

**Feature****Primary Education in Bangladesh : Quest for Quality**

by Md Kaiser Revi

In developing countries, primary education emerges as a cornerstone of economic and social development. To achieve EFA (Education for all) by 2000, almost all the countries involved have come forward with their own programmes and commitment. Within primary education, firstly, universal access and enrollment is the main challenge to them. Next, the priority for primary education should be to increase children's learning in school so that most students master the curriculum and complete the primary cycle. Both goals are important, school attendance without learning is meaningless, and development opportunities are lost when a large fraction of the school age population has no access to schooling. Therefore, beside the augmentation of the quantitative aspect, e.g. more classrooms, teachers, text books, learning-materials etc of education, due emphasis has to be given to ensure quality in the education programme.

**Why Quality?**

The main thrust of primary education is to produce a literate and numerate population that can deal with problems encountered at home and at work and to serve as a foundation on which further education is built. In many countries in the developing world, education systems fail to serve these purpose due to the poor quality of education. In seeking an explanation it can be seen that poor quality text books, teaching and instructional materials generate a vicious cycle, i.e. poor achievement, high drop-out and grade repetition which depletes the efficiency of the education system. Furthermore, the poor quality of education has been identified as one possible explanation for the weak connection between educational expansion and economic development in the third world.

For gaining maximum benefit from the investment of education, therefore, what we need is more primary schools, as well as better ones. Investment in primary education and its quality gives a higher rate of return than at any other level in the formal system. Better schools produce fewer drop-outs, contribute to higher achievement levels and enhance future economic productivity.

**Quality Indicators**

Generally, the quality of

HERE are two types of general education which are being taught in Bangladesh. Both types of education in respect of nature, approach and effect differ to a great extent. One's direction is to the East while the other is to the West. This ideological admixture is posing painful consequences in an independent state. It merits reform without delay.

One system of education is designed to meet the requirements and demands of the rich, well-to-do, higher strata of society and its medium of education is English. Though Bengali is our mother tongue, there is little room for Bengali in these Western oriented educational institutions. All subjects are taught in English. To partake of education in an English-medium school is a symbol of richness and great status, and parents will cross all obstacles to obtain this symbol.

On the other hand, the second type of education is Bengali-Medium. This system of education is prevalent 100 per cent in rural areas and to some extent in urban areas too. 70 per cent of children in this country, who live in villages are educated in these Bengali-medium schools. In cities and towns, Bengali-medium schools serve the needs of poor people. These poor people consist of day labourers, the lower middle class, small businessmen etc.

English-medium education signifies richness, and social success, while Bengali-medium education presents a picture of poverty and helplessness.

This duality in the arena of education is not acceptable. Due to this policy the feeling of two classes of people, the have-gots & the have-nots, is intensifying day by day and poor people are beginning to think that their rights are being usurped. Moreover these poor people also feel that their children are deliberately kept illiterate so that they do not become a source of threat to the monopoly of the privileged classes.

What are the reasons behind the success and popularity of English medium institutions? Some possible reasons are listed below.

1. The 'Spell' of English medium: How often we speak of the merits of our mother tongue, yet the English language still flows in our veins. English rule has disappeared, but the yoke of mental slavery is left behind in our head.

The language of the colonist is still acknowledged as

education depends on many variables which follow, in brief, with their status in Bangladesh.

Student-teacher Ratio: Teacher performance is affected in a large class size. In this situation, proper attention to individual students is not possible. Thus student-teacher ratio ultimately affects the performance of students' achievement and quality of education. In Bangladesh, in government primary schools, the teacher-pupil ratio was 1:66 in September 1992, and the teacher-pupil ratio for 1995 and the year 2000 is projected to be 1:69 and 1:82 respectively (The National Plan of

Curriculum. According to NPA (National Plan of Action) for EFA 1993, the official instructional time at grades I & II is only 222 days or 444 hours (two hours a day only) in a year. Yet the average international standard is 880 hours. So it can be seen that in Bangladesh instructional time (Gr I & II) is only 50 percent of the international standard. The instructional time for grades III to V is 734 hours (3.30 hours per day only). This figure is 146 hours less than the recognised international standard of 880 hours. NPA for EFA 1993 reported after close investigation that, 'The fact is, this curriculum

its needs and demands. The needs of the society continue to change through a dynamic process, hence the quality of education as well as curricula, text books, teaching and learning aids etc have to change correspondingly to serve those needs objectively. As of now, in Bangladesh, there are general observations to the effect that the curriculum e.g. content of text books and teaching is still overly theoretical and also overloaded. NPA for EFA 1993 reported after close investigation that, 'The fact is, this curriculum

suit to the needs of the students and society.

**Teacher Qualification**

Effective teaching is determined by the individual teacher's knowledge of the subject matter and mastery of pedagogical skills. The academic and professional training of teachers has a direct and positive impact on the achievement of students. Higher academic qualification and better teacher training therefore are required to maintain quality of education. In Bangladesh, the teaching profession doesn't attract the better students. S Rahman of the Institute of Education & Research reported that, 'Most teachers have only passed SSC/HSC examination in the third division. The poor quality of teacher and academic competence results in ineffective teaching. Pedagogical training fails with teachers of poor academic background. Such teachers can not teach children with confidence.'

These findings are confirmed in another study which argued that a minimum 14 years schooling should be the entry qualification for teachers.

**Instruction Materials**

The quality of learning of students, in any system of instruction greatly depends on the quality, suitability and availability of instructional materials used i.e. text books, teachers' guides, teaching aids, laboratory manuals, training manuals, source books, reference books, equipment etc. At present, in Bangladesh, the low allocation of expenditure (Table-3) for instruction materials is reflected in the unavailability or general inadequacy of instruction materials. Although, text books are supplied

free of cost to the students, they are hardly available and in short supply. There is also a general inadequacy of other basic instructional materials such as blackboards, exercise books, pencils, wall charts, maps, models, pictorial aids etc (NPA for EFA 1993), which are either in insufficient supply or non-existent.

**Quality Improvement Strategy in Bangladesh**

Improving the quality of education is the burning question in developing countries. But the task is difficult to achieve due to resource constraints. As in Bangladesh, it is hardly possible to increase the number of teachers, classrooms, textbooks and instruc-

tional materials, as much as we would wish to. Hence education planners and policy makers have to consider the strategy of not only increasing the number of teachers, text books, etc, but also ensuring their effectiveness. This implies that recruiting more teachers would be a fallacy without ensuring effective deployment and productivity of the present body. At the same time, more text books and instructional materials do nothing if effective teaching in the classroom can not be ensured.

Thus, considering the present situation it may be concluded that increasing the number of teachers, contact hours, professional qualifications, as well as focusing special attention on actual teaching — learning in the classroom — through utilising teacher-pupil contact hours more effectively and ensuring effective teaching and deployment of the present teacher force, are required for the development and advancement of primary education in Bangladesh.

The writer is a Student Researcher, IER at Dhaka University.

**Recognition**

Dr Abdul Khaleque, Professor of Psychology, University of Dhaka, has been offered membership of the New York Academy of Sciences in recognition of his contribution for the advancement of psychology as a science.

Professor Abdul Khaleque is currently the President of Bangladesh Psychological Association, General Secretary of the South Asian Association of Psychology and a member of the International Association of Applied Psychology. He has so far published over 50 research articles in a number of national and international journals of psychology. He has contributed 15 chapters in research books, edited by the world renowned Psychologists, published from Europe and America. He has also authored and co-authored 7 books, published in Bangladesh. He has presented papers in well over 30 international conferences and seminars. Professor A Khaleque has held visiting faculty positions at the University of Delhi, India, and University of Otago, New Zealand.

**Libraries Essential for Effective Education**

by Muhammed Abdur Rasul

It is on everybody's tongue, now-a-days, that the quality of education in Bangladesh has deteriorated. Day by day the condition is further worsening.

Our experts are trying to discover some solutions to improve the quality of education. But the golden egg of quality education is still out of our reach. Here anyone can pose the question — why is this so? It may be that there are some loop holes in the thinking and planning of our experts.

I had an opportunity to have a cursory glance over an interesting report, entitled "Post-Primary Education Sector Strategy Review" (14 May, 1994), which has been prepared by a group of local and foreign consultants who have worked at the instance of the Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. In the above interim report the consultants have tried to focus on some key issues relevant to qualitative expansion of the education sector, especially the post-primary sub-sector.

The consultants have emphasised the need for, better textbooks, audiovisual materials, co-curricular activities and teachers' training, etc. But it appears that they have missed one most significant element that really helps the development of the class room but in the library. We must also try to understand that for quality education and better learning, freedom is essential. The classroom cannot provide for "learner's freedom". It is the library where the learner enjoys freedom to learn. There, they are free to browse, explore and choose to learn.



They can match subjects and books according to their interest, capacity and intellect. Here lies the superiority of the library method of teaching to the classroom method of teaching.

It is not only astonishing but also an unfortunate event that our well paid consultants have failed to see the most significant element for the development of quality education in the country. Previously, in the National Curriculum Report (Vol. I, 1976), the word "library" was mentioned only once, and that too in a casual manner. And now we find that in this interim report the consultants have also used the word "library" only once, and that too, in a casual manner.

Good teachers and good textbooks are certainly needed for better teaching in the class rooms. But can these guarantee quality education? Our planners, decision makers, and report writers always place emphasis on text-books, teachers' training, and like things. But one unfortunate fact is that they always fail to emphasise one important thing — the thing which is said to be the "heart" of an academic institution. It is the library. No quality education can be achieved without any proper development of academic libraries. The library is the most important factor which can foster and ensure quality education.

In a conference in America (1992) it was said: "It is absolutely necessary from the earliest to the latest grades that there should be parallel reading." And about a quarter century later in 1995, one professor of Columbia University advised the teachers "lead their students beyond the contents of their text-books." These two ideas — "parallel reading" and "beyond text-books" are very much significant for the development of quality education. The American people accepted the advice of the experts. And so now we find that the Americans are leading the world, and their children are walking on the moon, and looking far beyond. Now, if we are to arrange for "parallel reading" and want to lead our students beyond the contents of their text-books, our schools and colleges must primarily be equipped with good libraries. Our educational activities should be library based and research oriented. At present we find our educational system is bound by the so-called text-books and class room teaching. But despite our sincere wishes the results of this have been a disastrous one — the quality of education has deteriorated to a shameful level, and the sense of value has come to the point of non-existence; and the teacher-student relationship has all but disappeared. All these are facts. To get rid of this sort of hellish condition, we need to understand the limitations of text-books, class rooms, and the lecture method

**Dual Policy in the Arena of Education and its Impact**

by Naoshad Rahman



superior. The highest jobs are given to English speaking people. Business opportunities in industries of commerce are offered to English speaking people.

3. Future success ensured: In English schools a child begins to speak English from nursery class, and achieves a fair command over it before reaching class IV. All the subjects are taught in English and grammar, etc is taught till class VII. When they enter into public school, they surpass the Bengali-medium school child whose knowledge of English is meagre. The foundation of a background in English, how-

ever is important for success in higher education & beyond.

After examining the condition of English-medium schools, we can just glimpse the pitiable condition of the Bengali-medium school.

1. The low spirit and profile of teacher: The school-teaching profession is not considered a respectable profession in our country. Educated people take up this profession when they face failure in other professions. For this reason the majority of our teachers do not take an interest at all

in their profession. They take up this profession only under compulsion.

Most of the teachers posted in rural areas are locally educated. Their activities mainly centre around the cultivation of land and their own problems. They come to school just to kill time. Their educational qualifications and ability are inadequate and superficial. The approach of these teachers is out-worn and out-dated. They do not know how to exploit the latent qualities of students & lack effective training.

2. The dilapidated condition of the buildings and lack of other facilities: The buildings of village schools except for a few exceptions give a picture of distress and hopelessness. If the school consists of 20 classes there may be only eight rooms. The remaining students (12 classes) pass their days under the open sky, regardless of the weather. They have no place to hide themselves in scorching heat or biting cold.

3. Lack of proper training: The majority of the village students come from illiterate and poor families. Their parents admit them into the village school in the hope of proper training and a sound education. But the irony of fate is that in such institutions they get neither proper training nor good education. Consequently their natural ability & potential is not actualised. In this way many good brains are being drained. Many promising students of the poorer classes get admitted into the police or army before reaching class VIII.

4. Public schools and class difference: In our public schools generally class VII students are admitted. The pupil has to undergo written examinations after which interviews are held. But the present situation is not so easy for these poor village students. They have to compete with city students who mostly come from the rich classes. They look & speak well. Their extra curricular activities are varied. They are able in games and sports. On the other hand, village students suffer from an inferiority complex. Defective education adds to their 'backwardness'. Though their mental faculties may be higher than many of the English-medium students, due to lack of opportunity they do not flourish, and they fail in the examinations.

Reforms are needed in the present state of affairs. The following steps must be taken

to curb the situation.

1. Abolition of missionary institutions: The present number of missionary schools must be abolished in Bangladesh, simply because these institutions do not run in accordance with our national culture and heritage. 2. Abolition of English from primary classes: Education in English should be abolished from nursery and KG I. English should be taught as a compulsory subject to children from class VI. It will be beneficial both for class students and society at large. A child can understand at the primary level in the vernacular, a freshness and perfection will be created in his or her thoughts and ideas.

The energies and money which are devoted to learning English will be utilised for other useful purposes. Society will be benefited in such a way that the present state of English-medium as a status symbol will be curtailed.

3. Elimination of privileged institutions: It is incumbent on educational policy that it should provide equal opportunity. Due to the present system of education, only one section of people is benefited, and the majority of the population is being deprived of such privileges. Such institutions should be closed down, where only the rich and elite of the society can be educated. Those institutions deserve our attention whose basic facilities and amenities are lacking.

4. Training facilities and incentive to our teachers. The majority of our teachers are indifferent to the dignity of their profession. It is imperative to give them a right place in society. Monthly salaries should be increased besides refresher courses being available for moral, mental and practical training. Those teachers who cannot meet the demands of our national, cultural and educational values should be sacked.

5. Special attention to village schools: Special attention has to be paid for ameliorating the moribund condition of such schools. In this connection a great deal of money is required for building, furniture and fixtures, teaching materials, facilities etc.

Conclusion: After examining critically the condition of our education system, the government must take effective measures to improve it, lest it take a serious turn by widening the gap even further between the rich and poor.

The writer is an ex-Library Specialist.