

## **INCREASING PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE STUDENTS IN MADRASA EDUCATION SYSTEM OF BANGLADESH: AN INVESTIGATION OF MADRASA STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim country religious allegiance is high among the people. As the country is home to Bar Aliya, Sufi saints and village chiefs so fear, and love of Allah are highest among both men and women. Due to religious adherence, parents prefer to raise and educate their female children religiously. Given the increase in the number of female students in madrasahs, the research explores the reasons for this. The study was mixed research, which was completed depending on primary and secondary data. The questionnaire was used for data collection in which 251 parents, 253 female students, and 22 teachers participated. In the study, structured interviews were conducted with 90 female students, parents and teachers. 6 groups (female students) participated in the focus group discussion. As the madrasa is rural and predominantly Muslim area, several reasons have been found for the increase in female students, among which the notable is to achieve success in worldly life.

**Keyword:** Increasing participation, Female students, Madrasa education, Bangladesh.

### **Background and statement of the problem**

"Madrasa" is an Arabic word that refers to a center of Islamic education or study, instruction and research. Madrasah is an educational institution that imparts knowledge and education like a school or college. Among the Muslims of Bangladesh, madrasa education is regarded as the basic education of Islam (Masum, 2020). The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established an educational institution called Madrasa-e-Sofa near the Prophet's Mosque and personally sponsored and looked after the Madrasa (Mehdi, 2003). After the development of Islam in Asia, Africa and Europe outside the Arabian Peninsula, it gradually developed under the name of a religious school or madrasah (Karim, 2018). Generally, madrasahs are religious schools that impart religious education with modern and human needs-related subjects similar to mainstream education. There are two types of Madrasahs in the country 1. Aliya and 2. Qaumi. Aliya madrasahs have historically been controlled and financially supported by the government (Hossain, 2016).

In 1995, the number of students in Ibtedayi Madrasa increased from 4505 to 30045 while the percentage of female students was 35.17%. In 2019 the number has increased to 6378, with students are 961091 and female students rating 53.16%. In 2003, the number of Dakhil to Kamil madrasahs was 8410, the students were 3438707, the female-student ratio was 46.76% and the female-teacher ratio was 6.52%. In 2020, the number

of madrasas increased to 9305(3) students is 3915133, the female-student ratio was 53.72% and the female-teacher ratio was 16.94% (Benbaise, 2023). In 1983 there were 2805 Dakhil to Kamil madrasahs but the number of female students was much less. The standards at the current Alia madrasahs Dakhil, Alim, Fazil and Kamil levels are equivalent to Secondary, Higher Secondary, Degree and Post Graduate respectively (Ahmed, 2020). Aliya madrasa has two departments: the General Department, where students mainly study Islamic Studies, Social Sciences and Arts; and the Science Department, where students learn physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology, information and communication technology (ICT) in addition to Islamic studies (Chandan, 2022). Aliya madrasahs combine general secular education with religious education to prepare their students for competition for university admission and entry into the workforce (Badrunnecha, 2015).

Morality or the judgment of right and wrong is related to human development. Being educated in a madrasa, people have high expectations about the behaviour and values of madrasa teachers due to the greater emphasis on moral education in madrasa education (Mehdi, 2003). Parents feel that the four walls of religious schools are safer and more affordable for children of poor Muslim parents when it comes to educating Muslim girls. As a result, more girls enrolled in madrasahs, even those who would have attended more expensive private schools (Anjar, 2006). The ulama themselves are conscious of both parents and students to combine secular or vocational education with religious education (Mohsinat Trust, 2007). Bangladesh is the third largest Muslim country in the world with 91.04% of the total population being Muslim (BBS, 2022). Madrasahs continue to contribute to secular values in the country (Uddin 2008). All modern subjects like English, Bengali, Social Studies, Mathematics, Geography, History, and Science are taught in madrasahs. Among the modern type madrasahs, the Dhaka Cadet Madrasa and a Nadbha-affiliated Madrasa in Chittagong are taught in Arabic and English versions as the medium of instruction. More than 90 percent of the students join the modern educational stream after graduating from the madrasahs. English has been added as a compulsory subject, and several madrasahs now offer high-level English education (Ahmed, 2004). The main reasons parents send their children to madrasahs are to promote Islamic knowledge, and culture and encourage them to follow Islam (73 percent). Basically, many parents are unable to afford their children's schooling (77 per cent) so they have no other option but to teach them in madrasahs (Barakat, 2008).

There is a strong correlation between madrasa attendance and family poverty among Bangladeshi students. Mainly, because of modernizing the curriculum and providing stipends in Aliya madrasahs, women's Student enrollment increased and a large number of women were educated (Asadullah, 2009). According to a World Bank study, Bangladesh's madrasa education system is the second largest in the world and has great potential to expand as religious institutions open their doors to female students for the first time. Senior Islamic scholar Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said, "Girls are thriving - they tend to perform better than male students". The study also emphasized that 'the country's madrasahs are helping Bangladesh achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (equality between boys and girls) and its modern religious education is associated with attitudes that are conducive to democracy. In a study, World Bank Country Director Robert Floyd said, "Fifty per cent of students in madrasahs in Bangladesh are female. Madrasahs in rural areas play an important role in girls' education, and many madrasah girls are pursuing higher education at universities." (Al Jazeera, 2009).

Madrasah education is deeply intertwined with Bangladeshi society and educational culture. An important

strength of madrasa education in Bangladesh is its strong support from the general public. Because madrasa education is more similar to their religious beliefs and sentiments. Because of this, madrasa graduates come from various social and economic backgrounds such as from wealthy families, rickshaw pullers, daily wage and labourers (Ahmed, 2009).

Appointment of female teachers in madrasas has opened the door for more infiltration of female students. Madrasah-educated women are seen as role models for good housewives and child-rearing rather than working women (Asadullah, 2010). The growing demand for women's madrasahs in recent years in Pakistan due to the increased demand for Islamic education for women indicates that madrasa education is positive for both family needs and Islamic educational institutions. There is a growing demand for Islamic education among Pakistani girls for access to secular, appropriate, good-quality education, employment and a good marriage (Banu, 2010). Madrasahs are more likely to enroll children from poor families and poor areas. A variety of other problems force parents to send their children to religious schools (Mahbub, 2010). The share of female students in madrasas in Bangladesh has increased dramatically from 7.7% in 1990 to 52% in 2008. The burqa serves as the school uniform in most Aliya madrasas in Bangladesh. Traditionally the burqa has been a means for women to enter public spaces without a male director and without violating socially prescribed norms. As a result, the burqa is a significant reason behind the increase in the number of women in madrasas (Asadullah, 2012). With the increase in the number of madrasahs in South Asia, the media's attention is on Bangladesh because of the deep roots of Islam and because of the importance of madrasahs on religious knowledge to make a good Muslim, people are attracted to madrasahs. The graduates who come out from here, including madrasa teachers, provide various religious services and religiously related jobs (Kusakabi, 2013).

Madrasa education is not backwards in the modern age of science and information technology. Children of all classes of parents, including sons and daughters of rural and poor families, complete their education and get degrees from here. 52 subject-based honors courses are introduced in the Madrasa, modern textbooks, ICT education, laboratories and more importance is given to the education of morals and humanitarianism in the classes. As a result, educated people from here are not engaging in immorality like others; don't rush to drugs. Overall supervision includes training of teachers, supervision and inspection of classrooms and conduct of examinations, madrasas provide necessary equipment including laptops, computers, projectors and trained teachers to enrich education with information technology (Hossain, 2018). According to the latest (2019), data from Banbeis, female participation in madrasa education is 10 percent higher than that of male students. Islamic education and concepts provide the life rule of Muslims, so madrasahs play a role in preserving the social values of society and securing the dignity of girls (Embrin, 2016). A UNESCO report states that madrasah girls are more advanced in thinking than school-going girls (Hasan, 2022).

To protect female students from being sexually harassed by teachers, a five-member 'Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee' has been in place since 2009, headed by a woman (Buklet, 2018). Besides reforming madrasa education, the government must ensure proper enforcement of laws, exemplary punishment of criminals and strict government monitoring of educational institutions. Parents should make their children aware of sexual harassment and encourage students not to hide such incidents. Sexual harassment and molestation of female students by teachers is a very old problem. "The government should deal with the matter with an iron hand" (NM, 2019). Recent reports indicate that 32% of students in humanities and social sciences departments in the country's public university faculties have come from Aliyah madrasas. Madrasa students can ensure the

sustainable progress of the country in keeping with the modern world (Masum, 2020). Teachers, parents and students, the participation rate of girls in education is increasing day by day due to government facilities, an increase in the number of educational institutions, parental awareness and recognition of the value of education (Akhtar, 2021). Growing awareness of the importance of education, linking Islamic education with modern subjects and separate madrasas for girls are playing a major role in increasing literacy among Muslim girls (Sikandar, n.d). With the increase in women's education in madrasahs, the participation of Muslim women in various religious institutions and forums has increased, raising the prospect of greater influence in religious life (Zaman, 2022). Also, as women's education is essential for society and the country, Bangladesh has made significant progress in women's education and has become a role model in South Asia (Lina, 2023). Although SOME research has been conducted in the country and abroad in this regard, the research was completed because there was no research to find out the reason for the increase in the number of female students in the Madrasah located in the research area of the researcher.

### Research objectives

To find out the factors why the participation of female students increasing in Madrasas.

### Research questions

What is the factors for the increasing participation of female students in Madrasa?

### Research Methodology

The study was conducted using survey method which was mixed research. Ekhlahpur Islamia Fazil Madrasah is located in the Begumganj sub district of Noakhali District of Chittagong Division located in the south-east of Bangladesh. The total population was 1530 students, 1530 parents and all teachers in Aliya Madrasa belonging to 1 MPO. In the Madrasa, the students are studying regularly from the infant class to the Fazil class. More than 65 percent of the students in the madrasa are women. 526 people were selected as samples. Among which were 251 guardians of the fourth to Fazil class, 253 female students of the sixth to Fazil class and 22 teachers. Structured interviews were conducted with 25 parents, 22 teachers and 43 students. 36 students participated in FGDs in 6 groups.

The primary data collection instruments were handwritten questionnaire responses by students and parents, structured interviews and FGDs. In addition, there was mobile, IMO, What Sapp. Secondary data collection tools were books, newspaper articles, research journal articles and relevant websites. Factors found in the study were coded inductively. Inductive codes were sub-coded and sub-coding were converted into categories. The categories were transformed into numbers and percentages of opinions in the table through descriptive analysis. The categories and percentages were presented in the table. Consent of the respondents was obtained in the study and confidentiality of information obtained from the respondents was ensured.

### Result

#### Guardian Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	25-35	92	36.7	36.7	36.7
	36-45	128	51.0	51.0	87.6

46-55	28	11.2	11.2	98.8
55-65	3	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	251	100.0	100.0	

### Why are you teaching your daughter in a madrasah?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	To acquire Ilme Deen and follow it to succeed in the Hereafter	511	40.0	40.0	40.0
	To succeed in the world by acquiring the knowledge of worldly life	649	50.8	50.8	90.8
	To be successful in both this world and the hereafter	118	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	1278	100.0	100.0	

It can be seen (Figure 1) that 50.8 percent guardians said to succeed in the world by acquiring the knowledge of worldly life, 40.8 percent guardians said to acquire Ilme Deen and follow it to succeed in the Hereafter, 8.4 percent guardians said to be successful in both this world and the hereafter.

### What is the reason for the increase in the rate of female students in Madrasa?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Village head Muslim-dominated country and religious loyalties	84	33.9	33.9	33.9
	Having a good marriage and leading Islamic Life as a good housewife	40	16.1	16.1	50.0
	Comparative reading cost is low	35	14.1	14.1	64.1
	Co-operation of Government and Addition of General Education	33	13.3	13.3	77.4

Women's religious adherence is high, helping to preserve and transform family and community relationships.	29	11.7	11.7	89.1
Disadvantaged and backward in education	11	4.4	4.4	93.5
Keeping the child in religious obedience get a sense of security and peace	10	4.0	4.0	97.6
Emphasis on safe environment and moral education in Madrasas	6	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	248	100.0	100.0	

It can be seen (Figure 3) that 33.9 percent of teachers said village heads Muslim-dominated country and religious loyalties. 16.1 percent of teachers said having a good marriage and leading Islamic Life as a good housewife. 14.1 percent of teachers said comparative reading cost is low. 13.3 percent of teachers said the cooperation of Government and Addition of General Education. 11.7 percent of teachers said women's religious adherence is high, helping to preserve and transform family and community relationships. 4.4 percent of teachers said disadvantaged and backwards in education. 4.0 percent of teachers said keeping the child in religious obedience gives a sense of security and peace. 2.4 percent of teachers said Madrasa emphasizes on safe environment and moral education.

### Why are you studying in madrasah instead of in school?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid To acquire Ilme Deen and follow it to succeed in the Hereafter	563	40.8	40.8	40.8
To succeed in the life of the world by acquiring the knowledge to walk in the worldly life	701	50.8	50.8	91.6
To be successful in both this world and the hereafter	116	8.4	8.4	100.0
Total	1380	100.0	100.0	

It can be seen in Table 2 that 50.8 percent students said to succeed in the life of the world by acquiring the

knowledge to walk in the worldly life, 40.8 percent students said to acquire Ilme Deen and follow it to succeed in the Hereafter, 8.4 percent students said to be successful in both this world and the hereafter.

### **Discussion**

In the context of Bangladesh and as a Muslim-majority country, it was to know very important why women are inclined towards madrasa education.

Guardians participating in the study were between the ages of 27-62. Guardians seem there is an opportunity to get moral education and general education at a low cost from Madrasa. Their girl will be humane and suitable for worldly activities. Their wish, a girl to lead a beautiful Islamic life by being an ideal woman, to be an ideal child and to succeed in worldly life by following the righteous path taught in Madrasa (50.8). The guardians think that they must teach their girls religious knowledge. In Madrasahs veiling is done, knowledge of the Quran and its pure recitation, pure prayer, knowledge of Hadith and moral life according to Islam are taught and practiced. So the guardians educate the girl in a madrasah to succeed in the Hereafter (40.4). Again, some parents educate their daughters in Madrasa to be successful in both worlds. The interviewed parents prioritized education to succeed in the hereafter (45), but more often said to acquire education for the world (55). However, the parents will be happy if the children do not do any job and acquire the education to be successful in the family life and the hereafter and retain it till death. It should be noted that the knowledge of Arabic and general education acquired from Madrasa helps to be more successful in the life of the world, so teach the girl in Madrasa.

The age of the teachers included in this study is between 28-57. The opinion of the teachers is that Bangladesh is still a village-dominated country. As most of the people in this country are Muslims, the number of Allama Huzur is also very high, so there is a lot of religious loyalty among the families. Besides, rural families are generally more religiously loyal, so girls are to teach in madrasahs to keep them religiously loyal (33.9). The madrasa's safe environment, manners, emphasis on moral education and continued practice habituate students, which are highly favored by guardians (16.1). As a result of the modern educational system of the present madrasahs and the cooperation of the government, Women educated in modern education are given special respect in the society. As a result, is able to lead a beautiful Islamic life by becoming good housewives as well as being given good marriages (27.4). As the cost of studying in a Madrasa is relatively low, girls from poor, lower class lower middle class, and middle-class families come to study more. Women studying in madrasahs play a positive role in maintaining religious loyalty, maintaining family, community relations and bringing about change. Again, women who do not have the opportunity to study for various reasons and women who have less education also study in madrasahs. All teachers interviewed confirmed the truth of the above reasons (95 per cent). Even the principal of the madrasa emphasized the safe environment of the madrasa for women students and the low economic status of the families.

The age of female students is between 11-24. To acquire all the knowledge of Islam such as the knowledge of the Qur'an, recitation of the Qur'an, veiling, learning to recite the prayer, learning the hadiths and learning full knowledge through following it to be successful in the Hereafter they read to the madrasa (40.8). On the other hand, they seem the cost of studying in a madrasah is low, protection from scoundrels, acquired general education, getting special honors in society, becoming suitable for worldly work, becoming a good person,

veil and Study well so that they read a good university or doing a good job. They read to the madrasa acquire both knowledge through following it to be more successful in real life (50.8). Through the interview, the students said that their books are divided into two parts, one part is for the hereafter and the other part is to be useful in this world. If the think about it very well, you will understand that it is for the sake of the world that we are study in Madrasas (55). From the feedback of the students in the focus group discussion, it is clear that they (52) study more in madrasa to succeed in the world.

Bangladesh is one of the countries of the world. Women's participation in education is increasing rapidly in this country. Statistics show that the number of madrasas has increased manifold over time. As a result, it can be seen that a large part of the students studying in schools, colleges and universities are passing out from madrassas. So it can be said that a large number of women are studying in madrasas and this rate is increasing. Madrasa education has merged with the mainstream of modern education through reforms. Along with the academic reforms, there have been reforms in related matters including curriculum, syllabus, and madrasa pattern. As a result, where only Arabic was taught in the Madrasa, today Madrasas have been made useful for society and the state by conducting multi-faceted activities to develop the talents of students including computer labs, science labs, scout-rover teams and other subjects. Along with Arabic, English, Mathematics, Bengali, Science, ICT and Honors courses have been introduced in madrasa education.

Mainly with the support of Madrasa modern education and subject-based (Arabic and general education), trained qualified teachers help the students are being able to prove their competence in all jobs including doctor, engineer, BCS cadre, government-private, bank-insurance, starting from admission in public universities. Most of the time women have served as the head of state in the democratic system of government in Bangladesh since independence. At present, a woman has been running the country as the head of state for a long time. This is happening in Bangladesh in the last three decades, starting from the national parliament, government-private-semi-government-autonomous and private sector and even the participation of women in education has increased a lot. Historically, there was no opportunity for women to participate in the madrasa education system that was introduced in the name of Islamic education in this country. In the British period and earlier, girls' acquisition of worldly knowledge was looked down upon. Madrasa education was looked upon differently and it was considered a sin. Gradually, considering real moral education and the safety of life and youth, the scholarly society and the common Muslim family turned towards madrasa education. As a result, women are now not only being educated in higher education but also in places like madrasas. Women are not only students in madrasas, but after completing general education, women are now teaching in places like madrasas. There are many madrassas where only women study.

## **Conclusion**

According to the opinion of the parents, the two main reasons for the growth of female students are to succeed in the Hereafter by acquiring complete religious knowledge and to succeed in more worldly life by acquiring complete knowledge of religious knowledge and general education, which can only be possible achieved by studying in a madrasa. Based on the opinion of the teachers, the main reasons for the growth of female students



are: village head Muslim family, religious obedience of parents, safe environment of the madrasa, emphasis on moral education and its practice, acquired general education knowledge, relatively low cost of education (poor, underprivileged, low middle class, middle class, come more from family) women's religious adherence, their special respect in the society, marry well, be able to lead a beautiful Islamic life by being a good housewife. On the other hand, based on the opinion of female students, the two main reasons for the growth of female students are to succeed in the Hereafter by gaining complete knowledge of religious knowledge and to succeed in more worldly life by acquiring complete knowledge of religious knowledge. Which can only be possible achieved by studying in a madrasa it is not possible to acquire through any other stream of education. Basically, the above reasons existed behind the increase in female students in the madrasas of the research area. Due to financial and time constraints, it was not possible to collect primary data from large and secondary data from many other sources hence the study was limited to 1 educational institution. A large area study can be conducted to verify whether the same results are obtained by researching other madrasahs. The impact of this growth rate on society as well as state, individual life and work life can also be researched. Even research can be done to find out the current social status of female students, teachers and parents associated with madrasa education.

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