

Needs of Ethnic Minority Students for Learning Improvement in Secondary Schools

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December 2005

BRAC Research Report



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our gratitude to PACE team at BRAC-BEP for their cordial support in this research project. We particularly would like to thank Dr Imran Matin, Director Research, and Dr Safiqul Islam, Programme Head of BEP for their interest, support and encouragement. We are grateful to those colleagues in BRAC who attended in the proposal and finding presentation sessions of this research and shared their thoughts and views. Thanks are also due to PACE staff working in the field including Mr. Habibur Rahman and Mr. Ashutosh Hazong helped in many difficult situations during the fieldwork. Special thanks to six Research Assistants: Mr. Mohammad Ohidul Islam, Ms. Fatema Nasrin, Mr. M. Sofikul Islam, Mr. Tariqul Islam, Mr. Bishwojit Kumar Saha, and Mr. Mohammad Suhel Alam whose sincere efforts made this work possible within the shortest time.

We would like to thank our colleagues at RED particularly Mr. Mirja M Shajamal, Ms. Tata Zafar, Ms. Rosie Nilufar Yesmin, Mr. Goutam Roy, Ms. Rifat Afroze and Mr. Anwar Hossain for their help and inspiration. Thanks to Mr. Abdul Mannan Miah, Mr. Shoib Ahamed, Mr. Abdur Razzak for their continuous help. Finally we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Hasan Shareef Ahmed for editorial support.

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the needs of ethnic minority students for learning improvement in secondary schools through an in-depth understanding of the factors affecting their poor performance. Findings reconfirmed the poor performance of ethnic minority students. An analysis of influential factors within and outside of school indicated that a weak foundation in Bangla language along with continuous economic crises, teachers' inefficient teaching methods and irregular attendance, parental disinterest, other responsibilities outside school, weak educational foundation in primary school stimulated and perpetuated a sub-standard performance in general. Support systems in place seemed to upgrade a few good performers at the same time neglecting the vast majority of pupils. This study revealed prime needs of ethnic minority students for learning improvement to be: developing a good foundation in Bangla as a second language; raising the quality of classroom teaching and need-based curriculum reinforcement for slow learners; sensitising teachers to issues specific to ethnic pupils; eradicating irregularities in the testing system; creating a space to facilitate increased interaction between ethnic and Bangali pupils; and developing a comprehensive support system for general and slow learners.

INTRODUCTION

Education - the catalyst to development

Ethnic minority people are commonly among the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society and in many countries they have not fully benefited from the development process (World Bank 2001). Education as a development venture not only helps individual taking steps out of poverty and miseries but also in effective inoculates future generations from many more mishaps. So, a comprehensive development initiative for ethnic minority people should and may have a well start from educational improvement.

Some recent studies on primary education in Bangladesh showed that five years schooling is mostly substandard and suffering from lack of quality and equity (Chowdhury *et al.* 2002, Ahmed *et al.* 2005). A study of five ethnic minority communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) found that provision, access, and standard of primary education were worse among the ethnic minorities than the national figure (Nath 2001). Although we have some knowledge on the status of primary education among the ethnic minority communities, understanding of their secondary education status is not clear enough.

Performance in learning achievement could be determined by multifaceted interlinked factors within the school and beyond i.e., the family and the community at large. This study tried to draw some lights on the factors affecting the performance in learning achievement of the ethnic minority students of secondary schools. Having an in-depth understanding of factors affecting performance of ethnic minority students and consulting different stakeholders about the possible way of improvement, we delineated the needs for their learning improvement. It is hoped that this delineation of the educational needs of ethnic minority children in secondary school would influence policy makers and practitioners to rethink on educational improvement for ethnic minorities of Bangladesh.

EDUCATION AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

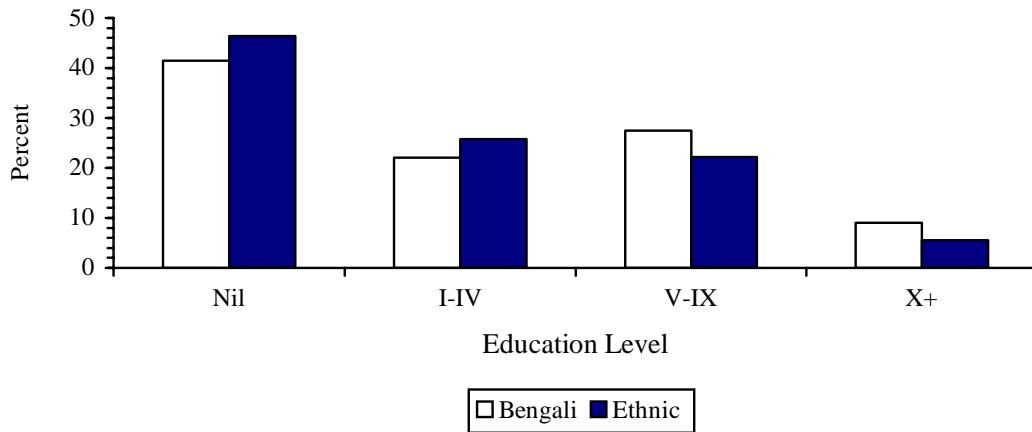
A history of denial

Bangali is the dominant ethnic group of Bangladesh. But the country is not a homogenous polity, nor is it bound by a common language or cultural heritage (Mohsin 1997). About 2% of the country's population belong to some small ethnic communities reported as 40-73 in number (Khaleque 1995, Rafi 2005). The government census of 1981 and 1991 counted the ethnic population as 1.03% and 1.13% of the total population respectively. They live in four different areas of Bangladesh: the north-western part of the country (North Bengal), in the north central plain lands (Greater Mymensingh), in the hilly north-eastern region of Sylhet, and, most notably in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in the southeast.

Studies on the different ethnic groups showed that they possessed some unique cultures, which include different languages, customs, norms, values and worldviews. In colonial era, when modern formal education system was introduced in this part of the sub-continent, the priority and benefit went to the mainstream Bangalis. It occurred because the most of the small ethnic groups lived in the hard to reach hilly or deep forest areas. However, there were some initiatives for the ethnic people by the Christian missionaries. As a result, in the latter part of the 19th century, Christianity spread among the small ethnic minority groups all over the Indian sub-continent through some lower graded schools. According to Burling, schools that had been constructed for the ethnic people also played a role for teaching of the Christianity (Burling 1997). Scope of schooling, however, was limited with those ethnic minorities who agreed to be converted. After the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947, the ethnic minority groups got a shake as borders were created in the places where they lived. They found themselves divided in the new nations created on the religion. Almost all the ethnic minorities in the plain land (excluding CHT) are actually fragments of their main population living in India (Raj 2000). Since the early 1950s a literacy programme was initiated mostly among the Chakmas, the majority community of the hill tracts (Chakraborty 2004). As a result, there was a considerable rise in Chakma literacy rate (50%) by 1970. Such change did not happen for other small ethnic minorities. At the same time, small ethnic groups hardly came into limelight claiming their stake in education.

In 1971, Bangladesh emerged as a new nation on the basis of Bangali nationalism. Early after the independence, question began to rise on the use of the term 'Banglai' to mean nationalism for all citizens including ethnic minority. The first Bangladesh government has always been criticised for its neglect on the ethnic people and not recognized them in the constitution. The successive governments followed the paths of formers. The change from Bangali to Bangladeshi nationalism further marginalized and alienated the ethnic communities (Mohsin 2001). Again, after the independence, without recognizing the fact of a multilingual situation, Bangla was taken unanimously as the medium of instruction at all levels of education. The Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission recommends, "We must...use Bengali as the medium of instruction at all level of education to make our educational schemes successful." (Bangladesh Education Commission Report 1974 in Jalaluddin and Chowdhury 1997). As a result, small ethnic communities' demands for learning in mother tongue as well as other educational needs were ignored. Though many of them could cross the primary education cycle due to flexible promotion system; many of them are caught in secondary level.

Figure 1. Persons completed different education levels



Source: Education watch database, Nath 2005

Figure 1 shows that in comparison with Bangalis proportionately ethnic minority people are more in criteria who never attend school. Although the situation is little better in primary level, proportionately there are more Bangalies than ethnic minority people who got secondary and post secondary education.

It shows disparities between the mainstream and ethnic minority people in Bangladesh. The educational needs of these ethnic disadvantaged groups, like other development interventions, should be reviewed carefully. When a substantial number of ethnic minority students failed in the public examinations at secondary level and many of them dropout early the issue deserve an in-depth scrutiny (Kalam 2003, Nasreen 2004).

QUALITY SECONDARY EDUCATION

The motto of BRAC-pace

In Bangladesh, secondary schooling covers seven academic years, from grade VI to grade XII where grade VI to VIII is called junior, grade IX and X is called secondary and grade XI and XII is called higher secondary. It includes two public examinations the Secondary School Certificate (S.S.C) and the Higher Secondary Certificate (H.S.C.). In the last few decades, Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable improvement in enrolment at both primary and secondary levels. Enrolment in secondary schools (including junior secondary schools) increased from 5.59 million in 1996 to 7.38 million in 1999 i.e., by 32 % (CPD, 2001). Perhaps this trend has also followed in the new century. Again, the number of secondary schools increased from 10,153 in 1990 to 16,166 (in BANBASE 2002, cited in BRAC 2004). Of these schools, 98 % are owned and managed by local communities but government subsidised 90 % salary of teachers and staff. On the other hand, in 1999, dropout rates in junior secondary and secondary level were 21.3 and 52.1% and repetition rates were 10.5 and 15.1 % respectively (CPD, 2001). However, quality of education in this level is denounced in every sphere. If S.S.C. result is considered as an indicator of quality in secondary education, the consecutive high rate of failure indicate very poor functioning of the system.

Having realised the existing challenges in secondary education, BRAC started working on secondary education through a pilot project in 1999. Experience of the pilot underpinned the Post Primary Basic and Continuing Education (PACE) programme which is the striving for a reformation in secondary schooling (excluding higher secondary). Now it is one of the four core programmes of BRAC Education Programme (BEP) 2004-2009 plan. Recognizing odds in the school system PACE concentrated on the areas where it could make the most important contribution considering its capacity and resources. The preliminary model for strengthening the capacity of secondary schools to deliver quality education had two basic elements:

- Teachers should be given the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge and teaching skills. This is based on the assumption that most existing teachers can be better teachers if effective training is given.
- An environment that facilitates good teaching and learning needs to be created within school. This will encourage that teachers get the level of support needed to use their skills to the best of their abilities.

The proposed outcome of this programme stated as 'To ensure that non-government secondary schools are better managed and have an improved capacity to deliver education' (BRAC 2004). In new approach for 2004-2009, PACE planed to have a more inclusive approach where issues of ethic minority student were caught a significant attention.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative focus

It is not plausible that all the students from ethnic minority background perform poorly. So, we wanted to know why some ethnic minority students do well in the existing condition and why many failed to do so. Specifically our concern was to understand how the performance (attendance, classroom participation, and examination score) of the ethnic minority students was influenced by school culture (teachers and students perceptions, believes, behaviour, norms, and values that reflected in interaction process of teaching-learning and beyond), socio-economic and culture of local community. Related issues have been the ethnic minority students' relationship with their Bangali classmates and the teachers, language of instruction, and the process of teaching and learning in the schools. Students, we assumed, may diffuse from learning by confronting something in school unknown to us or they may be handicapped by socioeconomic marginalization of their parents and the local community culture. This study intrinsically tried to explore the ways to improve the performance of the ethnic minority students.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

With above assumptions in mind, the specific questions for the study are as follows:

- a. What are the factors functioning in school culture and beyond (economic condition and community culture) that have been causing the poorer performance of ethnic minority students?
- b. Why do these factors exist?
- c. How do these factors influence on the motivation and performance of the students?
- d. How to improve the learning achievement of the ethnic minority students?

DATA COLLECTION

Six research assistants having university degree in education collected data from purposively selected six areas (three hill and three non-hill districts). Earlier they were trained up on the study objectives and application of data collection tools and techniques theoretically in office and practically in field. Being in the respective field, they selected six schools in consultation with local PACE staff. This study intended to include boys, girls and co-educational schools and exclude already programme-intervened schools where proportion of Bangali and ethnic students is around 50:50. However, confronting difficulties in communication and accommodation, we had to compromise with some of the above mentioned criteria for school selection. As a result, three programme-intervened and three non-programme schools were taken where all schools were co-educational. Each research assistants spent a month in the school for collecting data. On completion of two-thirds of the fieldwork, meeting of the research assistants with core researchers held in Dhaka for reviewing the progress and fixing strategies for rest of the work. Staying in the field, core investigators collected data while supervising the data collection of the assistants.

With some quantitative, we used mostly qualitative tools for collecting data. At the school level, some basic data on school and teachers were collected through a school profile questionnaire from six places. These include school history, social and physical environments around school, educational facilities, ethnicity-wise student performance in scholarship and

S.S.C examination, and some background information of the teachers. Information was collected on the process of teaching and learning through ninety classroom observations. Only the classes of Bangla, mathematics, science and English (grades VII and IX) were observed. Interaction of the ethnic minority students with their teachers and Bangali classmates was reported through observing them in various activities in the classrooms and outside through a school observation checklist. We also observed examination hall for 10 consecutive days. Interviews with 120 students, 72 parents (parents of Bangali and ethnic minority groups) respective subject teachers and the 6 head teachers were conducted. Interviews had basically been concentrated on finding the ways of learning improvement of the ethnic minority students. Through an attitudinal scale, we took test of 65 teachers (one was ethnic), and 75 Bangali and 71 ethnic minority students on their attitude towards capacity, quality and aptitude of ethnic students in learning achievement. The test included 18 statements on the ethnic issues relating to education. We purposively included almost all teachers, and students were selected on the basis of class roll number (first 4 students, middle 2 students and last 4 students of a class where half would be ethnic minority).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were processed manually. At the first phase, raw qualitative data were coded and summarised. Attempt was to find the pattern from those codes and summated form. We tried to find out the pattern related to the other patterns and themes. Then we distinguished the relative importance of the causing factors relating with the particular school with their students' performance. Here the comparison was the main tool for data analysis.

FIELD WORK: PLEASURES AND PAINS

Fieldwork, the essence of a social research enterprise, seems always full with many exciting experience and unwanted events. The unexpected painful experience was to find that teachers were not willing to report authentic information in many issues relating school, particularly in the cases of official records of student number. They confessed that sometimes they could not be candid because real and fake calculation is related with expected benefits as a non-government school as their Monthly Payment Order (MPO) and registration. The government stipend for girls depends on the number of students they report. It seems that it has become a mechanism for existence of many rural non government schools in Bangladesh particularly in the underdeveloped areas. However, we found that they were careless to store much information. For example, they were unable to provide performance sheet of scholarship examination of four years back. Again they did disagree to provide any kind of income and expenditure of school.

Another painful experience we had had in one hill district where we had to cancel our selected school after three days work. Head teacher disagreed to cooperate when our observer wanted to observe an exam hall. They demand that we get permission of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) who was chair of management committee of that school. When we sought permission of DC, he suggested us seeing the Assistant Deputy Commissioner (ADC) who oversees secondary schools on his behalf. On workday, we visited their office, got a welcome but they refused us to work on that school. They recommended us to study on some other school in the district. As some sources said, later on, there were some financial irregularities in that school that, perhaps, made them reluctant to give us permission of studying that school.

Pleasure has been the cooperation we received from the BRAC staff working in those areas and the students, teachers and staff of the schools and the guardians. Staying in the school for a month had developed close relation among the research staff and the teachers, school staff and the students. Students addressed the researchers as *Sir*. They expressed '*as salamualikum sir*' often as they usually greet their teachers. Teacher also accepted the researchers cordially.

At the time of leaving they arranged farewells in the teachers' common room. It seemed though teachers had some confusion on this type of work in the first few days subsequently they accepted the presence of a stranger in their classrooms.

SCHOOL PROFILE

Good infrastructure development, no learning improvement

The schools that we studied are situated in the peripheral areas of Bangladesh i.e., three in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)- Rangamati (Rangamati Sadar), Bandarban (Bandarban Sadar), Khagrachary (Manikchari), and other the three in Madhupur (Madhupur Sadar), Sunamganj (Sreemongol) and Chapai Nowabganj (Nachole). One of these schools was established in 1950s and the other five were between 70s and 90s. Schools were established with generous support of local social and political Muslim elites (i.e., Chair of Union Parishad). However the contribution of ethnic minority elites (e.g., headmen) was not rare. Many of the current teachers (mainly head teachers in two cases) had played a prime role in establishing school for creating their own employment.

These schools were initially set up as junior high schools. These schools primarily started with few students (in some cases 13 only), and handful of teachers with private initiatives. These were flourished considerably with help of SMC and local political and administrative support. Except one, other schools were developed as secondary school in the following years.

Table1. Basic information of the schools

Location	Distance from upazila town (km)	No. of student		No. of classroom	Library	Laboratory
		Bangali	Ethnic minority			
Bandarban	10	134 (64)	75 (36)	9	N	Y
Rangamati	5	331 (53)	289 (47)	12	Y	Y
Khagrachari	3	395 (70)	172 (30)	8	N	N
Sreemongol	10	238 (71)	96 (29)	8	N	N
Madhupur	10	331 (83)	66 (17)	8	Y	N
Nachole	11	239 (80)	61 (20)	8	Y	Y

Y=Yes, N=No

Two schools were initially boy's school but turned into co-educational and the other four were co-educational from the beginning. Now these six schools receive Monthly Payment Order (MPO) and it took an average 8 years for sanctioning the provision.¹ All schools were one-shifted that start at 10:30 and break at 4:00.

According to the teachers, on average 74 % of the students wear school dress, but while observed, it seemed about half. Each of the schools has playground. In the last years all the schools arranged yearly sports competition. The schools uphold national flag everyday, but one of it does not perform the national anthem. Two schools do not conduct parade and students' assembly. Except for one school, the school inspectors visited the schools 1 to 3 times a year officially and 3 to 8 times in two schools unofficially.

¹ MPO is governmental subsidy for non-government schools. It provides 90% of teachers and staff salary. Four of the schools needed 1 to 10 years and rest two took 12 and 22 years to get listed as MPO recipient school.

TEACHERS' BACKGROUND

There were altogether 71 teachers in the schools studied of which 58 (82%) male 13 (18%) female. Among the teachers only three belonged to ethnic minority and two of them were females. Most teachers had good background with sufficient academic degrees. More than half of the teachers had B.Ed degrees and some had Bp.Ed. On average, teachers had 12 years of teaching experience. Distribution of class for a teacher ranged from 8-38 per week. Head teachers take least number of classes and senior teachers take half of younger teachers take. Most of the teachers got MPO, a governmental subvention for the non-governmental teachers' salary.

SCHOLARSHIP AND PUBLIC EXAMINATION

A number of students from all ethnic groups were found participating in the scholarship examination. However, participation entailed no success for the ethnic minority students. During the last four year, only a Bangali student of Khagrachari school got a scholarship in 2002. Again, performance of students in school final examination is a measure of quality in secondary education. Average performance of the students during the last four years (2001-2004) showed a poor performance of ethnic minority students than Bangali students. About 72% of the ethnic minority students and 67.7% of the Bangali students could not pass the examinations.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The schools had 1 to 3.61 acres of land. All schools managed to have a good physical structural development which has been possible with the help of *Parbatta Unoion Parishad*, municipality, local administration, facility department of Bangladesh government or some other governmental and private donation. All the schools had spacious playground and trees. Three out of the six schools had library and science laboratory. All the schools had teachers' common room but common room for students exists in three schools (where one common room was only for girls). Three schools do not have light and fan while in other schools the number of lights and fans were 6 to 12. We found the roofs, doors, and windows of the classrooms mostly in good condition. There were no deficiencies of drinking water in 5 schools except one which depends on tube well of others. All the schools had separate toilets for boys and girls and in many cases one separate for teachers. However, toilets in two schools were found unhygienic.

A number of classes were found over crowded. Except very few, teachers seemed not to have professional attitude towards teaching or activities relating school. No active initiative of teaching-learning or extra curricula development was found. Though there were three libraries in three schools and at least a shelve of books in others, no borrowing of book came to our notice during our one month stay in the school.

MANAGEMENT: DESPOTISM OF CHAIR

Officially the authority of a non-government secondary school is the school management committee (SMC)². A 10-member SMC was found in each school with little representation of the ethnic minorities. Though the committees were inactive, there prevailed a dictatorial authority of the SMC chairs. Head teachers, the secretary of the committee, played the executive role with close consultation with the chairs. In two schools conflicting relationships among head teacher, other teachers and SMC chair were reported. An assistant teacher at

² SMC is formed by a president, a vice president, a secretary, a donation member, three guardians, an educationally enthusiastic and two teacher representatives.

Khagrachari school claimed that head teacher did not pay 10% of his salary that supposed to come from students' contribution. Generally teachers were divided into pro and anti of head teacher. Relationship among teachers were found so bad in some places that an assistant teacher did not hesitate to call a head teacher, "...a devil, a liar or a *Munafiq (hypocrite)*".

SCHOOL CULTURE

A bengali construction

Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action (Geertz 1973 cited in Rozario, 2001). In school, pupils must interact with other member of the school community in terms of a fixed set of rules. School, as a miniature of society, is a model of social system (Haralambus, 1991) that posses a culture, a unique social mechanism. Maslowski defined school culture as 'The basic assumptions, norms and values, and cultural artifacts that are shared by school members, which influence their functioning at school' (Maslowski 1997 cited in Maslowski 2001). This study depicted school culture as it was found in teachers' and students' perceptions, believes, behaviour, norms, and values.

GOOD SCHOOL VS. BAD SCHOOL: A BASIC ASSUMPTION

The teachers had their own view of a 'good' school and a 'bad' school. Many teachers thought that they were teaching in a bad school where quality of teaching learning could not and should not be expected. As backward areas, teachers contend, the weakest students come to these schools. 'A meritorious student goes to better school', head teacher of Khagrachari said. When teachers were convinced that meritorious students do not come to their schools, they felt that they had nothing to do with the poor performance of their students. Good school and bad school, the labelling teachers imposed, perhaps helps sustaining and stimulating their poor teaching.

WHO GOES BETTER – OPINION DIVIDED

The teachers were divided in their opinions on which ethnic groups were doing better in school. Most of the teachers in Bandarban school opined that ethnic minority students in their school were doing better than the Bangali students. On the other hand, in Rangamati and Madhupur, the teachers could not come to a consensus. The teachers of the other three schools reported that ethnic minority students were lagging behind. In some cases the teachers of the same school divided in their opinion on the issue. In support of their opinion, teachers mentioned that a number of *Upazati*³ students did well in the school examinations. According to them they were physically and mentally stronger than Bangalis. 'They are creative and getting help from many NGOs', a teacher opined. In contrast, teachers who believed that ethnic minority students performed badly pointed out causes rooted in their poverty and responsibilities outside school, illiterate families, difficulty with Bangla language, unconscious parents, and long distant school.

Questions arose that why did many teachers contradict with apparent performance in classroom, public examination, and school attendance. Many teachers, seemed unconsciously, considered few well performers from ethnic minority communities ruling out many in the

³ Bengali teachers of Ranganati and Banderban often used the term *Upazati* to mean the ethnic minority groups. This term is popular among the Bengalis however ethnic community people reject the term.

lower end category. However, teachers generally overlooked the needs of paying special attention to the slow learners of ethnic minority students. Teachers including the heads, who thought that ethnic minority students were lagging behind, assumed that the difference would no longer exist in the near future if economic condition of the ethnic minority communities had improved. No teachers ever considered school activities responsible for poor performance of ethnic minority students.

TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY PUPILS

Teachers, however, admit generally that students from small ethnic communities had weakness in Bangla, English, maths and science. Teachers described this weaknesses steaming mainly from irregular attendance in school. Further, inattentiveness, problem in pronouncing words particularly joint letters and understanding Bangla language, workloads within and outside the household, lacking necessary educational materials (in some cases, timely supply), prejudiced outlook, low self perception, introvert, laziness, weak foundation in the primary level, less in interaction with the Bangalis, unable to understand the value of education, over simplistic, keep silence in the class, no future plan, shyness, absence of educational environment at home, attracted to cultural activities, sports, and tendency to fleet away from school were reported as causes of weakness. Some teachers had a pessimistic attitude towards the learning of the ethnic minority pupils. For instance, head teacher of Khagrachari school thought, "Generally they (ethnic students) are not motivated to study. Their foundation in primary school is weak. They merely want to pass in the level except only very few." However, no teachers felt any urge to take any measure for changing their motivation. The head teacher of Nachole school explained, "...they (ethnic minority students) come, seat in the backbenches and go back from school. They do not study at all. If we say something, they would stop coming to school next day. So, we do not do anything." Further, many teachers have presumption that students from ethnic communities can understand lessons lesser than Bangali students. Even, teachers of Madhupur school think that ethnic minority people have less IQ.

According to some teachers, however, Bangali students were more attentive, can easily understand, more regular in school, possess competitive attitude, use library, and ask questions. "If Bangali students could not understand something in the classroom, they would ask but they (ethnic minority students) would never express their problems" a teacher said. However, a teacher at Madhupur school expressed, "Bangali students have more capacity to receive the subject matter." However, teachers said, "*Paharis* may not open up their mouth to speak in the classroom; they had strengths in extra curricular activities such as aptitude in game and sports, good at drawing, and create no noise in the classroom."

TEACHERS' STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS: SELF EVALUATION

As their strengths teachers commonly mentioned the sincerity in teaching, punctuality, responsibility, strong foundation on the subject, skill in making lesson understandable to the students, and pay attention to the weak students. They also said about the mastery over teaching that had developed through doing the same for long years. In contrast, teachers confessed 'irregular attendance' as their first weakness. Many teachers pointed out that their weakness lies within lack of proper evaluation of the students and taking classes without necessary preparation. Some mentioned that they did not know the techniques of teaching. A teacher of Khagrachari school regretted, "I have no training on teaching English language. I am teaching English with a simple BA degree, I have no mastery over the language." Particularly a teacher of Rangamati school pointed out, "We are lacking knowledge inflow in the continuous change of the curricula."

Many teachers said that they could not provide extra time to the students as they had some personal duties. Some teachers argued that due to over burden with many classes they

could not perform well. Particularly they felt most disgust taking other teachers' classes. Again they come crossing a long distance, which exhaust their time and energy. Many teachers of Rangamati school condemned over-crowded class for their weak performance.

OBSERVATION ON 'TEACHING LEARNING' AT CLASSROOM

Many teachers found late in the classrooms and anxious to finish as early as possible. When a teacher delayed in starting a class, students came to common room to call in. Some teachers came to class and did nothing except asking the students to do some class work. Sometimes they only finish class by asking students to read loudly in classroom. However, students in most of the cases were found polite but few were gloomy.

The teachers in most of the classes tried to make the students clear about the purpose of the lesson; however, in many cases especially in Bangla, English and science classes, they failed to do so. The teachers illustrated a particular topic/theme/lesson with example in many of the cases, but it was found less in the English, science and math classes. In the process of teaching, sequence of content covered logically but in some cases especially in English and Bangla there was no sequence. Teachers were able to present and explain contents completely in few cases and partially in many cases. In few cases in Science and Bangla classes the instructors failed to do so. Alternative methods like discussion, question and answer were used in few cases but many Bangla and English classes were devoid of these.

The teachers, in general, did not encourage the students to ask questions. If students asked questions satisfactory answers were given in very few cases. Relatively much legible and organized black board works were found in the mathematics and English classes. However, there was no use of board work in many classes when it seemed appropriate. Particularly, board work lacked most Bangla classes. Although many students were found attentive to the study, a good number of students, particularly in Bangla and English classes found without enthusiasm and seemed escaping. In very few classes were teachers tried to make students understood sincerely and gave encouragement saying "good" for giving correct answer. Home tasks were given sometimes very hurriedly. Teachers did not verify students' work (writing assignments, homework, class problems, etc.) properly and regularly. Although teachers of English and mathematics were found prepared in many cases, very few teachers seemed prepared enough for Bangla and science subjects.

There were few differences among teachers' attention to different ethnic groups. Suppose, for example, teachers (mainly at Madhupur) asked questions first to the Bangali students and it happened often. Sometimes teachers looked to the Bangali pupils in such a way that indicated that they were expecting answers from them. In general, overall interaction with ethnic minority students with teachers found relatively few.

TEACHING LEARNING –IN THE EYES OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS

Ethnic minority students opined that teaching learning in school was *Motamuti bhalo* (moderately well). According to them, the teachers become more careful just before the examinations, and considering examination the students also try to study well. Students pointed out teachers' tendency to finish syllabus just before the examinations. But some students dislike burden of study that imposed on them just before the examination. They dislike when the teachers punish them for not delivering lessons properly. Striking was that, according to students, teaching learning totally collapsed for many days just after the examination. Only very few expressed dissatisfactions claiming teachers' absence in the classes. It becomes a normal practice that teachers would take class whenever they like. Teachers think that other responsibilities than work curtails their time to attend school and prepare for class.

PUPIL–PUPIL AND PUPIL-TEACHER RELATIONS

Pupils of same ethnic groups had less interaction with the students of other ethnic background. Ethnic minority students of Nachole and Khagrachari schools had the least interaction with their Bangali classmates. The ethnic minority students try to seat together in the classrooms. With few exceptions, there was not much intimate relationship between Bangali and ethnic minority students. The ethnic minority pupils were mostly found to move in groups. Irrespective of ethnicity, teachers played an authoritarian role with all students. Some teachers think that ethnic minority pupils are not inclined to mix with their Bangali peers.

OBSERVATION ON EXAMINATION

Many irregularities were found in examinations. Firstly, in many cases the examinations did not proceed as per schedule – started late and finished early. Sometimes the students came on time but the teachers delayed in distributing question papers. It was very common that question papers were found insufficient. In many cases students had to share question papers with others. In some cases, questions were set beyond syllabus. In two schools, examinations had to be cancelled for printing mistakes in the question paper. In Nachole school, once not enough question papers were there, so the teachers distributed the question papers among the Bangali students first and then went to the office room, collected question papers and then distributed those among the ethnic minorities.

As the ethnic minority students had to come across a long distance on foot, in many cases they were late reaching at examination hall. Often they could not use allotted three hours fully. Most of them finished the examination by one hour and 20 minutes. In many cases in different schools ethnic minority students were found very slow in writing or remained static in the examination hall. This presumably indicates that students do not have capacity (if it was not common from memorization) to answer all questions within the set time. On the other hand, the teachers had a tendency to go back home as early as possible finishing the examination. So, the teachers almost in all the cases asked the students to submit examination papers earlier. As a consequence, they submitted their examination papers as early as after one hour of writing. Whenever a student submitted his/her examination paper, others had tendency to follow him/her. It was observed more in the lower secondary classes.

Seat plan was not maintained carefully. Actually there was no seat plan in two schools at all. As a result, sometimes, the examination hall became noisy. Teachers invigilated moderately and sometimes two classes at a time. In some cases they had to give proxy for absentee teachers since a good number of teachers were found absent in their vigilance duty. Sometimes they also spoke unnecessarily other than examination matters, collecting fees during examination. Teachers punished (i.e., slapped) students several times for not writing name and roll number correctly or copying from others. Sometimes students got help from the teachers to understand questions but no ethnic minority student did it.

SOCIOECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Traditional family life is in transition

Many studies showed a wide spread socioeconomic vulnerabilities among the ethnic minority population (Rafi and Chowdhury 2001, Ahasan 1998, Mohsin 1997). Traditionally, ethnic minorities live on a survival economy. Whatever they produce is to meet their consumption needs (Rafi and Chowdhury 2001). Still depending on the nature and traditional livelihood, many were pursuing day labourer/wage labourer although it is very hard to live with such meagre income. Informants indicate that socioeconomic vulnerability disfavours many ethnic minority pupils' to concentrate in study. The head teachers mentioned that a major portion of the pupils in their schools came from poor families, and such household were proportionately higher among the ethnic minority students.

According to some parents, three factors are common for a good student: they were from well-off families (a good source of permanent income), their parents were educated, and their parents are conscious. Let us look into their poverty first.

Table 2. Socioeconomic status of students by ethnicity rated by head teachers

Area	Socioeconomic status							
	Always deficit		Sometimes deficit		Break-even		Surplus	
	Bangali	Ethnic	Bangali	Ethnic	Bangali	Ethnic	Bangali	Ethnic
Bandarban	42.50	42.50	5.00	5.00	2.50	2.50	-	-
Rangamati	35.00	35.00	10.00	10.00	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.50
Nachole	36.66	13.33	5.00	20.00	13.33	1.66	8.33	1.66
Sreemongol	16.50	38.50	5.00	20.00	5.00	5.00	8.00	2.00
Madhupur	35.00	35.00	7.50	7.50	5.00	5.00	2.50	2.50
Khagrahari	14.00	21.00	16.00	24.00	12.00	8.00	3.25	1.75

Head teachers, as key informant, were asked to divide their students into four socioeconomic groups by ethnic identity. Although there was not a far difference in this divide in break-even groups, the group just up to poor category (always deficit and sometimes deficit), ethnic minority groups were less represented in the surplus group. In Sreemongol, Nachole, and Khagrahari, ethnic people were two/three time higher than Bangalis. This indicates that a significant proportion of pupils in these schools were very poor and their educational facilities in home are less than their Bangali classmates.

FAMILY CONDITION FAVOURS FEW, DISFAVOUR MANY

According to the parents, ethnic minority students who came from well-off families (who have a permanent source of income) having educated parents and getting parental care properly were doing well in education. They also mentioned that those unable to meet the educational costs got no help in their study. Moreover, they have to travel a long distance to reach the school. As such, they got little time for study at home and they are more likely to perform poorer in school. Parents reported that they often could not buy books and other educational materials. Again, the books they got from various humanitarian organisations were not sufficient and timely provided. Most of the time they did not get English grammar books in particular. Parents of Rangamati said, "Those who are day labourer send their children to work also. As such their attendance is too poor for that reason." However, many poor parents tried their best to support schooling but they were not solvent enough to support a private tutor, which became

necessary, as most of them have none at home to help in education. A parent opined, “Students who can afford private tutor can do well in the examinations.”

FEES BURDEN FOR ETHNIC STUDENTS

One of the great burdens that the ethnic minority students faced was to pay different types of fees in school. On average, a secondary level student has to pay at least Tk. 1,000 per year as fees. Many ethnic minority students cannot pay tuition fee regularly and when it cumulate to a high amount, they finally fell in trouble.

HEALTH HAZARD

Illness was found as an important factor that influenced schooling of the ethnic minority students. A common disease claimed by the ethnic minorities was malaria. As they live in remote hilly villages, they do not get a physician to advice promptly whenever they get sick. Many parents cannot afford doctor’s visit. During sickness, many depend on traditional treatment and thus in many cases prolong sickness. Ultimately they lag behind in education.

BRAIN OR PRIMARY SCHOOLING MATTER

Some parents have doubt on the abilities and capacities of their children. Many parents perceived that their children were weak in mathematics and English because they might be less intelligent. A parents of Madhupur said, “I suspect whether their brain functions or not? Either they do not pay attention to the teachers or they cannot catch lessons.” *Bagani*⁴ parents also believed the same, accounted ‘*Matha kom*’ (dull brain) for performing poor in study. However, a common complaint of the parents and teachers was that primary schooling made weak foundations for secondary level. Another parent of Madhupur said, “Students have a weak base from the primary level.”

RECONSIDER SEVERE POVERTY

Small ethnic groups depend on forest and farming for their livelihoods. The ethnic minority families in CHT largely depend on *jum* cultivation that required family labour support. Traditionally *pahari*⁵ boys and girls have to spend a good time in several months of a year. However, both in plain and hilly areas, a good number of them work as low waged daily labour or involved in household chores. According to the teachers of Rangamati school, many of the *upazati* students do not have money to buy tiffin. They come from a long distance from where they had to start at early in the morning and go back at the evening. So they often fast at lunch. Their attention in study diffused after lunch break. A teacher in a group interview in Sreemongol school said, “An empty stomach cannot be filled by words,” which show the association between poverty and school performance of the ethnic minority students.

⁴ The term *Bagani* is used by the informants to mean the ethnic community people of tea garden areas.

⁵ The term *Pahari* is used by the informants to mean the ethnic community people of CHT.

LOCAL COMMUNITY CULTURE

Language, a dominant factor

Stakeholders perceived that cultural factors had an important influence on the performance of ethnic minority students. Local community culture has been reported as influential in the sense that attendance in school and motivation for study has a close association with this. When a pupil from some small ethnic minority group come to study in a secondary school s/he does not fully ensure the opportunities as the school regulation is not friendly with their culture and local realities.

FESTIVALS AND RITUALS

According to some teachers, festivals and rituals are relatively frequent among the ethnic minority communities. It was reported that at the time of marriage or other festivities in their communities, no ethnic students from that community attend schools. In Bandarban, '*Para Bandho*' reported as a unique festival when nobody is allowed to go out of the locality even to school. Festivals like this made ethnic minority students irregular in school and lag behind in study.

FOND OF GAME, SPORTS AND TV

All small ethnic communities were reported as fond of performing cultural activities like dance, music, sports, etc. Teachers recognized that students from ethnic minorities do very well in most games and sports. They pay more time to gratifying their hobby but less time in study. Some teachers think that over attraction on game and sports hamper their study. Some teachers and parents reported that they wasted time watching TV.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

Among the cultural factors, language was perceived to be mattered than anything else. It was the single most difficulty in learning of the ethnic students. At examination, most ethnic minority students were seen not writing answer promptly. Teachers reported that students in secondary level were still weak in clear understanding and writing of Bangla language.

A guardian of Bandarban told his own story of difficulties he suffered in his life, "I stood first in the admission test in class VII. But as soon as I started my study, I got problem of understanding instructions in Bangla. I could not understand what teachers gave us as home task or what they said in the class. I had to overcome this problem with a long-time effort." But not every student could overcome this. Following statements could be important to understand the depth of the problem. Parents of Khagrachari said, "...many of *adivashis* are weak in Bangla. They cannot pronounce it well." Teachers of Rangamati said, "...they are weak generally but particularly very weak in Bangla. It is not their mother tongue." A teacher of Madhupur told, "They are weak in Bangla along with other subjects. Actually *adivashis* practice *Bangla* rarely. Except in school while talking with the Bangali teachers and classmates they do not use this language. Moreover, they do not study much at home. So, they pronounce it differently and write in accordance with those pronunciations."

In describing the weakness a teacher who teaches science and mathematics in Madhupur school told, "They feel difficulty in understanding Bangali teachers' lecture and they cannot make teachers understood what they want to express." Kanti Rani Kairi, an ethnic minority

teacher explained, “Bangali students can understand easily and ethnic minority students cannot. This happens because they (ethnic) have language problem, hence they require more time to understand.” A teacher of Khagrachari stated, “Our Bangla language is relatively newer to them. They mixed their language with Bangla and make a *jagakhichuri* (confusing mixture).” A Bangali subject teacher of Sreemongol claimed that many ethnic students did not put emphasis on learning Bangla. A teacher of Khagrachari opined, “They (ethnic minorities) cannot be expert in any subject. English, mathematics and science are different language to them (as they are taught it in Bangla).”

COMMUNITY SUPPORT ONLY FOR THE BRIGHT STUDENTS

Several support systems from the close kin among the ethnic minorities were observed. In *Chakma* community, as reported, people provide a toll for bearing the expenses of study. We found many guardians who had been supporting their kin in their education. Many of the ethnic minority students stay in their relative’s house for study as well. Lachai Marma of Khagrachari told, “I let my nice to stay at my home because her parents are poor to support her education.” However, most support goes only to very bright students and not to the average students. Stipends including government stipend for girl students were not supportive, as most ethnic students do not meet the stipend criteria. The stipends went to the well-off Bangali and few ethnic students who do not have to work (and for that reason they are regular in school) and who could do well in the examination with help of private tutor.

DISCUSSION

Lack of a friendly education arrangement

This study intended to present evidences that may help explain the poorer performance of ethnic students in secondary schools and herewith delineate needs of ethnic minority students for learning improvement. Special attention was paid to know how ethnic students cope with Bangali cultural environment in schools and how their local community culture influence on the performance. Let us explain the factors perceived by the actors/informants influencing on the poor performance of the ethnic minority students in secondary schools.

First of all the schools failed to provide proper learning environment for the students irrespective of ethnic background. Equipped with well infrastructure and experienced teachers, the schools became generally ineffective through teachers and students’ irregular attendance, teachers’ pessimistic outlook, poor management and supervision, insufficient emphasis on classroom teaching learning and examination. Having a weak foundation from primary school, ethnic minority children come to study in the secondary school simply to complete a vicious circle, which ends up with a poor performance in public examination. Teachers were found conscious about their strengths and weaknesses. However, what they failed to realize is the needs for extra attention for the slow learners where the ethnic minority students deserve it most. Teachers with professional degrees in education and enough experience in teaching were found very negligible difference in teaching.

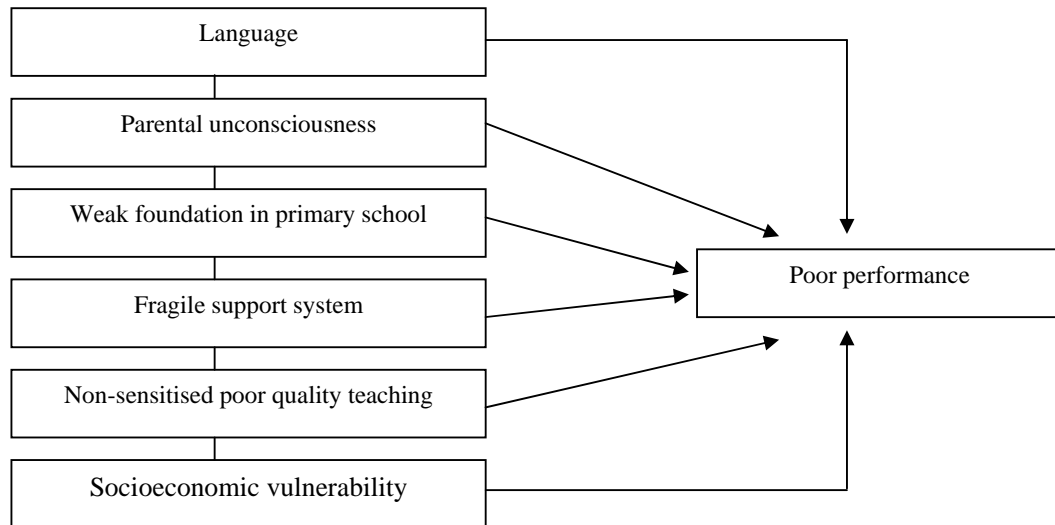
Again, these secondary schools, however, with few teachers from small ethnic background and the Bangali cultural construction, seemed not friendly enough for the ethnic students learning achievement. In one hand, many teachers are not sensitive to the slow learner of ethnic students. Moreover, on the other hand, they nourished many contrary assumptions on the standard of overall students and the school. Assumptions presumably have a strong relation with behaviour that affects ethnic students learning achievement predominantly.

More or less, ethnic minority communities' traditional way of life and livelihoods, particularly dependence on forest and agriculture, is changing. Economic hardship was growing that compelled children to work as day labourer with their parents. It took away a significant time from study. Many informants perceived poverty as one of the most influential factor for poor learning achievement of ethnic minority students. Support systems in place seemed to upgrade a few good performers at the same time neglecting the vast majority of general pupils. Crossing a long distance to school was found also problematic for many children. Again, study interrupted significantly when weather becomes rough or they become sick. So, they lag behind the study but find nobody at home to fill the gaps or unable to support private tutor. In many cases parents are stressed, they cannot supply the basic needs. Thus the issue of educational materials and fees for the school or private tutor come in consideration. Actually, neither teachers nor parents were able to create a true environment of education for the ethnic minority students.

However, along with the above-mentioned factors, a general weakness in Bangla language was found affecting learning performance of ethnic minority students in secondary school in crucial way. Teachers as well as parents perceived that very weak foundation in Bangla, the medium of instruction in the school, made students weaker in other subjects. The ethnic minority students, who use their mother tongue in day-to-day life, felt difficulty in understanding and internalising the meaning of the lessons. In primary education, in absence of multilingual instruction no bridging happened between their mother tongue and Bangla. The problem perplexed more for students from interior CHT than the plain land ethnic minority students. Students who live in interior hilly areas found most difficulty in answering the delicate questions in examination. Bangali students get an extra advantage in this case.

In general, with language problem, socioeconomic vulnerability, social perceptions, lack of sense and/or practices of cultural plurality in school presumably made ethnic students' performance poor in the examination. This has exposed in the following figure:

Figure 2. Factors influencing the poor performance of ethnic students



RECOMMENDATIONS

Lets pave the way

- Teachers have to be sensitised on the ethnic issues and cultural plurality through intensive training.
- Orient teachers with positive thinking.
- Employ more teachers from ethnic minority communities.
- Develop roles that teachers can play for creating a good school through participatory sessions and make it a part of training for the teachers of these schools.
- A component of training could be devised on the 'testing system' considering ethnic students' state of affairs. Some action research may be considered here.
- Advocating the government bodies to responsibly monitor attendance of teachers and students.
- Incentives such as 'educational visits' can be offered to regular students and teachers.
- Teachers have to be trained on the way they should treat ethnic students and how s/he could play a role to bring about positive attitudes regarding the capacity, quality and aptitudes in learning achievement.
- In training teachers particularly head teachers should be encouraged to be more cooperative and friendly with other teachers. The teacher could be suggested to raise fraternity among students through extra curricular interventions.
- Create and continue the effort of raising the quality of classroom teaching through subject-based training.
- Devise and implement a need-based curriculum reinforcement programme for slow learners of ethnic minority students.
- Develop a good foundation course for a better understanding and writing in Bangla as second language.
- Developing a comprehensive support system for slow learners among the ethnic minority students.

CONCLUSION

Need a culture sensitive education system

Ethnic minority communities are in the process of transition or change (Ali 1998). This change is being influenced widely through overall Bangali culture, polity and economic relations. However, these changing factors seemed to have pushed them in the periphery of socioeconomic arena. In narrow sense, along with economic vulnerability, cultural construction in schools dominantly by Bangali teachers, language and the textbooks seemed not warm enough for the facilitation of a positive change. Education seemed a road to approaching to the centre of this changing social panorama. Let us pave this way for the ethnic minorities by creating an inter-cultural education (UNESCO, 2003) that promote positive attitude to minority and a culture sensitive learning environment in school.

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Annex

Table 1. Percentage distribution of students' attendance by grade, ethnicity and gender

Area	Grades							
	VII				IX			
	Bengali	Ethnic	Bengali	Ethnic	Bengali	Ethnic	Bengali	Ethnic
	Male	Male	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Bandarban	45	66	41	62	50	40	58	43
Rangamati	33	71	42	30	38	38	32	39
Khagrachari	41	17	58	58	34	22	41	32
Sreemongol	19	14	39	37	35	11	25	37
Nachole	83	38	84	25	77	67	80	40
Madhupur	56	86	75	56	75	40	26	91

Table 2 . The range distribution of students' attendance by sex and ethnicity

Area	Identity	Identity							
		Bengali				Ethnic			
		Male Total	Range	Female Total	Range	Male Total	Range	Female Total	Range
Khagrachari	VII	34	2-24	48	36-5	12	1-4	19	5-14
	IX	26	5-10	53	14-32	18	1-6	25	3-14
Rangamati	VII	36	3-9	32	2-12	28	4-11	33	2-11
	IX	42	4-12	63	2-14	32	3-8	31	1-9
Bandarban	VII	11	4-6	17	2-9	12	3-11	8	1-7
	IX	10	5-6	12	6-9	5	1-4	7	2-6
Srimongol	VII	26	3-8	30	7-16	29	2-5	23	5-11
	IX	14	2-9	21	1-9	38	2-9	23	5-15
Madhupur	VII	40	13-29	22	13-17	9	2-9	12	2-8
	IX	22	3-18	38	7-11	5	2-3	6	1-6
Nachole	VII	32	14-30	25	17-23	8	2-4	8	1-3
	IX	22	14-19	20	14-17	3	1-3	5	1-3

Table 3. Performance of the students in SSC examination by year

Identity	GPA-5	GPA 4-5	GPA 3-4	GPA 2-3	GPA 1-2	GPA-0	Not pass	Total	
Bengali	2001	-	1 (0.6)	27 (16.5)	25 (15.2)	4 (2.4)	-	107 (65.2)	164
	2002	-	1 (0.6)	13 (7.9)	35 (21.2)	9 (5.5)	3 (1.8)	104 (63.0)	165
	2003	-	-	16 (7.9)	26 (12.8)	3 (1.5)	1 (0.5)	157 (77.3)	203
	2004	-	3 (2.2)	8 (6.0)	31 (23.1)	8 (6.0)	1 (0.7)	83 (61.9)	134
Ethnic	2001	-	-	4 (5.0)	18 (22.5)	1 (1.3)	-	57 (71.3)	80
	2002	-	-	4 (4.5)	11 (12.5)	4 (4.5)	4 (4.5)	65 (73.9)	88
	2003	-	1 (0.9)	21 (18.8)	40 (35.7)	4 (3.6)	3 (2.7)	43 (38.4)	112
	2004	-	2 (3.4)	6 (10.2)	15 (25.4)	3 (5.1)	1 (1.7)	32 (54.2)	59