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Madrasa Education in Bihar: Assessment of Learning Infrastructure

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ABSTRACT

Education is the most effective weapon for bringing about meaningful social change. Education is the primary concern for Muslims in India and plays a crucial role in improving their well-being. Madrasa plays an important role in educational, economic, political, and social development. Most Madrasa run with only charity and offer education to the poor and orphans. The objective of the study is to assess the infrastructural gap at Madarsas in Bihar.

The study findings reveal the lack of infrastructural facilities in the Madrasas of Bihar. The minimum basic infrastructural facilities are required at Madrasa to enhance the teaching and learning environment. To renovate the Madrasa into an institution of transformative learning, the government should provide them with infrastructural support. Apart from the salary of the teachers, the government should also provide funds for the operational development of the Madrasa. Stakeholders should take steps to maximize the participation of these students in higher education through an increase in the number of institutions in Muslim-majority areas. Much more is to be done in the Madrasas of Bihar, from infrastructural development to investment in teachers to improve their quality through training and capacity building and updating syllabus and curriculum.



Keywords: Bihar, Education, India, Infrastructure, Madrasa, Muslim



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INTRODUCTION

Education is the most effective weapon for bringing about meaningful social change. New Education Policy 2020 defines education as “a great leveler and is the best tool for achieving economic and social mobility, inclusion, and equality” (GoI, 2020). The new education policy emphasizes making education inclusive by focusing on marginalized and underrepresented groups. The quality of a nation depends upon the quality of its citizens, that further depends on the quality of education (Basheer, 2016).

Education is a major concern for Muslims in India and is crucial in improving their well-being. According to the Sachar Committee report (2006), the factors for a low level of education in Muslims are poverty, low perceived return from education, poor access to schools, and other factors associated with schools and Madrasas. These factors give the poor Muslim children only option to be enrolled in the Madrasas of their locality and hinder their educational growth.

Madrasa is derived from the Arabic word ‘dars’, which means ‘to study’ or ‘to learn’. Madrasa is a place of learning where instruction is given in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu languages. In general, Madrasa is viewed as a school of Muslim religious education. Most Madrasas follow the religious and traditional mode of instruction for imparting knowledge. There is an urgent need to re-design the courses, curriculum, and teaching pedagogy in

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Madrasa to match the next-generation education system. Several madrasas and Muslim organizations in India are attempting to blend theology and secular education, for example, Markazi Darsghah, Rampur; Jami'at ul-Falah, Uttar Pradesh; Islamic International School, Mumbai; Markaz ul-Ma'arif Education and Research Centre, Mumbai; Dar ul-'Umoor, Mysore; Jami'at ul-Hidaya, Jaipur (Sikand, 2009).

Under the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (Education for All) initiative, which was started in 2002, the government focused on universal elementary education. Central and state governments have taken several steps towards the modernization of Madrasa. The Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India launched Scheme for Providing Quality Education to Madrasas/Minorities (SPQEM) in 2014-2015, which comprises two schemes namely, Scheme for Providing Quality Education in Madrasas (SPQEM) and Infrastructure Development of Minority Institutes (IDMI). SPQEM aims to provide financial assistance to increase the quality of education in Madrasas so that Muslim children can meet the criteria of the national education system in formal education subjects, i.e., Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Hindi, and English. Similarly, IDMI aims to improve the quality of education for minority students by augmenting infrastructure in private aided/unaided minority schools/institutions. Since April 2021, the scheme is currently implemented by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India (GoI, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, 2019). A total of 1127 Madrasas received the first installment of Rs 1543.355 lakhs for grant of honorarium for graduate teachers, teaching-learning material, Science and Maths kits, Science/Computer labs, and monitoring under the SPQEM scheme in 2015-2016 (GoI, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, 2019).

Madrasa plays a vital role in the educational, economic, political, and social development of a society. However, even today, lack of teachers, basic facilities and infrastructure, and poor professional management are the major problems faced by madrasas (Syar'i, Hamdanah, & Akrim, 2020).

Although several studies have examined madrasa modernization, curriculum reform, and minority education in India, very few empirical studies have systematically assessed the physical learning infrastructure of madrasas in Bihar. Existing research largely focuses on policy issues and religious education rather than educational facilities that directly influence teaching and learning. Furthermore, district-level evidence on infrastructural disparities among Bihar's madrasas remains limited. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from 492 aided and affiliated madrasas across 24 districts of Bihar. The objective of the study is to assess the availability of learning infrastructure in aided and affiliated madrasas in Bihar.

Muslims in Bihar

According to the 2011 census, India's Muslim population is 172.2 million, or 14.2 percent of the country's overall population of 1210.9 million. Of these 172.2 million, 17.6 million are from Bihar, accounting for 10.22 percent of the total Muslim population. The total population of Bihar is 104.1 million and the percentage of the Muslim population in Bihar is 16.9 percent of the total population of Bihar.

According to Census 2011, a total of 18.7 percent, 18.2 percent and 17.9 percent of the Muslim populations of Bihar fall under 0-4 years, 5-9 years and 10-14 years, respectively. According to Census 2011, the total number of Muslims in the 0-14 category at that time is 43.33 percent of the Muslim population of Bihar, which is a considerable number in itself. Most of the population under this age category are from rural Bihar, accounting for 88 percent. And today, somewhere, this section is moving out of its childhood and moving toward adulthood. The entire social and economic position of this age group is critical in defining the general welfare conditions of minorities in the near future. Similarly, 24.9 percent of the Muslim population falls under 15-29 years, indicating that one in every four Muslims is a youth, and now they fall under the working-age category.

The educational standard of Muslims in Bihar is not uniform throughout the state. As per the 2011 census, literacy among the Muslim community ranges from 42.9 percent (Madhepura) to 75.5 percent (Aurangabad) and the overall literacy rate is 56.6 percent. The literacy rate for Muslim females is 48.4 percent, below the national literacy rate of 62 percent of the same community.

Madrasas in Bihar

Madrasas in Bihar are affiliated with the Bihar State Madrasa Education Board. Bihar State Madrasa Education Board was started in 1920 and functioned until 1980. It was known as the Bihar Madrasa Examination Board. On 17 January 1982, a 60-year-old education body was established under the Bihar State Madrasa Education Act, 1981, for the supervision and development of Madrasa education in the state of Bihar. Bihar State Madrasa Education Board headquarters at Patna and the Chairman is the principal executive and academic officer of the board.

Madrasa under Bihar Madrasa Education Board offers courses up to class 12. The classes in the Madrasas of Bihar are categorized as Tahtania, Wastania, Fauqania, and Moulvi. Tahtania is equivalent to primary school, covering classes 1 to 5. Wastania is equivalent to middle school, covering classes 6 to 8. Fauqania is equivalent to Matriculation covering classes 9 and 10. Moulvi is equivalent to Intermediate, covering classes 11 and 12. Apart from this, courses of Alim (graduate), Fazil (post-graduate), and Hafiz (Quran) are also conducted in madrasas. Bihar State Madrasa Education Board is recognized by the government of Bihar, the Council of Boards of School Education in India, and the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), USA.

Madrasas in Bihar are categorized as aided and unaided. Aided Madrasas get the salaries of teachers, whereas unaided madrasas are only affiliated to conduct exams. There is a total of 1937 aided madrasas and 2459 unaided madrasas registered with the Bihar State Madrasa Education Board. Table 1 shows the district-wise number of aided Madrasas in Bihar. Kishanganj, Katihar, and Madhubani are the districts with more than 10 percent Aided Madrasa. Darbhanga, Purnia, Araria, and Sitamarhi are the districts with Aided Madrasas between 5 to 10 percent. East Champaran, West Champaran, Supaul, Bhagalpur, Siwan, Samastipur, and Saharsa Districts with 1 to 5 percent Aided Madrasas. Aurangabad, Banka, Begusarai, Bhojpur, Buxar, Gaya, Gopalganj, Jamui, Khagaria, Madhepura, Munger, Muzaffarpur, Nalanda, Nawada, Patna, Rohtas, Saran, Sheikhpura, Sheohar and Vaishali are the districts with less than 1 percent Aided Madrasas. Out of 1937 Madrasa, a total of 1734 Wastania level Madrasa, 113 Fauqania level Madrasa, 55 Moulvi level Madrasa, 22 Alim level Madrasa and 13 Fazil level Madrasa.

Table 1: District-Wise Number of Government Aided Madrasa

District	Muslim Population (Census, 2011)	Aided Madrasa					Number of Aided Madrasa	District Wise Percentage of Aided Madrasa
		Wastania	Fauqania	Moulvi	Alim	Fazil		
Araria	1207442	114	9	5	0	0	128	6.61%
Arwal	700843	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Aurangabad	2540073	3	2	0	1	0	6	0.31%
Banka	250925	12	0	1	0	0	13	0.67%
Begusarai	407348	11	3	0	1	0	15	0.77%
Bhagalpur	537098	43	1	4	2	0	50	2.58%
Bhojpur	197819	1	0	0	2	0	3	0.15%
Buxar	105423	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.10%
Darbhanga	881476	166	11	1	1	4	183	9.45%
Gaya	488121	6	1	0	0	0	7	0.36%
Gopalganj	436057	11	1	0	0	0	12	0.62%
Jamui	217621	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.10%
Jehanabad	75742	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Kaimur	155283	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%

Katihar	1365645	253	13	7	0	1	274	14.15%
Khagaria	175588	9	1	0	0	0	10	0.52%
Kishanganj	1149095	327	8	0	3	0	338	17.45%
Lakhisarai	40886	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Madhepura	241760	9	1	0	0	0	10	0.52%
Madhubani	818912	206	9	7	3	2	227	11.72%
Munger	110416	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.10%
Muzaffarpur	745546	12	4	0	1	1	18	0.93%
Nalanda	198033	5	3	1	1	1	11	0.57%
Nawada	244394	4	0	0	0	0	4	0.21%
West Champan	865090	80	6	6	0	1	93	4.80%
Patna	439952	6	1	0	0	1	8	0.41%
East Champan	990349	47	12	5	1	0	65	3.36%
Purnia	1255641	148	6	6	2	2	164	8.47%
Rohtas	300487	10	1	0	1	0	12	0.62%
Saharsa	266620	18	1	1	1	0	21	1.08%
Samastipur	452370	35	3	1	0	0	39	2.01%
Saran	406449	2	0	1	1	0	4	0.21%
Sheikhpura	37653	4	1	0	0	0	5	0.26%
Sheohar	99342	8	1	2	0	0	11	0.57%
Sitamarhi	740101	87	7	3	1	0	98	5.06%
Siwan	608282	36	1	3	0	0	40	2.07%
Supaul	409251	51	6	0	0	0	57	2.94%
Vaishali	333980	4	0	1	0	0	5	0.26%
Total	20497113	1734	113	55	22	13	1937	100.00%

Source: (BSMEB, 2021) ; Census, 2011

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to assess the infrastructural status of madrasas in Bihar. Data were collected from 492 aided/affiliated Madrasa from 24 districts of Bihar. The districts covered were Saran, Muzaffarpur, Sitamarhi, Sheohar, Siwan, Gopalganj, Vaishali, Banka, Begusarai, Jamui, Sheikhpura, Bhagalpur, Munger, Khagaria, Gaya, Nawada, Patna, Nalanda, Rohtas, Aurangabad, Bhojpur, Buxar, Purvi Champaran, and Paschmi Champaran.

Data were collected through a structured schedule covering different aspects of facilities available at Madrasa. The dimensions covered were enrolled students, teachers available, availability of basic infrastructure, i.e., kitchen, classrooms, staff rooms, bench and desk, playground, boundary wall, multi-purpose hall, library, toilet, separate toilet for girls, electric supply, computer facility and fan installed, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 indicates the level of Madrasa recognized by the Bihar State Madrasa Education Board. Out of 492 Madrasas surveyed, the majority of Madrasa are of Wastania level (72.67%), followed by Fauqania (11.54%), Alim and above (7.89%), Moulvi (7.49%), and only Tahtania (0.40%).

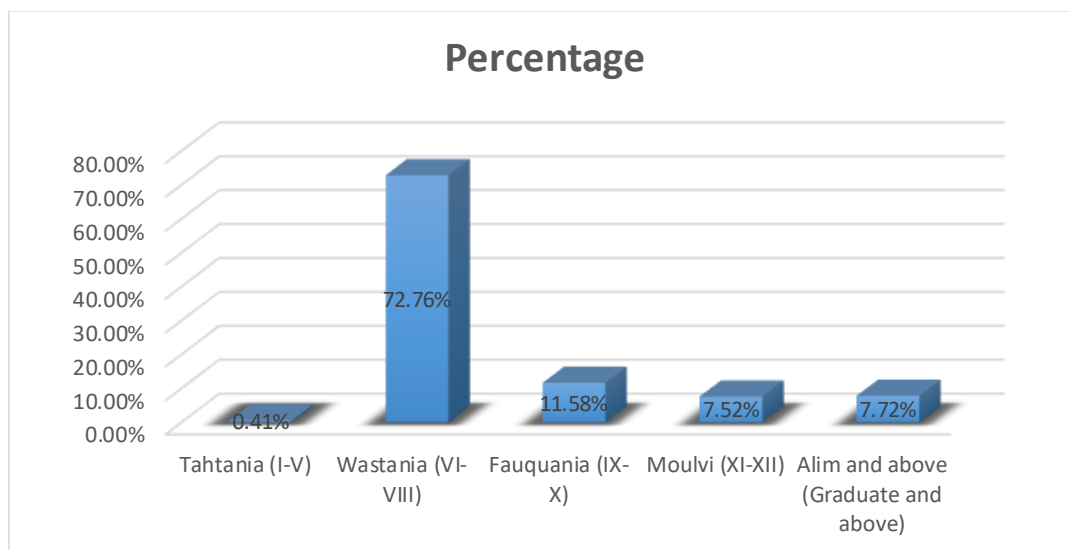


Figure 1: Level of Madrasa Affiliated from Madrasa Board

The Wastania madrasa in a nearby locality serves the student to complete their secondary education. For higher secondary education, students struggle to reach the Madrasa recognized/aided for Fauqania level and above. The limited number of higher secondary education Madrasa increases the dropout rate as parents avoid sending their children, especially girls, to distant Madrasas.

The majority of the sampled Madrasa are co-ed, covering 95.73 percent of the sampled Madrasa. Just 0.81 percent of sampled madrasas are for males, and 3.46 percent of them are for female students. Hence, it can be observed that madrasas are switching from all-female and all-male to co-educational institutions. Figure 2 shows the nature of the Madrasa.

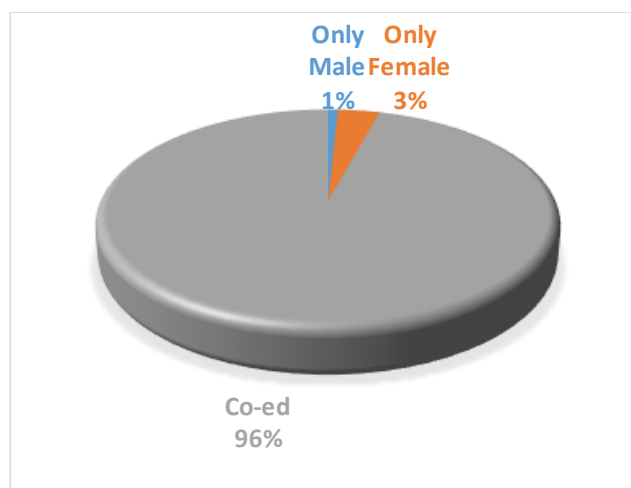


Figure 2: Nature of Madrasa

Figure 3 encapsulates the information about students enrolled in the Madrasas of Bihar. The total number of students enrolled in these madrasas is 1,43,801 accounting for 43 percent male students and 57 percent female students. There are more girls than boys in madrasas. The parents chose a madrasa for their daughters because it provides a blend of religious and mainstream education, training in piety practice, affordability, security, and training for future roles as spouses and mothers, making it a proper schooling option for their daughters (Borker, 2020). Many families who would ordinarily restrict the women's movement are willing to send their daughters for religious education to a Madrasa, even if it means sending them to different cities (Pande, 2018). Madrasas

are more commonly enrolled with girls, children from lower-income families, those who live in rural areas, and those whose parents are less educated (Asadullah & Maliki, 2018). The average number of students enrolled per Madrasa is approx. 292.

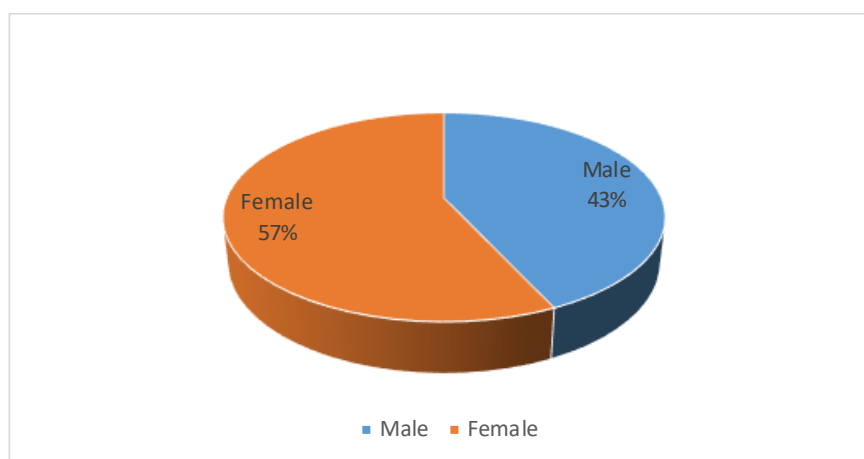


Figure 3: Students enrolled in Madrasas

Contrary to the majority of students in madrasas being female, the teachers are male. Table 2 shows the number of teachers available for teaching at 492 Madrasas in Bihar. 89.17 percent of available teachers are male and 10.83 percent are female. The number of students per teacher is 49.45 and the number of girl students per female teacher is 259.89. The teacher-student ratio is much higher than the recommended pupil-teacher ratio of 1:30 for the primary level and 1:35 for the upper primary level under the Right to Education Act 2009. As we have seen, most of the madrasahs are in rural areas, and most of the children enrolled are from low-income families whose parents are not educated. That is why every child needs equal and proper attention, for which we have to improve the teacher-student ratio.

Lack of teacher training and appointment processes are the major concern for the quality of education in Madrasa. Teachers in Madrasas are appointed based on their educational qualifications rather than using eligibility tests conducted by the state or central government. Moreover, teachers do not have any formal training or capacity building as part of their teaching practice. There is a huge gender gap in the composition of teachers despite the higher strength of girls enrolled in Madrasa. This could be due to the inability to attain higher education by Muslim girls or the patriarchal society limiting their space outside household chores. The common problem with all the Madrasa is that they do not have an adequate number of teachers to teach secular subjects with theological subjects.

Table 2: Teachers in Madrasa

Male Teachers (%)	89.17
Female Teachers (%)	10.83
Total Students per Teacher	49.45
Female Students per Female Teacher	259.89

Source: Compiled by Author(s)

Infrastructural facilities are important determinants for a conducive environment in any educational institution. There is a strong association between the availability of basic services (water, sanitation, communications, electricity, playground and waste disposal) at school, the physical condition of the school, enforcement of regulations and standards at school with the attendance of students as well as teachers (Barrett, Treves, Shmis, & Ambasz, 2019). Infrastructural facilities at 492 Madrasas were assessed based on 16 dimensions covering boundary wall, mid-day meal, computer facility, electric connection, fans installed, audio equipment, multi-purpose hall, bench and desk, drinking water, facility, library facility, open space for a playground, functional

kitchen, toilet, separate toilet for girls, and rooms for staffs. Figure 4 shows the outcome of the infrastructural facilities assessment in the madrasas of Bihar.

It is found that around 54 percent of sampled Madrasas have less than five classrooms for teaching and learning. This means that most madrasas still do not have a sufficient number of classrooms where children can be taught. In such a situation, either the children are taught on the verandah, or the children of more than two classes are made to sit together. Apart from this, there is no staff room for teachers in 42 percent of madrasas. It shows that Madrasas in Bihar still struggle to provide staff rooms to their teachers. The staffroom is the common base for teachers where they can communicate about school and classroom activities with their fellow teachers. A comfortable seating area is essential for them to prepare for classes and carry out other school-related work.

A toilet is an important component of student hygiene. More than 81 percent of Madrasas have toilets, and approx. 56 percent of sampled Madrasa have separate toilet facilities for girls. It can be noted that the lack of proper sanitation facilities may be hindering the participation of more girls in madrasa education. The participation of girls can be increased if every Madrasa has toilets and a separate toilet for girls, reducing toilet insecurity.

Mid-Day Meal is an essential entitlement for all primary school students to improve their nutritional status. A total of about 48 percent of sampled madrasas have a functional kitchen and approx. 49 percent of sampled madrasas serve mid-day meals to the students. If there is a system of mid-day meals in all madrasas, then enrollment and attendance of children can be increased considering their socio-economic background. Mid-Day Meals have a positive and significant impact on the learning achievement of students enrolled in primary school (Singh, Park, & Dercon, 2014).

Physical activity is also vital for children's well-being. Approx. 70 percent of Madrasa have open spaces that can be used as a playground for children. These spaces may also be used for morning assembly in Madrasa and other co-curricular activities. The proper infrastructure and equipment are required to promote physical activity among Madrasa students.

Library provides space for children to learn and is essential to student learning. There is just 23 percent of sampled Madrasa have library facilities. The absence of libraries may adversely affect reading habits, access to reference materials, and students' preparedness for higher education. Furthermore, 188 out of 492 madrasas have a computer facility, accounting for 38.21 percent of the total Madrasa surveyed. This finding is consistent with recent studies that emphasize the importance of digital infrastructure for improving educational quality and preparing students for higher education and employment in an increasingly technology-driven environment. Library, Laboratory and Computer facilities are an indispensable part of modern-day pedagogy. Lack of any of these facilities will leave the students behind in a competitive environment as they play an essential role in the quality of learning.

Clean and sufficient water is important for students' good health. Precisely, 315 sampled madrasas have drinking water facilities for the madrasa students from different sources such as hand pumps and boring. However, about 36 percent of sampled madrasas still do not have any drinking water facilities. The availability of clean water in school led to an increase in academic participation (Githaka, Gachahi, & Mwaruvie, 2019)

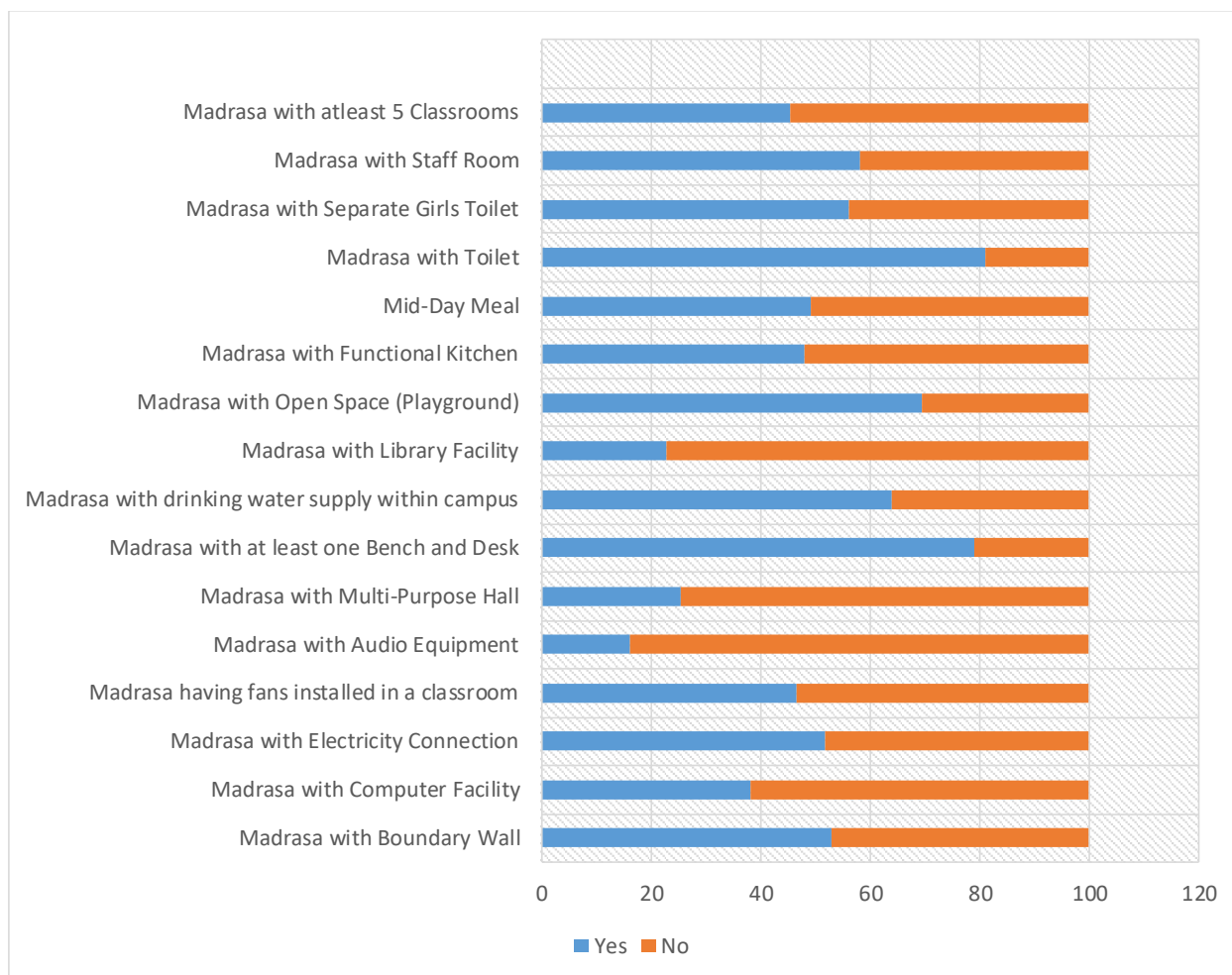


Figure 4: Infrastructural Facilities

Approx. 21 percent of Madrasa do not have a single bench and desk for students. Students generally sit on a mat or ground during their classes. The introduction of a blackboard and other classroom equipment is needed in madrassas apart from benches and desks to achieve the transformation we want to see. Approx. 26 percent of sampled Madrasa have a multi-purpose hall to accommodate students for common activities and 16 percent of these multi-purpose halls have audio equipment.

Additionally, about 52 percent of Madrasas have electricity connections and 47 percent of them have fans installed in their classrooms. Around 48 percent of Madrasas are deprived of electricity supply leading to poor learning opportunities for underprivileged sections. It was found that 53 percent of Madrasas have a boundary wall fencing the premises of Madrasa and around 47 percent of Madrasas still have their premises open that are not safe for students. There is a strong association between the enrollment of students and school with a boundary wall for boys and girls at primary school and girls in middle and high school (Gillani, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The current study assessed the infrastructural gap in the Madrasas of Bihar. The findings of the study reveal the lack of infrastructural facilities in the Madrasas of Bihar. The minimum basic infrastructural facilities are required at Madrasa to enhance the teaching and learning environment. To renovate the Madrasa into an institution of transformative learning, the government should provide them with infrastructural support. Currently, these madrasas are getting only salaries for their teachers. Apart from the salaries of the teachers, the government should

also provide funds for the operational development of the Madrasa. There is an urgent need to fill the infrastructural gaps in Madrasas to empower minority communities.

Infrastructural development will encourage and attract more and more students, and in turn, Madrasa will return to its original objectives to reduce the educational gap in the minority community. “Theories of curriculum and of teaching and learning cannot, alone, tell us what and how to teach, because questions of what and how to teach arise in concrete situations loaded with concrete particulars of time, place, person, and circumstance” (Schwab, 1971). Reform in curriculum and syllabus is an urgent need to upgrade the education system of Madrasa to adopt new and latest pedagogy to achieve the objectives of the New Education Policy. Reforms in Madrasa's syllabi and curricula are crucial for the development and progress of India. The government has a very important role to play in mainstreaming the largest minority group of India through Madrasas. The majority of the students are from an economically poor background, and an introduction to skill development and vocational training through Madrasa will help them get employment.

There is also a gap in the number of Madrasas at Wastania, Fauqania, and Moulvi levels which may be the major factor causing dropouts in Muslim students, especially females. Stakeholders should take steps to maximize the participation of these students in higher education through an increase in the number of higher education institutions in Muslim-majority areas.

The leadership of the principal of the Madrasa plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education in Madrasas (Nursaid, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for training for principals of Madrasas covering different leadership styles, such as managerial, instructional, and transformational (Nursaid, 2020). Most teachers are untrained in the formal education system as they are from a madrasa background. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a capacity-building program for teachers to improve education quality and reduce the gap between traditional and progressive teaching. These Madrasa teachers can be instrumental in further making efforts to create a conducive environment through awareness and inspiring the community to participate in the development of society. Much more is to be done in the Madrasas of Bihar, from infrastructural development to investment in teachers to improve their quality through training and capacity building and updating syllabus and curriculum.

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