

Open University and Women's Literacy

DISTANCE education and open university concepts are new in the country. These systems have emerged as an outgrowth of education by correspondence with help from electronic communications. Over the last two decades, opportunities for learning at a distance are expanding rapidly and distance education is becoming increasingly common in the developing countries. These countries, desperate to expand their educational systems to meet unprecedented demand for education due to rapid growth in population, consider distance education as a viable low-cost alternative and establish distance teaching networks or institutions.

Evidences show that the Distance Education (DE) in the developing countries, by and large, follow the Western models with emphasis on the use of self learning and audio-visual materials. Little attention is paid to few basic issues like (a) level of literacy (b) population distribution (c) access to media (d) traditional school system (e) resource constraints (f) convenience of target groups (g) academic control (h) tensions and conflicts in educational development and (i) relevance of education to clientele's need etc. As a result, a number of distance education institutions in the developing countries are caught between the imposing demands and resource constraints, high expectations and low achievement.

Now how far the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) with all its prospects and problems will be able to promote female education and literacy? For women in Bangladesh, illiteracy, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease, unemployment go together. More than 80 per cent rural women do not have access to health, hygiene, employment and education.

Use of DE for promotion of literacy among rural women is difficult due to the fact that a person who has not learned how to read can not benefit from distance education.

Further, traditional mode of DE techniques to deliver even traditional packages of literacy materials would be quite risky as it requires use of mass and electronic media while receiving end arrangements are least satisfactory. Costs involved are quite high and relevance to clientele's need in terms of

tie, energy is expensive. Reference may be made to satellite programme on adult functional literacy in India, adult literacy programme of Pakistan using televised literacy lessons through a network of community viewing centres. Example of these two countries indicate a shortfall between target level and actual achievement. Various reports on the experiences of these two countries maintained that had face-to-face tuition been

by Salma Akhter
people even after going to school on a compulsory basis, cannot read and write well enough to cope with living in the modern world. The UNESCO (1992) recently observed that functional illiteracy has become a matter of growing concern in a world where technological progress demands even higher levels of skills.

cultural and human rights. The possible application of DE for promoting women's literacy under the open university would require to consider contextual dimensions, courses, programmes, learning materials related to social, cultural, economic, linguistic, ethical heritages, beliefs and values, demands and needs of the area, community, group of people or individual in the country.

practices. Women should also have to be aware of their legal and family rights which would protect them from desertion by husbands, multiple marriage of husband, divorce, dowry, violence, denial from family assets.

For the women of Bangladesh, education in any form should be considered as a catalyst that would give her equality, economic power, justice and dignity she had long been denied. Evidences, studies, NGO activities unequivocally point to the positive impact of women's literacy and employment on fertility, children's health, nutritional status and quality of life. That is why women's literacy is considered to be a more sensitive index of social development than the overall literacy rate of a country.

the principal learning mode, success rate would have been much higher.

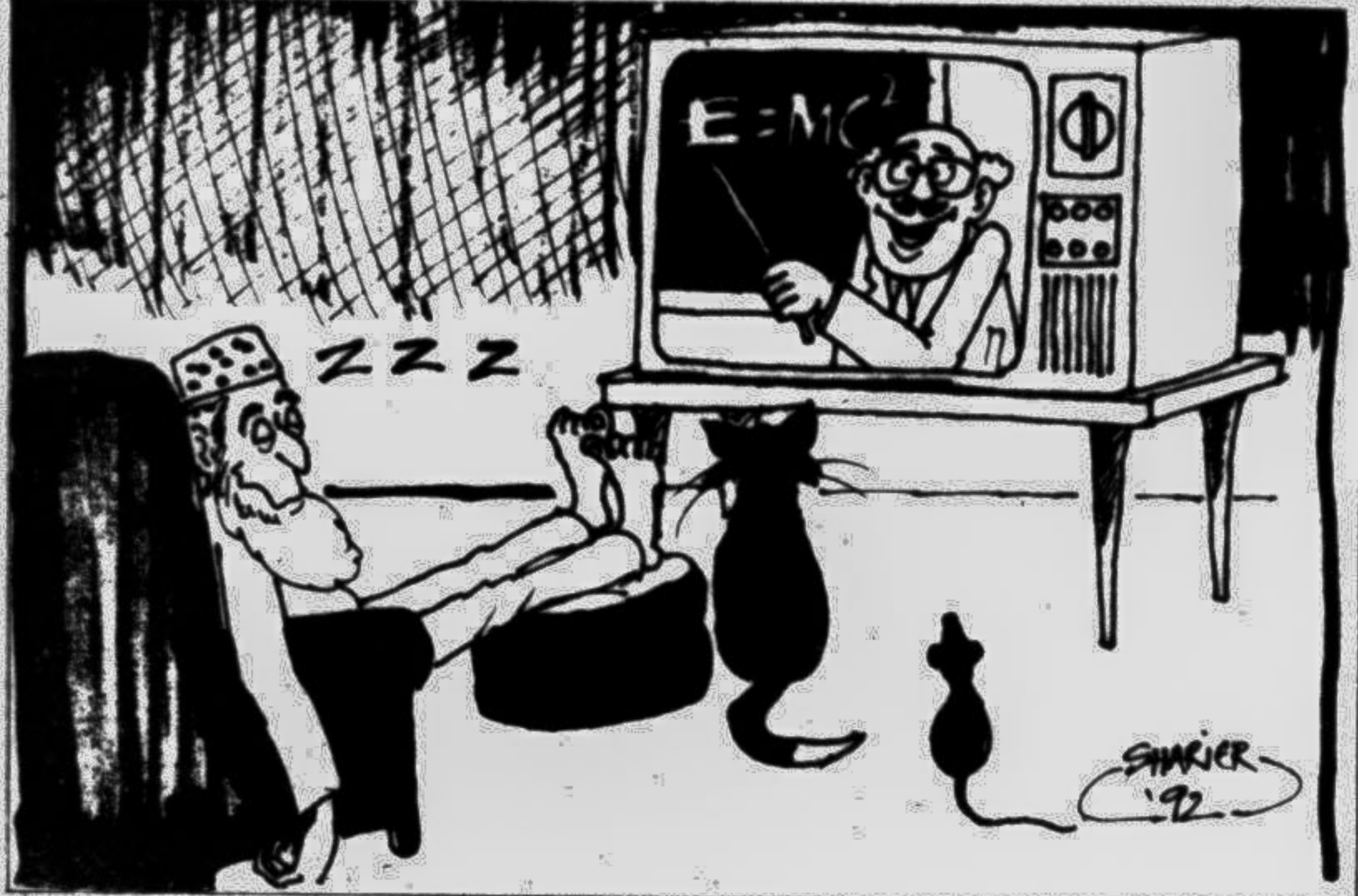
standing of literacy has progressed quite substantially. Literacy is neither confined to broadening of perception only, nor to a unified competency alone. It is rather complex.

literate women or girls through BOU needs, to be influenced by the perceived relevance of education to their as well as societal concern for a better life. Women, through

For the women of Bangladesh, education in any form should be considered as a catalyst that would give her equality, economic power, justice and dignity she had long been denied. Evidences, studies, NGO activities unequivocally point to the positive impact of women's literacy and employment on fertility, children's health, nutritional status and quality of life. That is why women's literacy is considered to be a more sensitive index of social development than the overall literacy rate of a country. But, not enough people, even amongst the educated urban population are aware of this correlation!

An integrated and holistic approach of education and literacy is essential for the development of women. Now, the question is whether open university is and will be able to create such a model and environment in which women as a human-being can be valued and nurtured. An open university among its various departments and divisions, will have a women's education division. The designers, curriculum planners, programmers must create an educational environment and process which would enable women to seek literacy at a point when it is meaningful and valuable to them. The educational process must enable women to ask for literacy, to ask questions, seek answers, take action and reflect on actions. There is no point in teaching women, to read and write unless they are given the hope of a better life.

The Bangladesh Open University, instead of treating women's literacy and basic education as a part of ready-made packages for DE should create an independent structure to experiment with female literacy at the initial stage. If BOU is to develop integrated literacy programme, co-ordinate activities of hundreds of NGOs, supplement formal education and provide leadership, it would require to sensitise and mobilize community and experiment through research and other developmental activities.



inter-disciplinary and relativistic, open-ended in terms of individual's lifetime aspirations, as well as in terms of possible adaptations to changing times and environments. Modern literacy is functional in the sense that it is concerned with the practical application of reading and writing in daily life. Literacy according to the UNESCO, is learning to read and write and count as an attempt towards achieving political, economic

education need to be empowered with information about safe water, sanitation, child care, nutrition, animal husbandry, modern agriculture, elementary and intermediate technology. If majority of the poor rural women are not to be marginalised forever, they also need a basic grasp of irrigation, pumps, tubewells, farm machinery, elementary accountancy, rural marketing, distribution networks, banking and loan facilities, co-operative

education need to be empowered with information about safe water, sanitation, child care, nutrition, animal husbandry, modern agriculture, elementary and intermediate technology. If majority of the poor rural women are not to be marginalised forever, they also need a basic grasp of irrigation, pumps, tubewells, farm machinery, elementary accountancy, rural marketing, distribution networks, banking and loan facilities, co-operative

Literacy Brings Light to Dharavi Squatters

by Prakash Chandra

They were exposed to important social issues like bride-burning, dowries, alcoholism and "untouchability" of certain members of the Indian caste society.

Municipal Council for school dropouts. Teachers visit children at home to determine their needs. For example, children who have to work and cannot attend school are taught at home.

FOR many residents of Dharavi in this city, "living in the dark" was both a figurative and literal description of their existence. Dharavi is one of Asia's biggest slums. Residents not only had to live in badly lit dwellings amidst dark and narrow alleys but they also had to survive without the light of literacy or basic reading, writing and numeracy skills.

The literacy campaign is a success by any standards and has drawn the support of other groups like the Bombay Literacy Mission, the Society for Human and Environmental Development and Yuva Saathi. The Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work supported the project by making available students working on their Master of Social Work diploma.

The Society for Human and Environment Development (SHED) runs three centers in Dharavi, the biggest of which has 600 children. Initiated by Begum Bilkis Lateef, wife of former Governor I.H. Lateef, SHED also conducts adult classes for the mothers of children enrolled in its centers. Mothers are compelled to attend the adult classes, a requirement so their children would not be suspended from the centers.

Admittedly, the figure is only a fraction of the 280,109,000 adult illiterates in India as estimated by the Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Small religious groups have also joined the campaign, organising literacy camps in 30 small areas. One of the first student volunteers, Srinivas

Yuva Saathi, another organisation involved in the literacy campaign, organises street plays featuring school children. The plays underscore the importance of literacy. The organisation also conducts forums during which public officials dialogue with the people and explain government rules and regulations.

But the number of illiterates in Dharavi represents a rather large concentration of uneducated people in a small area.

The work was not always focused on basic literacy. "We have to deal with personal problems of the slum people. For instance, every family has at least one alcoholic. Here people spend more time earning money. And they come late in the evening. It is difficult to persuade them to attend literacy classes. Then, of course, there is the drinking water problem, scarcity of electricity and very little sanitation facilities," said Bhimrao, a social worker.

Shinde, who started Yuva Saathi, said, "We invite the municipal authority to answer the queries and complaints from the public." A sports club, Ekta, has also been initiated by Shinde. The club organises leadership development camps, civil defence classes and story-telling competitions.

Initially enlisting the support of various women's organisations, such as the All-India Women's Conference, CORO volunteers started walking the ill-lit alleys of the slum to teach its residents. Literacy awareness marches launched the drive and created an essential atmosphere for the campaign.

Despite the difficulties, the project pushed through and has since led to a circulating library project which required only a small capital. Some 600 houses were divided into four groups of 150 units each. A set of books is rotated in each group for a month.

The success in Dharavi, so far, is encouraging Mr Sawant to consider other activities. He is planning to conduct after-school classes in mathematics and English for children who have trouble with these subjects. Children will also be encouraged to teach their parents. Literacy activities for school dropouts will also be expanded.

Politicians Derail Literacy Programme

KARATE lessons in literacy? An enthusiastic Ms Qudsiya Gandhi, officer of Puzumpon Thevar district in Tamil Nadu state, has been teaching self-defence techniques to women as part of their empowerment under the district's literacy programme.

At the last meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education, the Tamil Nadu education minister disclosed that complaints have been received about literacy volunteers engaging in political propaganda in the Kanniyakumari district.

Ms Jayalaththa has said that literacy programmes should be handled not by NGOs but by the State bureaucracy. The governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are also demanding control of the money.

The National Literacy Mission had earlier identified district officers known for their dedication to the literacy mission, and given the funds to such officials. A district can get almost as much as 40 million rupees (US\$1.4 million).

Prominent among literacy activists are women who also lead in efforts to check liquor smuggling and bootlegging, and are active in the country's immunisation programme.

Some workers are alleged to be connected with the terrorist Liberation Tigers of Sri Lanka. One of those pinpointed is the coordinator of the lead organisation in the literacy campaign in Tamil Nadu, the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi.

The success of the Pondicherry is also being marred by accusations that the Science Forum, which organised the movement nationwide, is anti-patriotic. State ministers have objected to a song in the post-literacy primer which asks "freedom for the country" but questions "Why poverty for us?"

Politicians had demanded that the literacy association Puduval Arvoli Eyakkam be disbanded for distributing the offending literacy primer, and that teachers belonging to the Science Forum be removed from their posts. In response, authorities have withdrawn the primers from circulation and shifted the teachers to other assignments.

Says Mr Parmeshwaran, general secretary of the Bharat Vigyan Samithi: "Politicians have realised the power of literacy and are feeling threatened."

In the district of Pudukottai, newly literate women were taught to handle explosives as well as bank accounts so they could take over the operation of mines leased to private contractors.

In both districts, more than a thousand women involved in spreading literacy were also given bicycles so they could reach other villages more easily.

Full-length articles have expressed a similar opinion in the mass-circulation Indian Express. One article says: "In States where literacy has taken roots, politicians find themselves marginalised and are therefore unhappy with the literacy programme. They see distinct advantages in keeping people dull, driven, mute and subservient. Literacy has even become a bone of contention in Centre-State relations."

The government has, however, recognised that in order to enable secondary education contribute much more to the national development efforts, it is necessary to tackle these problems urgently, so as to introduce some minimum standard and relevance at the secondary level of education. In this ladder, Secondary Education has a crucial role to play, which prepares the students for higher education, the quality of which largely determines the standard of higher education. It prepares also a good number of young men and women who give up education before or after the completion of secondary education due to one reason or the other.

Colleges like this impart training to teachers, but these are not enough. — Star photo

Teacher Training Improves Educational Standard

by Muhammad Anwar Hossain

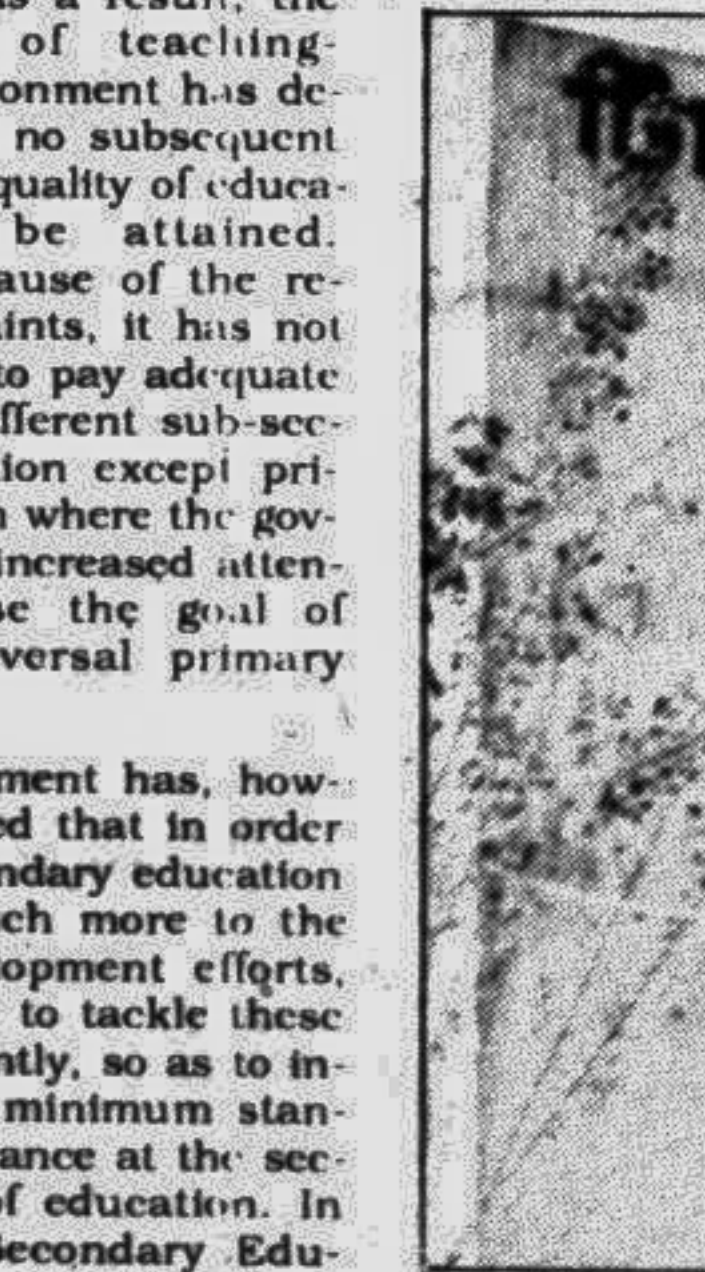
THE educational system is among the largest social enterprises in any country. The present educational system in Bangladesh has evolved with only minor adjustments to the patterns inherited from Pakistan since independence in 1971. Except for some expansion quantitatively, not much change in the areas of curriculum development, examination systems, vocational education, physical facilities, staff positions, supervision and inspection, teacher education and specially the quality of education took place.

Today, secondary education is a hotbed of controversy, because it fulfills no aims, the standard of teaching is low and there is laxity and confusion. The entire teaching is not related to life in general but caters to most urban requirements. It is said that the teachers are the custodians of society. The secondary level teachers have a great responsibility since they have to train the youngsters between the ages of 11 to 18 years so that they become good and useful citizen of tomorrow. It is sur-

things as may be considered vital. Besides, there are other problems in the existing educational set-up which continually agitate the minds of teachers, frustrate them and affect their efficiency.

As three-fourth of the secondary-level teachers have no pedagogical training and a small proportion who have such training find hard to practice and improve the teaching-learning conditions at this stage. The teacher-education

There is provision for training and continuous updating the knowledge of teachers by providing pre-service and in-service training programmes for primary and secondary level teachers. NAPE and PTIs provide training for primary level teachers and IER, TTCs, BIDE and SESDCs provide training for secondary level teachers.



the knowledge of teachers by providing pre-service and in-service training programmes for primary and secondary level teachers. NAPE and PTIs provide training for primary level teachers and IER, TTCs, BIDE and SESDCs provide training for secondary level teachers.

adequate facilities and opportunities in the field of professional development of the teachers: (g) lack of research facilities, (h) lack of proper books, journals etc. in the library, and (i) absence of a system of supervision which is needed for the development of teachers.

Apart from the recommendations on teacher education stated in the "Report of the Bangladesh National Education Commission" (The Summary and selected chapters, February 1988) the following few recommendations deserve due

attention: (1) The present patterns of B.Ed/Dip-in-Ed and M.Ed. (TTC) /M.Ed (IER)/MA in Education (TTC) should follow the same curriculum and syllabus and obtain the same Degree/Diploma only to avoid confusions in the respective ladder.

(2) Education as a subject at the graduation level has to be introduced to the colleges with recommendation of the university. (3) At least two years' academic session in the college level and one full year academic session at B Ed levels should be introduced. (4) M Ed, M Phil and PhD courses can be introduced with the establishment of a department of education to all the universities. (5) Research in education should be popularized as per the need of society. (6) The curricula and syllabi need to be modernised and advanced courses including vocational training to be introduced in this discipline. (7) Appropriate text books has to be produced and printed with recommendations of a Committee of Experts. (8) It is necessary to ensure and arrange at least three terminal examinations including the final examination in an academic year for all courses. (9) The time devoted to practise teaching is inadequate. Simulation classes has to be introduced at all the institutions and due emphasis on two-month crash training on teaching should be given by maintaining proper link between the schools and the TTCs. (10) Necessary provision should be ensured so that participation of women teachers in the teacher education programmes is enhanced with the provision of their employment in teaching in greater number. (11) New teachers' Training Institutions should be established (at least doubled or proportionate to be population). Selected PTIs to be upgraded to TTCs, Open University to run the distant education programmes smoothly and links to be maintained to all these educational institutions where the teacher-education programmes exist. (12) Short-term pedagogical training can be ensured to all college and university level teachers including the Basic/Foundation Training at NAEM. (13) Short-course in-service teachers training programmes can be established through NAPE and SESDCs and frequent academic supervisions to be made through TTCs, SESDCs, NAPE so that minimum standard/quality of education is emphasized in society; and (14) Adequate number of teachers and staff for the smooth running of the teacher education programmes should be recruited and higher posts of subject teachers to be created for the qualitative improvement of the teacher education programme.

The writer is Deputy Executive Director, Secondary Education and Science Development Centre)