

## Primary Education:

## A One Hour Class Can Improve Quality

by Zakeria Shirazi

EDUCATION for All is the declared policy of the state, and has become a widely popular slogan. Universal primary education and eradication of illiteracy are the two goals of the government's Perspective Plan, 1980-2000. But what is the present status of primary education? With sustained effort it has been possible to raise the rate of enrolment to about 70 per cent, but the gain becomes insubstantial when it is realised that 65 per cent of the students drop out before completing the five-year course.

The reasons are obvious. Poverty mainly. Then there is the lack of awareness. Children are required to work with parents in the field, or to perform household chores in the case of girls. An apathy towards school also arises due to lack of the right kind of school atmosphere, devoted teachers, essential educational materials and teaching aides. In many cases distance of the school from home also becomes a factor in dropout. All these causes are rooted in the social-economic condition of the country and defy any easy short-term solution.

Obviously the question of drop-out is closely related with the quality of education, and if the teaching done in school is able to capture the interest of a pupil, he will be more inclined to complete his/her education despite all economic adversities. By quality of education is not meant the toughness of syllabus; quality consists in the fact that underprivileged students are not left out and are able to successfully complete their five years of primary education, not as a burdensome exercise

but with interest and zeal. This kind of education has to be entirely school-based and must dispense with "homework", since the underprivileged children in uncongenial domestic surroundings are at a serious disadvantage when it comes to completing lessons at home. The parents of these children are not able to help, and a private tutor is beyond their means. If homework becomes a part of primary education, underprivileged children are bound to fall behind. Unable to catch up with the lesson in class, s/he will remain inattentive, go to school irregularly and eventually will stop going to school altogether. A survey undertaken a few years ago revealed that the parents of 74 per cent of primary school-going children are uneducated, 8 per cent are too insufficiently educated to help with homework and 4 per cent are too busy.

Thus, in order to universalise primary education, and to prevent dropout of poverty-stricken children, lessons must be completed in the classroom instead of leaving them to be learnt at home. But how? In the primary schools of the country, the teacher-student ratio is on average 1:61 (much worse in poor, rural schools). How to complete the lesson within the classroom?

Estimates show that the total time allotted for primary education in Bangladesh is the lowest in the world. In China a student spends 1265 hours a year in primary school, in Indonesia 1100 hours, in the Philippines 750 hours. But a Bangladeshi student spends no more than 440 hours a year in primary school. The time allotted for primary schooling must



undoubtedly be extended, but the immediate objective must be to maximise utility of the allotted 440 hours. In this context, a voluntary research organisation, Association for School-Based Education (ASBE), has found in different surveys that a mere change in the period-length, keeping the total school time unchanged, has shown good results. This was persuasively stated by Ibrahim Sobhan, a researcher and author of the one-hour period system. In the first 35-minute period of the day, the teacher entering the classroom, taking his seat, exchanging initial talks and roll call, takes up most of the time, leaving very little time for actual teaching before the bell is rung. "Learn the rest of the lesson at home", orders the teacher and leaves. Classroom quizzes and individual evaluation of students permanently runs into the arrears of an unfulfilled task. A study by the Association for School-Based Education, which has been included in the World Bank's general education project studies, reveals that in the 35 minute first period, only 10 minutes is devoted to actual teaching.

It is quite possible to complete all lessons within the classroom, and raise the quality of education simply by replacing the 30/35 minute period by a one hour period, keeping the overall school time unchanged. A study has shown that in a one-hour period 20 minutes is available for teaching a new lesson, 15 minutes is available for the student to learn the new lesson and ten minutes is again left for evaluation. A few schools which adopted this new routine have been able to

reduce their rate of dropout dramatically.

Recently, a report by an expert committee at the Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University, has revealed that teachers are overwhelmingly in favour of the one-hour period, students prefer it, and members of managing committees of the schools also support it. The survey has shown that 94 per cent of the managing committees favour continuing the new routine in their schools, and 100 per cent of them believed that after the prescribed one hour period-length was adopted in certain schools, the interest of the local people about primary education increased.

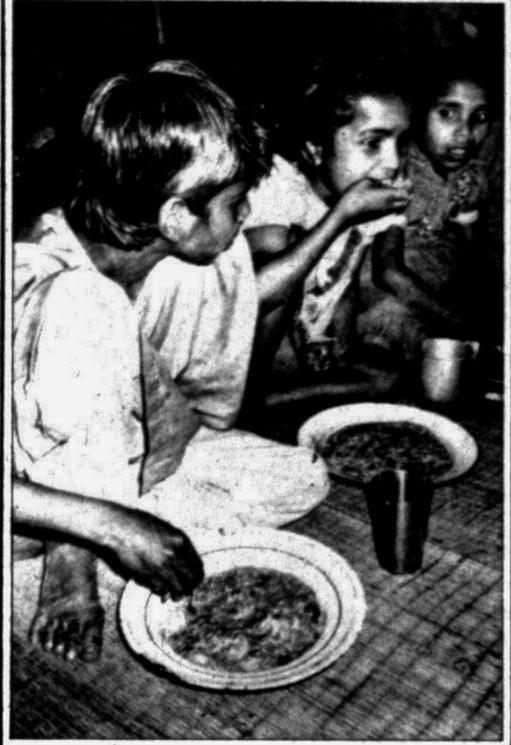
Recently, with the cooperation of the ASBE and financial support from UNESCO, the new routine of a one-hour period has been adopted in the primary schools of Kushtia Sadar thana. Earlier, the routine was adopted in 30 project schools in four unions of Kushtia from 1993 to 1994, with the result that the rate of dropout in these schools fell sharply compared to a control group of 30 non-project schools.

Significantly, adoption of the new routine costs nothing and requires no major restructuring. Only a small change has made possible a significant improvement in quality. In different surveys, conducted in a scientific manner, the superiority of the new routine called School-Based Education has been conclusively demonstrated. What, then, stands in the way of its adoption on a national basis? Why the hesitancy?

— Development Features

## Eating Can Also Be An Education!

Over 22,000 children in over 500 non-formal primary schools throughout northern Bangladesh have been receiving practical nutrition education through cooking demonstrations organised by RDRS (Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service) in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture Extension's Crop Diversification Project. The children learn in an easy way about new and nutritious foods cheaply available to try to influence their and their families' future diets for the better.



THE status of any language depends on the culture of knowledge developed by the people speaking that language. Again language is the medium through which man's thoughts and creations are not only expressed to his contemporary fellow beings but also preserved and transmitted through ages overcoming the barrier of time and space. Here, the present discussion will emphasize the status of English in Bangladesh. English has been with us for the last two hundred years and will doubtless be with us in the future.

## International Status of English

Goethe said, "those who do not know a foreign language do not know their mother tongue." English is an international language and is spoken in almost all the countries of the world. It is the means of international communication. It is therefore the only language which can maintain a global link and hence it has a global importance. Bangladesh, being a newly born underdeveloped country, has to maintain an international relationship for her own development and as Bengali, our mother tongue, is not internationally spoken, English must be retained and taught in our country in the interests of the citizens. This foreign language came to our country with the coming of the English in the 17th century. It had set such a firm footing in our country and had attained such a predominance during the British and Pakistani Colonial rules that its influence and predominance have not yet waned.

At present the world has over 3,000 languages. But English is the fastest growing and most influential language. At the beginning of the 19th century, English was the native language of barely 15 million people, now it is spoken by over 320 million. More than half of the world's scientific and technical journals and newspapers are printed in English alone. Three fourths of the world's mail are written in English. It has a vocabulary of 500,000 words, more than three times its nearest competitors. Again English is the mother tongue of 200,000,000 people of many races and nations. English is the instrument of world exchange, and European and Non-European peoples all over the world take English as the best source of information. The total number of people who speak English, or desire to speak and read it, is vast. So this is how English gets its international status as a language.

## Government Policy on English and its Effect

The government of Bangladesh has declared Bengali as the state and official language, and this has been recorded in the constitution of Bangladesh.

In view of the present policy of the Government regarding English, many of our younger generation have been ignoring English since the independence of the country in 1971. During this period, the new generation of Bangladesh

## The Status of English in Bangladesh

by Md Abul Hasan

completed their academic careers without learning much of English. Now, many of this generation, who were fortunate enough to get into Government jobs, cannot understand the contents of reference books, magazines and journals written in English. Thus their knowledge is very limited though they have obtained the highest university degrees. In pursuing our prescribed education policy, the majority of our students learn only Bangla terminology. When these students go to study Medicine or Engineering, or any other subject of higher science, they need to follow books in English which become very difficult for them to understand.

**English** *ing'lish*, *adj.* belonging to England or its inhabitants: of or relating to English. — *n.* the English people (as *pl.*): a Germanic language spoken in the British Isles, U.S.A., most parts of the British Commonwealth, etc.: 14-point type: *side* (U.S.; *billiards*). — *v.t.* to translate into English (*arch.* or *rare*): to make English: to impart a side to (U.S.; *billiards*). — *n.* Eng'lander an Englishman. — *adj.* Eng'lished like the English of England in speech or ways: Southron in speech, esp. affectedly so (*Scot.*). — *ns.* Eng'lisher a translator into English: an Englishman (*Scot.*). — **Englishism** (U.S. *rare*) an expression or idiom originating in or found only in the English of England or Britain: a custom or practice peculiar to England: great admiration or enthusiasm for England and its customs, etc.: Eng'lishman a native or naturalised inhabitant of England: — *sem.* Eng'lishwoman; Eng'lishry the fact of being an Englishman: in Ireland, the population of English descent. — **Basic English** see *base*; **Early English** often means Early Middle English: (*archit.*) see *early*; **English breakfast** a cooked breakfast, usu. consisting of several dishes or courses (*cf.* *continental breakfast*); **English disease** the British disease; **English flute** the recorder; **English horn** the cor anglais; **English sickness** same as *English disease*; **English sweat** (*hist.*) the sweating sickness (see *sweat*). — **in plain English** in clear, simple language; **little Eng'lander** an opponent of British imperialism and empire-building; **Middle English** from about 1100 or 1150 A.D. till about 1500; **Modern English** from about 1500 onwards; **Old English** a kind of type — black-letter: the English language down to about 1100 or 1150 A.D.

## English at Different Levels in Bangladesh

## English among the illiterate

Contact with the British over long period has brought even the illiterate people close to the English language, from the time of the East India Company. A good number of this type of people use English words, correctly, or incorrectly although they cannot read or write. It happens because of the functional utility of English in our country.

## English among the villagers

In the village the female population, and mostly the younger ones, are the users of common English words. Here it is seen that the females who have undergone family plan-

ning training or some other extension training by the foreign agencies use 25 per cent of common English words. Older women do not use many English words, except for those in common Bangla usage, cup, time, table, lamp, chair etc. Thus even the villagers feel that learning English is necessary for the betterment of their life.

## English among the city people

The tendency to learn English is greater in the job-oriented population of the cities. In fact, in the cities, all speak Bengali no doubt, but the percentage of English words is substantial and the

up. Here the access is available only to the wards of the elite in society. There is a popular belief that the kindergarten and English medium schools are capable of giving a good grounding in English and prepare the students for a successful career at home and abroad. They have immense snob appeal and are regarded as the road to status and position.

In primary schools, especially in the village, students learn little English. They learn to write the letters of the alphabet and recognise simple words in isolation. Here instead of basic language skills, students only pick up memorising habits. If, however, fruitful use of school years were made, there would be no need to make English compulsory in Colleges and Universities.

In Government Colleges, the results of the students show that they are, on average, about four years below the expected level of proficiency in English. They have not mastered the material beyond class VII, and could not be expected to study the English Texts which are used at University level. The standards of English in Non-Government colleges are also a long way below their supposed levels of proficiency in English. In contrast, in Cadet colleges the standard of English is quite good because here the good students are enrolled and a homely atmosphere for learning English is made available from the very beginning of their admission.

The result of banishing compulsory English from Degree classes and discouragement of taking English as a medium of instruction, English at the University level has greatly deteriorated. Here, the students face problems due to the lack of necessary books written in Bangla. They end up collecting prepared answers in Bangla from their seniors, and pass the examination without comprehending the subject matter properly and sometimes even without seeing the face of a text book. But, University graduates who have a good command of written and spoken English occupy better and superior positions in Government and Non-government jobs, and also enjoy higher social status.

## Translation

The translation from English and vice versa has not gained much momentum, greatly due to the linguistic barriers that exist. In translating and writing Bangla medium books on the latest developments in various disciplines, we need scholars adept in both languages.

## Teaching of English in Bangladesh

The teaching of English in Bangladesh is highly ineffective because students in an English

class expect everything to be explained in Bangla. But the system of learning a language should be otherwise.

In Bangladesh, English is taught as a second language. But the pity is that most students take it as a subject only, and not as a language. The result is loss of fascination for learning a foreign language. It is also disappointing that the teachers of English are not well-trained in Bangladesh. So many of the English teachers remain unaware of the latest developments of the English language. In spite of our association with English from the British period, the average level of performance in the language is alarmingly low. Our achievement in English, especially in oral communication, is very poor compared to many Asian and African countries whose entry into the English language has been much more recent than ours.

In Bangladesh more than sixty per cent of those who teach English at the secondary level have no professional knowledge and competence. English is offered at the Primary Training Institutes of teachers, but very few trainees take it seriously. As a result, more than 90 per cent of the primary teachers who have to teach English do so without any professional background.

In college and University teachers believe that since they teach literature and not language, they do not need any training. They remain complacent about what they teach without caring much about how they teach and why they teach. Whether we teach language or literature, we must teach language first. The medium through which the content or the subject matter is to be presented is of vital importance and of primary concern if we want any real learning to take place.

We must shake off all doubts about language and literature being regarded separate entities. In the present situation of Bangladesh language must come first, and it is the basis for and gateway to all higher education, including the study of literature. In world communication we need the language first, not the literature.

In conclusion, we admit that we must put our best efforts into the development of our mother tongue. But at the same time English should also be taught at schools, Colleges and Universities to supplement our knowledge in those technical matters that cannot at the present time be done in the vernacular. Our need for English should not blind us of our prime duty to our own language, but at the same time we must not nurture any resentment against English as being a foreign language. The status of English in Bangladesh should be higher than ever in order to maintain global links, as a means of international communication, and to enrich us a nation by providing information and knowledge that would otherwise be lost to us.

## Technology as a Learning Tool Explored by Educators

by Perla Aragon-Choudhury

SCHOOLTEACHERS in the Philippines used to be reverently called by the Spanish titles "Maestro" "Maestra".

"Before the war the teacher was glorified," says Mr Minda Sutaria, director of the Manila-based Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (SEAMEO-INNOTECH).

She spoke to Dephnews after chairing one of the sessions of a conference held recently in Manila by the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP).

During the American Occupation of the Philippines, Grade 7 graduates were sufficiently qualified to teach pupils only slightly younger than themselves. Dr Sutaria herself, then age 16, started her teaching career just when that era was ending.

Teaching then gave you a stable post, prestige, a comfortable life and a good amount of purchasing power. But things changed after the war.

The former undersecretary of education and professor of the University of the Philippines' College of Education explains that honour graduates no longer aim for further expertise by going into teacher training institutions. Their time is taken up augmenting dwindling income with buy-and-sell sidelines. Worse, many have abandoned the profession altogether to work abroad as better paid nannies or house-help.

Dr Sutaria can only shake her head over how teachers are overworked and underpaid despite the 1987 Philippine Constitution's guarantee that education will get the highest priority.

Yet selflessness continues to shine through. There are still the likes of Professor Norma Sinubalan, biology graduate and social science teacher, who leads colleagues in a state-owned agricultural college in an outreach programme to remote villages.

In a town in northern Philippines, nun Angela Barrios has learned to live with the fear of being unable to meet the high interest rates of banks, as long as she can continue to modernize the St Paul University Graduate School so it could turn out competent professors and academics in nursing, the physical sciences and business.

The two school officials had been helped in their task by audio-video, computer and telecommunications technologies in varying degrees. They came to the IAUP conference to learn further about school-based uses of electronic communications technology.

Close to 200 participants came from the Philippines,

Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, South Korea, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Russia, the United States and Ghana.

All wanted to know how to respond to the challenge of delivering education effectively and to as many people as possible through technological advances.

The Pacific Basin is a prime concern of the IAUP, said association president Dr Kanichi Miyaji in welcoming the university presidents, rectors and heads of higher education institutions and organizations.

Believing that the area is vital to the future of humankind, the IAUP created in 1991 a Commission for Human Resource Development for the Pacific Basin Countries.

"The resources develop-

**A report on the challenge of delivering education effectively and to as many people as possible through technological advances**

ment challenge of the impending 21st century is particularly relevant to the Basin's educational institutions called upon to prepare the youth and human resources of the region to meet the challenges of the next century," the Philippines' Dr Helena Benitez told the conference.

Dr Benitez chairs the IAUP Southeast Asia Council and the Board of Trustees of the Philippine Women's University (PWU), conference host and the first university for women in Asia founded by Asians in 1919.

The value and worth of teachers was reiterated in one workshop by Shelly Weinstein, president and chief executive officer of Washington DC's National Education Telecommunications/Educational Satellite. "In the foreseeable future, traditional forms of pedagogy will continue to exist alongside new technologies. The teacher will remain important," she said.

Dr Sutaria, who chaired the session, called for community-based programmes that develop a teacher-friendly atmosphere and for guidance and vocations counsellors to present to graduating high school students a good image of teachers.

This prompted Dr Eddie Kuo, sociologist and founding dean of the School of Communication Studies of Nanyang Technological University, to point out: "Our schools in Sin-

gapore play videotapes showing model teachers — often-times male ones too".

"We should explore the development of software and the use of development education technologies for making schools centres of excellence," urged Dr Florangel Rosario-Brad, president and dean of Manila's Asian Institute of Journalism and president of the Foundation for Continuing Education.

She added: "Funding, technical assistance and professional training may help overcome barriers to the effective use of technologies in education but let's also look for user-friendly technologies."

Jesuit priest Raul J Bonoan, president of a university in central Philippines, agreed that technologies can indeed make schools centres of excellence but cautioned against neglecting the lack of very basic facilities such as good roads.

"From Naga City, I can call anyone of you direct. But to contact the family of a sick student in the next town, I have to send a messenger," he said.

Brother Andrew Gonzalez, president of one of Manila's premier universities, singled out the problems of multiplicity of language, inadequate infrastructure for Internet or electronic mail, and unreliable power systems even in the Metro Manila area.

But these did not daunt the participants, 149 of them from the Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges. "Give us the tools and the training," many of them asked.

Keynote speaker President Fidel Ramos had ordered all state colleges and universities to coordinate with the Philippine Educational Telecommunications Consortium for such possibilities.

Among ongoing initiatives harnessing technology for learning is Channel 36, a partnership between PWU and ABS-CBN's Sky Cable for educational television. Starting this school year, a foundation headed by Senator Edgardo Angara will air programmes on science education for teachers over the government's Channel 4.

A science education programme for grade school children which teachers may also watch is *Sine skwela* (school on screen). The show is rating well on commercial TV despite its instructional thrust and its mid-morning time slot, reported Regina Lopez-Roy, president of ABS-CBN Foundation, Inc and a conference panelist.

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