the students of NFPE schools (Nath, et al., 1998, Khan, 1995). In some cases the household characteristics of the students in BRAC-run community schools were even backward than the students of NFPE schools. A recent study (Khan, 2002) conducted on the BRAC graduates documented that the proportion of households having less than 50 decimal of land was 63.8%, which was 67% for the households of the students studying BRAC-run community schools. Moreover, majority of the community schools were located in backward places in terms of road communication, literacy level and employment opportunity of the people. It was observed that of the 45 community schools, nearly half were located in coastal districts of Bangladesh, i.e., Bhola, Patuakhali, Pirozpur, Barishal, Chittagong, Madaripur, etc. A large proportion of the people of these districts was extreme poor and dependent on fishing, boating, fishing-related labour, small trading and rickshaw/van pulling. Thus, majority of the guardians in community schools were not in a position to pay the material fees regularly due to economic insolvency. Some of them had no security of regular income and some of them had seasonal income. It was also observed that a proportion of them had to pay not only for their children studying in the community schools but also for their other children studying in different educational institutions.

Thus, it is questioned if socioeconomic characteristics of the students in the BRAC-run community schools were more backward than the students in NFPE schools, why BRAC introduced a higher amount (the rate in class III - V was four times higher than that is charged to the students in NFPE schools) of material fees to the students of the community schools. Some guardians in the community schools, especially those who were aware of the amount of fees charged in NFPE schools, also raised the above-mentioned question. It should be mentioned here that BRAC primarily charged at the rate of Tk.10 to its NFPE students, which was reduced to current rate of Tk.5 considering the socioeconomic status of the students.

Although BRAC charges material fees in community schools, the guardians of the students studying in these schools had no objection to pay the material fees, because they were aware of the bad affect of free education. Thus, almost all of them had no interest to enrol their children in government primary schools, although in some locations the government primary schools were closer to their locality. Rather, some of students who dropped-out from the government primary schools were found to be enrolled in BRAC-run community schools. It was further observed that the people had negative attitude towards the government primary schools. A BRAC study (Chowdhury, et al. 1992) revealed that teachers in government primary schools did not teach properly. Although the class duration was 30 minutes, on average, each teacher taught only for 15-20 minutes per period. The remaining time was spent by gossiping amongst themselves. The same study reported that *"most of the students of class I and II could not correctly read their text books. Most of them could not read or write numbers. The students were very poor in arithmetic."* From the above statements it can clearly be understood, why guardians of the students of community schools were not interested to enrol their children in government primary schools, although government does not charge tuition fees in its schools.

However, although majority of the guardians were interested to pay the fees regularly, they could not do it due to their poverty. The teachers of the community schools and the members of the management committee as well as community people advocated for reducing the amount of fees to make bearable for the service receivers. It was also

realised that the existing system of fees realisation may need to be reduced. In the existing system of fees realisation, the guardians are asked to pay the fees in the monthly meetings, but no actions were taken if someone did not pay the fees on time. Thus, it is not sure that the total amount of material fees will be realised regularly if the amount of material fees is reduced. Rather, appropriate measures may ensure the realisation of fees. As there existed not a uniform system to realise the fees in all the locations, measures may also be taken to do so.

Finally, it can be concluded with a suggestion that considering the socioeconomic characteristics of the concerned households and request of the students' guardians of the community school, BRAC may reduce the amount of material fees in an extent so that all the students able to pay the fees regularly. At the same time, necessary measures should be taken to realise the fees from the service receivers.

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Appendix

Socioeconomic characteristics of the selected students' households

Table 1. Distribution of student by households head's occupation

Household's head occupation	Number	%
<u>Farmer</u>	171	31.1
<i>Small farmer*</i>	72	42.2
<i>Marginal farmer*</i>	89	52.0
<i>Big farmer *</i>	10	5.8
<u>Trader</u>	89	16.2
<i>Small trader*</i>	56	63.0
<i>Mid level trader*</i>	23	25.8
<i>Big trader*</i>	10	11.2
<u>Service holder</u>	46	8.4
<i>Small service holder*</i>	25	54.3
<i>Mid level service holder*</i>	20	43.5
<i>Big service holder*</i>	1	2.2
Teacher	4	0.7
Driver	11	2.0
Rickshaw/van pullar	49	8.9
Day labour & Factory labour	92	16.7
Handicrafts	7	1.3
Fisherman	20	3.6
Unemployed, Disabled & retired	24	4.4
Skilled labour	19	3.5
Foreign job	9	1.6
Others	9	1.6
All	550	100.0

* The status of the farmers, traders and service holders was determined by self-assessment method of the respondents as they determine themselves following a traditional way.

Table 2. Distribution of students by their father and mother's education, household's land size and economic status

Father and mother's education	Number	%
<u>Father's year of schooling</u>		
Nil	285	51.8
1-5 year	153	27.8
6-10 year	96	17.5
11+ year	16	2.9
Mean year of schooling	2.9 years	
<u>Mother's year of schooling</u>		
Nil	319	58.0
1-5 year	166	30.2
6-10 year	64	11.6
11+ year	1	.2
Mean year of schooling	2.0 years	
<u>Land</u>		
Nil	284	51.6
1-49 decimal	67	12.2
50-99 decimal	69	12.5
100-149 decimal	30	5.5
150-199 decimal	34	6.2
200+ decimal	66	12.2
Mean land (decimal)	78.5	
<u>Household's economic status</u>		
Surplus		13.6
Balance	75	30.5
Deficit	168	55.8
<u>NGO eligibility</u>	307	
TG		50.7
NTG	279	49.3
	271	

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by actual mode of payment of material fees

Proposed mode of payment	Number	%
Advance	73	13.3
Per month	52	9.5
Per two / three month	220	40.0
At the end of year	5	0.9
As they could	70	12.7
We could not pay	94	17.1
Adjusted from <i>Upa britti</i>	25	4.5
Per six month	7	1.3
Were not charged / Free education	4	0.7
All	550	100.0

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by mode of payment of material fees that they liked

Options they choose to pay the material fees	Number	%
Per month	247	44.9
Per two month	14	2.5
Per three month	59	10.7
Per six month	31	5.6
At the end of year	8	1.5
We should not be charged material cost	138	25.1
Can be adjusted from <i>Upa britti</i> (stipend)	51	9.3
Others	2	.4
All	550	100.0

Table 5. Proportion of respondents by comment about the amount of material fees by their household's economic status

Economic status	Number	Amount was O key (362)	Amount was less (14)	Amount was higher (174)	All (550)
Surplus	75	82.7	13.3	4.0	100.0
Balance	168	82.7	1.8	15.5	100.0
Deficit	307	52.4	.3	47.2	100.0
All	550	65.8	2.5	31.6	100.0

Table 6. Distribution of respondents by their opinion about the quality of teaching in community schools

Status of quality of teaching	Number	%
Not good	1	.2
Moderate	21	3.8
Good	447	81.3
Very good	81	14.7
All	550	100.0

Table 7. Distribution of respondents by their logic behind enrolment their children in community school

Logic for enrolment in BRAC-run community school	Number	%
Schools were close to home	149	27.1
We were aware about the quality of education in BRAC school	487	88.5
We did not know that we have to pay material fees	35	6.4
School was close to home	50	9.1
Facilities were higher than other schools*	58	10.5
BRAC staff and teachers suggested us to enroll in this school	31	5.6
BRAC supplies all educational materials	54	9.8
We were not informed that we will be charged against material	20	3.6

Multiple responses considered.

- Teacher were known to them, teachers and BRAC staff frequently contacted with them, home assignment is minimal, lessons were taught in school, progress of the children was shared with them, etc.

Chart 1: Association of payment status of material fee with different socioeconomic indicators of the households by areas

