

Compulsory Primary Education Programme : Problems And Issues

Syed Naquib Muslim

E DUCATION or at least literacy has been recognised as one of the basic indicators of development. Education is a fundamental human right; and it is therefore the constitutional obligation of a welfare state to provide basic functional education to all citizens irrespective of caste, creed and colour. The rate of literacy in Bangladesh ranges from 26 to 30 per cent whereas the rate of literacy of the SAARC countries like Sri Lanka and Maldives ranges between 88 to 90 per cent.

Perceiving the importance of literacy, the present government has introduced massive compulsory primary education programme (CPEP) as one of the strategies to alleviate increasing poverty and raise the level of the development sensitivity of the multitude of population. The Jatiya Sangsad enacted a law namely the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act No. 27, 1990. A total of about 29 lac primary age group population (6 to 10 years of age) are being covered through 9295 primary schools and 2,644 ebte dayee madrasahs under this programme.

It is of course an uphill task for the government to implement the goals of an ambitious programme like CPEP when it is facing unbridled population growth and continuous resource deficits. The CPEP has begun operating in 68 thanas of 64 districts since January, 1992 and time is not ripe to make a summative evaluation of the on-going programme as only two years have elapsed in the mean time.

Recently, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) conducted a survey on a multistage random sampling basis to identify the constraints on the implementation of the CPEP in various parts of the country where it is operating. Another objective was to help the government in formulating evolving pragmatic strategies so that the CPEP goals are fully implemented. The study covered 241 villages of 44 thanas under 43 districts of Bangladesh and 37,612

households have been surveyed. The newly recruited civil servants who participated in the 9th and 10th Foundation Training Courses were assigned to act as the data collectors and data analysts. The study sought to address three basic questions. These are

- ★ Are the goals of CPEP fully implementable?
- ★ What are the factors or forces that are hindering the implementation process?
- ★ What measures may be adopted to counteract them?

The study revealed certain interesting features which are discussed below.

Findings

The majority of the members belonging to the households surveyed have been found illiterate, the percentage being 39.45%. Literacy rate in terms of writing skills is 42.56% which is much higher than the national average which is claimed as 26%. About 53% of the household members have been found landless and 22% belong to the marginal farmers' group. About 52% of the heads of the households have monthly income less than Tk. 1500. The result is that they can afford to send their wards to schools as their children are a ready source of cost free labour for them.

Of the primary age population, 79.50% have been enrolled in the primary level institutions and the rest have not been enrolled. The interviewee-guardians have claimed that 92% of the enrolled children regularly attend classes. The highest rate of attendance is in Chittagong division and the lowest is in Rajshahi. Irregularity of attendance occurs during seed-sowing and harvesting seasons.

The above facts indicate that non-enrolment and non-attendance of the children in the schools are two major problems CPEP is facing. Seven hundred and seventeen guardians have admitted that poverty is the main

reason for which they cannot afford to get their children educated despite their having intention. There are many children who are indispensable to their parents for supplementing labour and therefore they are non-separable for schools. As many as 196 interviewees have opined that undeveloped communication is another demotivating factor for which child do not like to get enrolled or even if they are enrolled they do not feel attending schools. Four hundred and twenty respondents think that they do not see any future if their children get educated and therefore they do not feel motivated to send them to schools.

The study further reveals that drop-out is a major problem in the primary education sub-sector. In the study 2,184 drop-out cases have been identified; in the surveyed areas drop-out rate is higher in case of boys (51%) than of girls (49%). Khulna has the highest drop-out rate while Barisal has the lowest.

The World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP and other donor agencies are emphasising education of mothers for the education of their children. Studies carried by these agencies in the developing countries testify that there is a linkage between the guardians' educational level and regular attendance of their children in the schools. The present study validates that fact that among the graduate guardians the rate of non-attendance of children is 0.83% and among the guardians having post-graduate degrees, the percentage of non-attendance is zero. It also proves that the children of the literate or educated mothers are more regular in attending schools than those of illiterate fathers. This finding confirms the validity of the proposition that mothers should receive priority in education. Thus the question of adult literacy arises here.

Effectiveness of teaching and retention of lessons by the children

depends considerably on the teaching methods/style practised by the teachers. The study reveals that the teaching strategy practised by the non-government school teachers are more effective than that of the government school teachers. Majority of the respondents are appreciative of the innovative teaching techniques that are in practice in the non-government primary schools especially those sponsored by BRAC. Here teachers are more attentive, creative, punctual, affectionate and informal. Students feel motivated to spend their time in the classrooms. The state of the extra-curricular activities in both the government and non-government schools is less than satisfactory whereas it is more satisfactory in the schools following kindergarten approach. One of the remarkable features of the teachers of ebte dayee madrasah is that they themselves maintain punctuality and enforce it on their students.

The Act on primary education clearly spells out the role to be played by different committees towards implementation of the programme. The study shows that these committees are not active or mobile; only 0.71% of the guardians were motivated by the ward committee. Meetings for problem identification and solution are not held regularly; it is stated that one or two meetings were held throughout 1992 although at least 12 meetings are expected to be held each year.

Suggested Measures

The above scenario demands adoption of concrete and pragmatic steps if CPEP goals are to be achieved.

1. Poverty alleviation programmes undertaken by the government or non-government organizations need to be integrated. Landless people whose children drop out deserve special attention. It has to be appreciated that unless poverty of the rural and urban population is reduced, enrolment rate will not rise and drop-out rate will not decline.

(To be continued)