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# Employment and Expectations of Former Madrasah Students in Cox's Bazar

A Cross-Sectional Exploration





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## List of Acronyms

BANBEIS	:	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	:	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDT	:	Bangladeshi Taka
BIGD	:	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
HSC	:	Higher Secondary Certificate
NGO	:	non-governmental organization
RDS	:	respondent-driven sampling
SDP	:	Skills Development Programme
SSC	:	Secondary School Certificate



## Executive Summary

Madrasah is a significant part of Bangladesh's education system. Alia madrasahs—the government-regulated and parallel to the mainstream education system—and the more orthodox Qawmi madrasahs are the two most dominant Islamic education systems in the country. In 2021, only the government-accredited madrasahs catered to 13% of the post-primary students in Bangladesh, out of which half were female.

However, madrasah students who were deemed to be the best suited for religious professions have been left behind, especially in terms of jobs that demand technical and other professional skills. The unemployment rate among madrasah graduates is estimated to be around 75% (Behera, 2013; "Three of Four Madrasa Students Remain Jobless," 2018). The failure of the madrasah system—which has been responsible for educating a large segment of the population—to equip students with the necessary skills for today's age calls for a review of the ways these students can be integrated into the skilled workforce.

**J**oblessness among madrasah graduates is estimated to be a whopping 75%.

Former madrasah students of Cox's Bazar were of particular interest for this study because BRAC Skills Development Programme (SDP) plans to design an intervention that would develop skills and employment opportunities for such youth in Cox's Bazar. It is essential to understand the current employment status, needs, and expectations of the target group to design an effective program.

The primary objective of the study was to explore the current economic and labour market participation of former madrasah students in Cox's Bazar. It used the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) technique for listing the target population. The respondents were asked to provide referrals to build the sample size. Eventually, the sample concatenated up to 1,038 eligible individuals whose last educational institution was a madrasah. The respondents were aged between 15 and 40 years, not enrolled in any educational institution during the survey, and lived in Cox's Bazar district at the time of the survey.

Enrollment in a madrasah is usually influenced by demand-side factors propelled by poverty and the desire to get religious education. Students, mainly from low-income households, enrol in madrasahs because, at

the secondary level, it is more affordable than the mainstream schools. However, madrasah education provides limited qualifications to students, making it difficult to compete in the mainstream labour market. According to the findings of this study, only one-third deemed their madrasah education to be perfectly useful. Half of them deemed it to be somewhat useful, and less than a fifth of madrasah students, both men and women, believed it was not useful in finding employment in non-religious institutions. Additionally, the majority of the respondents believed that English, mathematics, and computer literacy in madrasahs should be improved for better employability of the graduates.

The madrasah education system faces multiple structural challenges. For example, Qawmi madrasah degrees are not recognized by the state; however, since 2017, the government started recognizing master's-level education only. On the other hand, Alia madrasah students faced difficulties getting admission into mainstream universities, potentially yielding a higher dropout rate in this education system. In this study, we find that the majority (62%) of the respondents had completed only up to the secondary level in Alia madrasahs and did not pass the Dakhil examination (equivalent to Secondary School Certificate [SSC]); very few (2%) had tertiary education where there was no female. Although both Dakhil and Alim (equivalent to Higher Secondary School Certificate [HSC]) completion rates were higher among women, employment outcomes for women were far poor compared to men.

**Average monthly income for former women students was only BDT 224, while it was BDT 3,047 for men.**

The labour market participation among former madrasah students was quite low. About 47% of the men in our sample were employed during the survey, 33% were unemployed, and 20% were out of the labour market<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, only 9% of women were employed, 15% were jobless, and 76% were not in the labour market. Of those who were out of the labour market, 43% were doing household chores and the remaining 57% were not looking for work, of which very few were physically unfit for work. Of those unemployed and out of the labour market, 62% and 71%, respectively, could not complete the secondary education level and have limited digital access.

**Computer literacy and tailoring training might help madrasah graduates set up a new enterprise or get a job.**

Moreover, the labour market is very limited for madrasah students. We find that 26% of the respondents were engaged in religious activities such as religious teaching, followed by small business and farming. Very few (4%) were involved in government and private jobs. When we look at the entire sample, the average monthly income stood at BDT 3,047 for men and BDT 224 for women. Results show that of those employed, most were not satisfied with their jobs and envisioned being in a different occupation in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Out of the labour market can be described as those who are not actively looking for work. Among them, most of the respondents are involved in household chores and few are not physically fit to work.

Most respondents were interested in training to improve their employability, with interests concentrated on computer-related training among men and tailoring among women. Even those who were not in the labour market also wanted to participate in training programs because they were enthusiastic about earning a livelihood in the future.

Future training requirements, employment, and predicted salary all show a gender-based discrepancy. Men requested a wider range of skills, including computer literacy, driving, electrical work, tailoring, and mobile servicing, compared to women who mostly requested instruction in computer literacy and tailoring. Moreover, women had slightly lower business aspirations (41%) compared to men (47%) who had this ambition in greater numbers. In contrast, women are more motivated to work in the public and private sectors than men. Furthermore, men and women have very different future training demands and types of jobs, which impact their predicted future income differently with and without training. Without training, men expect to earn BDT 9,019 per month; conversely, it was BDT 6,024 per month for women. It was 108% higher for men with training compared to without it, while women's predicted future income with training was 90% more than it was without. The difference in predicted income between men and women demonstrates that the mentality is a problem for former female madrasah

students. Despite having the training, many believed they were less capable than males and would be paid less.

As the majority (62%) of the former madrasah students could not complete the secondary level of education and had inadequate digital access, they face challenges to obtain a job. We discovered that among them, the unemployment and out-of-the-labour-market rates were significant. Even if they had plans to participate in training programs and hoped to find employment in the future, improving their employability requires a skill-development intervention. Their prospects of finding employment can be improved with the help of a need-based training program that focuses on computer literacy, sewing, and driving. In addition, women require special consideration due to their lower levels of education and low participation in the labour market. To manage expectations, up-skilling should be combined with accurate information about the wage market. The demand side should also be considered in the training program designs.

When designing a training program, some of the challenges might be (a) dealing with the low baseline skill levels, (b) high expectations, (c) limited occupational choices, and (d) low participation of women in the labour market.



# 1. Introduction

Bangladesh offers pupils the basic, intermediate, and tertiary levels of education through its three educational streams, which include Bangla medium, English medium, and madrasah (Rahman, 2022). With respect to the national curriculum, public and many private schools primarily offer mainstream non-religious education in the Bangla language. On the other side, English-medium schools provide non-religious education at all levels, mostly through private institutions, and the medium of instruction is the English language. Last but not least, the madrasah education system focuses on teaching Islam and includes the holy Quran and hadiths, and the educational institutions are known as madrasahs.

Two different madrasah types—Qawmi and Alia—offer primary, secondary, and even tertiary levels of education in Bangladesh. Alia madrasahs follow the guidelines set forth by the state’s madrasah education board for the national curriculum and are governed by its directives. The goal was to create a model Muslim school that would teach both religious and non-religious subjects, such as Bengali, English, arithmetic, and science. On the other hand, Qawmi madrasahs are primarily operated by non-governmental groups and

are community-based. They use their own curriculum, resources, and philanthropic organizations to fund themselves. After 2017, the state started recognizing the degree these madrasahs offered, but only at the master’s level (Asadullah et al., 2019).

In Bangladesh, 9,291 recognized madrasahs offer post-primary education to 2.6 million students (13%), of which 54.28% are girls (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS], 2022). The report also shows that 7,373 Ebtedayee<sup>2</sup> and primary sections of higher madrasahs offer primary education to 5% of the primary students in Bangladesh, 50% of whom are girls. There is no exact estimate of the number of Qawmi madrasahs in this country. However, according to the BANBEIS (2022), around 13,902 Qawmi madrasahs are in operation and providing religious education to 1.4 million students, of which 24.28% are girls. Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board is primarily responsible for the design of a national curriculum for all recognized madrasahs in the country (Asadullah, 2016).

A child’s decision to enrol in a madrasah in Bangladesh is more likely influenced by

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<sup>2</sup>In the Alia education system, primary education is provided by Ebtedayee madrasah, secondary education by Dakhil madrasah, and higher secondary by Alim madrasah (two years of study) institutions. There is also three-year Fazil (bachelor’s-level) and two-year Kamil (master’s-level) education provided by Fazil and Kamil madrasahs.

demand-side variables like poverty, cost, or desire (Asadullah et al., 2009; Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2013). Many students get enrolled in Alia madrasahs at the secondary level because it is less expensive than non-religious institutions at this level (Asadullah et al., 2015). However, the costs of primary education are low at schools operated by nonprofit organizations or the government (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2016). Therefore, enrollment at the secondary level (22%) is more significant than at the primary level (14%) (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2013). However, the dropout rate is significantly high in madrasahs. BANBEIS, (2017) reported that 46% of students in Bangladesh dropped out of madrasahs before completing their Dakhil exam, of whom 37% are boys and 56% are girls.

In a competitive labour market, employability depends on various competencies, including good educational outcomes, professional ability, and technical skills (Nilsson, 2017), increased demands for efficiency and productivity, new ways of organising work and increased international competition. The labour market structure varies between different countries. In Europe there has been a polarisation over the past several years, with increasing numbers of top-paying and low-paying jobs, and slower growth in the middle due mainly to a loss of jobs in manufacturing and construction. There has been a shift in the labour market, for example in Sweden, that will become even more prominent in the coming decades when an increasing number of people will be working in the service sector (both private and public, predominantly the latter. In Bangladesh, madrasah education generally does not provide the skills needed to take part in the mainstream job market (Asadullah et al., 2009; Asadullah & Chaudhury,

2010). Moreover, many pursue madrasah education to have a religious career, like Islamic preacher (imam, muezzin), madrasah teacher, and so on, in the hope of spiritual gains. These jobs, however, are limited in number, and an estimated three-quarters of the madrasah graduates remain unemployed (Behera, 2013; "Three of Four Madrasa Students Remain Jobless," 2018).

At least two structural problems affect madrasah students to access the mainstream labour market. First, a student's ability to continue their studies at mainstream universities is constrained by the madrasah curriculum (Rahman, 2022). Before 2013, the Alia madrasah curriculum did not satisfy the requirements for enrollment in several university-level mainstream education (Farhin, 2017). In addition, the Qawmi madrasah curriculum prevents students from taking many recognized university admission exams, as the state does not recognize the degrees offered by Qawmi madrasahs except for the master's-level education (Asadullah et al., 2019). Second, madrasah students' low academic performance restricts their access to higher education and the job market (Asadullah, 2009).

However, the large and growing size of the madrasah-educated population in Bangladesh calls for extensive research into the issue of their low participation in skilled jobs and the strategies and programs to improve their employment outcomes. Analyzing the current economic and labour market outcomes of madrasah graduates and the relevance of madrasah education to the labour market requirements in Bangladesh can give us valuable insights into how to better integrate them into the formal and informal job sectors.

Since its initiation in 2015, the BRAC Skills Development Programme (SDP) has been working towards transforming the massive human capital of Bangladesh into skilled workers. SDP is interested in working with the madrasah-educated youth in Cox's Bazar, where 143 post-primary madrasahs offered Dakhil- to Kamil-level education to 63,819 students in 2021 (BANBEIS, 2022), and 125 Qawmi madrasahs provided religious education to 30,421 in 2011 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2018).

SDP commissioned a study to understand the skills and employment scenario of madrasah-educated youth in Cox's Bazar to develop an effective program for their job market integration. Against this backdrop, the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) undertook the study, Employment and Expectations of Former Madrasah Students in Cox's Bazar: A Cross-Sectional Exploration.

## 1.1. Objectives

The study aims to assess the constraints, gaps, and opportunities for the labour market participation of the madrasah-educated youth in Cox's Bazar. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Examine the current employment status and future expectations,
- Identify the right skills and training needed, and
- Identify scopes for interventions.

## 1.2. Scope of the Work

The geographical location of this study was Cox's Bazar, and our target population was the former madrasah students. We covered all eight upazilas of Cox's Bazar and both Alia and Qawmi madrasahs.





## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Listing the Target Individuals

We adopted a respondent-driven sampling (RDS) technique to produce a target population list. As it was difficult to get a list of dropout or graduated madrasah students, we ran a snowballing procedure to identify the targeted individuals. We conducted a phone-based survey, as the nationwide lockdown during the study period restricted our ability to do an in-person survey.

Starting with 261 samples provided by BRAC, we ran 15 waves of surveys and accumulated a list of 1,900 individuals after making 3,447 phone calls. At least 48% of the phone calls were made during the first half of the day (from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.) and 32% after 5:00 p.m. In each wave, we tried to collect 3–5 referrals from each respondent. However, we were able to collect an average of one referral only.

During the listing, we called an individual twice a day for two days (four times) to reach a greater number of potential respondents. The respondents received BDT 10 as an airtime transfer for each referral they provided. We allowed them to provide the phone numbers of the referrals at their convenient time since many of them could not provide phone numbers during the survey.

### 2.2. Main Survey

Eligible individuals were identified from the list of 1,900 persons collected through the listing process. The eligibility criteria were: (i) respondents' last educational institution must be a madrasah from Cox's Bazar, (ii) they must be graduates or dropouts, (iii) they must be in the age range of 15 to 40 years, and (iv) their place of current residence must be Cox's Bazar. Using these eligibility criteria, we found 1,038 eligible samples for the survey. In total, we could survey 75% of them successfully; 21% were unreachable over the phone and 4% did not agree to talk.

### 2.3. Analytical Technique

We successfully surveyed a sample of 782 individuals and carried out an analysis of this sample. We mostly used descriptive statistics and generated cross tables and graphs to analyze, interpret, and present data and findings. We disaggregated and compared the results based on gender, completed levels of education, and the type of the last madrasah where the respondents were enrolled.

## 2.4. Study Limitation

The study does, however, have certain drawbacks. We were unable to conduct in-person surveys due to the pandemic, 21% of respondents were unavailable by phone, and 4% refused to speak. We had fewer female samples on the final list because we used an RDS technique and could only communicate

with 22 women in the first wave of the survey. As a result, our sample is skewed towards men. However, expanding the sample size and conducting an in-person field survey can help to reduce the biases observed in this study.



## 3. Results

### 3.1. Demographic Characteristics

Table 3.1 describes the demographic characteristics of the sample and the last type of educational institution in which they were enrolled. Around 84% of our sample were men whose average age was 20 years. The average years of schooling were 8.9 years for men and 8.4 years for women. Respondents with education from Alia madrasahs accounted for around 89% of the total sample, while those with education from Qawmi and other madrasahs made up the remaining 11%. The sample distribution was skewed towards Alia madrasahs as the greater number of initial seeds<sup>3</sup> came from them.

**Table 3.1. Demographic Characteristics**

	Men	Women	Total
Gender distribution (%)	84	16	100
Age distribution (average years)	20	18	19
Average years of schooling	8.9	8.4	8.6
Type of madrasah enrolled			
Alia (%)	83	17	89
Qawmi and others (%)	86	14	11

<sup>3</sup> Initial list of madrasah graduates provided by the field-level program personnel.

Figure 3.1 describes the gender-wise distribution of the different levels of education. There were five distinct categories, including primary (grades 1–5), secondary (grades 6–9), Dakhil/SSC (grade 10), Alim/HSC (grade 12), and Fazil and Kamil (above grade 12). The level of education was defined as the last grade the respondents completed.

As Alia madrasahs are government-accredited and follow the standard grading system, we analyzed the educational status only of those who completed their schooling in these madrasahs. Of the 696 successfully interviewed samples from Alia madrasahs, most students completed only their secondary education. As shown in Figure 3.1, the majority dropped out just before passing the Dakhil exam, and very few managed to reach the tertiary level of education.

We did not see any gap in the proportion of men and women up to the Dakhil level. On the contrary, 16% of women appeared in the Alim exam, while for men, the proportion was only 11%. However, at the tertiary level of education, the presence of women was nil in our sample.

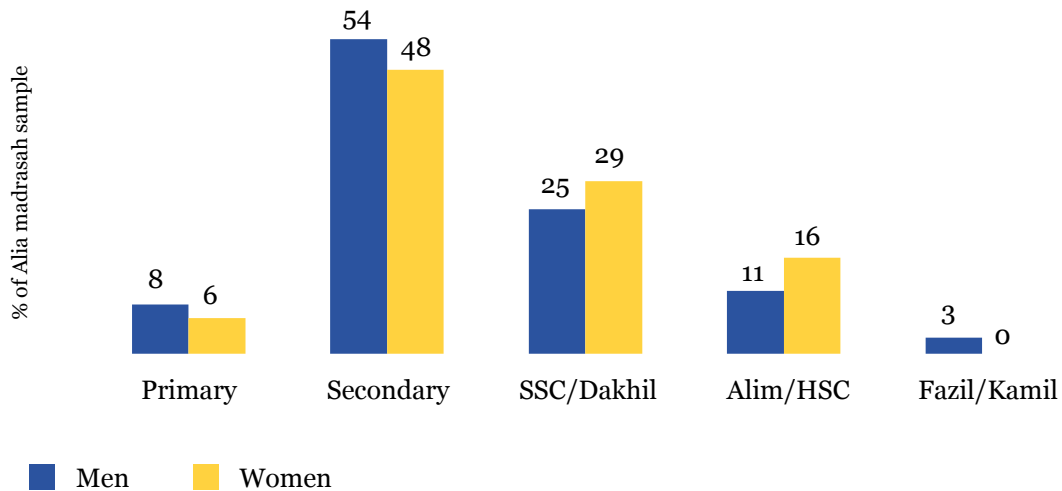


Figure 3.1. Different Levels of Educational Attainment (Among Respondents With Alia Madrasah Education), by Gender

### 3.2. How Useful is Madrasah Education in Getting a Job in a Non-Religious Institution?

During the survey, the respondents were asked how useful madrasah education was for getting a job in non-religious institutions. We recorded three different responses—“not useful,” “somewhat useful,” and “perfectly useful.” We can observe from Figure 3.2 that less than a fifth of the respondents (19% of men and 18% of women) responded that madrasah education was not at all useful in this regard. Therefore, more than 80% of the madrasah-educated youth in our sample found it “somewhat” or “perfectly useful.” “Somewhat useful” was the most frequent answer (63% of women and 48% of men). Another key observation is that the proportion of men who considered madrasah education as “perfectly useful” is almost twice as much as women who share the same view.

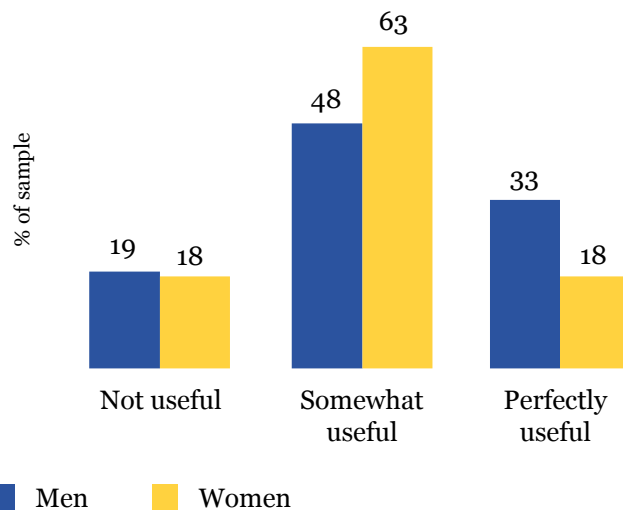
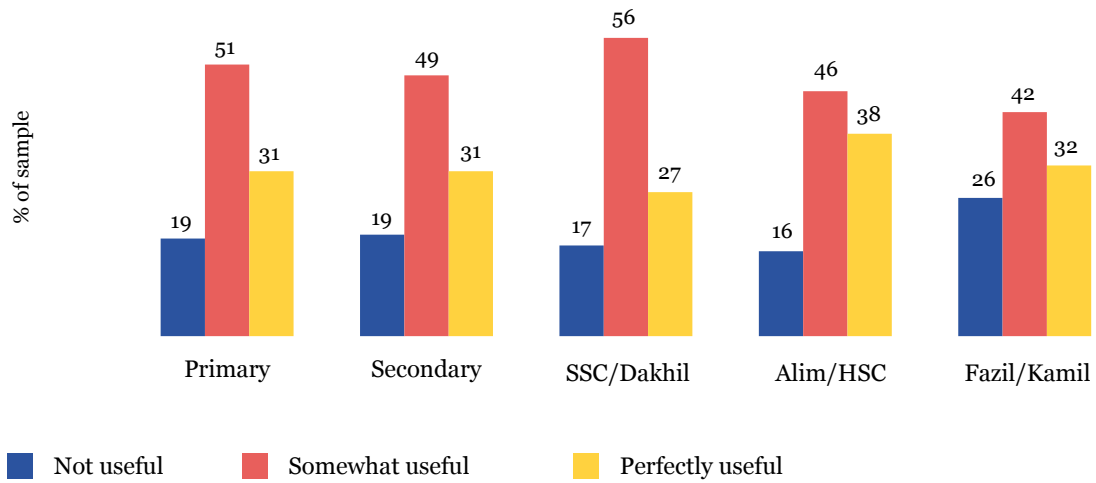


Figure 3.2. Perceived Usefulness of Madrasah Education, by Gender

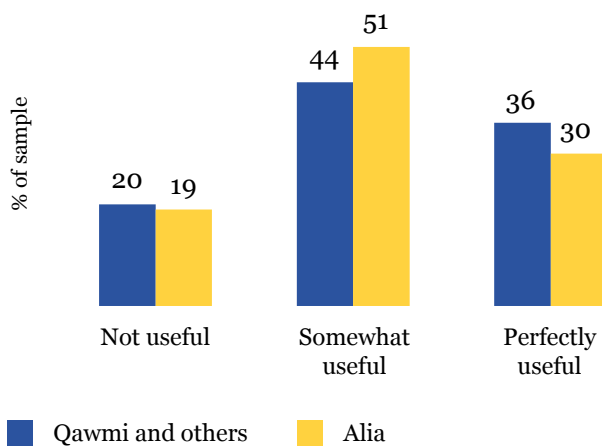
We further disaggregated the perceptions based on the level of schooling completed by the respondents. We can see from Figure 3.3 that the perceptions slightly vary across the groups. A relatively significant change was observed among the respondents with the highest education level. The proportion of respondents who responded “not useful” was the largest.



**Figure 3.3. Perceived Usefulness of Madrasah Education, by Different Levels of Educational Attainment**

Note: Analysis is done on the full sample, including Alia and Qawmi madrasahs.

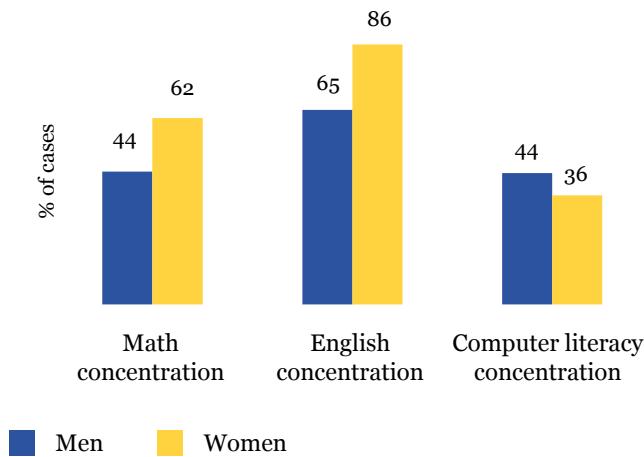
As Qawmi madrasahs do not focus on mainstream curriculum, we have reasons to suspect that those from Qawmi madrasahs have fewer prospects compared to those from Alia madrasahs. However, we were unable to confirm this in our study. On the contrary, we found the proportions of those who deemed madrasah education as “not useful” were similar across both types of madrasahs, while 36% of those from Qawmi and 30% from Alia madrasahs said it was “perfectly useful” (Figure 3.4).



**Figure 3.4. Perceived Usefulness of Madrasah Education, Across Different Types of Madrasah**

### 3.2.1. Scope of Improvement

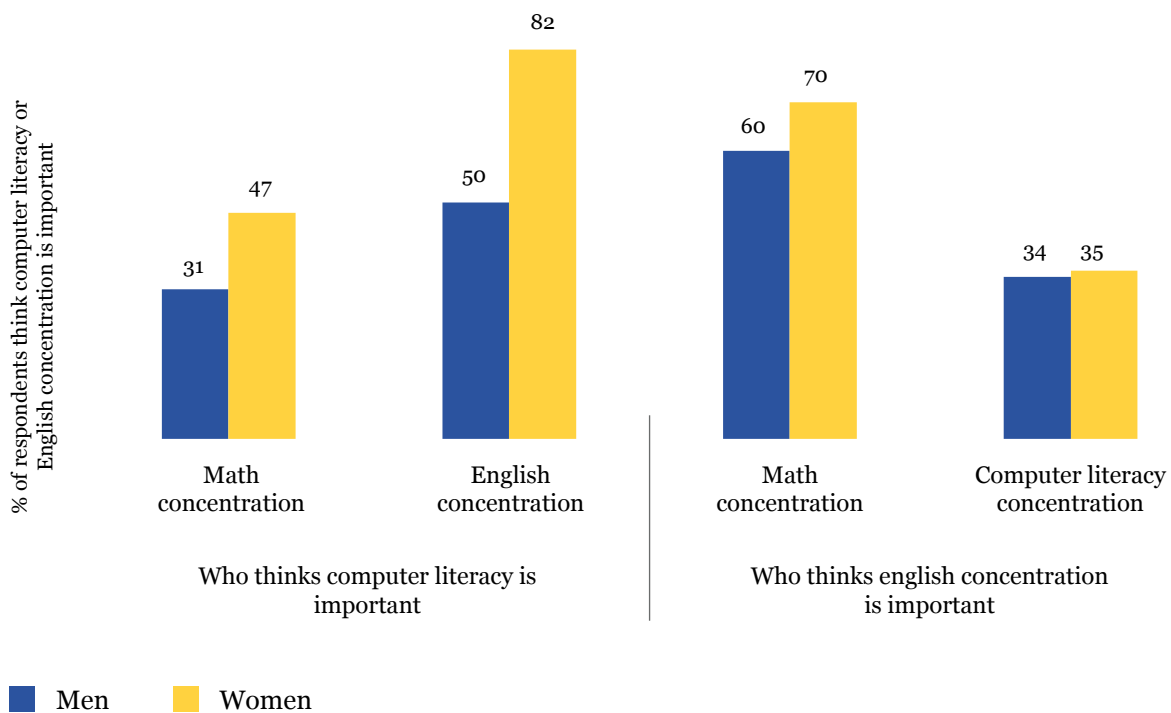
We asked the respondents whether any improvements should be made in madrasah education to enable them to participate better in the current job market. Almost two-thirds of the men in our sample opined that English concentration in the syllabus should be enhanced. This is followed by an emphasis on mathematics (44%) and computer literacy (44%) (see Figure 3.5). We also found a notable difference in opinion among women in our sample. Though more women compared to men thought that greater concentration in math and English was necessary, the scenario was the opposite in the case of computer literacy. This is not surprising as there was a significant gender gap both in digital access and skills among the rural population in Bangladesh (Shadat et al., 2020).



**Figure 3.5. Scope of Improvement to Make Madrasah Education Practical**

While disaggregating the scope of improvement based on the particular subject choice, we found some coherent linkage among choices made by

the respondents. As they made multiple choices, they selected subjects that they found complementary to each other. We cluster this demand into two broader categories: English and computer literacy concentration. For example, Figure 3.6 shows that those who perceived English concentration as necessary also voted for math concentration, which is almost similar in proportion between men and women. On the other hand, those who thought computer literacy should be included in the syllabus also demanded that English be included. However, women are 32 percentage points higher compared to the men who urged for English concentration in this cluster.



**Figure 3.6. Subject Choice Based on Computer Literacy and English Concentration**

As Figure 3.7 shows, respondents from both Alia and Qawmi madrasahs had similar suggestions for improvements in the curriculum that would help them improve their ability to participate in the job market. The former madrasah students prefer English concentration in all kinds of madrasahs over the other two subjects (by at least 20 percentage points).

When the scope of improvement is divided based on the respondents' levels of education, it is seen in Figure 3.8 that improvement in English is considered a priority at each educational level, averaging around 66%; a slightly greater share of those with Dakhil- and Alim-level of education mentioned the importance of English. On the other hand, a greater share

of those with primary and secondary education mentioned mathematics. There is less variation in the case of computer literacy, varying between 38% and 42% across primary to Alim levels. However, the trend reverses in the Fazil/Kamil category. In this category, 60% wanted computer literacy, followed by English and mathematics.

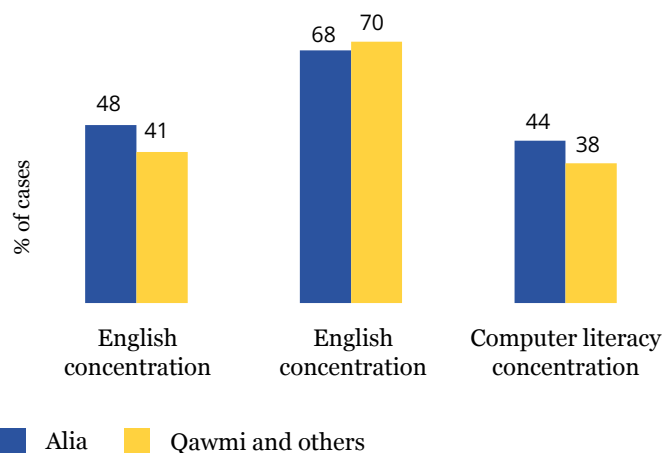


Figure 3.7. Scope of Improvement Based on the Type of Institutions

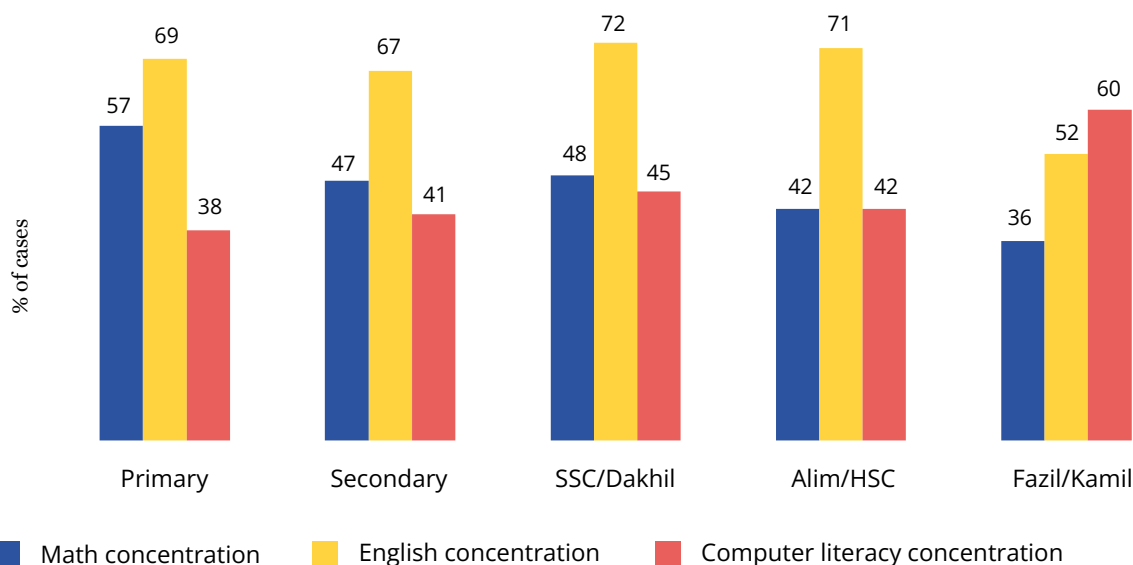


Figure 3.8. Scope of Improvement and Level of Education of the Respondents

Note: Analysis is done on the full sample, including Alia and Qawmi madrasahs.

### 3.3. Employment

Figure 3.9 describes the labour market involvement of former madrasah students disaggregated by gender. About 47% of men and 9% of women were employed. When compared to the national statistics, the employment rate of madrasah-educated men and particularly women seemed to be exceptionally low. However, according to national statistics, 78% and 34% of working-age men and women, respectively, were employed in Bangladesh (BBS, 2018).

A more significant proportion of women (76%) were out of the labour market and for men, the rate was 20%. The women were primarily involved in household chores.

Another observation from these figures was the low labour force participation of madrasah-educated women. The unemployment rate is more than twice as high among men compared to women in our sample, but the labour force participation rate among women was just 24% (including employed and unemployed), while it was 80% for men. Notably, the rate among men in this sample was similar to the rate of working-age men nationally (78%) but much lower among sample women compared to the national rate (33.9%) (BBS, 2018).

Thus, the overall employment scenario for madrasah-educated youth in Cox's Bazar, particularly for women, was significantly poor than the general scenario in the country.

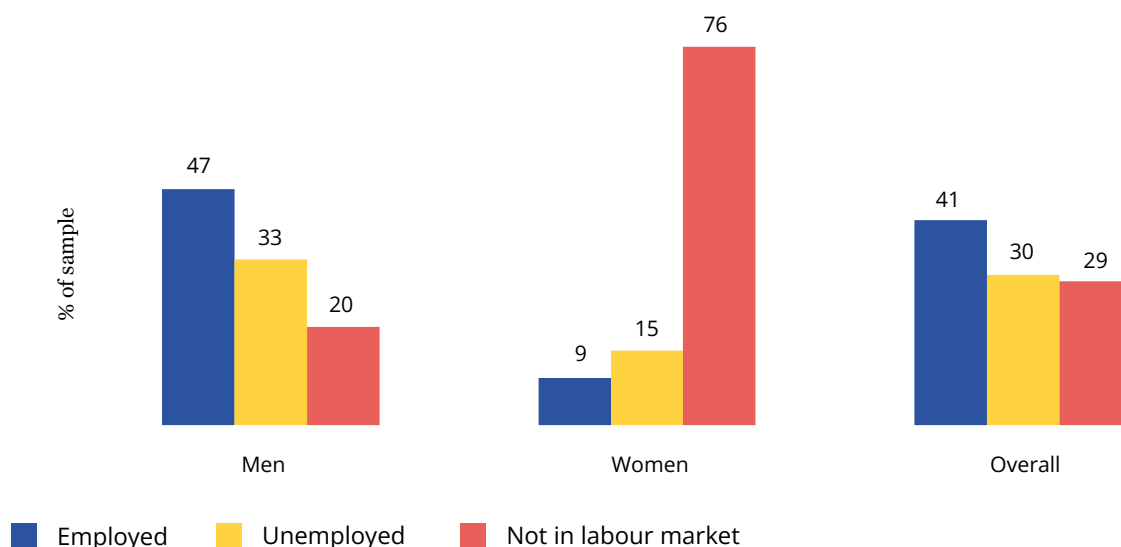
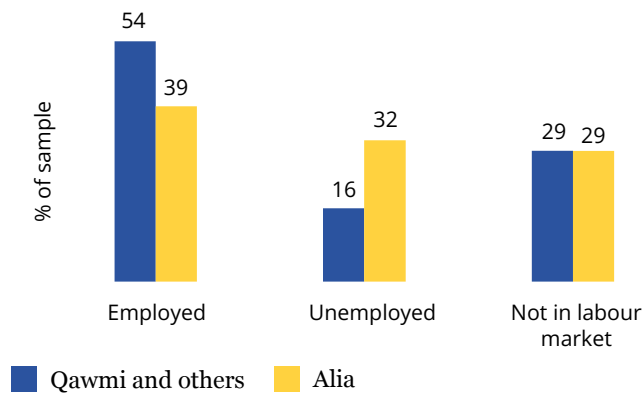


Figure 3.9. Labour Distribution Based on Gender

Figure 3.10 shows the distribution of labour based on the type of madrasah in which they were enrolled. The figure states that about half of the former Qawmi and other madrasah students were employed, while Alia madrasah accounted for 39%. Besides, around 32% of

Alia madrasah graduates were looking for work during the survey, compared to 16% of Qawmi and other madrasah graduate jobseekers. The remaining proportion of madrasah graduates was out of the labour market.

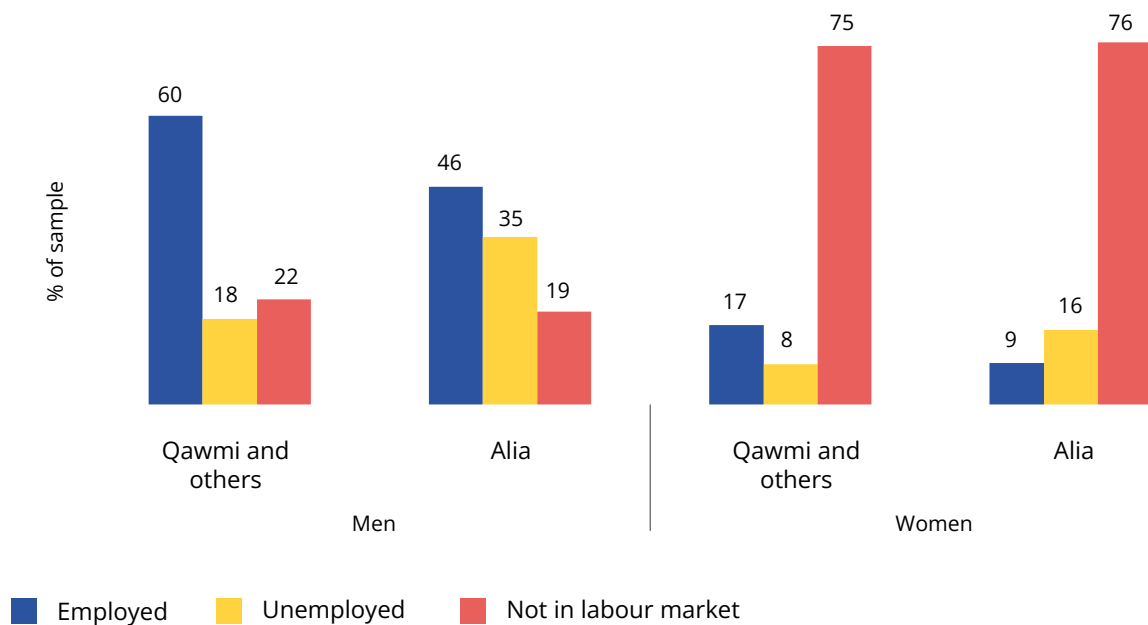




**Figure 3.10. Labour Distribution Based on Type of Madrasah**

respondents were enrolled, we find at least 75% of women were not in the labour market, irrespective of the type of madrasah (Figure 3.11). However, the employment rate among Qawmi and other madrasahs was relatively higher for both men and women than in Alia madrasahs. Conversely, the unemployment rate was higher among Alia madrasah students, irrespective of their gender, compared to the Qawmi and other madrasah students.

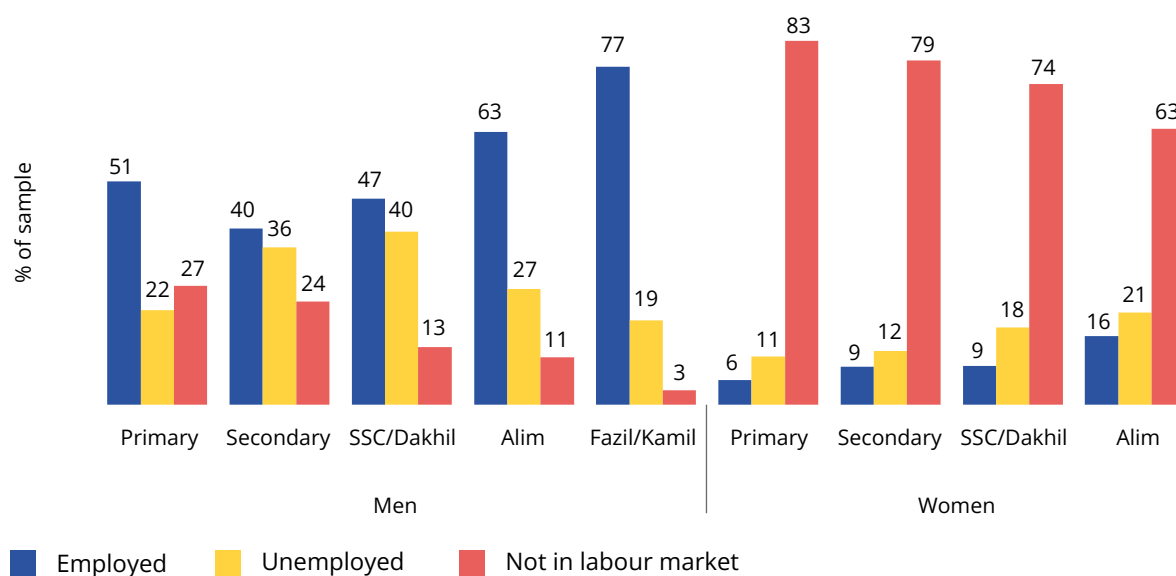
While disaggregating the labour market participation based on gender and the type of madrasah where the



**Figure 3.11. Labour Distribution Based on Gender and Type of Madrasah**

Figure 3.12 describes the labour distribution based on the level of education completed and the gender of the respondents. We can see that with the level of education, the proportion of employed former madrasah students increased significantly among men, whereas the rise among women was negligible. The majority of women were not involved in the labour market, irrespective of their education

level. Even among those who completed Alim, 63% were neither employed nor looking for any jobs. In contrast, 90% of men with similar education levels were active in the labour market, either employed or looking for work. Reducing the dropout rate from different levels of education might increase their participation in the labour market.



**Figure 3.12. Labour Distribution Based on the Level of Completed Education and Gender**

Note: Analysis is done on the full sample, including Alia and Qawmi madrasahs.

Further, we explore the type of employment they were involved in. Since very few (9%) women were employed in our sample, we disregard the gender-wise distribution. In Table 3.2, we report the sector-wise distribution of the employed sample based on the type of madrasahs they were enrolled in. As it shows, employed individuals from madrasah backgrounds were primarily involved in the informal labour market. Considering the full sample, 26% were engaged in religious

activities, including religious teaching. The proportion of the Qawmi and other madrasah students involved in this category is twice as much as that of the Alia madrasah students. The majority of the Alia madrasah students are doing farming, which is followed by small business and day labour. Very few madrasah graduates were involved in the service sector, including government and private jobs. In addition, around 10% were working as skilled labour.

**Table 3.2. Sector-Wise Employment**

Current occupation	Qawmi and others (%)	Alia (%)	Overall (%)
Religious activities including teaching	45.65	22.99	26.25
Small business	15.22	13.14	13.44
Day labourers	13.04	13.87	13.75
Farming	8.70	24.82	22.50
Service	2.17	4.74	4.38
Skilled labour	10.87	10.95	10.94
Others	4.35	9.49	8.75

Table 3.3 describes the average monthly income of the former madrasah students based on their gender and the type of madrasah in which they were enrolled. Among the employed sample, men earned BDT 8,106 while women earned a more modest amount of BDT 2,389 on average in July 2021. However, while considering the full sample, men's earnings are dragged down to BDT 3,047 due to the fact that only 41% of surveyed former madrasah students were involved in income-generating activities, of which 96% were men and only 4% were women. Consequently, women's average income in the last month (July 2021) takes a nose dive to a scanty BDT 224 for the full sample.

Considering the sample of those employed again, we see that former students of Alia

madrasah earned BDT 7,732 monthly which was lower than the Qawmi and other madrasahs. This is because the former students of Qawmi and other madrasahs are primarily involved in religious activities and teaching, and they earn on average BDT 1,500 more from this occupation than those from Alia madrasah. However, in the case of the full sample, the earnings for the former students of both Alia madrasah and Qawmi and other madrasahs are slashed to almost half of that of those when the employed sample is considered. This is again owing to the fact that 41% of surveyed former madrasah students were employed, and 86% of them belonged to Alia madrasahs and the rest belonged to Qawmi madrasah<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 3.3. Average Monthly Income Based on Gender and Madrasah Types (BDT)**

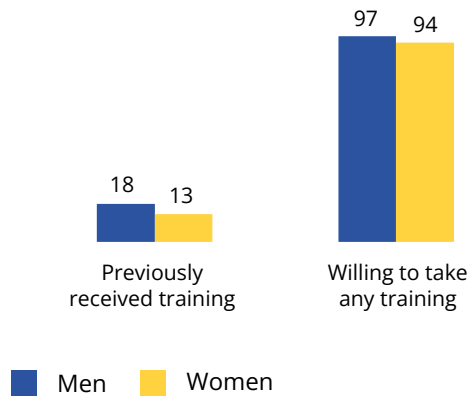
	Men		Women		Alia madrasah		Qawmi and other madrasah	
	N	BDT	N	BDT	N	BDT	N	BDT
Average income (only employed)	308	8,106	12	2,389	274	7,732	46	9,064
Average income (full sample)	654	3,817	128	224	679	3,039	85	4,787

### 3.4. Training or Apprenticeship

There was a stark contrast between the proportions of madrasah students who received any livelihood training and that of those who wish to receive such training. Only 17% received training. Among this 17% were 18% of all the men and 13% of all the women.

The vast majority wished to participate in livelihood training. Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 3.13, at each level, at least 94% of respondents wanted to receive training, indicating that they felt inadequately prepared for the job market.

<sup>4</sup> This proportion is representative of the distribution of the former students of each type of madrasahs in the entire sample (89% of them are from Alia madrasahs while 11% from Qawmi and others).



**Figure 3.13. Willingness to Take Part in Training**

Table 3.4 describes the willingness to participate in the training based on the respondents' employment status. Again, most respondents were willing to receive training regardless of their employment status. Even those who were not looking for work also expressed their interest in receiving training.

**Table 3.4. Willingness to Take Part in Training**

	Willing to take training (%)	N
Employed	94.69	320
Unemployed	98.30	235
Not in labour market	96.44	225

When asked about the types of training they think they need, computer training was the most desirable to 65% of men and 52% of women respondents (see Table 3.5). Other findings show that 42% of women were interested in tailoring training. The survey found men were also interested in electric work (12%), mobile phone servicing (4%), and 17% mentioned several other types of training. The figures

show a clear division of gender-based preference for training.

**Table 3.5. Types of Training Needed Based on Gender**

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Overall (%)
Computer	65.24	52.10	63.16
Tailoring	3.63	42.02	9.71
Electrical work	11.53	0.00	9.71
Mobile servicing	3.79	0.00	3.19
Agriculture	1.90	2.52	1.99
Driving	9.95	0.00	8.38
Business	0.79	0.00	0.66
Others	3.16	3.36	3.19

Since women's employment is one of the significant issues in development discourse, we further disaggregate the distributions of women who wanted training on tailoring by their desired scope of improvement in the madrasah syllabus. For example, Figure 3.14 shows that the women who wished to participate in the tailoring training expected more English and math in the syllabus. Perhaps one explanation is they thought it would enrich their knowledge of measurement and help them better understand updated styles in this new world where the design and tastes of the consumers have been changing rapidly.

**Figure 3.14. Areas That Need Improvement, According to Women Who Wish to Receive Tailoring Training**

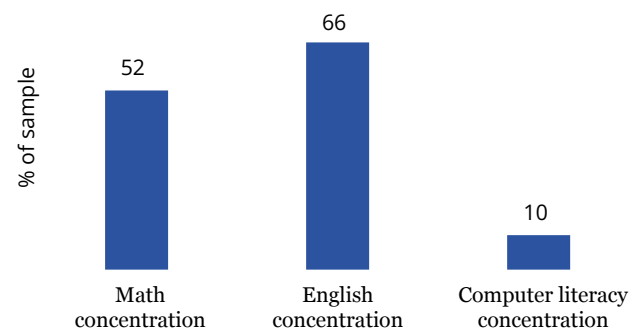
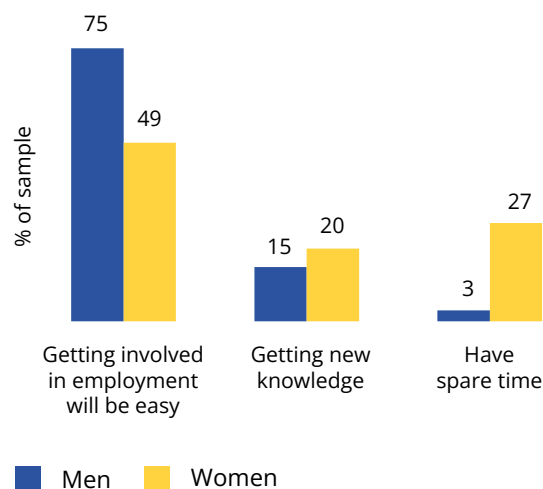


Table 3.6 depicts the required training types according to the respondents' employment status. Again, computer training accounts for the highest position irrespective of the respondents' employment status. Specifically, most of the unemployed (73%) former madrasah students thought that computer training would help them get involved in income-generating activities. On the other hand, most of those not in the labour market wanted computer and tailoring training as they thought it might create opportunities for them in the future.

Training enhances the capability of individuals and makes them fit for the competitive labour market. As Figure 3.15 shows, most men and women responded that getting involved in employment will be easier with training—a view shared by 75% of men and 49% of women. Others wish to receive training to gather new knowledge or simply because they have some spare time for it.

**Table 3.6. Types of Training Needed Based on Employment Status**

	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	Not in labour market (%)
Computer	55.45	73.16	63.43
Tailoring	5.61	5.19	20.37
Electrical work	14.52	6.93	5.56
Mobile servicing	4.29	3.03	1.85
Agriculture	3.30	0.87	1.39
Driving	11.22	8.66	4.17
Business	1.32	0.43	0.00
Others	4.29	1.73	3.24



**Figure 3.15. Reason for Interest in Training**

Figure 3.16 describes why former madrasah students wanted to participate in different training programs. Irrespective of the employment status, most thought it will help them get a livelihood activity. Most of those who were out of the labour market (67%) wanted to participate in a training program and were optimistic about future jobs. Therefore, skill enhancement programs might increase active participation in the labour market.

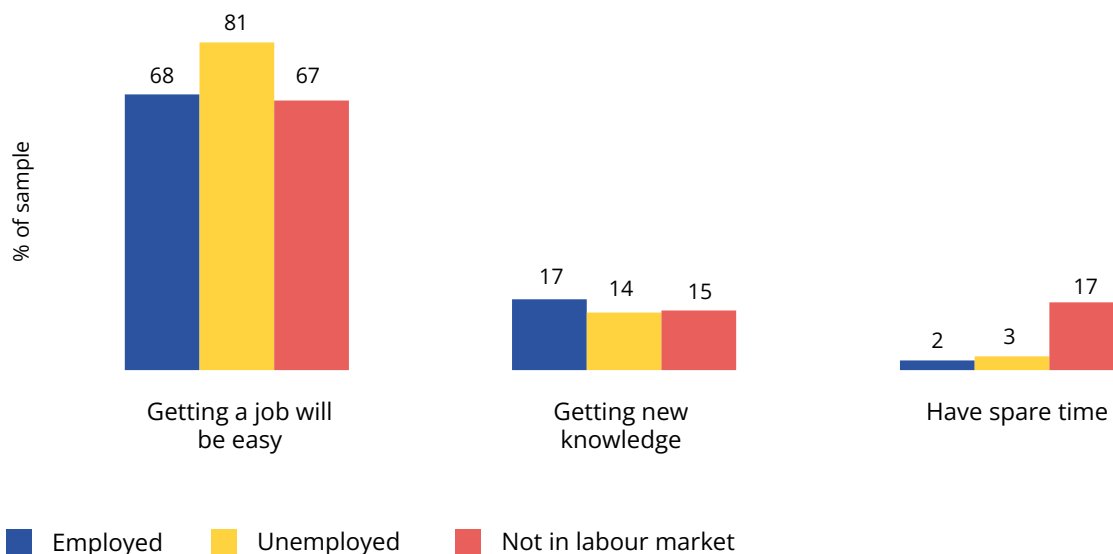


Figure 3.16. Reasons for Interest in Training, According to the Employment Status

### 3.5. Future Income Expectation

Figure 3.17 describes the expected income before and after receiving the training. When asked about their perception of change in income after training, both men and women reported very high expectations. Men expect their income to increase by 109%, while women expect a 90% growth. We have seen that the average monthly income for employed men is BDT 8,194, which is very close to their expected income without training. At the same time, women anticipate more earnings than they are earning on average per month.

When comparing expectations after training based on education level, similar perceived increases were observed within genders. For both primary and secondary education levels, men expected an increase of approximately 100%. However, those who completed Dakhil

and Alim levels expected their income to increase by around 125% after training. The anticipated growth was only 38% for women at the primary level, compared to above 100% increases for other education levels (see Table 3.7).

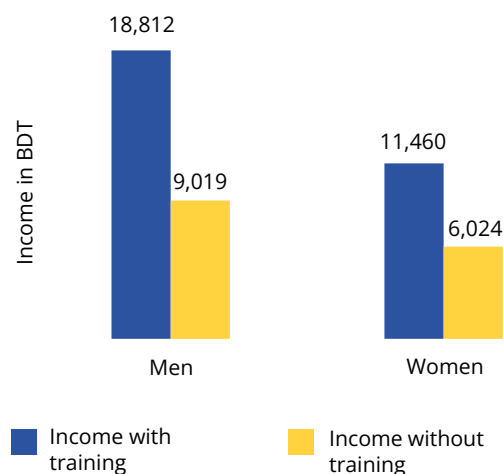


Figure 3.17. Future Income Expectation With and Without Training

**Table 3.7. Level of Education and Income Expectation With and Without Training**

Level of education	Male			Female		
	Male income with training	Male income without training	increase in (%)	Female income with training	Female income without training	increase in (%)
Primary	16,612	8,289	100	11,444	8,278	38
Secondary	18,074	8,910	103	8,858	4,381	102
Dakhil/SSC	18,606	8,185	127	10,973	5,497	100
Alim/HSC	21,832	9,788	123	19,368	9,221	110
Fazil/Kamil	22,487	12,470	80			

### 3.6. Future Employment Aspiration

Table 3.8 shows the future employment aspirations of former madrasah students based on their gender. As a future job, most of them (46.27%) chose business, followed by government and private jobs.

While disaggregating the findings by gender, it was observed that the majority of men (47.32%) desired to have a business of their own in the future, while most women (45%) wanted government or private jobs. On the other hand, 41% of women wanted to have their own businesses in the future. As shown earlier, 47% of men and 9% of women were employed in our sample, but only 3% wanted to improve their current livelihood activities. These findings indicate former madrasah students' desire to switch jobs, while business was their most chosen future livelihood strategy.

**Table 3.8. Future Job Aspirations**

	Men (%)	Women (%)	Total (%)
Business	47.32	40.52	46.27
Government jobs	18.77	21.55	19.20
Private jobs	11.51	23.28	13.33
Electrical work	6.31	0.00	5.33
Improving the current job	3.79	0.86	3.33
Others	12.30	13.79	12.53

For future job aspirations, distribution based on individuals' education levels varies by the type of job (see Table 3.9). However, small business remains dominant as a preferred means of employment among respondents of all educational levels, particularly those with primary and secondary education. Among respondents with higher education levels, interest in business remains the strongest, while those who passed their Dakhil and Alim exams were more interested in government and private employment.

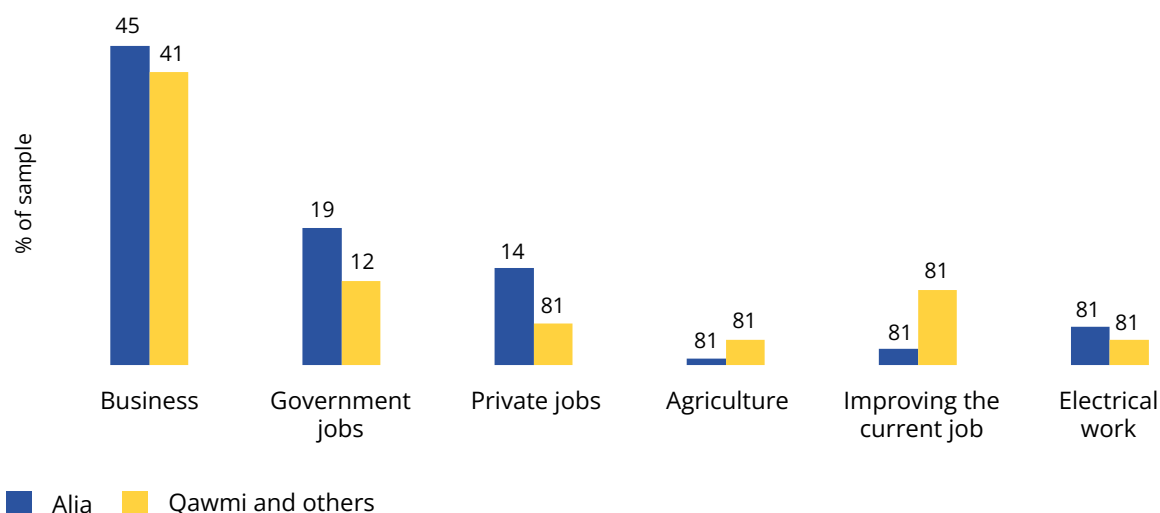
Lastly, we observe a notable increase in the aspiration to improve current jobs among those with education levels beyond Dakhil. However, the rates were still only 16% for Fazil/Kamil and 9% for those with Alim education.

of madrasah attended. Both Alia and Qawmi madrasah graduates preferred business more than other fields; agriculture and electrical work were the least preferred job sectors (see Figure 3.18).

We discovered that the most aspired occupation category does not differ by the type

**Table 3.9. Future Job Aspirations Based on Level of Education**

	Primary	Secondary	Dakhil/SSC	Alim/HSC	Fazil/Kamil
Business	59.41	49.59	38.82	32.10	41.94
Government jobs	8.91	16.35	28.82	27.16	12.90
Private jobs	6.93	13.90	15.88	16.05	6.45
Electrical work	5.94	7.36	2.35	3.70	0.00
Improving the current job	3.96	1.63	1.76	8.64	16.13
Others	14.85	11.17	12.35	12.35	22.58



**Figure 3.18. The Most Aspired Category of Occupation by the Type of Madrasah**



Since the respondents are interested in receiving different types of training, we tried to explore how their desired training aligns with their future job expectations. Therefore, we disaggregated the future job expectations with the two popular training categories: tailoring and computer literacy. For example, Figure 3.19 shows that those who wanted training in tailoring, irrespective of gender, wished to set up their own business. In contrast, among those who urged computer training, men were more interested in doing business, while women wanted jobs in the government or private sectors.

Since business appears to be the most desired profession, we wanted to dig deeper into the type of business they are interested in. From the gender-segregated distribution below (Figure 20), we find almost a dichotomy between men's and women's aspirations. We see that 54% of men and 6% of women aspire to engage in computer-related businesses. On the other hand, 79% of the women and only 6% of men aspiring to be in business want to be in tailoring. Only 1–5% of men want to be in mobile, electrical, or vehicle repair businesses.

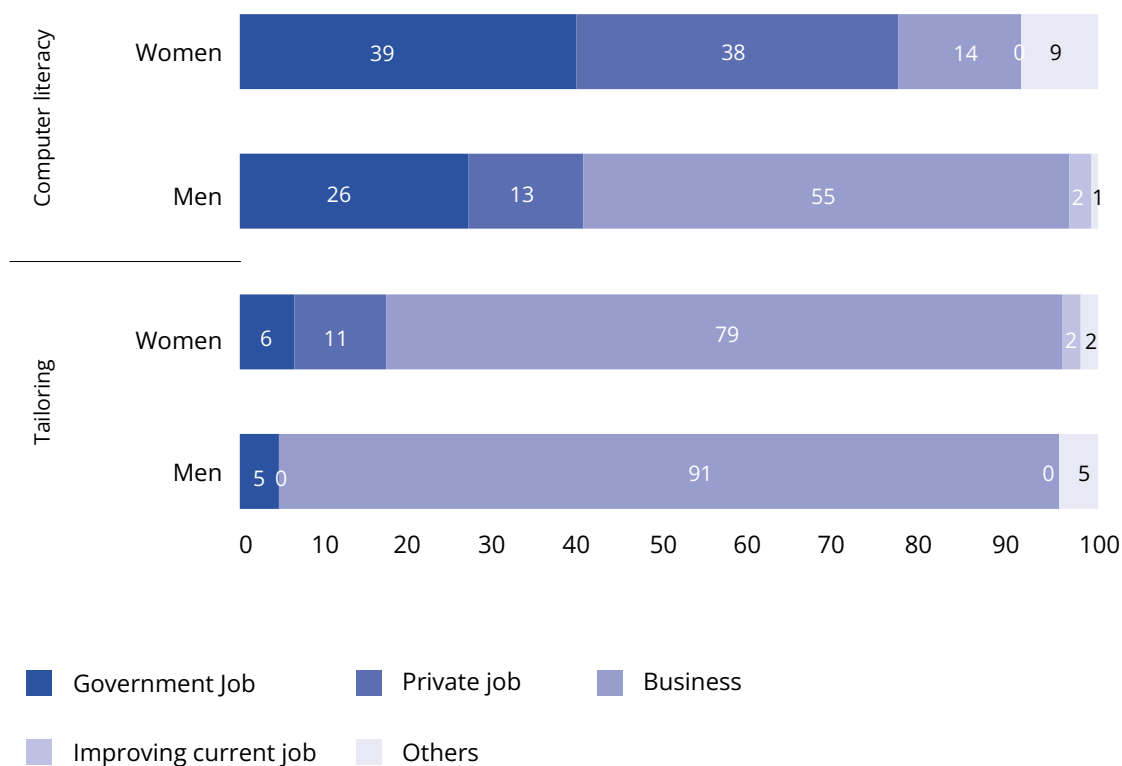


Figure 3.19. Most Aspired Type of Occupation by Gender and Type of Training Required

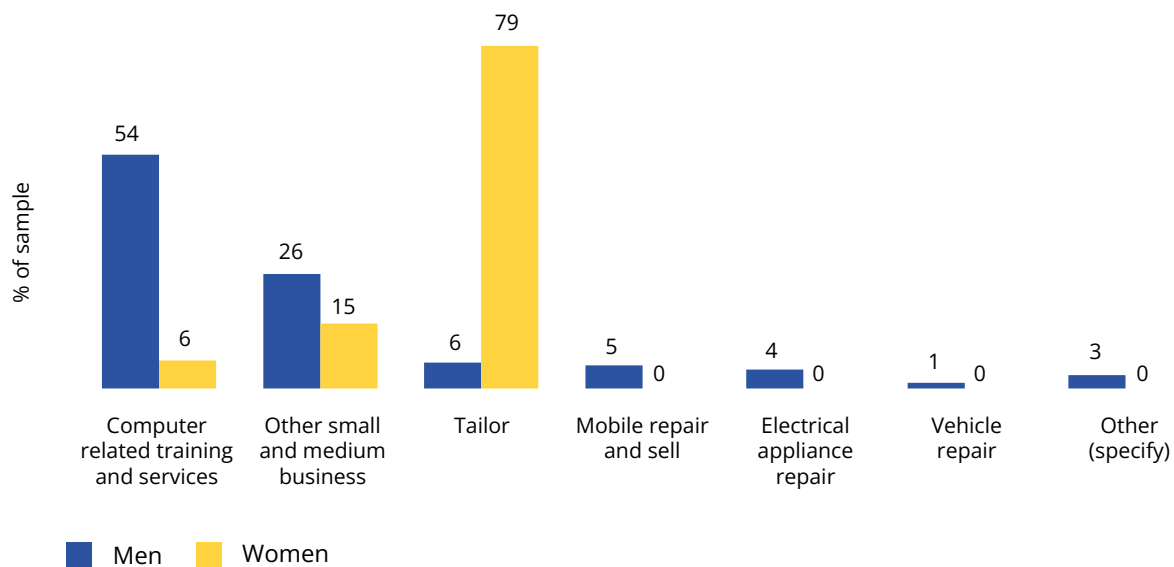


Figure 3.20. Differences in the Desired Type of Businesses by Gender

### 3.7. Financial Inclusion and Access to Smartphones and the Internet

Around 23% of men and 21% of women have a bank account. The similarity is also evident in cases of mobile bank accounts—more than 60% of both men and women have a mobile bank account. Additionally, 13.93% of women and 9.18% of men were non-governmental organizations (NGO) beneficiaries.

However, there is a stark disparity in terms of access to smartphones or the internet. Around 64.7% of men and 36.9% of women have access to a smartphone, and 79% of men and 55.5% of women have access to the internet,

which can be attributed to men's higher access to smartphones.

Table 3.10. Financial Inclusion and Access to Smartphones and the Internet

	Men (%)	Women (%)
Bank account	23.02	20.5
Mobile bank account	67.8	62.3
NGO beneficiary	9.2	13.9
Smartphone	64.7	36.9
Internet	79.0	55.7

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Madrasah education is generally deemed to be less focused on building employable skills for its students and more focused on religious education. As the number of madrasahs and students increased over the last few decades in Bangladesh, the employability of madrasah-educated people has become a critical issue. The situation is no different in Cox's Bazar, a district in the south of Bangladesh. Therefore, BRAC SDP intends to design a program to develop the skills of former madrasah students in Cox's Bazar and facilitate employment generation. The study was conducted to provide SDP with insights for developing an effective program.

Overall, we found low educational attainments among the target group, particularly among women. On average, men completed 8.68 years of schooling, while it was 7.74 years for women. This is consistent with the fact that most students dropped out before appearing at the Dakhil (SSC-equivalent exam), while only a few men had completed a tertiary level of education, which is almost nil for women.

Consequently, we find a dispirited perception of the madrasah students about their employability. Though less than one-fifth said it was not useful, not many said it was perfectly useful. About half of the respondents gave a vague response—somewhat useful. A

large share of respondents also opined that English, mathematics, and computer literacy in madrasahs need improvement.

Similar findings were published in the English daily, *The Daily Star*. It said that around 50% of the Alia madrasah students think their education system was almost ineffective in getting good jobs. In comparison, 70% said their textbooks should be modernized further, and 73% said their teachers were not well-trained (“Three of Four Madrasa Students Remain Jobless,” 2018).

Compared to the national statistics, the current employment scenario of the respondents was significantly poor. The unemployment rate among male respondents was many times higher than the national average. Women's labour force participation was much lower than the national rate, and their employment rate was alarmingly low. Of those who were employed, very few were satisfied with their current job, evident in the fact that more than 97% of the respondents aspire to be in a different occupation.

Though an overwhelming majority of the respondents expressed their interest in getting training, their preferences for the type of training are limited to two main categories: computer training and service-related training

for men and tailoring training for women. Moreover, both men and women believe that their income would be doubled in one year if they received any training. In addition, those who are inactive in the labour market also aspire to participate in a training program and want to get involved in livelihood activities in the future.

The gender disparity is visible in future training requirements, employment, and predicted earnings. Women mostly requested computer literacy training and tailoring, but males requested a broader range of abilities, including computer literacy, tailoring, electrical repair, mobile maintenance, and driving. The majority of men (47%) and women (41%) wished to do business in the future. However, women are more interested in government and private sector careers than men. These significant differences in men and women in desiring various future training and types of jobs consequently vary their predicted future income. Without training, men expect to earn BDT 9,019 per month, conversely, it was BDT 6,024 per month for women. It was 108% higher for men with training compared to without it, while women's predicted future income with training was 90% more than it was without. The difference in predicted income between men and women demonstrates that preconceived perception is an impediment for former female madrasah students. They believe that they are less capable than men and would be paid less despite having the training.

We observed that the unemployment and out-of-the-labour-market rates among former madrasah students are significant; more than 60% of them did not complete secondary school and had poor digital access, which are

essential for finding work. Even if they want to engage in training programs and hope to find work in the future, a skill development intervention is required to improve their employability. A need-based training program that focuses on computer literacy, tailoring, and driving can help individuals enter the labour market or improve their prospects of finding work. Furthermore, with lower levels of education and low participation in the labour market, women require special attention. In addition to up-skilling, proper information about the wage market should also be provided to manage expectations. The program design should also take into consideration the demand side expectations.

High expectations coupled with a low level of baseline skills and a limited band of preferred trades may pose potential challenges in implementing a successful training program. Besides, given that about two-thirds of the women are either involved in housework or not looking for employment, it is important to further explore their constraints and motivations to design something useful for them.

We believe that the findings of our study will provide some useful insights to SDP in designing a program for the madrasah-educated youth in Cox's Bazar.

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