

Wastage at primary level-I

The relationship between education and socio-economic development is now an acknowledged fact: the rate of literacy is positively related to overall development process of a country. It is, therefore, not surprising that one of the stumbling blocks to any sustained economic growth in Bangladesh is the low rate of literacy which was 23.8 per cent for population 5 years and above according to the Population Census carried out in 1981.

To improve the situation Bangladesh Government have now been making determined efforts to increase the rate of literacy through greater participation of children (5-10 years of age) in primary education and trying to ensure their successful completion of primary cycle of education, Grades I-V.

However, some major problems tend to slow down the expansion of primary education in Bangladesh. The problems as identified in an evaluation

report are: (i) low enrolment; (ii) high drop-out and repetition rates; (iii) inadequate curriculum and weak teaching; (iv) unequal opportunity for the poor and the female students; and (v) Government's inability to finance a long term free primary education programme (Hakansson, 1986:4).

Among the five problems listed above, the educational wastage, i.e., drop-out and repetition, appears to be the most serious one which thwarts any

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attempt to realise the goal of universal primary education. It makes the system neither cost effective nor efficient.

Studies on educational wastage at primary level which are scanty and inadequate, give unreliable and widely different rates of drop-out: 70 per cent quoted in Country Studies series on Bangladesh published by UNESCO Regional Office, Bangkok (1984:31); 75 per cent quoted in a joint study undertaken by the Ministry of Edu-

cation and UNESCO-UNDP Primary Education Project BGD/62/048 (1986:18); 27 per cent in Grade I only as quoted in Mid-Term Evaluation Report of IDA assisted UPE Project (1982:17); 43 per cent in Grade I only as found in a study carried out by the Institute of Educational Research (IER) Dhaka University in 1974-75 (1980:62); and 5 per cent found in a study on the situation of children in Bangladesh carried out by the Foundation For Research on Educational Planning and Development (FREPD) (1981:5). In a summative evaluation of the UPE (IDA) project carried out in 1986, Hakansson found the drop-out rates for Grade I only at 13 per cent 12 per cent for 1982-83 and 1984 respectively (1986:36). This shows a lack of uniformity in data collection, problems of definition, measurement and sources, and unreliability of data analysis. The study by FREPD further shows gender and regional differences in the rate of drop-out. The distribution is skewed towards female and urban areas

showing a positive relationship between grade status and the rate of drop-out (FREPD, 1981:83).

The main causes of drop-out as stated in the FREPD report are: (a) economic, (b) lack of interest of the student, (c) want of time and (d) difficulties in sending children to school (FREPD, 1981:90). In addition, the following causes were particularly found responsible for drop-out of female students: no separate arrangement for boys and girls failure in school examination and high cost of reading and writing materials (FREPD, 1981:90).