

Primary education in Bangladesh

Syed Zinat Ali

Education is traditionally regarded as a social obligation of late, it has come to be deemed as an essential pre-requisite in the process of the development. Countries which have made rapid economic and social progress are significantly those that have devoted a great deal of attention to education.

Education is an investment and a pre-condition to improve the conditions of backward sections.

Education is a must and right of a citizen. The constitution of Bangladesh stipulates for free and compulsory education to all children up to an age as may be determined by educational authorities for removal of illiteracy from the country. It urges uniform, mass-oriented universal system of education suited to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens.

All citizens, should be afforded opportunity for formal education, at least, an open door education policy upto the primary level. Education must be responsive to the needs of the nation and will prepare students for future productive employment. It should be geared up to turn out skilled personnel and not educated unemployment.

Emphasis on vocational and technical training should be laid down. Community Laboratories and workshop and improvement of school and college laboratories intensification and practical courses will go a long way to improve the quality of education.

The prevailing formal primary education system with 46 thousand primary schools alongwith 19,5000 teachers have the potentiality of imparting education to most of the children (6-10 years) and their right to a minimum formal education in the country. In 1990, the number of govt. and non-govt. primary schools was 37,616 and 9000 respectively. On the other hand, the number of govt. primary school was 39 thousand and non-govt. primary school was 29,694 in 1947. In 1948, the number of total school going students (both sex) was 59 lakh 79 thousand which in turn has now increased to 1 crore 44 lakh 97 thousand students in Bangladesh. The number of primary school was 290 and the total number of school going students (both sex) in primary school was 87 lakh 97 thousand 830 in 1970. In spite of 18% allocation in the first five year plan, 47% in the second five year plan and 46% in the third five year plan respectively for primary education, out of the total outlay for education sector, universal primary education programme has not performed and improved satisfactorily. All the previous plans and programmes indicate about non-formal education as an alternative delivery system for providing education and skill training to the vast multitude of illiterates who are outside the purview of formal education frame of the

country. But no such concerted efforts has yet been made to plan and implement a comprehensive programme on non-formal education. There is a project which has some resemblances of non-formal education, is the center based adult literacy activities conducted through Mass Education project that was launched in 1980, discontinued in 1982 and revived again in 1987.

Education is the backbone as well as foundation of a nation. If a nation is to be improved and self-dependent through mass oriented education we must emphasize on implementation of the universal and compulsory primary education. Primary education is the foundation of education system in any country. As much as the foundation of any country is so strong, that country will be able to build up so much enlightened citizen in future. If primary education is to be made universal and compulsory, a few practical measures must be taken such as:

(a) the number of primary education school will be increased in accordance with the ratio of population in the country.

(b) the non-govt. primary schools which are still now neglected will have to be upgraded

and the pay-scale and other allowances of the teachers of these schools are to be finalised very soon for gearing up the activities

of the school well (c) a necessary

steps have to be taken in this context so that the guardians can send their children to school. (d)

If required, the local govt. administration will have to be empowered to enforce moral and social obligation on the guardians for implementation of this principle.

A social movement and a comprehensive publicity should be launched to motivate the local leaderships in the remote corner of the village so that they can create real consciousness on the universal education among the common people. The above mentioned steps may be taken in a well-planned way so that the education can be ensured by the year 2000. The main reason and factor for non-attainment of primary education is the inequitable nature of formal system and its inefficiency and inability to reach

and offer the vast majority of the people. Out of an estimated 1.51 crore primary age group children (6-10 years) about 1.14 crore are enrolled in 1990 leaving another 37 lakhs outside the purview of formal schooling. While the estimated gross enrolment rate is

about 74 percent and almost 65 percent of them drops out, the large organised system produced an output of mere around 25 percent of the enrolled children who complete the 5 years cycle. Wastage is alarming. Out of an estimated 4.80 crore adolescents, youth and adult, representing the most productive age-group of population about 3.40 crore are illiterates.

The percentage of illiteracy increased from 78.90 pc. to 82.39 percent during 1951-61 and enrolment in primary schools rose from 26 lakhs to 60 lakhs between 1947 and 1973. About 58

percent of the present primary age-group population are enrolled in schools. The number of primary schools declined from 29,633 in 1947-48 to 26,665 in 1960-61. The number of primary schools was 30,446 in 1972-73.

Since the mid-fifties efforts had

been going on to reconstruct about 15,000 of the primary schools and to provide each of

them with 5 teachers. The financial provision for instructional materials, text books, qualified teachers and their training has been extremely inadequate all through.

The primary education was

much neglected in our present

Bangladesh due to wrong policy adopted by the then govt. of

Pakistan in comparison with that of west Pakistan. Due to wrong

policy of the then govt. of

Pakistan the basic principle of

the education was not matched

with the system prevalent in

Bangladesh. The govt. of

Bangladesh has taken up a broad

based plan to expand the primary

schools on the basis of population

and to cope with it.

According to historical review,

the past efforts indicate that be-

tween 1951-81 the literacy rate

for age groups 5% increased from

21% to 23.8% i.e. 2.8 during the

last 30 years. The adult literacy

rate was 29.2% in 1981 (census).

The estimated weighted average

adult literacy rate is around 31%

in 1990 the ratio between male

and female being 40% and 22%

respectively. If we go through the

history of other countries in the

world, we find that no single

country had universal primary ed-

ucation some 130 years ago. In

France they Law of 1888 abolished

fees in all primary schools and

the law of 1882 established com-

pulsory attendance. In England

the Elementary Education Act of

1870 laid the foundation upon

which elementary education was

voluntary primary schools at each

village of Bangladesh with the

financial assistance of UNICEF,

CARE, OXFAM, N.G.O.

Bureau, the Asia Foundation and

other organisations along with

the donation and contribution by

indigen out well-to-do persons

like the Path Kali Trust formed

during the regime of former govt.

(d) The village and local leader-

ship should be involved to look

after and manage these voluntary

primary schools at each vil-

lagers for gearing up formal and

non-formal primary education.

(e) A permanent fund for these

voluntary schools may be raised

for giving a monthly allowance

to the teachers and for maintain-

ing non-recurring expenditure of

these schools.

(f) Each student of these

schools should be given full uni-

form and tiffin charge without

any cost or from the fund of

school so that the boys and girls

can be encouraged to attend

school regularly.

(g) The village and the local

leadership should create a provi-

sion of cultural amusement at

each voluntary school for enhanc-

ing more encouragement of the

students (both sex) to attend the

school everyday for learning less-

(h) Adult education programme

may be implemented to literate

the adults in second shift of the

voluntary schools.

(i) We should follow the foot-

prints of a developed nation like

Japan in regards of rapid spread of

education and industrialisation at

all levels. We may cite an ex-

ample that after the second world

war, the very Japanese people

started their economic life from

"O" point and now they stand as

a super nation in all respects,

especially in industrialization as

well as education in the third

world. They have advanced their

lives rapidly in all respect be-

cause they are very honest and

sincere. Their leadership is so

honest and sincere that there is no

scope for a man to be dishonest

and insincere in their society. My

question is this how Japan could

become a super nation within a

short time if we analyse their

background history we can easily

find out the clue which is very

hardy and laborious and sim-

ple in their jobs which in turn

leads them to success. The Japanese

people have now crossed the im-

passable roads and bridges and

become the first bridge of the

Third World.

Bangladesh is blessed with

natural resources like gaseous oil

and stone and cheap manpower

not able to do our job like the

Japanese people for the prosperity

of our people. It is hoped that the

present government will be able

to resolve the problems con-

fronting us and help implement

programmes of compulsory and

universal primary education in

the country.

made compulsory throughout England and Wales and in 1891 fees were abolished in all but a few elementary schools. It took about 32 years to attain universal primary education in England about 45 years in Sweden. In the Indian sub-continent under the British rule a bill on compulsory primary Education was first introduced in the parliament in 1912, but lost. 78 years later, compulsory primary education Act 1990 was passed in the parliament of Bangladesh, which came into force from January 1, 1991.

A well informed circle is of opinion that it will be very difficult to enforce the law and ensure compulsory primary education by the year 2000. Out of the total population of 11.4 crore, about 49% are girls and women. It is encouraging that the proportion of enrolment of girls at the primary level increased from 36% in 1975 to 37% in 1980, 40% in 1985 and 44% in 1990. To attain the universal primary education and literacy within short times, the base development must be retained and expanded. The current enrolment rate of about 74% must be enhanced to about 90% by the year 2000. During the nineties primary education has

started widespread by making it universal and visibly relevant.

Retention and expansion of the

enrolled students will contribute

to the success of universal pri-

mary education and literacy.

Continued participation by the

parents, school management

committee and various commu-

nities involved in the vital process of