

Bangladesh: Using open school data to improve transparency and accountability

Dipu Roy and Abu Said Md. Juel Miah

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United Nations
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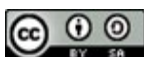


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Presentation of the series: Ethics and Corruption in Education

Several studies conducted over the last two decades have emphasized the negative impact of corruption on the economic, social, and political development of countries. Corruption increases transaction costs, reduces the efficiency of public services, distorts the decision-making process, and undermines social values. Studies have also shown a strong correlation between corruption and poverty: statistical regressions suggest that an improvement in the ‘control of corruption’ indicator by one standard deviation (two points) is associated with an increase of some \$11,000 in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (Sturm, 2013, in OECD, 2015). Moreover, corruption tends to contribute to the reinforcement of inequities by placing a disproportionate economic burden on the poor and limiting their access to public services.

As a consequence, fighting corruption has become a major concern for policy-makers and actors involved in development. In view of the decrease in international aid flows and the increasingly stringent conditions for the provision of aid – due to growing pressure on public resources within donor countries and the pressure exerted by taxpayers on governments to increase transparency and accountability in resource management – fighting corruption is now regarded as a major priority on the agendas of countries and international agencies of development cooperation. The Drafting Committee of the World Education Forum expressed this concern in the following terms: ‘Corruption is a major drain on the effective use of resources for education and should be drastically curbed’ (UNESCO, 2000). In other words, to ‘ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning’ – the fourth of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals – the issue of corruption must be properly addressed.

A brief review of the literature highlights a number of global and sectoral attempts to tackle the issue of corruption. In the social sector, for example, several studies have been conducted on corruption in relation to the provision of healthcare services. However, it appears that the education sector has not received adequate attention from national education authorities and donors, despite numerous grounds for prioritizing the challenge of combating corruption in education:

- Public sector reforms aimed at improving governance and limiting corruption-related phenomena cannot produce significant results unless adequate attention is paid to the education sector, as in most countries this constitutes the largest or second-largest public sector in both human and financial terms.
- Any attempt to improve the functioning of the education sector to increase access to quality education for all will be undermined if problems related to corruption, which have severe implications for the efficient use of resources and the quality of education and school performance, are not being properly addressed.
- Lack of integrity and unethical behaviour within the education sector are inconsistent with one of the primary aims of education: to produce ‘good citizens’ who are respectful of the law, human rights, and equity. They are also incompatible with any strategy that considers education as a principal means of fighting corruption.

In this context, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) launched a research project entitled ‘Ethics and Corruption in Education’. Corruption is defined as the systematic use of public office for private benefit that results in a reduction in the quality or availability of public goods and services. The main objective of this project is to improve decision-making and the management of educational systems by integrating

governance and corruption concerns into methodologies of planning and administration of education. More specifically, it seeks to develop methodological approaches for studying and addressing the issue of corruption in education and to collect and share information on the best approaches for promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity in the management of educational systems in both developing and industrialized countries.

The project includes publications on topics such as school financing, pro-poor education incentives, teacher codes of conduct, textbook production and distribution, and academic fraud. It also features monographs on success stories in improving management and governance, as well as case studies that facilitate the development of methodologies for analysing transparency and integrity in education management.*

Within this framework, IIEP conducted research to explore the recent development of school report cards and to examine cases in which report cards prove especially successful in helping to improve transparency and accountability in education systems. This research included the preparation of case studies on the use of open school data in six countries from Asia and the Pacific – namely Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan (Punjab), and the Philippines – as well as two state-of-the-art papers on Africa and Latin America.

This publication presents the case of Bangladesh. It is based on interviews with key informants and a survey of 250 school-level actors. It compares the design and implementation of two major initiatives, namely the open school data programme developed by the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), which is government-led, and Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report cards, which is citizen-led. It investigates and compares the type of information published, those who publish it, and how it is accessed. It highlights the most critical data for improving transparency and accountability, and explores how different categories of stakeholders access and utilize the information. It also identifies the conditions required to improve transparency and accountability in the education system, and the limits of such processes.

It concludes by highlighting that open school initiatives led by civil society value downward and external accountability routes, while the government approach is more upward and internal. The publication ends with a series of recommendations including: creating legal provisions for disclosing school data; publishing additional data (e.g. on income and expenditure, teacher absenteeism, eligibility criteria and amount of stipends, or the satisfaction level of parents); allocating budget for organizing mothers' and parents' gatherings to discuss school data; training school management committee (SMC) members, teachers, and selected parents on the modality and practical usage of open school data; and introducing community-led monitoring of school performance.

IIEP is very grateful to Dipu Roy and Abu Said Md Juel Miah for their valuable insights; accordingly, it would like to thank them as well as Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). It would also like to thank all the people interviewed as part of this research and those who gave their time to participate and collaborate in the fieldwork.

Jacques Hallak** and Muriel Poisson***

* An information platform entitled ETICO has been created within the framework of the project and can be accessed at: <http://etico.iiep.unesco.org>

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Foreword

The number of countries providing the general public with access to school data has grown rapidly over the past decade, encouraged by the development of information technologies and under the pressure of social movements demanding the right to information and greater accountability in service delivery. A wide variety of initiatives have been developed to share school-level information in the form of school report cards. These provide key information about a school, including student enrolment, funding, number of teachers, teacher qualifications, pupil/teacher ratios, conditions of school facilities, textbooks, and student achievement. In some countries, governments have taken the lead in disseminating such data, relying on existing educational management information systems. Elsewhere, civil society organizations have taken the initiative to produce school report cards for selected schools, placing the emphasis on community engagement in data collection and use.

In recent years, the Asia-Pacific region in particular has become a hub for increased initiatives for access to information and has called for more transparent and accountable government. Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore have pioneered innovative and comprehensive uses of new technologies with the launching of *My School*, Education Sector Indicators, and the School Information Service respectively. Grassroots movements in India have stimulated the passing of Right to Information Acts in many states during the last decades; furthermore, initiatives aimed at displaying information through district report cards and school boards have spread throughout the country. Bangladesh now has more than a decade of experience in developing school report cards with the support of civil society, and the Check My School initiative has spread from the Philippines to Cambodia and Indonesia. These are but a few examples which highlight the opening up of school data to the general public throughout the region.

It is widely acknowledged in the literature that public access to information is one of the most efficient means of achieving better transparency and accountability in the education sector. It enables education authorities not only to better monitor educational progress and outcomes, but also to detect bottlenecks in the system and take adequate measures to address them. It also enables school communities to check whether they have received all the resources they were entitled to, in terms of funding, teachers, textbooks, and so on. Finally, it enables parents to exert pressure on school authorities and public officials to improve service delivery. Nevertheless, experience shows that the link between data, transparency, and accountability is not straightforward in practice, and needs to be unpacked carefully.

Indeed, while open school data are important, the information published is not always the kind most urgently needed to improve accountability in the management of education systems. In addition, when data are available to the public, they are not necessarily in easily accessible formats, and people are often unaware of how to access and utilize those data. Moreover, sharing best practices in this area has not yet been carried out in a useful and systematic manner. Essential to addressing these issues is an increased dialogue between key stakeholders, that is to say government education officers and planners responsible for data collection and dissemination, civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in the empowerment of citizens through information, and parent representatives.

This raises a number of questions:

- What data are most relevant to improving transparency and accountability in the system?
- What format is most likely to encourage school communities to make better use of data?
- What can be done to ensure that the data provided benefit more than a small proportion of the population, allowing all the community to make informed decisions?

- What mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that parents and communities can make proper use of data?
- What incentives are needed to help stakeholders improve their practice?

Such questions can be seen as all the more relevant as the amount of school data – and the number of countries adopting school report cards – continue to grow. They are also timely, as there is still a lack of robust assessment of the actual efficacy of such initiatives: the ‘lessons learned’ so far rely predominantly on desk reviews and anecdotal evidence. They are also critical for ascertaining whether the conditions for the usefulness of open school data are properly taken into account, together with other factors critical for improving transparency and accountability in a sustainable way.

In this context, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) initiated a research project in 2014 on ‘Using open school data to improve transparency and accountability in education’, so as to compare the motivations, purposes, audiences, data sources, contents, uses, and impacts of school report cards developed in different regions of the world.

The overall goals of this programme are to: develop an evidence base for the most critical data needed and the most effective open education policies for improving government transparency and accountability in education; help decision-makers and educational managers make informed decisions about the design and implementation of open education data policies, so as to promote transparency and empower citizens to fight against corruption; build the commitment and capacity of civil society organizations, media representatives, in addition to education officials in charge of access to information, to work together to develop access to more practical, effective, and usable educational data.

The research addresses the necessary conditions for enabling open education data to promote transparency and accountability in education. It pays particular attention to data published at school level through school report cards, in the belief that the school level is particularly critical for encouraging citizens to make the best use of the information provided and to act upon it. It analyses the chain of action needed for developing school report cards successfully at each of the steps involved in their design and implementation.

The main assumptions underlying the research are as follows: First, open data initiatives are powerful tools to improve transparency, hold schools accountable, and reduce corruption risks in education. Second, government-led initiatives are less likely than citizen-led initiatives to respond to users’ needs, engage them, and generate real impact, since they are often more supply- than demand-driven. And third, all users do not benefit equally from open data initiatives. In the absence of adequate safeguards, such initiatives can enhance inequalities and result in ‘elite capture of information’. Within this framework, the research attempts to address and document the following questions:

- What is an enabling legal framework for access to information initiatives in the countries under analysis?
- What are the most critical data for revealing corruption in different areas such as school funding, infrastructure procurement, or school and teacher management?
- Which information model has proven to be more effective: supply-driven (for top-down management) or demand-driven (for bottom-up control)?
- How can we ensure that the information is actually being used by the target audiences in the desired manner?
- What is an effective setup that will facilitate participation by the general public?
- How can demand for information be created among a desired range of audiences?
- What successful actions following the publication of school-level data have a real impact in improving transparency and accountability in the education sector?
- What are the potential adverse effects of access to information on the existing education systems?

The research focuses on countries from Asia and the Pacific which have developed innovative projects during recent years in the area of open data in education, including Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan (Punjab province), and the Philippines.* In each participating country, national researchers have analysed in detail these initiatives' aim to share access to school data with the general public in order to improve transparency and accountability and fight corruption in education systems. They have compared, as far as possible, two types of initiative, one that is government-led (the collection and distribution of school-level information is initiated by the central authority of the country or of a jurisdiction), and one that is citizen-led (the collection and distribution of school-level information is initiated at the community level). The following activities were accordingly undertaken at country level:

- The analysis and collection of relevant documentation and laws related to the right to access information, including legislation specific to the education sector, if any;
- A review of the list of education data shared with the public at all levels of the system, but particularly at the school level, produced and disseminated by government authorities and also through large-scale civil society initiatives;
- A series of semi-structured interviews with key informants (people in charge of the implementation of the right to information legislation, education sector managers, actors from civil society organizations involved in the empowerment of citizens through public access to data, members of parent associations, and representatives from the media);
- A survey of 250 school-level actors, using a multi-stage stratified sample method to illustrate the diversity of perspectives and perceptions about the usefulness of open education data, considering socio-economic, educational, and geographical factors. Informants included head teachers, teachers, parent-teacher associations, parents, and community leaders.

At the school level, field surveys helped to identify the type of information published, those publishing it, and how it is accessed; the most critical data for improving transparency; how different categories of stakeholder access and use the information; the conditions required to impact the level of transparency and accountability in the education system; and the limits of such processes, particularly from a legal perspective. Their main findings are analysed in detail in a set of case studies published by IIEP in its series, 'Ethics and corruption in education'. This report presents the results of the case study conducted in Bangladesh.

It is hoped that the results of this work will help build the capacities of education officials, as well as civil society representatives in charge of the management of school data, to develop access to practical, effective, and usable open data in education; to encourage further dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders within individual countries and in the wider region with respect to the conditions in which such initiatives can improve accountability in education; and beyond this, to enable promoters of public access to information based in different regions of the world to learn from the success and limits of the experiences of other regions.

IIEP would like to thank Dipu Roy and Abu Said Md. Juel Miah for their valuable contributions and the interviewees for sharing their knowledge and experience. It would also like to express its gratitude to the high-level decision-makers from the six countries under review, who agreed to discuss the main findings of the research during a policy forum organized by IIEP in Manila, Philippines, from 24 to 26 January 2018.


Muriel Poisson, Programme Specialist, IIEP

* The six case studies have been published as part of the IIEP Series on Ethics and Corruption in Education, and are available on the Institute's publication website: www.iiep.unesco.org

This study was prepared under the supervision of Muriel Poisson, Programme Specialist at the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO).

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Abbreviations

AUEO	Assistant Upazila Education Officer
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CCC	committees of concerned citizens
CSO	civil society organization
DEO	district education officer
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
EMIS	education management information system
FGD	focus group discussion
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
Mol	Ministry of Information
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MP	member of parliament
NGO	non-governmental organization
PEC	primary education certificate
PEDP	Primary Education Development Programme
PTA	parents–teachers association
ROSC	reaching out-of-school children
SLIP	school-level improvement plan
SMC	school management committee
TAI	Transparency and Accountability Initiative
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
UEO	Upazila Education Officer
YES	youth engagement and support

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Executive summary

In Bangladesh, the government and several civil society organizations (CSOs) have undertaken a number of open school data initiatives in public primary schools. These initiatives differ in terms of type, modality, target audience, and objective, among other factors. Major government-led initiatives include school monitoring boards, mothers' gatherings, and a citizen charter. Citizens' initiatives include open information boards, citizen report cards, and public hearings.

As a CSO, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has contributed to ensuring quality in primary education by implementing transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) in public primary schools. TIB's work aims to empower the parents of students in selected schools by providing useful school data through leaflets, information boards, information desks, interactive discussion at mothers' gatherings, and meetings with the authorities.

This study highlights the importance of TAIs and compares government and CSO-led initiatives by testing the following three assumptions: first, that open data initiatives are powerful tools to improve transparency, accountability, and reduce corruption in education; second, that government-led initiatives are less likely than citizen-led initiatives to engage with users, respond to their needs, and generate real impact; and, third, that all users do not benefit equally from open data initiatives. To test these assumptions, the study mined data from 20 public primary schools, 10 of which were TIB intervention schools and 10 were non-intervention schools.

Field data captured from school-level stakeholders, including parents, suggest that open school data initiatives conducted under these interventions have proved useful in improving transparency and accountability and reducing corruption risks in schools. However, field data show that none of the selected schools under any of the initiatives directly disclosed financial statements to parents. Rather, the schools tended to provide open access to information relating to pedagogical issues and management issues on a limited scale. Nonetheless, field data suggest that the sharing of pedagogical and management data can indirectly illuminate the use of financial resources, providing parents with knowledge of corruption risks in schools and allowing them to confront irregularities in a variety of ways. Field data further suggest that most parental expectations are limited to obtaining their children's exam results and accessing services for their children to which they are entitled. Hence, there are deficiencies relating to the willingness of school authorities to proactively provide the full sets of data necessary to understanding the use of resources in schools.

Field data also suggest that CSO-led initiatives make additional efforts to ensure that parents, school management committee (SMC) members, teachers, and education officials are supplied with school data, and thereby act properly to ensure transparency and accountability in schools. These initiatives take into account parents' degree of access to school data, which is addressed through interactive discussion at mothers' or parents' gatherings, as well as via leaflets, information desks, and so on. Government-led schools tend to be deficient in this regard. Moreover, their accountability route is mostly upward and internal (i.e. to education offices and to some extent to SMCs). Conversely, CSO-led initiatives value downward and external accountability routes. School authorities are accountable specifically to parents and more broadly to the community as a whole.

This study also indicates that a significant number of parents of students at non-intervention schools living in poverty-stricken and rural areas have less access to school data than parents in better-off and urban areas. Notably, no significant differences were found in parents' access to data in intervention schools located in diverse locations and socio-economic conditions, though differences were observed for various means of

information sharing. The findings of the present study therefore indicate that CSO-led initiatives are more likely to address the data needs of parents, benefit them equally, and create positive impacts in quality primary education.

Major recommendations are as follows:

For decision-makers:

1. **Create legal provisions for the disclosure of school data:** Legal provisions should be adopted to ensure that disclosure of school data in the primary education sector is undertaken in an effective manner by all public primary schools.
2. **Allocation of budget:** Budgets for organizing mothers' and parents' gatherings, as well as other activities related to disclosing school data, must be allocated to all public primary schools to enable them to plan and implement additional and effective disclosure activities.
3. **Rewards and punishment:** Schools that perform better in terms of disclosing data and ensuring transparency and accountability should be rewarded. Schools that do not disclose the necessary data and fail to ensure transparency and accountability should be encouraged to do better. Punitive measures can be taken in the event of failure to undertake disclosure activities.

For education managers, including teachers:

1. **Training for teachers on effective information disclosure:** All teachers, and especially head teachers, should be trained in how to implement the information disclosure policy, and how to organize mothers' and parents' gatherings in an effective manner. Detailed modules should be developed for this purpose.
2. **Regularize mothers' gatherings:** Mothers' gatherings must be held regularly and should prioritize the effective participation of parents, the usefulness of school data, interactive discussion, and the use of multimedia. They should also highlight good practices.
3. **Identify and disclose more useful information:** More useful information should be disclosed, including data on income and expenditure, teacher absenteeism, inspections, the socio-economic status of students, rules regarding services (free and paid), eligibility criteria and the amount of stipends, the responsibilities of SMC members, the satisfaction level of parents, and community involvement. Education offices can engage community and local civil society members to inquire into illegal practices such as fund embezzlement and leakage in schools.
4. **Systematize regular dialogue:** Regular dialogue among teachers, SMCs, education officials, and parents should be organized to discuss their collective role in improving the quality of schools and stopping irregularities.
5. **Create incentives:** School data initiatives should be designed and organized in such a way that both the school authority and parents are incentivized to become involved in disclosure procedures. Parents should be engaged in mothers' and parents' gatherings by facilitating interactive discussion. Schools can arrange small gifts for active mothers in recognition of their contributions to school-level open data initiatives.
6. **Introduce community-led monitoring of school performance:** A Citizen Report Card (CRC) programme should be introduced, and the community should be encouraged to participate in the data-collection process. For example, young people can be engaged to measure community satisfaction with school performance. The findings of the CRC should be disclosed to all stakeholders, including parents.
7. **Training for teachers, SMCs, and selected community groups:** Teachers, SMC members, and selected parents, such as participants in TIB's Active Mothers' Forum, can be trained in the modality and practical usage of open school data. The

Upazila Education Office can coordinate the process. Parents should be involved in organizing mothers' and parents' gatherings.

8. **Make information available in public places:** Monitoring boards, Citizen Charters, and other information boards should be hung in public spaces to ensure they are accessible to all stakeholders.
9. **Regular home visits:** Home visits should be made on a regular basis. These may include messages for parents to encourage their participation in mothers' or parents' gatherings.
10. **Learning visit to TIB-led mothers' gatherings:** Teachers from non-intervention schools can visit TIB intervention schools to observe mothers' and parents' gatherings, in order to take note of good practices.
11. **Use attractive information dissemination mediums:** Non-intervention schools can develop and use innovative media for data dissemination. Additionally, they can make use of leaflets, images, multimedia, drama, folk song, etc. The ability of illiterate parents to access and understand data must be taken into consideration.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

Quality education is a prerequisite for a country's socio-economic progress. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh explicitly states that the 'State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law' (Article 17, Bangladesh, 1972). To this end, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has undertaken various initiatives including, inter alia: the enactment of the Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990; implementation of the Food for Education Programme, the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), the Stipend Programme, and the Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) programme; formulation of the Education Policy 2010; education data management conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS); and the creation of the School Management Committee (SMC), the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA), and School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) committees.¹ Alongside these government initiatives a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have made a substantial contribution to ensuring Education for All, in particular by providing second-chance, non-formal education to mainstream education dropouts or the poor and disadvantaged.

Over the years, these initiatives have contributed to achieving very high enrolment and completion rates² and commendable gender equity levels in primary education,³ as well as a dramatic decrease in disparities between the highest-income and lowest-income groups (World Bank, 2017). Despite these remarkable achievements, the primary education sector is beset by many governance challenges that undermine the successes achieved to date. The quality of education of the large number of students graduating every year has also been questioned.

The involvement of citizens is key to holding service providers in the education sector accountable. The absence of relevant information, or the unavailability of open data, prevent people holding decision-makers to account for their actions or inaction. Today, the right to information has gained widespread recognition as a fundamental element of ensuring transparency, accountability, and participation in institutional policies and practices. The Right to Information Act, 2009 gives citizens the right to access information from public, autonomous, statutory bodies and non-government organizations operating with government or foreign funds (Mol, 2009). This law is crucial to enhancing transparency and accountability on the one hand, and reducing corruption and irregularities on the other.

Box 1. Pertinent sections of the Right to Information Act, 2009

'Every authority shall publish and publicize all information pertaining to any decision taken, proceeding or activity executed or proposed by indexing them in such a manner as may easily be accessible to the citizens' (Section 6).

'A person may apply to the officer-in-charge requesting for information either in writing or through electronic means or through e-mail' (Section 8).

1. Every school has a SLIP committee constituted by the community. The committee prepares a plan for the development of the school and is expected to hold the school authority accountable for its activities, budget, and expenditure.
2. The enrolment rate increased from 85.5 per cent in 2000 to 97.7 per cent in 2014. The proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 and reaching the last grade of primary school increased from 66 per cent in 2000 to 81.0 per cent in 2014. For more details, see: www.mopme.gov.bd
3. The ratio of girls to boys increased from 0.96 in 2000 to 1.03 in 2014 (GED, 2015).

Various disclosure measures have been introduced in the primary education sector in Bangladesh. For example, the websites of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)⁴ and the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE)⁵ and BANBEIS⁶ provide information on policy, law, guidelines, annual reports, monthly reports, budgets, procurement, number of primary education institutions, teachers and students, school infrastructure information, and so on. In particular, BANBEIS discloses information on the number of primary education institutions, teachers, and students, the enrolment rate at pre-primary and primary levels, the number of special children, classified by disability and gender, the student dropout rate, and so on. Users can also access the Education Management Information System (EMIS) database developed and administered by the DPE to obtain national, divisional, district, and sub-district level⁷ school data. However, complete information or data for each primary-level institution are not yet available in the EMIS database.⁸ Moreover, the websites of relevant government departments are often not user-friendly from the perspective of local communities, owing to complicated formatting of data, affordability, and internet accessibility.

It is interesting to note how the data-sharing process works between education offices and schools, as well as between schools and students and their parents at the grassroots level. All education offices at different levels are networked and have easy access to data provided by the MoPME and the DPE. Schools receive information from the government through official orders, circulars, letters, Citizen Charters,⁹ training, and meetings. In reality, however, the absence of computer and internet facilities on school premises prevents them from accessing the DPE website. In addition, many primary school teachers lack internet-browsing skills.

The DPE also introduced some transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) under the PEDP. During the second phase (PEDP II), school-level planning processes encouraged better links among teachers, parents, and SMCs, while a general objective of the third phase (PEDP III) was to involve parents and the community in providing support for their children's education. As part of this community involvement process, in 2004, PEDP II introduced mothers' and parents' gatherings in primary schools. Under PEDP III, it became mandatory to share exam results with parents. In addition, head teachers were instructed to ensure the effective involvement of parents, guardians, and the local community in school activities, including SMCs and PTAs. Schools were obliged to ensure the presence of parents during stipend distribution, a rule which came into effect from 2010.¹⁰ SMCs and PTAs receive information from their respective schoolteachers and education officers through SMC and PTA meetings, as well as from mothers' or parents' gatherings. Parents and students usually receive the information through mothers' or parents' meetings, and sometimes through home visits made by teachers.

The National Education Policy 2010 states that, 'Initiatives have to be taken to set up an IT-based rich database by compiling all information regarding education of all levels so that everyone can use it easily. All this information has to be updated' (MoE, 2010). The policy further states that BANBEIS should be further strengthened with IT equipment, networking, finance, and human resources. However, very few data on primary education are available on the BANBEIS website. Moreover, the Bureau lacks a database to store and manage primary education data, because DPE has been working to fulfil data needs

4. See www.mopme.gov.bd/site/page/dfce77b9-0665-40e1-b07a-7485a686b0ac/five%20year%20achievement

5. See www.dpe.gov.bd

6. See www.banbeis.gov.bd

7. In Bangladesh, the Bengali word '*upazila*' is generally used instead of 'sub-district'.

8. See <http://180.211.137.51:4023/Infrastructure.aspx>

9. The Citizen Charter is an instrument for sharing information with the community on behalf of the school. It follows a standard format provided by the government.

10. Stipend Programme for Primary Education – Phase II, revised guideline, 26 September 2010.

by maintaining the EMIS. Secondary, higher secondary, tertiary, and private education data are all available on BANBEIS.

Aside from the government, a few NGOs are working on TAIs in the education sector. Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) are the most prominent of these. In 2003, TIB initiated its programme in individual schools with a view to making each one an 'Island of Integrity'. TIB has been working with 103 primary schools in 45 areas of Bangladesh.¹¹ Initially, TIB provided education-related information to people through an Advice and Information Centre set up through a Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC). In 2004, TIB began information-dissemination activities in selected primary schools through parents' and mothers' gatherings, Advice and Information Desks, information boards,¹² and leaflets,¹³ in order to create awareness among parents and the wider community about education issues. In 2006, TIB conducted a Citizen Report Card Survey in selected primary schools and shared the findings with school-level stakeholders including parents, the SMC, the media, and school authorities. As a continuation of TIB's efforts on education governance, further activities were conducted in different areas, including stakeholders' meetings, mothers' and parents' gatherings, Active Mothers' Forums, mothers' workshops, the SMC, and the PTA.

This section demonstrates that different types of TAIs have been implemented in Bangladesh in the primary education sector by the government, NGOs, and civil society organizations (CSO). However, there are deficiencies in the initiatives. For example, despite the availability of education information on government websites, accessibility is low for the majority of the community. Moreover, the information is not always updated, and people cannot receive information according to their needs. The NGO or CSO initiatives cover some selected areas, but not necessarily all schools across the country. From this perspective it is crucial to identify effective TAIs and ensure they reach community-level stakeholders and people with easily communicable school data, so that they can understand the main areas for improvement, hold education authorities accountable, and thus contribute to improving quality in the primary education sector of Bangladesh.

1.2 Rationale of the study

This research is crucial for several reasons. First, one of the key issues in access to information in the primary education sector is dearth of knowledge, which can be remedied by access to available data. Second, all stakeholders lack capacity to make effective use of the data that they need to ensure transparency and accountability in primary education. Third, it is crucial to understand the effectiveness of existing efforts (i.e. TAIs in primary education undertaken by the government and NGOs), in order to accelerate discussions on the importance of open school data initiatives for the sake of quality primary education. Fourth, the dialogue between education sector managers in DPE, CSOs, and the media on these issues is currently limited. Improvement and growth of this dialogue is dependent on the availability of school data.

TIB has undertaken this study in collaboration with UNESCO to assess school data initiatives in Bangladesh, with a view to making available the required data and ensuring its effective use, understanding the effectiveness of existing initiatives, providing the required data to help improve the depth and breadth of dialogue, and helping to ensure transparency and accountability in the primary education sector.

11. These areas consist of 38 districts and seven *upazilas* (sub-districts). TIB refer to them as Committee of Concerned Citizens (CCC) areas. See the CCC location map in *Annex 2* for more details.

12. Each board includes basic information on the school concerned, stipend rules, the responsibilities of teachers, the SMC, and the PTA, and is hung in a visible location.

13. These are printed sheets that include information on the primary school concerned. They are distributed among students' parents from the selected schools.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this research are:

- to obtain an updated overview of various open school data initiatives developed in Bangladesh;
- to better understand how the initiatives contribute to improving transparency and accountability in primary education;
- to reflect on the limits and potential adverse effects of public access to information;
- to formulate key strategic recommendations for decision-makers.

1.4 Assumptions

The main assumptions tested through this research are:

- Open data initiatives are powerful tools to improve transparency, hold schools accountable, and reduce corruption risks in education.
- Government-led initiatives are less likely than citizen-led initiatives to respond to users' needs, engage with them, and generate real impact, as they are often more supply-driven than demand-driven.
- All users do not benefit equally from open data initiatives. In the absence of adequate safeguards, such initiatives can enhance inequalities and result in elite capture of information.

1.5 Scope of the study

This research examines open school data initiatives undertaken by the government and NGOs in the formal public primary schools of Bangladesh. The research covers the following issues:

- the legal framework for access-to-information initiatives;
- the structure and content of data disseminated through both initiatives;
- the disclosure of data critical to identifying irregularities in different domains, such as school funding, infrastructure procurement, or school and teacher management;
- the most effective information model – supply-driven (top-down management) or demand-driven (bottom-up control);
- the demand for information among the target audience;
- ensuring this information is used by the target audience in the desired manner;
- the setup needed to facilitate public participation;
- key actions following the publication of school data that have a real impact on improving transparency and accountability in the education sector.

1.6 Methodology of the study

Data sources

The study relies on both qualitative and quantitative data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data sources include: DPE education sector managers, actors from NGOs or CSOs involved in empowering citizens by creating access to data, members of SMCs and PTAs, head teachers, individuals responsible for government-led initiatives and TIB-led initiatives, parents, assistant teachers, and representatives from the media and sample schools where institutional-level data have been collected. Secondary sources of data include: relevant documents and laws related to the right to information, including specific legislation related to the education sector; education data shared with the public across different levels by government authorities and civil society initiatives; newspaper reports; articles; MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS websites.

Selection of study areas and schools

TIB has been working closely with 45 public primary schools located in 43 districts of Bangladesh to contribute to improving transparency and accountability in primary education. Of these, 10 schools are located in urban areas and 35 in rural areas.

In order to choose the schools, the study team selected 10 of the 43 districts, where all 45 of the TIB intervention schools are located. To select the districts, the study employed the criteria poverty rate, literacy rate, and primary school completion rate, and divided the districts into three categories. Category A comprises the districts that have a low poverty rate and a high literacy and primary school completion rate. Category B consists of districts that have a medium poverty rate and medium literacy and primary school completion rates. Category C encompasses districts that have a high poverty rate and a low literacy and primary school completion rate. Three districts from each of Category A and C and four districts from Category B were chosen. Selection of the districts necessitated the consideration of three sets of characteristics in order to apply the classification. However, some of the districts exhibited inconsistencies; for example, in one of the selected districts in Category C (Barisal) the literacy rate was high compared to other districts despite its having a high poverty rate. However, the poverty–literacy anomaly in Barisal may not be unexpected given that this district is renowned historically for its achievements in education. Parents’ interest in sending their children to school in this district is accordingly perceived to be higher than the norm. The high rate of poverty is related to natural disasters, as Barisal is located in a coastal area where cyclone and tidal surges are prevalent.¹⁴

The number of sample schools from the list of TIB intervention schools was set in accordance with the proportion of school locations. For this study, 3 schools were selected from the 10 schools located in urban areas and 7 from the 35 schools located in rural areas. Diversity in the schools selected was ensured by considering criteria such as the school grade as defined by the education authority, number of students, and the school location. The study also selected 10 non-intervention schools from the same sub-districts as the selected TIB intervention schools are located – 3 from urban areas and 7 from rural areas. The study followed the same criteria in selecting these schools (e.g. school grade, number of students, and distance from district or sub-district town). To determine the matching schools from the list of non-intervention schools, the study team consulted concerned sub-district-level education offices.

Methods of data collection

The methods of data collection employed in the field included semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and sample surveys (i.e. primary sources of information). The main tools used for primary data collection were structured and semi-structured questionnaires for surveys and interviews and a checklist for FGD.¹⁵ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals responsible for government and TIB-led initiatives mainly at the implementation level, representatives from CSOs, education experts, and the media. In-depth interviews were conducted with head teachers and SMC and PTA members through the use of semi-structured questionnaires. FGDs were conducted with assistant teachers. A sample survey was performed with the parents of students using a structured questionnaire.

Selection of respondents for survey

A total of 250 parents were chosen for the survey from 20 government schools located in the 10 districts. Parents were selected from both intervention and non-intervention

14. See *Annex C* for more detailed information.

15. See *Annex D* for more detailed information.

schools in equal numbers; 125 parents were selected from 10 TIB intervention schools (see Annex 3) and the remaining 125 were selected from 10 non-intervention schools. As the number of students differed in the selected schools, 15 parents were selected from each school having more than 150 students and 10 parents from each school having 150 students or fewer. During the field test, the study team found that some parents of students from both types of schools had no interaction with the schools through any initiative or event, and were unable to provide information on the open data initiatives or their results. Therefore, the study team decided to consider parents for selection who had participated in some form of interaction with the school.

Profile of the selected respondents

In the selected TIB intervention schools, 100 per cent of the selected parents were female. In the case of the non-intervention schools, the figure was 93.6 per cent. In both cases, the majority of parents (42.4 per cent in TIB intervention schools and 44.0 per cent in non-intervention schools) were aged between 26 and 35 years. A majority of parents (60.8 per cent in TIB intervention schools and 59.2 per cent in non-intervention schools) had completed primary education and 23–26 per cent of parents exhibited minimum levels of literacy (only able to write or sign their name). In both cases, most of the parents were housewives (87.2 per cent in both types of schools) by profession. Among other respondents, in the selected schools 14 head teachers were female, 15 SMC members were male, and 10 out of 20 PTA members were female. More detailed information on the profile of respondents is provided in Annex 4.

Methods of data analysis

Statistical Programme for Social Science (SPSS) software was been used to analyse the survey data. The analysis includes comparisons between the two initiatives with a specific focus on the main features, accountability models, usefulness of data, success, limits, and strategies for improvement.

Data validation and quality control

Data were collected by deploying 10 data-collection teams in the field, with each team consisting of two enumerators. Each enumerator held a minimum of a graduate degree and had had prior experience of data collection. The selection process included a competitive examination. The successful candidates underwent a two-day training course to provide orientation and guidance on the questionnaires and data-collection techniques. After completing a field test with a draft questionnaire in four schools¹⁶ and finalizing the questionnaires based on field experiences, the enumerators were deployed for data collection. One Senior Programme Manager, one Programme Manager, six Deputy Programme Managers, and one Assistant Programme Manager from the Research and Policy Division of TIB carried out on-the-spot monitoring of data collection in each selected school. Crosschecking of data was then done by phone to ensure data accuracy.


Period of the study

The study was conducted from February to July 2017. Survey data were collected during 6–20 May 2017.

1.7 Structure of the report

The report consists of six chapters excluding references, annexes, and photos. The first chapter highlights the background, rationale, objective, scope, and methodology of the study. The second chapter compares the main features of the two presented initiatives

16. Field tests took place in three TIB intervention schools and one non-intervention school in Savar and Munshiganj.



(government-led and TIB-led). The third chapter explores differences and similarities between the two initiatives with regard to accountability systems and models. The fourth chapter examines the usefulness of the initiatives as a way to improve transparency and accountability in schools, and discusses how much of the information disclosed through the initiatives is relevant, useful, and accessible. The fifth chapter highlights success, limits, and strategies for improvement of the two initiatives, and the sixth chapter presents concluding remarks and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

2. Main features of the open school data initiatives

2.1 Types of open school data initiative

The non-intervention schools shared information through nine distinct types of initiatives. In the intervention schools, TIB added a number of new initiatives to complement those of the government (see *Table 1*).

Table 1. Government and TIB initiatives

Government initiatives	TIB initiatives
1. MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS websites	1. Baseline survey
2. Annual Primary School Census	2. Interactive discussion at mothers' and parents' gatherings
3. Official orders, circulars, letters, and reports	3. School information boards
4. School monitoring board	4. Advice and Information Desk
5. Citizen Charter	5. Leaflet distribution
6. Meetings between the School Authority, SMC-PTA, and Education Officers	6. Formation of Active Mothers' Forum
7. Mothers' gatherings	7. Workshop with SMC and teachers
8. Parents' gatherings	8. Special coordination meeting between teachers, SMC, and PTA
9. Home visits	9. Advice and complaint box
	10. Consultation meeting with education authorities (local and national)
	11. Workshop on mothers' role in promoting good governance and quality education in primary schools

Source: Prepared by the authors¹⁷

Analysis of the types of open data extracted through the survey shows that parents of students at the TIB intervention schools received more data than the parents of students at the non-intervention schools. At the TIB intervention schools, all parents stated that they received school-related data through different initiatives. However, a significant proportion of parents from the non-intervention schools stated that they did not participate in any school initiatives that would enable them to receive information. Only 56.8 per cent of these parents obtained access to school data through the initiatives mentioned in *Table 2*.

In both cases, mothers' gatherings were the principal means of sharing information. However, TIB intervention schools provided additional data to parents by publishing leaflets and displaying an information board, as well as by conducting interactive discussions at mothers' or parents' gatherings. DPE and BANBEIS websites contain some general data on schools, but few school-specific data. Moreover, school-level local stakeholders, especially head teachers, teachers, and parents, were found to have no access to internet facilities and thus to the DPE and BANBEIS websites. Again, more than 25 per cent of parents stated that they experienced difficulties in reading the display boards or leaflets due to their poor level of education. Access to school data therefore depended on informative, open, and friendly mothers' gatherings, especially for those with literacy deficiencies.

17. Unless indicated otherwise, the figures and tables in this book have been prepared by the authors.

Table 2. Parents' means of accessing school data (multiple responses)

Means of accessing school data	TIB intervention schools* (%)	Non-intervention schools* (%)
School monitoring boards	21.6	2.4
Mothers' gatherings	100	44
Parents' gatherings	91.2	24.8
Advice and Information Desks	67.2	N/A
TIB information boards	80	N/A
Leaflets	78.4	N/A
Workshop for mothers	54.4	N/A
Advice and complaint box	52.8	N/A
Did not participate in any initiative	-	43.2
Others	4	5.6

Source: Field survey data.

Notes: * n = 125; N/A = Not Applicable (there were no activities).

TIB intervention has some drawbacks – the baseline survey findings of TIB are shared with teachers, SMCs, and education officers, but not with parents. Under the existing system, it is not mandatory for the school authority to make government orders, circulars, letters, reports, and even the minutes of meetings held with the SMC, PTA, or education officers and so on, accessible to the community.

Table 3. SMCs' and PTAs' means of accessing school data (multiple responses)

Means of accessing school data	SMC (frequencies)		PTA (frequencies)	
	TIB	Non-TIB	TIB	Non-TIB
School report	5	5	6	2
TIB baseline report	7	-	7	-
School meeting	10	10	9	9
School monitoring boards	6	9	6	6
Mothers' gatherings	9	9	9	6
Parents' gatherings	10	8	9	9
TIB Advice and Information Desks	9	N/A	6	N/A
TIB information boards	10	N/A	10	N/A
Leaflets	10	N/A	8	N/A
Workshop for mothers	9	N/A	8	N/A
Advice and complaint box	8	N/A	7	N/A
Do not get any data	-	-	-	1

Source: Field survey data.

Note: N/A = Not Applicable (there were no activities).

The study findings show that the SMC and PTA in both types of schools have sufficient accessibility to school data through school reports, meetings, mothers' gatherings and the school monitoring board (see *Table 3*). In the TIB intervention schools, additional information is provided through the supplementary initiatives stated above.

Survey data indicate that the ways in which parents access school data vary across rural and urban locations. In the TIB intervention schools, the school monitoring board, the TIB information board, leaflets, and workshops for mothers increased accessibility to information for the selected parents from the rural schools. However, some means of accessing data enhance the availability of information irrespective of rural vs urban locations. For example, mothers' or parents' gatherings in both TIB intervention and non-intervention schools are used equally by parents to obtain information (see *Table 4*). It might seem paradoxical that parents of children at urban schools have less accessibility to readable data sources; however, field data show that the parents selected for the survey from rural areas are more literate than those selected from urban areas. This finding might have been influenced by factors such as the socio-economic condition of the parents in urban areas. The present trend shows that the majority of better-off parents in urban locations tend to send their children to private schools. Moreover, the parents of children in urban areas spend less time at schools as they are more occupied with work-related activities compared to rural parents.

Table 4. Parents' means of accessing school data, by rural-urban categories (multiple responses; percentage)

Means of accessing school data	TIB intervention schools (%)		Non-intervention schools (%)	
	Rural*	Urban**	Rural*	Urban**
School monitoring boards	31.8	-	3.5	-
Mothers' gatherings	100	100	45.9	45
Parents' gatherings	92.9	87.5	21.2	35.0
TIB Advice and Information Desks	67.1	67.5	N/A	N/A
TIB information boards	88.2	62.5	N/A	N/A
Leaflets	85.9	62.5	N/A	N/A
Workshops for mothers	62.4	37.5	N/A	N/A
Advice and complaint box	52.9	52.5	N/A	N/A
Did not participate in any initiative	-	-	44.7	32.5
Others	-	2.5	7.1	5.0

Source: Field survey data.

Notes: * n = 85; ** n = 40; N/A = Not Applicable (there were no activities).

Survey data further show that usage of some means of accessing school data does not significantly vary by different poverty categories. In some cases, usage is actually better in poverty-stricken areas. For example, the school monitoring board and TIB information board are more accessible in Category C¹⁸ (see *Table 5*). This finding may be a consequence of the selection of a few districts that have a higher literacy rate in spite of their poverty (see Section 1.6.2). In the case of the TIB intervention schools, this finding can also be interpreted as the result of specific interventions, as TIB focused its efforts on schools

18. Category C refers to a high poverty rate and low literacy and school completion rate (see Section 1.6.2).

interpreted as the result of specific interventions, as TIB focused its efforts on schools located in rural and poverty-stricken areas, and worked closely with parents to encourage them to participate in different school events in order to gain access to useful data.

Table 5. Parents' means of accessing school data by poverty category (multiple responses; percentage)

Means of accessing school data	TIB intervention schools (%)			Non-intervention schools (%)		
	Category A*	Category B**	Category C***	Category A*	Category B**	Category C***
School monitoring boards	5	20	42.9	5	–	2.9
Mothers' gatherings	100	100	100	45	68	14.3
Parents' gatherings	97.5	82	97.1	42.5	20	14.3
TIB Advice and Information Desks	70	52	85.7	N/A	N/A	N/A
TIB information boards	77.5	76	88.6	N/A	N/A	N/A
Leaflets	95	56	91.4	N/A	N/A	N/A
Workshops for mothers	45	42	82.9	N/A	N/A	N/A
Advice and complaint box	52.5	66	34.3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Did not participate in any initiatives	–	–	–	32.5	26	71.4
Others	–	2.0	–	7.5	8	2.9

Source: Field survey data.

Notes: * n = 40; ** n = 50; ***n = 35; N/A= Not Applicable (there were no activities).

2.2 Formats of open data initiatives

Both types of school use various formats to publish school data. TIB intervention schools use reports, leaflets, and display boards to publish school data, while the non-intervention schools publish school data on the school monitoring board in the teachers' room and through the Citizen Charter in public spaces. Schools choose different times to publish data. The survey data show that both types of schools make data available to parents at the end of one school year and the beginning of the next (see *Figure 1*). It should also be noted that none of the schools in the survey consult users or otherwise involve them in establishing formats for publishing school data.

On the other hand, the SMC and PTA at TIB intervention schools were found to receive school data all year round. They also receive school data more frequently compared to the non-intervention schools (see *Table 6*).

2.3 Content of school data published by the two categories of school

In the non-intervention schools, parents received eight sets of data from schools that organized mothers' gathering and parents' gathering properly (see Table 7). However, most of the schools only felt comfortable disclosing exam results to parents. On the other hand, most of the schools shared all kinds of information with the SMC and PTA (see Table 7). Such data shared included management and financial issues relating to the status of school equipment, funding sources, income and expenditure, school inspection by education officers, community involvement, school security, and the enrolment rate. However, financial and management issues relating to information on school funding, the condition of school facilities, teachers' behaviour, and school management were not shared proactively with parents. It should be noted that no government initiative generates information on teachers' behaviour or provides an overview of school management.

Figure 1. Times of year for parents to receive school data (multiple responses)

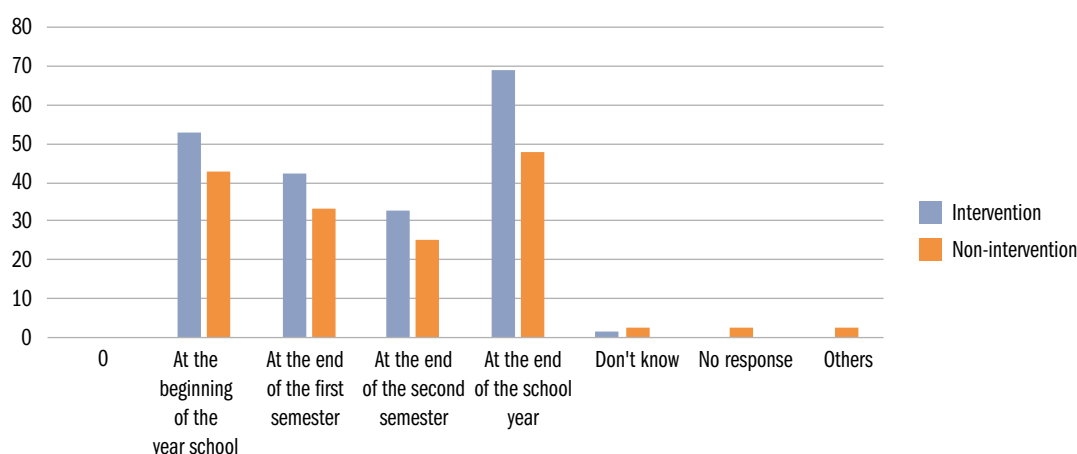


Table 6. Timetable for receiving school data by SMC and PTA (multiple responses)

Timetable for receiving school data by SMC and PTA	SMC		PTA	
	TIB intervention schools	Non-intervention schools	TIB intervention schools	Non-intervention schools
Beginning of the school year	8	7	3	3
End of the first semester	8	2	4	4
End of the second semester	4	1	3	2
End of the school year	6	5	7	5

Source: Field survey data

In the TIB intervention schools, parents receive 12 different kinds of school data (see Table 8). The additional school data provided by the TIB intervention schools include stipend amounts and eligibility criteria, services available in schools (free and paid),¹⁹ and the responsibilities of SMC members.²⁰ Parents can also acquire information on teachers'

19. Government primary schools are not allowed to charge fees with the exception of exam fees. The fees for different exams are discussed at mothers' and parents' gatherings.

20. The responsibilities of other stakeholders (i.e. the PTA, head teachers, and assistant teachers) are also discussed at the mothers' and parents' gatherings facilitated at TIB intervention schools.

attendance and qualifications, as well as financial matters relating to the schools, through active participation in school events.

Prior to TIB's intervention, parents were not informed formally about the eligibility criteria for stipends or the stipend amount. Parents would find that the stipend funds to which their children were entitled were deducted by teachers – a process which the parents were unable to comprehend owing to lack of proper information. Awareness of the actual amount of the stipend, exam fees, and other entitlements empowered parents to raise their voices against irregularities in stipend distribution and payments to school.

Research findings show that SMCs and PTAs in TIB intervention schools obtain access to almost all kinds of school data. They receive information from the TIB baseline survey²¹ and other initiatives, as mentioned above. However, TIB intervention schools provide more information to parents, and to SMC and PTA members, compared to non-intervention schools (see *Tables 7 and 8*).

Table 7. Data published through government initiatives

Data shared with parents, SMC, and PTA	Data shared with SMC and PTA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students • Student attendance • Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students • Number of teachers • School facilities • Textbooks • Student examination results • Passing rate of Primary Education Certificate (PEC) exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School equipment • School grade • Funding sources of the school • Sources of school income • Amount of school fees • School capital expenditure • School inspection • Community involvement • School security • Enrolment rate

Table 8. Data published through TIB initiatives

Data shared with parents, SMC and PTA	Data shared with SMC and PTA	Extra data published by TIB
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students • Student attendance • Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students • Number of teachers • School facilities • School equipment • Textbooks • Stipend amount and eligibility criteria • Services available (free and paid) • Responsibilities of SMC members • Students' exam results • Passing rate of Primary Education Certificate (PEC) exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' attendance • Qualifications of teachers • School grade • School inspection • Community involvement • Parental satisfaction • School security • Socio-economic status of students • Funding sources • Amount of school fees • Sources of school income • School capital expenditure • Enrolment rate • Teachers' behaviour • School management overview • Students' learning outcomes • Undue payment of extra fees • Corporal punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stipend amount and eligibility criteria • Services available (free and paid) • Responsibilities of SMC members • Parental satisfaction • Socio-economic status of students • Funding sources • Amount of school fees • Sources of school income • School capital expenditure • Teachers' behaviour • School management overview • Students' learning outcomes • Undue payment of extra fees • Corporal punishment

21. TIB's baseline survey generates information on school funding, the condition of school facilities, teachers' qualifications, teachers' behaviour, school management, students' learning outcomes, undue payment of extra fees, corporal punishment, and so on. TIB uses baseline survey data in developing leaflets which are shared with parents. TIB also shares baseline findings at stakeholders' meetings through which teachers, SMC and PTA members, and Upazila Education Officers receive additional data on schools. Baseline data influence school authorities to take measures to improve the quality of their services.

2.4 Data sources

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) is responsible for collecting and compiling data from schools. The Annual Primary School Census is conducted every year, using a structured form which is sent to all schools for completion.²² In most cases, head teachers complete the forms in hard copy themselves. Assistant Upazila Education Officers (AUEOs) are responsible for collecting the completed forms from their respective clusters.²³ This data-collection process must be completed by May each year. Upazila Education Officers (UEOs) are responsible for sending the collected data to the DPE. District and divisional offices monitor and coordinate the processes, respectively, during the data-collection and reporting period. DPE is the main depot for education data, and is also responsible for sharing data with MoPME, BANBEIS, and other relevant government agencies and development partners. DPE also uploads and makes available school data through its website. The flowchart in Figure 2 provides a simplified view of government data-collection processes.

Figure 2. The data-collection process of the government-led initiatives

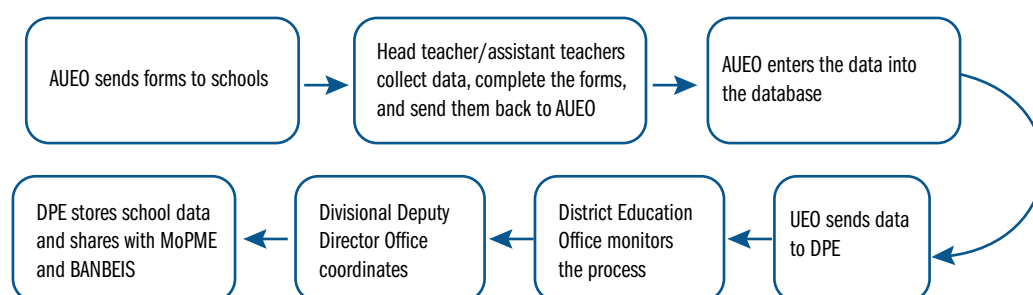


Table 9. Data sources for the schools under two initiatives

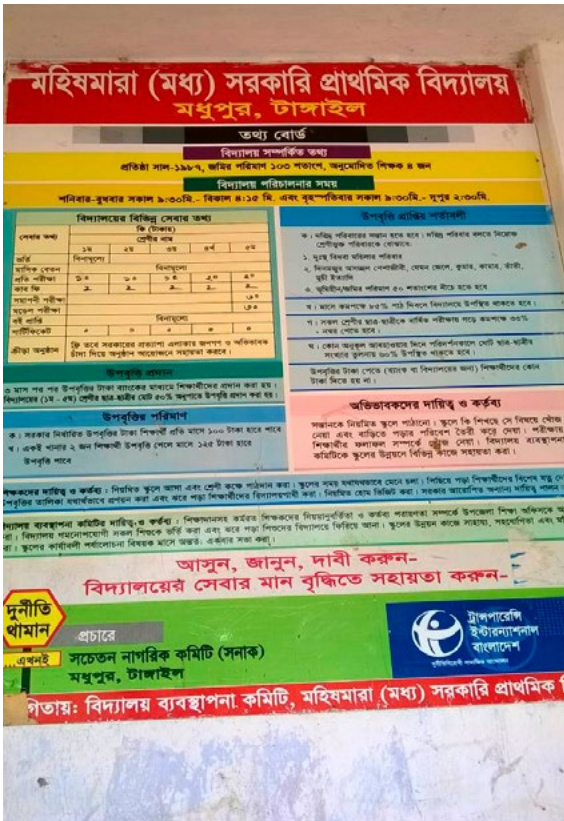
TIB initiatives	Government initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Teachers • SMC members • Education officers • Government policies, orders, rules, acts, and reports • Newspapers • Websites of MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS • Relevant research reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Annual Primary School Census • Official orders, circulars, letters, and reports • Attendance sheet • School report • Websites of MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS

Head teachers and assistant teachers are the first sources of information in non-intervention schools. They collect basic school data from the attendance sheet, register, and other documents that they maintain in their schools. They also receive data from official orders, circulars, letters, and reports sent from education offices. In addition, they can gather information from the DPE website. However, lack of computer and internet facilities at schools hinders access to website data. Other users, such as parents and SMC and PTA members, are not involved in school data collection.

Checks and balances at the education office level ensure data accuracy during the government data collection process. The UEOs and AUEOs make visits to schools on a

22. A specific form is used for collecting data from all primary schools. For detailed information please visit: <http://www.dpe.gov.bd/site/view/forms/ফর্ম-সমূহ>

23. An *upazila* is divided into three clusters that cover, on average, 120–300 government primary schools.



School information board supported by TIB

In the case of TIB intervention schools, TIB collects data from direct discussions with parents, teachers, SMC members, and education officers. In addition, TIB generates information from the websites of MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS, and newspapers,²⁵ as well as on the basis of relevant government policies, orders, rules, acts, and reports. TIB officials collect up-to-date data by ensuring accuracy and scrutiny at different stages of the process. TIB's research staff working at field level and civic engagement teams²⁶ are responsible for data collection, while staff at the national level are responsible for crosschecking and guidance to ensure data accuracy. Before releasing data to stakeholders, 25 per cent of the data undergo crosschecks and scrutiny. TIB collects baseline data

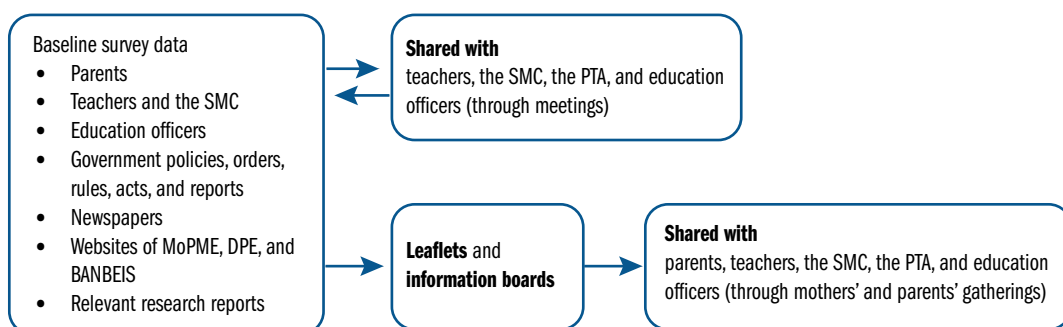
24. Instructions from DPE stipulate that each DPEO will visit 2 schools, each UEO 5 schools, and each AUEO 10 schools per month. Usually one AUEO is assigned to 30 schools and is supposed to visit all allocated schools every three months.

25. The national media publish information on government circulars, rules, regulations, and news on corruption in teachers' recruitment and transfers, illegal practices in spending SLIP money, stipend distribution, receipt of illegal fees, and so on, in the primary education sector.

26. Like most research units, TIB has a separate unit dedicated to civic engagement. The staff of this unit are responsible for organizing activities relating to civic engagement at the local level (45 CCCs).

once every five years, but updates these on a yearly basis while developing leaflets and information boards. However, as with non-intervention schools, TIB does not involve users (i.e. parents or the community) in the data-collection process (it should be noted that individuals from the community are among the respondents of TIB's baseline survey). The flowchart in Figure 3 presents TIB's data-collection and data-sharing processes.

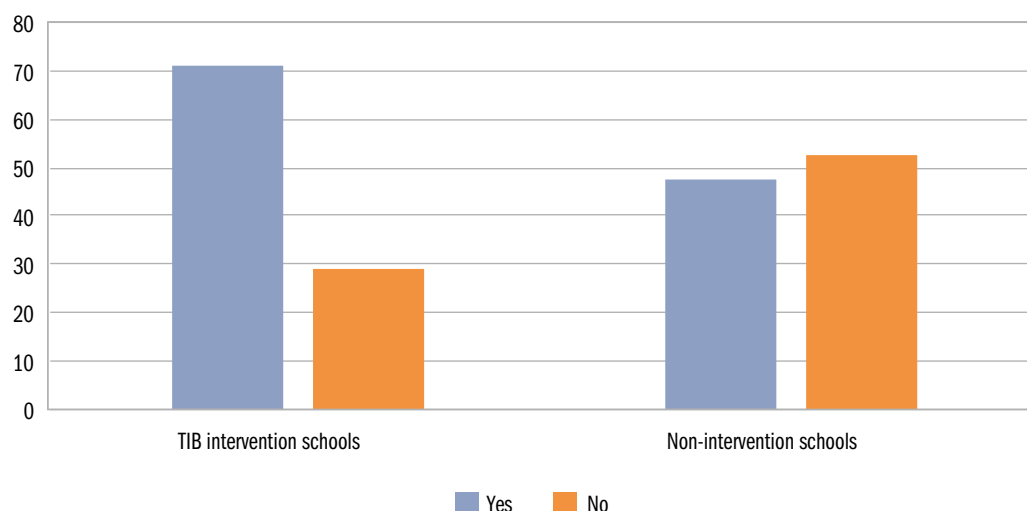
Figure 3. The data-collection and data-sharing processes of the TIB initiative



2.5 Comparisons between schools

In the TIB intervention schools, almost all head teachers (10), SMC members (9), and PTA members (10) use school data to make comparisons between different schools. These figures are slightly lower in the non-intervention schools. Survey data also show that 71.2 per cent of parents of children at TIB intervention schools also make comparisons between schools on the basis of school data. Parents at non-intervention schools also make comparisons on the basis of these data, but less so (47.3 per cent) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Parents' use of data for comparison of schools



Survey data show that parents in both cases use school data to make year-to-year comparisons of schools. They also use standards in their comparisons (see Table 10). Data also show that head teachers, and SMC and PTA members also make comparisons between schools. In the TIB intervention schools, head teachers, assistant teachers, PTAs, and SMCs are concerned with the development of their schools and, therefore, make comparisons with other schools on the basis of set standards (see Table 10).

Table 10. Comparisons made between schools by parents, head teachers, and SMC and PTA members on the basis of published data (multiple responses)

Types of comparison	Parents (%)		Head teachers (frequency)		SMC (frequency)		PTA (frequency)	
	TIB*	Non-TIB**	TIB	Non-TIB	TIB	Non-TIB	TIB	Non-TIB
Year-to-year comparison of schools	76.4	67.6	2	5	3	2	3	1
Comparison with a set of standards	74.2	73.5	6	4	7	6	6	5
Comparison with other similar schools	38.2	8.8	5	5	5	2	3	2
Comparison with other schools within the district	10.2	5.9	2	2	2	–	2	2
Other comparisons	–	–	1	–	3	2	2	–

Source: Field survey data.

Notes: * n = 125; ** n = 35

2.6 Summary

Initiative	Content	Data source	Comparison	Format	Access
TIB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students • Student attendance • Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students • Number of teachers • School facilities • School equipment • Textbooks • Stipend amount and eligibility criteria • Services available (free and paid) • Responsibilities of SMC members • Students' exam results • Passing rate of PEC exam • Teachers' behaviour • School management overview • Students learning outcomes • Undue payment of extra fees • Corporal punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Teachers • SMC members • Education officers • Government policies, orders, rules, acts, reports, etc. • Newspapers • Websites of MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-to-year comparison • Comparison with a set of standards • Comparison with similar schools • Comparison with schools in the same district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline survey report • Leaflets • Display boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School monitoring boards • Mothers' gatherings • Parents' gatherings • Advice and Information Desks • Information boards • Leaflets • Workshops for mothers • Advice and complaint box
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students • Student attendance • Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students • Number of teachers • School facilities • Textbooks • Exam results including PEC exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Annual Primary School Census • Official orders, circulars, letters, and reports • Attendance Sheet • School report • Websites of MoPME, DPE, and BANBEIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year-to-year comparison • Comparison with a set of standards • Comparison with similar schools • Comparison with schools in the same district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display boards • Citizen Charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School monitoring board • Mothers' gatherings • Parents' gatherings

3. Comparison and analysis of the accountability models

3.1 Comparison of the targeted accountability domains

Three types of accountability domains can be tracked through open school data initiatives: pedagogical, management, and financial. *Pedagogical accountability* can be defined as school-level accountability driven by a process of assessing school performance on the basis of student performance measures (Figlio and Loeb, 2011). *Financial accountability* relates to tracking and reporting on the allocation, disbursement, and utilization of financial resources (Brinkerhoff, 2001 cited in Xaba and Ngubane, 2010). Financial information refers to financial reporting to assist users in decision-making (Xaba and Ngubane, 2010). *Management accountability* can take different forms as school management may be perceived in different ways and may have different meanings, including academic management, financial management, and reporting (World Bank, 2008). Academic management-related accountability is similar to pedagogical accountability, while financial management-related accountability is close to financial accountability. Management accountability involves reporting at different layers of school management. In Bangladesh, head teachers are supposed to report to *upazila* education offices, SMCs, and PTAs on their day-to-day activities, progress, and performance.

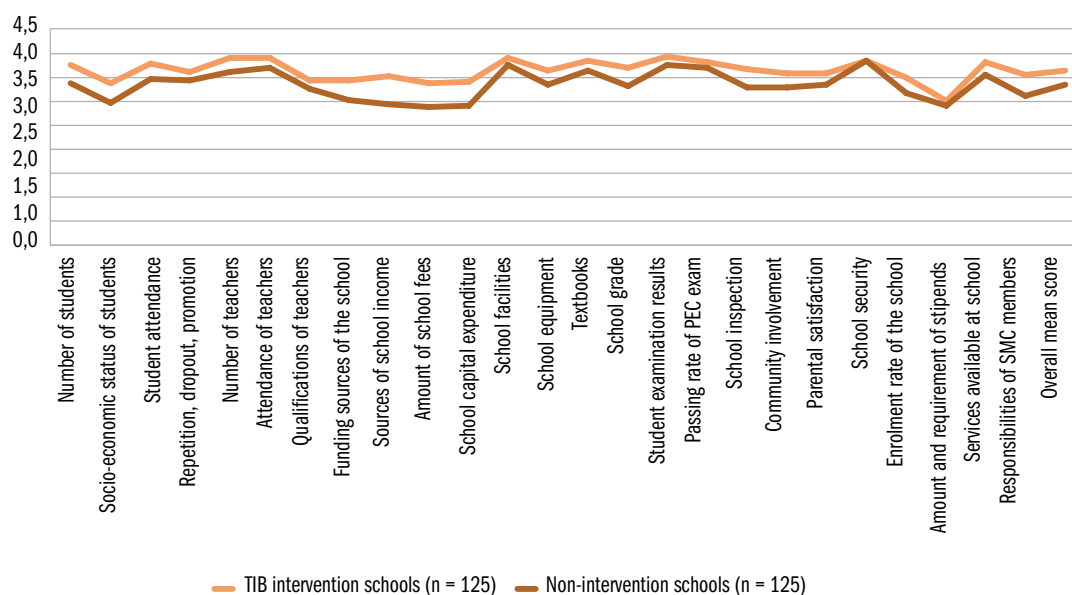
In the case of government and TBI initiatives, the main domain of accountability targeted by the agencies involved is pedagogical accountability. Management accountability has also been targeted under both initiatives. Financial accountability is applied in all public schools, but is limited to reporting to education offices. However, none of the initiatives target parents and local communities as stakeholders with regard to financial accountability. In this regard, it is expected that by-products or unintended outcomes concerning financial accountability would result from opening school data to local communities.

Targeted pedagogical accountability in both categories of school meets parents' needs

Assistant teachers at non-intervention schools argue that student performance and learning should be the highest priority in meetings with parents. Therefore, they prioritize information on student attendance, and brief parents about their role in checking that their children dress correctly, preparing their school bag, and providing guidance on homework and exam preparation. Assistant teachers from a selected non-intervention school stated that, 'We think information related to improvement of students [is] important and most relevant.'

In the case of TIB intervention schools, assistant teachers argue for providing more information to parents, including on the attendance of teachers and students, enrolment, dropout rates, results, school facilities and materials, book distribution, school safety, and so on. *Figure 5* shows that parents find particular data useful that are related to pedagogical issues such as student numbers, attendance, and results. In the non-intervention schools, the parents emphasized the usefulness of information relating to their children's results. Parents from intervention schools are also interested in their children's educational performance. As one assistant teacher from an intervention school noted, 'Parents come to school to inquire into their children's performance and discuss with teachers about it.'

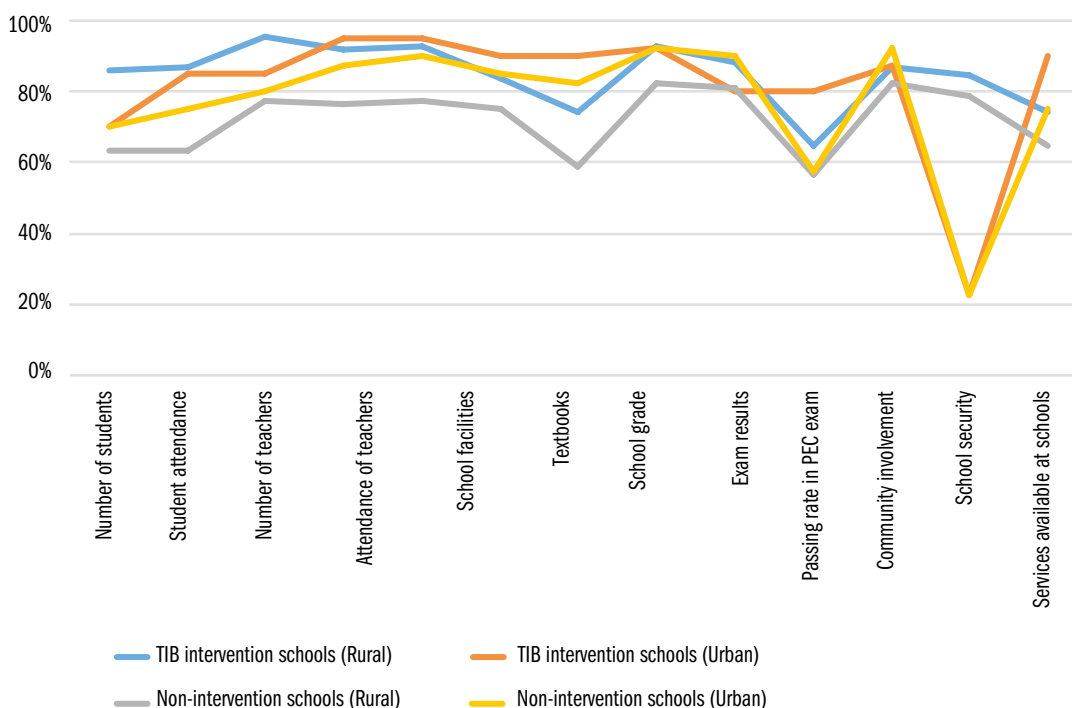
Figure 5. Scoring of parents' perceptions of their information needs



Note: Very useful = 4, Quite useful = 3, Not very useful = 2, Not at all useful = 1.

Source: Field survey data.

Figure 6. Distribution of parents' perceptions of their most useful information needs by rural and urban schools (percentages of individual information type)



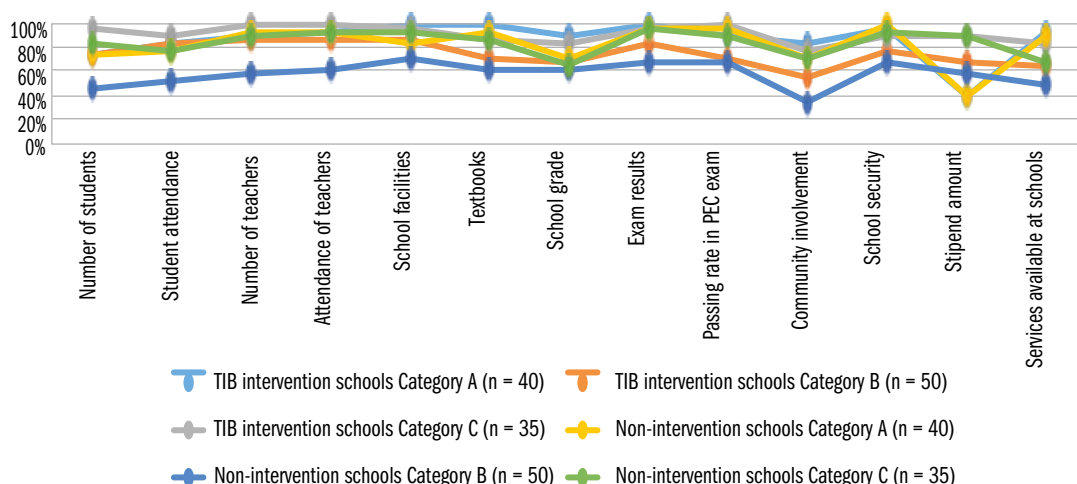
Source: Field survey data.

Figure 6 shows that information needs vary according to school location, especially between schools located in rural and urban areas. In rural schools, parents value information on the number of teachers and their attendance, school facilities, exam results, and so on. Parents in urban areas place importance on teacher attendance, school facilities, textbooks, the school grade, exam results, services available at schools, school

security, passing rate in the PEC²⁷ exam, and so on. There are clearly common priorities shared by parents in rural and urban areas, but also differences. Parents in urban areas place higher importance on textbooks, the school grade, services, security and the passing rate at final exams, than parents in rural areas. Parents in rural areas tend to prioritize issues relating to pedagogical issues, somewhat in common with urban parents, although urban parents also add issues related to management accountability. However, financial issues are not perceived as important by parents from any of the locations.

A comparison of findings from different poverty categories demonstrates that information needs vary in different strata. Figure 7 shows that the richer group of parents (Category A, poverty rate 27 per cent or less) is more concerned about school facilities, textbooks, the school grade, exam results, community services, security, and services available at schools in both TIB intervention and non-intervention schools. The poorer sections (Category B, poverty rate 28–47 per cent; and Category C, poverty rate 48 per cent or greater) are more interested in information on student attendance, the number of teachers and their attendance, the passing rate in the PEC exam, stipends, and so on.

Figure 7. Distribution of parents' perceptions of their most useful information needs by poverty categories (percentage of individual information type)



Source: Field survey data.

Management accountability targeted by both initiatives is likely to improve school management and education quality

Management accountability has been targeted to some extent in both types of schools. DPE has some concrete mechanisms by which all school authorities report to the education offices on their day-to-day activities, progress, and performance. However, the field data suggest that the selected non-intervention schools did not provide management-level information to parents. The information they provided to parents was limited to student exam results. To supplement the conventional mechanism operated by the DPE, TIB worked with teachers and SMC members to organize mothers' gatherings in an interactive and effective manner that provided space for parents to ask questions on management issues such as teacher attendance. TIB also facilitated awareness-raising activities with parents to help them make use of mothers' and parents' gatherings to hold the education authorities accountable for their performance. In addition, TIB formed the Active Mothers' Forum and facilitated activities such as workshops, where they conducted capacity

27. The PEC exam (the Primary Education Certificate examination) is held at the end of Grade 5.



Mothers' gatherings at a TIB intervention school

building to strengthen the role of mothers. The findings show that active mothers that took part in awareness-raising activities played an important role in holding school authorities accountable by asking questions on teacher attendance, teacher shortage, and quality of teaching, among other matters. As a result of these initiatives, parents have also become empowered to ask questions on management issues. One UEO recalled, 'I participated in a mothers' gathering where a discussion on absenteeism of a teacher was held.'

TIB intervention schools have also played an active role in addressing management accountability issues. The school authorities created initiatives to hear and attend to parents' feedback. For example, assistant teachers at a TIB intervention school reported setting up an advice and complaint box to receive complaints and suggestions from parents.

Figure 5 shows that parents of TIB intervention schools are interested in knowing about teacher numbers and attendance, school security, and so on (which link closely with management issues) at a higher rate than those of non-intervention schools. The assistant teachers at one TIB intervention school noted that, 'Parents ask us about teachers' crises, classroom crises, toilet crises, results of their children, etc.'

TIB worked with SMCs in the intervention schools to help them function effectively in hearing from and representing parents with regard to holding teachers accountable for their attendance and performance in providing education to children. Assistant teachers at the TIB intervention schools stated that SMC members had not previously attended mothers' gatherings, a feature which changed following TIB's intervention. TIB conducted workshops with SMC members to ensure that they were well informed about their roles and responsibilities. TIB also worked with teachers through meetings and workshops. All these encounters with teachers and SMC members helped to instil a sense of the importance of accountability. As a result, stronger voices on the part of parents and SMC members regarding teacher attendance did not create tension in the intervention schools. Rather, the authorities were receptive to feedback from parents and clarified their positions.

The study also found that the parents of children at non-intervention schools were interested in learning about management issues, particularly with regard to teacher attendance (Figure 5). However, as indicated earlier, the teachers from non-intervention schools understood that they should also provide management-related information to parents along with pedagogical information.

Financial accountability to parents was not targeted under any initiative

Usually, the government allocates a maximum of Taka 40,000.00 as SLIP money to each public primary school per year for development purposes. Every year, the school authority is supposed to organize a meeting with community representatives including the SMC, PTA, local influential persons, and parents to discuss expenditure. Field data suggest that this meeting involves the SMC and sometimes PTA members, and that implementation is administered by head teachers who are in charge of the fund and monitored by the *upazila* education office. However, as indicated above, the authorities take no initiative in ensuring financial accountability to parents, including the use of SLIP money, although there is a clear mechanism to report financial issues to education offices. In short, school authorities are not legally bound to provide financial statements to parents. However, they can provide the information under the provision of proactive disclosure policy. Most head teachers and assistant teachers, especially in TIB intervention schools, stated that they have no problem with disclosing data on financial issues relating to the income and expenditure of their schools. Conversely, some assistant teachers from non-intervention schools have opined that disclosing income and expenditure-related information to parents carries risks. The assistant teachers of one non-intervention school stated that, 'We do not provide all information including income-expenditure. Many guardians are illiterate. We think they would not understand many of the provided information and rather they would create chaos.'

Moreover, parents have exhibited reluctance regarding major financial issues relating to accountability, such as school income and expenditure. Rather, they are more interested in obtaining information on specific items such as stipends and exam fees rather than the whole gamut of a school's financial details. *Table 11* shows that 58–66 per cent of parents from TIB intervention schools believe that it is important to have knowledge of financial issues; the proportion is lower in the non-intervention schools (ranging from 47 per cent to 51 per cent). Compared to the information that parents perceive as most important (*Figure 5*), financial information carries noticeably less weight for parents in both types of school.

Table 11. Parents' perceptions of the usefulness of financial information (percentages)

Type of information	TIB intervention schools* (%)		Non-intervention schools* (%)	
	Very useful	Quite useful	Very useful	Quite useful
Funding sources of the school	60 (75)	24.8 (31)	48 (60)	24 (30)
Sources of school income	64 (80)	25.6 (32)	47.2 (59)	21.6 (27)
Amount of school fees	58.4 (73)	24.8 (31)	49.6 (62)	16 (20)
School capital expenditure	65.6 (82)	18.4 (23)	51.2 (64)	14.4 (18)

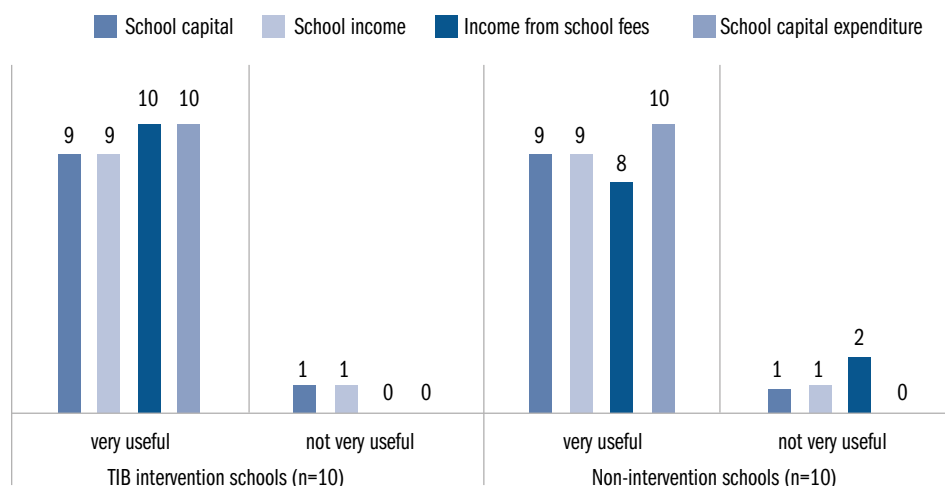
Note: * n = 125

Source: Field survey data.

Although some assistant teachers at non-intervention schools have opined that opening up financial information to parents might be risky, most head teachers of both categories of school have argued for this approach, stating that releasing financial information might help to enhance the transparency and accountability of their schools among parents (*Figure 8*). This difference in opinion between head teachers and assistant teachers

might result from exposure to new concepts and approaches. Head teachers take part in different initiatives and training that provide them with greater understanding of the potential of opening up school data, compared to assistant teachers.

Figure 8. Scoring of head teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of financial information in ensuring transparency, accountability, and the fight against corruption



Source: Field survey data.

Note: Very useful = 4, Quite useful = 3, Not very useful = 2, Not useful at all = 1.

Assistant teachers at TIB intervention schools opined that some information was crucial for parents, including financial issues such as sources of income and expenditure, use of school facilities and materials, status of book distribution, and so on. Nonetheless, they did not provide any information on income and expenditure to parents. They provided, as guided by TIB, information on which services are free and which are paid. This information enabled parents to ascertain that they were not required to pay any fees except for examinations. Assistant teachers from a TIB intervention school recounted the result of this information: '[There was] huge confusion before about the real allocation of stipends, examination fees, etc. [Guardians] used to make many questions on those issues out of confusion. Now they are aware about everything. So, we do not face those kinds of questions anymore.'

According to the institutional arrangements, teachers are accountable to SMC members for their expenses against the implementation of SLIP. One UEO from a selected *upazila* stated that SMC members of TIB intervention schools have greater awareness about the utilization of SLIP money. He noted that that some parents contact them if they find any irregularities in schools, although they do not receive information about irregularities through the initiatives. He explained, 'Parents even come to [the] office to lodge their complaints. They also make phone calls to my officers to inform them about irregularities. SMC members also make phone calls to us to inquire into the expenditures of SLIP money.'

3.2 Comparison of the accountability models used

Ideally, accountability has two meanings: answerability and enforceability. Answerability refers to the responsibility of service providers to provide information and clarify their actions. Enforceability refers to the possibility of rewarding or punishing performance (Goetz and Jenkins, 2001). Hooze, Burns, and Wilkoszewski (2012) highlight some forms of accountability based on their experiments in the education sector. They identify four

forms of school accountability: regulatory school accountability, school performance accountability, multiple school accountability, and professional school accountability.

Regulatory school accountability concerns the mechanism for reporting to higher levels of school authority, which is found in all public primary schools (under government and TIB interventions). *School performance accountability* engages the mechanisms of standardized student testing, public reporting of school performance, and rewards or sanctions. Through this type of accountability highest-performing schools are rewarded and lowest-performing schools are sanctioned. The reward or sanction is determined through an assessment of schools based on aggregate student performance in examinations. The sanctions or rewards can be either explicit or implicit. Explicit sanctions or rewards might include bonuses, whereas implicit ones might include minimal punitive measures imposed by central decision-makers (Figlio and Loeb, 2011). *Professional school accountability* takes into account mechanisms such as credible, useful standards and the creation of professional learning communities. *Multiple school accountability* involves students, parents, communities and other stakeholders in formulating strategies, decision-making, and evaluation.

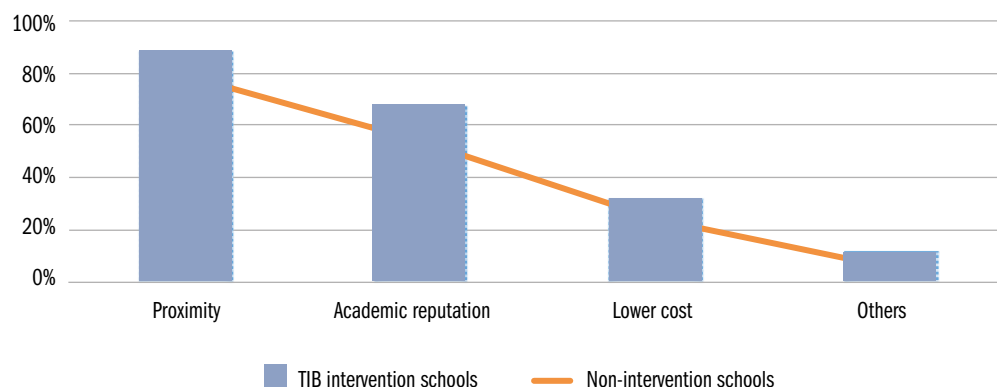
School performance accountability has been implemented in all public primary schools to ensure transparency and accountability. DPE provides instructions to the schools on implementing set activities based on its proactive disclosure policy. These include the Citizen Charter, School Monitoring Board, annual plan, notice board, parents' and mothers' gatherings, SMC-PTA meetings, signboards, and so on. In the selected schools, the instructions provided by DPE were followed. However, the DPE did not consider the use of open data initiatives to assess school performance. Rather, other indicators were used to ascertain which grade the schools deserved, including the number of students, school facilities, number of teachers, results in PEC exams, and so on. Under the initiatives, there are no clearly stated provisions for rewarding schools or making extra allocation for their performance in open data initiatives. In relation to school performance accountability, it is noteworthy that one of the selected intervention schools received funds to build a classroom based on TIB's recommendation to the respective education office and the improved performance of the school.

Some of the activities under both initiatives, such as parents' and mothers' gatherings and SMC-PTA meetings, link closely with multiple school accountability, in particular through public participation. The manner in which the TIB intervention schools managed these activities resulted in the implementation of an authentic public participation model. TIB invested in extra activities to increase awareness of accountability issues among parents, so as to enhance their contribution to parents' or mothers' gatherings. TIB also invested in supporting active mothers to enable them to play an important role in holding school authorities accountable for their performance.

Since professional school accountability places an emphasis on standards and the creation of learning communities, it is closely associated with the market model used to undertake TAIs in schools. This market model is based on the assumptions that competition improves school performance and that parents as customers will determine suitable schools for their children (Hooge, Burns, and Wilkoszewski, 2012). Table 10 shows that a significant number of parents consider school performance on the basis of certain standards in selecting schools for their children, which means that the market model is important to these parents. However, none of the initiatives reflect consideration on the part of the school authorities that open data initiatives might enhance their reputation among parents, leading them to enrol their children in the best-performing schools. There are a number of reasons behind this reluctance. Parents who send their children to public schools in Bangladesh, particularly in rural locations, prioritize proximity to their locality when selecting schools for their children (Figure 9).

Although many parents have stated that they also consider the reputation of schools, the importance given to proximity is entirely plausible, given their socio-economic condition.²⁸

Figure 9. Parents' reasons for selecting schools (percentage; multiple response)



Source: Field survey data.

Parents' capacity to hold schools accountable and address inequality in accessing school data is limited under the regulatory and school performance model

In government-run primary schools, parents and the wider community should be able to access information on school services through the Citizen Charter and the School Monitoring Board. The DPE shares information through their dedicated website and Facebook page, which are accessible to people with internet access. The DPE also publishes a report on the data collected and managed through the EMIS. This report is sent to district education offices, but not to individual schools. Parents can attend parents' or mothers' gatherings held at schools, which are organized mainly during the publication of exam results. These events can provide a space to discuss issues related to pedagogy and some management issues. In the case of the non-intervention schools, however, these events were organized on an irregular basis and were limited to providing advice related to children. In short, these events did not offer any form of interactive discussion. As one assistant teacher of a non-intervention school stated, 'Mothers' gatherings are not regular in our school. In mothers' gatherings, we provide advice to the parents like [the] importance of regular attendance of their children, wearing school uniform, taking water pot, etc.'

Field data suggest that 43.2 per cent of parents from the non-intervention schools did not participate in any form of initiative (see Table 2), such as attending school meetings or visiting schools to obtain information openly displayed on boards. Accordingly, they received no information at all from their children's schools. Either the parents in question felt no need to obtain this information or the schools failed to encourage them to participate in school activities. Field data also recorded inequalities in accessing data in the non-intervention schools (see Tables 4 and 5). Table 4 shows that 44.7 per cent of rural parents and 32.5 per cent of urban parents in the non-intervention schools do not receive school data. Table 5 shows that 71.4 per cent of parents in the poorest areas did not receive school data from the non-intervention schools, although this proportion dropped for Categories A and B (i.e. in richer locations).

28. Upper-class and upper-middle class families in Bangladesh tend to enrol their children in private schools. Lower and lower-middle class families prefer public schools because the education is free. Moreover, stipends and, in some cases, food are provided to the students of public primary schools.

Field data also suggest that parents in the non-intervention schools are less interested in participating in mothers' gatherings on a regular basis. They are not attracted to the meetings and find them to be of little value, possibly because the meetings are mainly used to brief parents about their duties regarding their children, and not to provide parents with feedback about the schools' performance. The non-intervention schools lack any form of programme to raise awareness among parents of the importance of their participation in school activities. One Assistant Upazila Education Officer argued that, 'Schools do not have budget for making parents aware and providing information by applying different techniques that the TIB does.'

Multiple accountability and the public participation model create ownership for parents

As explained above, TIB intervention schools employ the public participation model in facilitating TAIs in primary schools. Field data show that the level of participation in school events is far better among the parents of TIB intervention schools. TIB intervention schools take into account the literacy barriers of some parents and accordingly adopt alternative methods for informing and involving them. For example, TIB sets up an advice and information desk prior to mothers' gatherings and carries out open discussions during the meetings. They also read out leaflets containing school information for illiterate parents and involve them in interactive discussions to ensure they understand the information. The advice and information desk run by TIB YES members²⁹ also helps parents to obtain further information and clarify matters of importance to them. In short, TIB facilitates an extensive programme to build awareness among parents of the importance of participating in mothers' and parents' gatherings at schools, ensuring they are equipped with adequate knowledge to hold school authorities accountable for their performance. As the assistant teachers of one TIB intervention school explained, 'TIB does some activities to attract parents so they attend parents' and mothers' gatherings. Public announcement through mobile loud speaker is done in the areas. Then the meeting is held in the hall room and a long discussion is carried out with parents.'

The assistant teachers of another intervention school explained that, '[The] TIB leaflet is informative and useful. Some parents do not understand what are written there because of their illiteracy. However, we help them read when they ask. TIB provides huge information through leaflet and even through mothers' gathering and information desk.'

One Assistant Upazila Education Officer (AUEO) also noted that, 'Parents participate more actively in TIB-supported mothers' gathering because of their attractive techniques and extra efforts like public announcement through mobile loud speaker, providing refreshment during mothers' gatherings that we cannot ensure in other schools.'

3.3 Comparison of accountability lines or routes

Lindberg (2009) talks about two kinds of accountability – vertical and horizontal. Vertical accountability consists of two routes – upward and downward. Lindberg (2009) further mentions two sources of control for accountability – internal and external. Field data suggest that upward and downward as well as internal and external accountability routes are used by the selected initiatives. The non-intervention schools followed the upward route, which is mostly limited to internal stakeholders. TIB intervention schools followed the downward accountability route with a focus on ensuring participation among external stakeholders, in particular parents.

29. TIBYES members (TIB Youth Engagement and Support) are youth volunteers who take part in awareness-building and community-mobilization activities.

Figure 10. TIB leaflet



The upward-internal accountability route followed in the non-intervention schools does not empower parents

In the non-intervention schools, teachers, including head teachers, are accountable to SMCs and UEOs. The SMC's members represent parents and local people, and as part of their function are expected to hold teachers accountable on behalf of the community as a whole. However, it has been alleged that SMCs often function poorly. As one UEO of a selected upazila noted:

There is a provision to provide SMC membership to some local elites through nomination from respective MP [member of parliament]. In most of the cases, this provision creates possibilities to appoint their own partisan local political leaders. The political nexus between the elites and MP empowers the SMCs in such a way that they eventually tend to empower teachers over the UEOs, which hampers internal monitoring system and creates conflict between teachers and education officers.

While teachers are supposed to be accountable to SMC members, who represent the community as a whole, the process is effectively dominated by the most powerful SMC members, who are nominated by MPs. As a result, it is not possible to ensure accountability to education officers. As indicated above, informal accountability to parents does not take place either, owing to lack of political will on the part of school authorities. As direct accountability to parents other than their representatives (i.e. the SMC) is not mandatory, school authorities are reluctant to place themselves in contexts where they are answerable to parents, such as mothers' or parents' gatherings. Moreover, teachers generally aim to avoid unexpected questions from parents, and therefore work to manage mothers' or parents' gatherings in such a way that the participants do not get an opportunity to raise or discuss their concerns. Instead, the teachers tend to use the gatherings to provide advice to parents, but do not offer opportunities for participants to make enquiries.

The downward-external accountability route followed in the TIB intervention schools empowers parents

Field data suggest that TIB intervention schools target parents as key stakeholders. Accordingly, TIB worked with parents to raise their level of awareness and engage them in parents' and mothers' gatherings with a view to voicing their concerns or questions about teacher performance and specific school-related issues (e.g. classrooms, toilets, teacher attendance, etc.). This process enabled parents to hold teachers and the school management

accountable. TIB also provided information to parents and SMC members about the role of the SMC and other important actors in the local education system. However, TIB has not worked directly with SMCs to increase transparency regarding their formation, although it has convinced SMCs to comply with their expected roles through separate meetings and workshops. TIB has also worked closely with head teachers in meetings and workshops to reinforce the importance of interactive discussion in parents' and mothers' gatherings. Greater knowledge of the responsibilities of the different actors has led parents to increase their participation in school activities and to play an active role in parents' and mothers' gatherings. As one assistant teacher of an intervention school stated, 'Parents have become more conscious now. They hold us accountable in the parents' and mothers' gatherings.'

Table 12. Comparison of accountability lines or routes

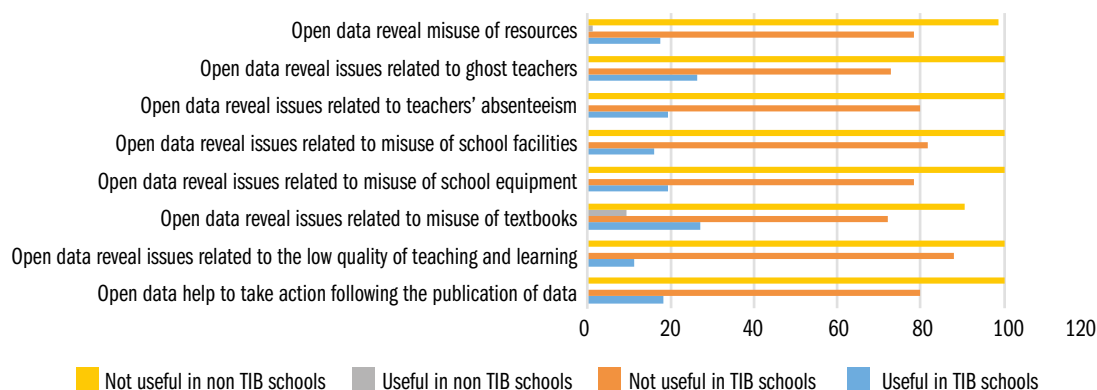
	Stakeholders involved	
	TIB intervention schools	Non-intervention schools
Who is made accountable to whom?	Teachers to SMC and parents	Teachers to SMC and UEO
Type of accountability	Downward-external	Upward-internal
Data processes:		
<i>Data collection</i>	TIB, schools	Schools
<i>Data formatting</i>	TIB, DPE	DPE
<i>Dissemination</i>	TIB (staff, YES, and CCC), schools	BANBEIS, DPE, DEO, UEO, schools
<i>Use at administrative level</i>	Schools, UEO office	Schools, UEO, DEO, DPE

3.4 Consequences of not publishing school data

As indicated earlier, the Right to Information Act, 2009, guarantees the free flow of information and the people's right to information. It provides that every authority shall publish and publicize all information pertaining to any decision taken, proceeding or activity executed or proposed, by publishing them in a manner easily accessible to citizens. Procedures are also prescribed for citizens to obtain access to information from government and non-government institutions. The Act also empowers citizens to have access to education data. Section 6 of the Act along with the Right to Information (Publication and Dissemination) Rules, 2010, provides that institutions should proactively disclose information to citizens, and implies that education offices should have in place proactive initiatives for information disclosure. As part of the provisions of the Act, education offices should designate officers responsible for providing data upon receipt of requests from citizens. In the event of refusal to provide data, citizens are empowered to lodge complaints to the Information Commission of Bangladesh. In 2014, the Information Commission received only four complaints lodged by citizens against education institutes (InfoCom, 2014). While this might indicate that citizens have experienced only minimal difficulties in obtaining information from education offices, it might also imply that people are not yet well informed about the complaints mechanism. In addition, the provisions of the Act do not clearly stipulate that individual schools must have designated information officers to provide information.

As part of the proactive disclosure of information, schools are instructed to make information available through the Citizen Charter and the School Monitoring Board, among other means. The National Education Policy 2010 also provides instructions for

Figure 11. Practical uses of open school data to enable parents to identify mismanagement and corruption (percentage of parents)



Source: Field survey data.

education data management and sharing.³⁰ However, there is no clearly stated legally binding provision in any relevant government policy, law, rule, or regulation that states that primary education offices and schools are bound to disclose their school data on the basis of a proactive disclosure policy. However, there are practices and initiatives in government primary education to disclose information through a variety of initiatives.

Existing laws do not include provisions for engaging parents and other members of the community in data collection and holding school authorities accountable for their performance. This implies that the way in which the TIB has carried out open data initiatives is not prescribed or prohibited under any legal document. It is therefore not mandatory for schools to engage parents in a manner that would ensure they receive information beyond the examination results of their children. However, this research found some differences between the two types of schools selected for the present study, which indicate certain consequences of not publishing school data. Field data show that the non-intervention schools faced no pressure from parents to improve quality of education or to ensure the proper use of resources and reduce corruption in schools (see Figure 11). As a result, these schools missed opportunities to empower and involve parents and work with them collectively for the greater interest of the schools.

3.5 Consequences of publishing school data

Both TIB intervention and non-intervention schools present concrete examples of sharing information with parents and other community people. Figure 11 illustrates the consequences of the initiatives for specific issues in both sets of schools. The differences are the result of techniques and modes of engaging with people and opening up data. TIB intervention schools have invested in creating modes of dissemination and in making events and school data attractive to parents. Non-intervention schools have also shared information but have not made any additional effort. As a result, it is evident that the parents of children in non-intervention schools have not made any use of open data in uncovering mismanagement and corruption. A small percentage of parents from TIB intervention schools have exploited open school data for this purpose to some extent. However, the differences are not significant. This is because parents are mostly

30. The National Education Policy 2010 states that, 'Initiatives have to be taken to set up an IT-based rich database by compiling all information regarding education of all levels, so that everyone can use it easily. All these information have to be updated' (MoE, 2010).

interested in obtaining information on their children's education and school facilities, rather than information on financial, transparency, and accountability issues.

3.6 Summary

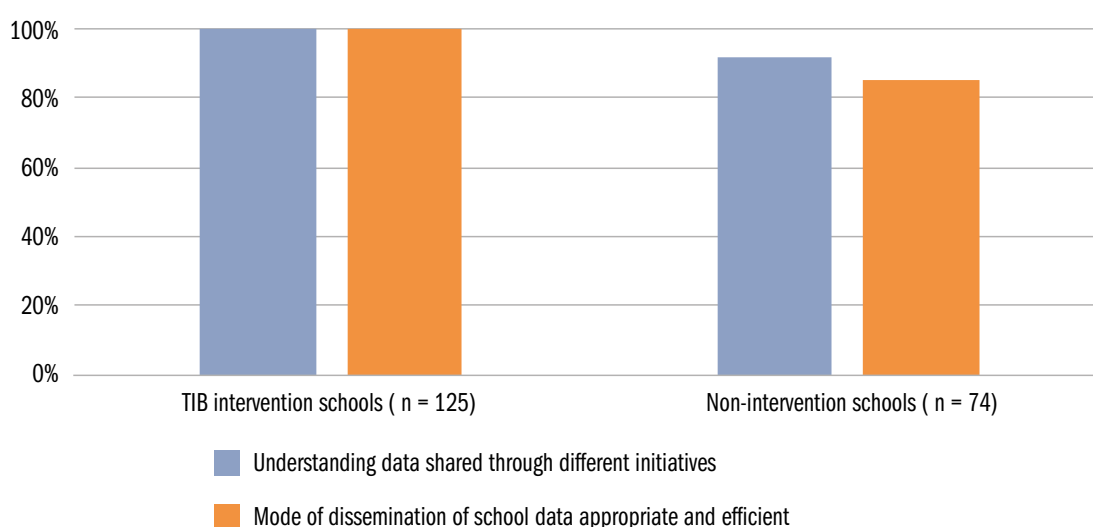
Initiative	Domain of accountability	Accountability models	Lines of accountability	Consequences of not publishing info	Consequences following publication of school data
TIB intervention schools	Pedagogical and management	Multiple accountability	Downward-external	Specific state of corruption not published, so no actions taken to prevent corruption	Empowered users raised concerns and exerted pressure to improve quality and reduce corruption
Non-intervention schools	Pedagogical, management, and financial	Regulation and school performance	Upward-internal	Missed opportunity to work together with active parents	No significant consequences

4. Analysis of stakeholders' perspectives on the usefulness of the initiatives

4.1 Stakeholder perspectives on the fulfilment of school data needs and the usability of publicly shared school information

Field data show that the information provided by TIB intervention and non-intervention schools are understandable to most parents in non-intervention schools and to all parents in TIB intervention schools (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Understanding data and appropriateness of mode of dissemination (percentage of parents)



Field data also indicate that, in both cases, parents lack access to direct information on mismanagement and corruption in their respective schools because none of the initiatives capture or share these kinds of data with parents and other stakeholders. However, findings indicate that most of the data provided to parents in both sets of schools fulfilled various types of information needs (see Figure 13). The level of fulfilment is significantly higher among parents from TIB intervention schools compared to those of non-intervention schools.

Figure 13. Fulfilment of parents' data needs (type-wise responses)

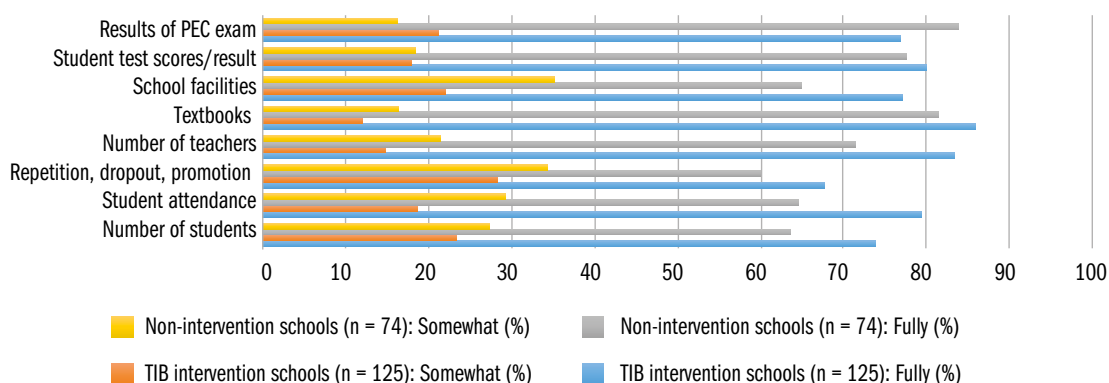


Table 13. Parents' perceptions regarding the usability of open school data to improve transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption activities in schools (type-wise responses)

Type of very useful data	Transparency (%)		Accountability (%)		Anti-corruption (%)	
	TIB*	Non-TIB**	TIB*	Non-TIB**	TIB*	Non-TIB**
Number of students	86.4	60.6	84.5	72.7	82.5	75.8
Student attendance	79.4	62.5	81.4	81.3	78.4	68.8
Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students	66.7	57.1	76.8	77.1	72.7	65.7
Number of teachers	73.1	66.1	87.0	66.1	80.6	80.4
Textbooks	77.2	74.4	87.0	76.7	87.0	79.1
School facilities	79.8	78.4	81.7	75.7	85.3	86.5
Student test scores	64.2	63.3	89.5	81.6	83.2	71.4
Enrolment rate	65.2	-	69.6	-	68.1	-
Result of PEC exam	56.6	62.2	83.8	62.2	61.6	-
Eligibility criteria and amount of stipend	62.4	-	81.2	-	84.7	-
Services from school (free and paid)	68.5	-	80.4	-	73.9	-
Responsibilities of SMCs	77.4	-	84.5	-	84.5	-

Source: Field survey data

Notes: *n = 125 **; n = 71

Field data also indicate that stakeholders, including parents, especially from TIB intervention schools, perceived a relationship between open data and efforts to improve transparency and accountability and fight corruption in schools. Most stakeholders understood the usefulness of open school data for improving transparency in the management of education resources, holding school authorities accountable, and fighting corruption and irregularities in schools. *Table 13* highlights the differences between parents from intervention and non-intervention schools in terms of their perceptions of the usability of open school data. For example, most parents (86.4 per cent) found the data provided through TIB initiatives on the number of students to be very useful in ensuring transparency. A large proportion (89.5 per cent) of parents from TIB intervention schools also found their children's test score to be very useful in holding teachers accountable for their performance. Similarly, 87 per cent of parents from TIB intervention schools stated that information on textbook distribution was important to anti-corruption efforts.

In the case of non-intervention schools, most parents (78.4 per cent) thought that the information on facilities contributed to improving school transparency. With regard to accountability, most parents (81.6 per cent) perceived test scores to be very useful. A large majority of parents (86.5 per cent) also found the information on facilities to be very useful for anti-corruption efforts in schools.

Field data indicate that there is a difference between the perceptions of parents living in rural and urban areas. Parents from rural areas for both sets of schools found the published school data to be more useful for improving transparency, accountability, and fighting corruption in schools.

Field data show that in many cases school authorities (e.g. teachers, SMC and PTA members, and education officers) used TIB-generated school data to improve school

Table 14. Head teachers' perceptions of potential uses of school data

Type of use	TIB intervention schools (n = 10)	Non-intervention schools (n = 10)
Allocation of resources	6	6
Feedback to school	9	7
Parent and community engagement	7	5
Reward and punishment	4	4
Goal-setting for school	8	6
Others	2	2

Source: Field survey data.

performance. Education officers referred to TIB initiatives in different meetings and suggested improvements for other schools' performance. The head teachers of the selected schools also argued that the school data could be used for different purposes (see Table 14).

Field data also indicate that parents from TIB intervention schools, and especially the Active Mothers' Forum, have used open school data for a variety of purposes. For example, they shared important information with other parents to make them aware of the performance of their children's schools. They also used school data to inspire other parents to participate in mothers' and parents' gatherings. In addition, school data was used to inspire other parents to send their children to the school their own children attended (see Table 15). As indicated in Table 10, parents, teachers, and SMC and PTA members use school data to make comparisons between different schools.

Table 15. Use of school data by parents

Type of use reported	TIB intervention schools	Non-intervention schools
Discussion with other parents	Yes	Yes
Inviting other parents to join mothers' gatherings	Yes	No
Discussion in mothers' gatherings	Yes	Yes
Discussion in Active Mothers' Forum	Yes	No
Inspiring parents to send their children to their schools	Yes	Yes
Development of children	Yes	Yes
Placing pressure on teachers to resolve problems	Yes	No

Source: Field survey data.

4.2 Stakeholder perspectives on the impact of publicly shared school information

Field data show that open school data initiatives have created new avenues for parents to make practical use of information published by schools (see Figure 10). Open data initiatives, especially among TIB intervention schools, have produced remarkable short-term impacts in communities and schools, some of which are detailed in the following sections.

Community initiatives

Greater community participation in school events led to awareness of incidents of mismanagement and corruption in schools and resulted in a number of initiatives. Survey

data show that 17.6 per cent of parents have taken part in an initiative following the publication of school data, as a result of heightened awareness of mismanagement and corruption in schools. *Table 16* shows that almost none of the parents of children from the non-intervention schools were able to provide an example of using school data for any purpose. However, 15 parents from intervention schools cited examples of using school data to exert pressure on teachers to improve education quality in the schools, as a result of obtaining access to open school data. Similarly, 12 parents were able to use school data to pressure education officers to increase funding for their respective schools.

Table 16. Initiatives taken by parents using open school data

Initiatives	TIB intervention schools (%)	Non-intervention schools (%)
Pressure on school authorities to increase funding	57.1 (12)	-
Pressure on school authorities to make better use of funds	14.3 (3)	-
Pressure on education authorities to increase number of schoolteachers	33.3 (7)	-
Pressure on education authorities to increase teacher qualifications	9.5 (2)	-
Pressure on school authorities to reduce absenteeism of teachers	19 (4)	-
Pressure on education/ school authorities to reduce corruption in use of school facilities	9.5 (2)	-
Pressure on education/ school authorities to reduce corruption in use of school equipment	9.5 (2)	-
Pressure on education/ school authorities to reduce corruption in textbook distribution	23.8 (5)	-
Pressure on teachers to improve education quality	71.4 (15)	One response

Source: Field survey data.

Awareness-raising among parents of the need to hold schools accountable

Field data suggest that TIB-led interventions have contributed to building awareness among parents and SMC and PTA members regarding their responsibilities. This has led to increased activity among both parents and SMC members. As indicated earlier, a UEO received phone calls from parents who had noticed irregularities in their respective schools. Teachers from a TIB intervention school also noted that parents had become more aware of their children's education as a result of TIB's intervention, and were now playing a more active role.

Enhanced sense of responsibility among teachers and SMC members

Field data show that teachers in TIB intervention schools have become proactive in disclosing school information. Their behaviour to parents and students has also improved, with teachers taking greater care of students. The teachers in a TIB intervention school noted that their sense of responsibility increased following TIB's intervention. They

became punctual in attendance and more serious about teaching in classes. Assistant teachers from a TIB intervention school confirmed this finding, stating that, '[A] sense of responsibility has increased among us. Now we attend school on time. We are serious on teaching in classes. We compare result and transparency issues with other schools.'

Regular mothers' gatherings held in TIB intervention schools

Teachers at the TIB intervention schools also stated that they have started organizing mothers' gatherings on a regular basis, with the cooperation of TIB. They have also found that TIB's interactive sessions at the gathering increase parental participation in school events. However, regular mothers' gatherings are still not being held at the non-intervention schools. As a teacher at a non-intervention school stated, 'I joined this school for more than a year. I saw only one mothers' gathering held in a year. Parents are not conscious here. They do not want to attend the gathering.'

Replication of good practices

Some UEOs explained that they discuss the results of TIB initiatives with non-intervention schools, so that they can learn about good practices and apply it in their schools. One UEO stated:

We saw that TIB invites parents for mothers' gathering by taking a few days at hand. They also hold a long meeting in the gatherings and provide more information on SMC, teachers, etc. The schools they are working with are far better than the average schools. We discuss this difference with other schools and ask them to regularize mothers' gathering by ensuring proper attendance and participation of parents.

4.3 Summary

Initiative	Data relevance	Data readability	Data accessibility	Data discussed	Data usability
TIB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students Student attendance Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students Number of teachers School facilities School equipment Textbooks Stipend amount and eligibility criteria Services available at school (free and paid) Responsibilities of SMC Exam results Passing rate of PEC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27.2% of parents cannot read data shared through leaflets or information boards owing to illiteracy Open discussions, leaflets read out in mothers' gatherings, and information desk run by TIB YES members to help illiterate parents understand school information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance of teachers and students Enrolment and dropout rates Exam results School facilities Materials Textbook distribution Cleanliness of children Study at home School safety Teacher shortage Classroom crisis Toilet crisis Teachers' behaviour Quality of teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of resources Feedback to school Parents and community engagement Reward and punishment Goal-setting for schools Inviting other parents to participate Inspiring parents to send their children to their schools Holding teachers accountable
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of students and teachers Student attendance Repetition, dropout, and promotion of students School facilities School equipment Textbooks Exam results Passing rate at PEC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 24.8% of parents cannot read the data shared through the school monitoring board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 59% of parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam results School facilities Materials Textbook distribution Cleanliness of children Study at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocation of resources Feedback to school Parents and community engagement Reward and punishment Goal-setting for schools

Initiative	Impact on funding	Impact on management	Impact on pedagogy	Other short term impact
TIB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few schools received funding for school development as a result of joint advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers became punctual in attending school SMC and PTA became more active SMC members participated in mothers' gatherings UEOs and AUEOs shared good practices with other school teachers UEOs and AUEOs act on complaints lodged by parents and SMC members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers became more concerned with student's studies, cleanliness Teacher attendance increased Student attendance increased Parents became aware of their children's right to quality education Passing rate at PEC increased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback loop from parents created Role of Active Mothers' Forum became visible Mothers' gatherings regularized Home visit increased
Government		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UEOs and AUEOs shared good practices from TIB intervention schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher attendance increased Passing rate at PEC increased 	

5. Conditions of success, limits, and strategies for improvement

5.1 Stakeholder perspectives regarding the conditions for success of the initiatives

Field survey data suggest that several conditions lie behind the success of open data initiatives. Table 17 shows that accessibility to data is the main factor in ensuring an effective TAI initiative. According to parents, access to school data plays a crucial role (95.2 per cent of responses from parents of children from TIB intervention schools and 41.9 per cent of responses from parents of non-intervention schools). Comprehensibility of data is the second most important factor for parents from TIB intervention schools (84.8 per cent) and the most important issue for parents from non-intervention schools (55.4 per cent). Having accurate and timely data that are usable, and the capacity of parents and communities to use school data, are also considered by parents to be important factors.

Field data collected from other stakeholders suggest that additional factors contribute to the effectiveness of open data initiatives. These views suggest that additional efforts made by TIB-led initiatives have increased the usability of data and the overall effectiveness of initiatives. The mode of facilitation also affects the accessibility and comprehensibility of data, as has been clearly observed in the TIB intervention schools. The usefulness of data is also important: data that have a clear, practical use are valued by parents and generate interest in becoming involved in open data initiatives. The following sub-sections detail some of the conditions for success underlying open school data initiatives.

Table 17 Parents' perceptions regarding the conditions for effective open school data (multiple responses; percentages)

Conditions	TIB intervention schools (%)	Non-intervention schools (%)
Capacity to produce accurate and timely data	74.4 (93)	45.9 (34)
Comprehensibility of data	84.8 (106)	55.4 (41)
Accessibility of data	95.2 (119)	41.9 (31)
Capacity of the school to act upon information	26.4 (33)	5.4 (4)
Capacity of parents/communities to act upon information	24.8 (31)	6.8 (5)
No response	–	8.1 (6)

Source: Field survey data.

Additional efforts

TIB has invested in a number of additional efforts to support parents' participation in school activities, including public announcements via microphones, information leaflet

distribution, organizing Advice and Information Desks during mothers' gatherings, and the creation of an Active Mothers' Forum. As a result, the attendance of parents at TIB-supported mothers' gatherings has increased. Conversely, the non-intervention schools do not invest in any additional efforts due to a lack of planning and budgetary allocation for such activities. The UEO of a selected *upazila* argued that, 'Mothers' gathering in government schools is not likely to attract parents. There is no provision to even entertain them with tea.'

An AUEO of a selected *upazila* also noted that, 'Schools do not have budget for making parents aware of the programme and providing information beforehand by applying different modes that the TIB does. So, parents participate more enthusiastically in TIB-supported mothers' gatherings'.

Mode of facilitation

In TIB intervention schools, mothers' gatherings invest huge time and effort in generating interactive discussion on different issues. As a result, participating mothers feel empowered to ask questions during the meetings. *Figure 11* shows that all parents of TIB intervention schools who attended school events were able to understand the content and messages delivered to them. They have also confirmed that the mode of dissemination used by TIB is appropriate. On the other hand, a few parents (8.1 per cent) who attended school events in non-intervention schools were not able to understand the messages delivered to them. A slightly larger proportion (12.2 per cent) opined that the mode of dissemination used in non-intervention schools is not appropriate, since many parents failed to understand the messages delivered to them.

Field data also show that the teachers in the TIB intervention schools provided help to ensure illiterate parents received information by reading out the information boards and leaflets provided by TIB. The assistant teachers at a TIB intervention school confirmed this: 'Some illiterate parents want us read out what are written in information board when they come to visit school. We do for them wholeheartedly.'

Comprehensibility and usefulness of data

Increasing understanding of the usefulness of open school data, as well as the capacity to make use of them, helped to encourage parents to participate actively in school events. Field data clearly indicate differences between parents of children at TIB intervention and non-intervention schools in this regard. Parents of children at TIB intervention schools better understood the usefulness of open school data. Many of the mothers of TIB intervention schools were also able to use school data to raise concerns over shortages of teachers, classrooms, toilets, and so on. Parents of non-intervention schools, on the other hand, were unable to understand the value of open data and thus failed to raise questions over quality education or school management issues related to open school data (see *Table 16*).

Upazila Education Offices also found the open school data to be useful. They now receive complaints from data-conscious mothers and SMC members from TIB intervention schools, which function as an informal monitoring mechanism. Teachers from the TIB intervention schools also find the data to be useful. In particular, they found that active participation in mothers' meetings has encouraged parents to provide due time to school. For example, home visits are conducted by almost all schools in cases of students who are absent from classes for more than three consecutive days. The teachers from TIB intervention schools have become more serious about making home visits to such students. As one assistant teacher of a TIB intervention school stated, 'We maintain attendance registers and identify students having tendency of not attending school regularly. We make visit to those students to make them understand about their regular attendance in classes. We have found it works.'

Legal provisions and guidelines

As indicated earlier, there are no legal provisions or corresponding measures to punish failure to proactively disclose information. However, there are provisions to take measures if schools fail to perform according to the instructions issued by the field-level education officials following guidance by the DPE. As one DPE official stated, '[The] DPE or UEO takes measures against any failure of following instruction in providing data to education offices. The punishments include show-cause, transfer, holding up increment, one-day salary cut, etc.'

Provisions relating to proactive disclosure of information under the Right to Information Act, 2009, empower the DPE to issue instructions to schools to publish data through monitoring boards and parents' or mothers' gatherings. However, the field data suggest that there is little evidence of punishments being imposed in cases where schools fail to organize mothers' gatherings or other open data initiatives to provide information to parents or communities. However, the Act does empower parents to claim information from any public institution, including schools, with any failure to provide data on application punishable by law. TIB refers to this legal framework in assisting schools to provide school data to parents and communities. In particular, these laws and instructions from the DPE have proved helpful to TIB when implementing TAIs in primary schools.

Accurate and timely data

Field data highlight the importance of providing information at the right time, for example student results. All the selected schools prefer to organize mothers' gatherings to coincide with the publication of results, especially annual exam results. To parents, timely and accurate data are vital, and promote enthusiastic participation in school gatherings (see Table 17).

Political will

Political will among teachers, the SMC, and education offices is an important factor in providing information to parents. As indicated earlier, many non-intervention schools believe that open data initiatives could pose risks to their schools, although this conclusion is not the result of experimentation. They suspect that the resulting confusion among parents might lead to school authorities facing unexpected questions and harassment. However, teachers at the TIB intervention schools have found that open information policies narrow the information gap between schools and parents and thus reduce confusion and mistrust. Political will to open up school data is therefore an important precondition to ensuring its success. It is also vital that school authorities sacrifice any personal interest linked to corruption.

5.2 Stakeholder perspectives regarding the limits and risks of the initiatives

Field data suggest that the number of parents who believe there are risks in providing data to parents is insignificant (see Table 18). Those parents who argued in favour of non-disclosure of school data stated that negative aspects of teacher behaviour should not be disclosed to parents in public. Culturally, teachers are highly respected individuals in Bangladeshi communities. It is, therefore, not unusual for parents to hold the view that teachers should not be publicly humiliated in the name of accountability.

The teachers from the TIB intervention schools stated that they had no problem with publishing data on pedagogical and management issues. However, the teachers from the non-intervention schools believed that there were risks in opening up data, especially on financial issues, as stated earlier. They argued that some parents might not understand

the calculations, which could create chaos and hamper education in schools. All SMC and PTA members interviewed also found no risks in the open data initiatives.

Field data suggest that both of sets of initiatives have certain limitations, which could prevent them from achieving the best possible results. Some of these follow.

Table 18. Parents' opinions regarding the risks of open data initiatives (percentage)

Response	TIB intervention schools* (%)	Non-intervention schools** (%)
Yes	1.6	1.4
No	89.6	95.9
No idea	3.2	-
No response	5.6	2.7

Source: Field survey data.

Notes: * n = 125; ** n = 74



Parents' gathering at a TIB intervention school

Top-down approach

Mothers' gatherings in non-intervention schools operate mostly on the basis of one-way communication. Parents gather on a particular day fixed by the schools to hear advice from teachers regarding their children's performance. Data needs are not identified in consultation with the users (i.e. the parents) for either intervention. Moreover, parents are not involved in the data-collection process.

No budget allocation from the government for mothers' gathering

The government has not made a budget available for additional efforts to build awareness among parents of the importance of their active involvement in school activities. The TIB intervention schools receive a budget from TIB to carry out additional activities to encourage parent involvement. However, this support is project-based and short term in nature. After phase-out, the schools might face challenges in continuing the activities in an effective manner.

Lack of attractive sessions in parents' or mothers' gatherings

Non-intervention schools do not provide information through an attractive and effective process. Moreover, the teachers have not received any training on effective information-disclosure mechanisms. Without proper orientation, it is difficult to expect that teachers in the non-intervention schools can make information-providing channels attractive.

Lack of awareness among parents of the usefulness of school data

Field data suggest that, compared to parents from the intervention schools, parents from the non-intervention schools are limited in their ability to understand the usefulness of open school data in terms of the quality of education of their children.

Lack of legal measures to punish failure to proactively disclose information

As the current legal framework does not guarantee punishment for failure to proactively disclose information, the schools depend on instructions from the DPE. The DPE imposes some punitive measures in cases of failure to follow their instructions, as indicated earlier.

5.3 Stakeholder perspectives regarding strategies to improve the impact of initiatives

Stakeholders interviewed for this research suggested some strategies for the improvement of open data initiatives. Parents of children from both types of schools provided several suggestions, which included increasing the number of mothers' gatherings, using appropriate techniques, implementing collective initiatives and policies, and organizing training for teachers (see Table 19).

Table 19. Parents' suggestions for improving open school data initiatives (multiple responses; percentages)

Suggestions	TIB intervention schools* (%)	Non-intervention schools** (%)
Arrange mothers' gathering at least once per month	23.1	21.1
Implement collective initiatives and policies	7.7	15.8
Promote cooperation between teacher and parents	5.1	21.1
Organize regular mothers' gathering	17.9	26.3
Organize more training and meetings for teachers	7.7	-
More assistance from upper-level education offices	2.6	-
More assistance from TIB	5.1	-
Use appropriate techniques	20.5	10.5
More interest among guardians in obtaining information	5.1	5.3
More active role of teachers	5.1	5.3
Publication of the budget	5.1	-
Reduce corruption	2.6	5.3

Source: Field survey data.

Notes: * n = 42; ** n = 21

Teachers, and SMC and PTA members from the selected schools, as well as UEOs, also made a few recommendations. These included the increased need for mothers' gatherings, interactive discussion during meetings, home visits, greater self-initiative on the part of teachers, the adoption of popular information-sharing techniques such as drama performances and short mobile phone messages, the use of complaint mechanisms, consultation meetings with individual parents, and so on.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This research has helped to test a few assumptions laid down at the outset of the study. The *first assumption* is that open data initiatives help to improve transparency and accountability in the management of education system. The findings of this research suggest that this assumption is true. In the TIB intervention schools, parents have become empowered by accessing school data provided to them. They have learnt to voice their concerns not only about their children's learning, but also regarding school facilities and teacher attendance. SMC members have also become more active compared to the past (i.e. prior to the interventions). Both parents and SMC members now appear to play active roles in holding teachers accountable. In addition, mothers and SMC members have reported corruption and irregularities at the school level to education authorities. Upazila Education Offices have become more aware of good practices and have shared examples of these with non-intervention schools. Thus, the authorities of the selected schools have become more accountable to education managers as well as citizens. TIB intervention schools have found that open data initiatives work to bridge the information gaps between school authorities and parents, which has inspired the authorities to become more transparent with parents by disclosing information through different media. Thus, the open data initiatives have helped to improve transparency and accountability in the management of the education system.

The open data initiative in the TIB intervention schools also disclosed crucial information important for improving transparency and accountability, such as the rights of students regarding eligibility criteria and the amount of stipends, the responsibility of all relevant stakeholders, the state of school facilities, teachers' performance, and so on. This disclosure created scope for parents to identify inconsistencies and malpractices in the schools their children attend. Upon ascertaining the existence of irregularities some parents voiced their concerns and made the school authority accountable, thereby working to ensure lawful and transparent practices in their schools. In some cases, parents lodged their complaints directly with UEOs, citing mismanagement and illegal practices on the part of the school authority. Examples from a few non-intervention schools also suggest that opening up school data, albeit on a limited scale, through mothers' or parents' gatherings helped parents to become aware of factors such as the status of school facilities, and the number and attendance rate of teachers, among others. These examples clearly indicate that open data initiatives play a useful role in ensuring transparency and accountability in public primary schools.

The *second assumption* concerns the effectiveness of open information models, and assumes that citizen-led open data initiatives are more effective than those of the government. Analysis of short-term impacts suggests that citizen-led initiatives are more effective than government initiatives in improving school management systems, pedagogy, and building agency and encouraging active participation among parents and communities. However, the analysis did not find any tangible long-term impacts of the initiatives in either the education system or the communities. The findings show that TIB-facilitated, citizen-led initiatives contributed to improving transparency and holding school authorities accountable to parents and reducing corruption risks in primary schools. In spite of literacy barriers with many parents, all the parents interviewed reported being able to understand the information disseminated to them. Conversely, many parents of the non-intervention schools operating government-led initiatives stated that they had not received any information from their children's schools. A large proportion also stated that they were unable to understand the information shared with them by their

respective school authorities. Under the TIB-led initiative, the information was discussed and disseminated more efficiently and effectively with parents, SMC members, and PTA members, especially through regular mothers' and parents' gatherings. TIB also ensured that a significant portion of parents participated in the mothers' gatherings and other school events. They also implemented additional activities such as Advice and Information Desks, and leaflet distribution, which supported information-disclosure efforts. In addition, TIB hung information boards in public places to ensure easy access to information for all concerned. TIB also organized multi-stakeholder meetings to share baseline survey data, which helped to identify irregularities such as extra fees received from students and corporal punishment in classes. This information has helped school authorities take measures to improve their service and put a stop to irregularities. TIB has also formed an Active Mothers' Forum and instilled a sense of responsibility with regard to helping promote good governance and quality education in primary schools.

In comparison, the government-led initiative supplied only a relatively small proportion of parents with school data, and the information in question was limited to children's exam results. As stipulated by the DPE, most information was disclosed through monitoring boards. Parents of non-intervention schools were found to be less aware of their right to information as well as their roles as citizens in this regard. Very few parents were aware of their entitlement to free school services or the fees of the schools. As a result, there is a comparatively lower chance in government-led schools of parents looking into irregularities, rather than limiting their data needs to learning about their children's exam results. This indicates that the government-led model is less effective than the citizen-led model in the selected schools.

The research findings show that the non-intervention schools used regulatory and performance-accountability models, while the TIB intervention schools applied multiple accountability including a public participation accountability model. Through application of the public participation model, TIB encouraged the participation of parents, and SMC and PTA members. Specific initiatives such as mothers' and parents' gatherings, and the Advice and Information Desk inspired parents to participate actively in school events. TIB also inspired other relevant stakeholders to take part in school activities. These activities reinforced the role of parents in improving transparency and accountability at the school level.

The regulatory and performance models applied in non-intervention schools depend on government instructions to schools to organize mothers' and parents' gatherings and display monitoring boards as part of a proactive disclosure policy. There is no legally binding framework to take punitive measures in the event of failure to disclose information proactively. The school authorities studied for this research were found to be following their instructions, but not undertaking any additional effort to ensure the active participation of parents and communities. As a result, the regulatory model does not guarantee the participation of parents and cannot, therefore, create any sense of ownership among parents, which is the case with the public participation model facilitated by TIB. The public participation model proved more effective in promoting efforts to ensure transparency and accountability. Moreover, the public participation model follows an external and downward accountability route, which further empowers citizens, in this case parents, to hold school authorities accountable.

The *third assumption* focuses on the benefits of open data initiatives. In the non-intervention schools, a considerable number of parents surveyed did not receive any data from schools. As such, they were deprived of the benefits of open school data initiatives. A quarter of the parents surveyed in the non-intervention schools reported that they could not read the information provided on the monitoring board owing to literacy barriers. Some parents actively participated in parents' or mothers' gatherings in both types of schools. However, a significant number of parents of the non-intervention schools were

not willing to invest sufficient time in school activities. Moreover, it was found that the non-intervention schools did not make any additional effort to involve parents in school activities. As a result, school data did not reach or benefit a significant portion of the non-intervention school parents. In addition, only a few parents had sufficient knowledge to understand the potential applications of school data (with the exception of students' exam results) for improving transparency and accountability in schools and thus school performance. Accordingly, their participation in TAIs without proper orientation did not significantly affect or improve school performance. A large number of parents of non-intervention schools located in the most poverty-prone areas were unable to access school data. In particular, parents of non-intervention schools located in rural areas had relatively less access to school data compared to urban areas. This deficiency suggests that there is inequality in accessing school data in the non-intervention schools. However, the TIB intervention schools encountered no significant differences when addressing parents in different locations in terms of poverty and rural–urban categories. This implies that inequality in access to school information can be minimized if the barriers to accessibility can be identified and addressed through proper planning and action.

6.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the above conclusions of the research findings and target decision-makers, education managers, school authorities, and parents, with a view to strengthening the effectiveness of open data initiatives as a means to ensure quality service in schools.

For decision-makers

1. **Create legal provisions for the disclosure of school data:** Legal provisions should be adopted to ensure that disclosure of school data in the primary education sector is undertaken by all public primary schools in an effective manner.
2. **Allocation of budget:** Budgets for organizing mothers' and parents' gatherings, as well as other activities related to disclosing school data, must be allocated to all public primary schools to enable them to plan and implement additional and effective disclosure activities.
3. **Rewards and punishment:** Schools that perform better in terms of disclosing data and ensuring transparency and accountability should be rewarded. Schools that do not disclose the necessary data and fail to ensure transparency and accountability should be encouraged to do better. Punitive measures can be taken in the event of failure to undertake disclosure activities.

For education managers including teachers

1. **Training for teachers on effective information disclosure:** All teachers, and especially head teachers, should be trained in how to implement the information disclosure policy, and how to organize mothers' and parents' gatherings in an effective manner. Detailed modules should be developed for this purpose.
2. **Regularize mothers' gatherings:** Mothers' gatherings must be held regularly and should prioritize the effective participation of parents, the usefulness of school data, interactive discussion, and the use of multimedia. They should also highlight good practices.
3. **Identify and disclose more useful information:** More useful information should be disclosed, including data on income and expenditure, teacher absenteeism, inspections, the socio-economic status of students, rules regarding services (free and paid), eligibility criteria and the amount of stipends, the responsibilities of SMC members, the satisfaction level of parents, and community involvement. Education offices can engage community and local civil society members to inquire into illegal practices such as fund embezzlement and leakage in schools.

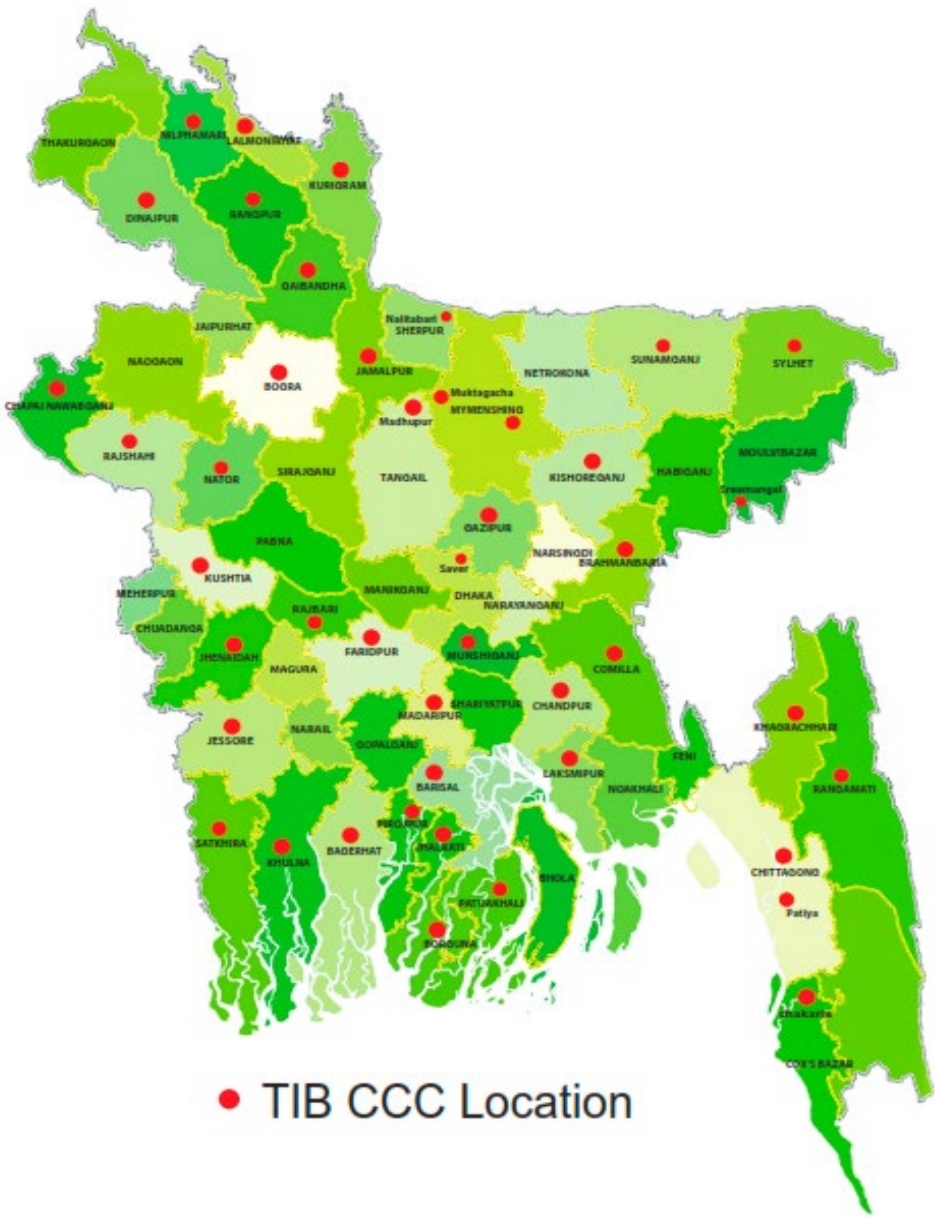
4. **Systematize regular dialogue:** Regular dialogue among teachers, SMCs, education officials, and parents should be organized to discuss their collective role in improving the quality of schools and stopping irregularities.
5. **Create incentives:** School data initiatives should be designed and organized in such a way that both the school authority and parents are incentivized to become involved in disclosure procedures. Parents should be engaged in mothers' and parents' gatherings by facilitating interactive discussion. Schools can arrange small gifts for active mothers in recognition of their contributions to school-level open data initiatives.
6. **Introduce community-led monitoring of school performance:** A Citizen Report Card (CRC) programme should be introduced, and the community should be encouraged to participate in the data collection process. For example, young people can be engaged to measure community satisfaction with school performance. The findings of the CRC should be disclosed to all stakeholders including parents.
7. **Training for teachers, SMCs, and selected community groups:** Teachers, SMC members, and selected parents such as participants in TIB's Active Mothers' Forum can be trained on the modality and practical usage of open school data. The Upazila Education Office can coordinate the process. Parents should be involved in organizing mothers' and parents' gatherings.
8. **Make information available in public places:** Monitoring boards, citizen charters, and other information boards should be hung in public spaces to ensure they are accessible to all stakeholders.
9. **Regular home visits:** Home visits should be made on a regular basis. These may include messages for parents to encourage their participation in mothers' or parents' gatherings.
10. **Learning visit to TIB-led mothers' gatherings:** Teachers from non-intervention schools can visit TIB intervention schools to observe mothers' and parents' gatherings, in order to take note of good practices.
11. **Use attractive information dissemination mediums:** Non-intervention schools can develop and use innovative media for data dissemination. Additionally, they can make use of leaflets, images, multimedia, drama, folk songs, etc. The ability of illiterate parents to access and understand data must be taken into consideration.

Annexes

Annex A. Data available on the GoB (MoPME and DPE) websites

Type of data	Available data	Status
Aggregated data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total number of schools by year (1996–2014) Total number of students by year (1991–2014) Total number of teachers by year (1990–2014) 	Not updated after 2014
Data on students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National, sub-national, and local level: Number of students by administrative division, district, <i>upazila</i> (sub-district), and cluster (each <i>upazila</i> is divided, usually into three clusters) Number of students by school Number of students coming from catchment area and from out-of-catchment area by school Enrolment by school and by gender Repeaters by school including role number, section, repeated year, and class Presence of students by school and by gender 	Not complete and updated
Data on teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National, sub-national, and local level: Number of teachers by gender, division, district, <i>upazila</i> (sub-district), cluster, and school Educational qualification, designation, age, and training received by individual teacher 	Not complete and updated
Data on Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Status of school building (old, new, repairable, and non-repairable) by individual school Data on status of boundary wall by individual school Availability of ICT facility, status of ICT tools (workable, repairable, and out of order) by individual school Toilet facilities (usable or non-usable) by individual school Drinking water facilities by individual school 	Not complete and updated
Geographical demarcation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map of schools by division, district, and <i>upazila</i> 	Not complete and updated
Accounting system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographical Directorate of Primary Education accounting system 	Restricted for authorized user
Contact points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact numbers and email addresses for all Primary Education Offices at division, district, and <i>upazila</i> level 	Complete

Annex B. TIB CCC Location Map



Annex C. Main features of selected districts

Category	Name of districts	Poverty rate (upper line)	Literacy rate	School completion rate	Area type	Number of selected schools
Category A Poverty rate 27% or less	Gazipur	19.4	62.6%	80.9%	Urban	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Chittagong	11.5	58.9 %	92.4%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Jhenaidah	24.7	62%	79.2%	Urban	TIB 1 and GoB 1
Category B Poverty rate 28–47%	Nilphamari	34.8	44.4%	75.8%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Satkhira	46.3	52.1%	79.8%	Urban	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Tangail	29.7	46.8%	80.5%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Natore	35.1	49.6%	84.9%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
Category C Poverty rate 48% or greater	Gaibandha	48.0	42.5%	58.5%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Jamalpur	51.1	38.4%	75.9%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
	Barisal	54.8	61.2%	84.2%	Rural	TIB 1 and GoB 1
Total number of selected schools						20

Sources: Poverty rate (BBS, 2010); Literacy rate (BBS, 2011); School completion rate (DPE, 2016).

Note: Categories are defined on the basis of the poverty rate demarcated in the Poverty Map of Bangladesh 2010 (World Bank/ BBS/WFP, 2010).

Annex D. Sources of primary data, method of data collection, and tools

Data collection method	Sources of information	Tools
Semi-structured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing authority – person from Information Commission and Education Sector Authority (school level to national level) Persons responsible for GoB and citizen-led initiatives Civil society representative Education expert Persons from media 	Semi-structured questionnaire
In-depth interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Head teachers Parent-Teacher Associations – (individual schools) School Management Committee/Community leaders 	Semi-structured and structured questionnaire
Focus group discussion (FGD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers 	Checklist
Sample survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents 	Structured questionnaire

Annex E. Profile of respondents

Age of respondents (percentage)

Age range (years)	TIB intervention schools (n = 125)	Non-intervention schools (n = 125)
Up to 25	16	14.4
26-30	42.4	44
31-35	24	23.2
36-40	8.8	12
Above 40	8.8	6.4

Educational qualifications of respondents (percentage)

Level of education	TIB intervention schools (n = 125)	Non-intervention schools (n = 125)
Never attended school	0.8	1.6
Can sign	26.4	23.2
Primary education	60.8	59.2
Secondary education	7.2	12.8
Higher secondary	4.0	2.4
Graduate/ Postgraduate	0.8	0.8

Profession of respondents (percentage)

Type of profession	TIB intervention schools (n = 125)	Non-intervention schools (n = 125)
Businessman	5.6% (7)	3.2% (4)
Farmer/day labourer	1.6% (2)	4% (5)
Housewife	87.2% (109)	87.2 % (109)
Others	5.6% (7)	5.6% (7)

Educational qualification of parents by urban-rural (percentage)

Level of education	TIB intervention schools		Non-intervention schools	
	Rural (n = 85)	Urban (n = 40)	Rural (n = 85)	Urban (n = 40)
Never attended school	-	2.5%	2.4%	-
Can sign	22.4%	35%	31.8%	5%
Primary education	64.7%	52.5%	50.6%	77.5%
Secondary education	9.4%	2.5%	12.9%	12.5%
Higher secondary	3.5%	5%	2.4%	2.5%
Graduate/ Post-graduate	-	2.5%	-	2.5%

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The case study

The number of countries providing access to school data to the general public has grown rapidly over the past decade, encouraged by the development of information technologies and under the pressure of social movements demanding the right to information. A wide variety of initiatives have been developed by both governments and civil society, to share school-level information in the form of 'school report cards'. These provide key information about a school, e.g. on student enrolment, funding, number of teachers, teacher qualifications, pupil–teacher ratios, conditions of school facilities, textbooks, and student achievement. But now that such data are in the public domain, how can it be ensured that they are used to promote not only transparency but also accountability in the education sector?

This case study compares the design and implementation of two major open school data initiatives implemented in Bangladesh – the open school data programme developed by the Directorate of Primary Education, and Transparency International Bangladesh report cards. It covers the types of information published, who publishes it and how it is accessed; the critical data for improving transparency and accountability; how different categories of stakeholders access and use it; the requisite conditions for improving transparency and accountability; and the limitations of such processes.

The publication concludes by highlighting that open school initiatives led by civil society value downward and external accountability routes, whereas the government approach is more upward and internal. It ends with a set of recommendations, including: creating legal provisions for disclosing school data, publishing additional data (e.g. on income and expenditure, teacher absenteeism, eligibility criteria and amount of stipends, or the satisfaction level of parents), allocating budget for organizing mothers' and parents' gatherings to discuss school data, training teachers and selected parents on the usage of open school data, and introducing community-led monitoring of school performance.

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