



Administration and Management of Primary Education: Problems and the Way Out

Executive Summary

(Report of the diagnostic study on the subject was released on 27 July 2008)

Primary education has always been high on the priority of the Government of Bangladesh. Many initiatives have also been taken were taken under successive governments for the improvement of this sector, which have produced some remarkable successes. The enrollment of female students is now equal to that of male. The net enrollment has increased gradually reaching upto 87 percent in 2007 from 75 percent in 1996. The participation and passing rate in the primary scholarship examination has significantly increased.

However, despite all these achievements, the quality of primary education under some other vital consideration has not improved upto the expected level. A report published by the Campaign for Popular Education in 2001, showed that around 98 percent of primary students could not obtain the level of competence determined by the National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB). The drop out rate in primary education is also high (48%). A number of problems exist in the administration and management of primary education that are hindering improvement of education quality as well as the quality of service to the students.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has been working for improving primary education service over the last few years, working with school authorities and the administration for improving local level services. From the feedback and experiences of work at the school level TIB realised that while some limited degree of change is possible within the capacities and resources, since a number of issues are linked with the high policy making level, only local level initiatives are not sufficient to improve the primary education services.

In this context TIB has conducted this diagnostic research to identify the nature and extent of problems, irregularities and corruption existing in this sector. In this study both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. The secondary information has been collected from different published books, reports and documents. Primary data were collected through 59 in-depth key informant interviews, 29 focus group discussions and 17 case studies.

1. Nature of problems

1.1 Problems related to teaching

Shortage of teachers: According to national statistics, the average number of teachers per school is about four. However, many schools are run by only one or two teachers, while some teachers enjoy leaves and some of them spend time in the year-long Certificate in Education training at PTI. Because of the shortage of teachers, the teacher and student ratio in government schools is 1:59. In registered non-government schools it is 1:47 and in community schools it is 1:49.

Student drop-out: Considerable numbers of students are getting admission in NGO run schools and *madrastas* leaving primary schools, as the timing of NGO schools is more convenient for the poor villagers than government school. On the other hand, *madrasta* education is easier than general education. Enrolment in *ebtedayee* *madrasta* education increased by around 66.87 percent in 2005 compared with the year 1996. Another cause of student dropout is mismanagement and corruption in the scholarship for the ultra-poor, which is one of the key incentives for those student to attend school. But failure to ensure proper distribution of the scholarship discourages them to carry on, leading to dropping out.

Over-crowded Classrooms: The average number of students per classroom in the government schools is about 68 and 63 in the registered non-government primary schools. Most of the primary schools do not have adequate space in the classroom. Around 88 percent government and 91 percent registered non-government primary schools run double shift classes.

Lack of skilled teachers: Around 73 percent teachers of government primary schools and 70 percent teachers of registered non-government primary schools do not have subject-based training. Moreover, due to overall shortage of teachers, they have to teach more than one subject, even if they don't have the necessary skill and training.

Teachers residing a long distance from the school: Often teachers have to come to the schools covering a long distance from their residence. So they sometimes come to school early and also leave early.

Workload: Teachers have been found to be engaged in about 73 kinds of various academic and non-academic tasks. As a result they are over-burdened and do not have sufficient preparation for teaching.

Low allocation of fund: It has been estimated that Tk 6,850-10,600 are required annually for executing all sorts of school level activities properly. But the government provides only Tk 3,000-4,200 for all government primary schools, Tk 3,000 for non-government primary schools and Tk 360 for community schools for recurring expenditure. Because of the shortage of fund, important activities such as SMC meetings, guardians' meetings, mothers' gatherings and observation of national events are not regularly organized.

Inactive or non-existent SMCs, parent-teacher associations and welfare associations: With a few exceptions, maximum members of the School Management Committees (SMCs) are inactive. Similarly, the parent-teacher associations and welfare associations are equally inactive. Most schools do not have welfare associations at all.

Negative attitudes towards female teachers: Many of the SMC members think that female teachers do not come to school on time and they also leave the school early. They enjoy more leave than their counterparts. They are less eager to teach the students and waste time gossiping with their colleagues.

Low salary and benefits: The salary range of the teachers of government primary schools is Tk 4,900-5,780, registered schools is Tk 2,950, and community schools is Tk 1,200. This is very poor and inconsistent with rising cost of living. Therefore, teachers are often engaged in other jobs such as private tuition or farming, where possible. This affects their commitment to teaching.

Harassment at Upazila Education Office: Primary school teachers depend on the Upazila Education Office (UEO) for various administrative tasks. It has been observed that they become victims of harassment in the UEO, especially with regard to time-scale, efficiency bar cross,

certificate attestation, leave adjustment, pension, and loans from GP fund. Teachers are forced to pay bribe without which the simplest of tasks are kept pending.

Limited scope of promotion for the teachers: There are only two types of posts available for the teachers in government primary school – Assistant Teacher and Head Teacher. As a result, the scope of promotion from the post of assistant teacher is very limited. On the other hand, the head teachers who are directly recruited in this post have no scope of promotion.

Different educational qualification for male and female candidates: To become an Assistant Teacher, the minimum educational qualification for female candidates is SSC, while for males it is graduation. There being no difference between salaries depending on level of education, this is a source of dissatisfaction among teachers.

Absence of transport allowances for official tours: The Head Teacher has to go to the Upazila Education Office about 3 to 4 days in a month for several official purposes, but s/he is not paid any amount to cover costs of such travel.

Insufficient book carrying cost: Every school is paid roughly Tk 200 for carrying book from the Upazila Education Office every year, which is not sufficient for schools located at long distances.

1.2 Management problems

Lack of field level work experience: The officials in management positions often do not have field level work experiences. As a result they cannot often appreciate the problems prevailing in the field level.

Lack of initiatives for promotion of administrative officials: No initiative has been taken over the last decade for promotion of administrative officials. This in spite of prevailing vacancies which include 57 percent vacant positions of district primary education officer, 29 percent positions of assistant district primary education officer, 20 percent positions of upazila primary education officer and 13 percent positions of assistant upazila primary education officer.

Shortage of staff: The allocated positions in the administration of primary education are 9,092, of which 20.7 percent positions (1,880) are vacant, which is another reason for administrative inefficiency.

Engagement of the staff in other tasks: The administrative officials of primary education are often engaged in various other duties. For example they have to perform responsibilities of monitoring in different types of survey, relief activities, and OMS activities.

Inadequate allowance for Assistant Upazila Education Officer for school visit: The Upazila Primary Education Officer is the key person for monitoring and supervising primary education. Every Upazila Primary Education Officer is responsible for visiting 10 schools in a month. S/he is however entitled to a monthly transport allowance of Tk 200 only for this purpose, which is not sufficient for this purpose.

2. Irregularities and Corruption in the administration and management of primary education

Different sorts of corruption and irregularities exist in the administration and management of primary education. These can be described in two categories – (i) corruption and irregularities at school level, and (ii) corruption and irregularities at administration level.

2.1 Corruption and irregularities at school level

Negligence of duty by teachers: Negligence of duty and irregularity by teachers is a frequently observed behaviour. Many teachers do not come to school on time, nor do they attend classes regularly. Even when they are taking classes, they do not spend the full amount of allocated time in the classroom. They also often do not demonstrate educational materials while teaching the students. The obligatory practice of starting the school with the national anthem is not also observed in many schools.

Illegal collection of fees/subscriptions from the students: The Government has made primary education completely free of cost. There are no provisions to collect fees/subscriptions from the students except specific amount of examination fees determined by the government. However, it was found that admission fees, class promotion fees, sports fees, farewell fees and different day observation fees are taken from the students. In some schools teachers allegedly collect money from the students for distribution of books which is also supposed to free. on this purpose. Unauthorized payments also takes place in the name of examination fees collected at a rate higher than that determined by the government.

Irregularities in distributing stipend: Some irregularities were observed in distributing government stipend to the students. Often students who do not meet the criteria for the stipend, are paid due to pressures of influential persons and nepotism. On the other hand, some amounts of money are collected from the students receiving stipends in the name of refreshment and fuel cost of officials who come for distributing the stipend.

Irregularities in buying teaching-learning materials: Purchasing teaching-learning materials as per specification requires forming a committee consisting of the Head Teacher and the managing committee. The Upazila Education Office is not supposed to interfere in the process. However, a section of the Upazila Education Officers influence teachers to buy the materials from selected vendors. The study reveals that around 20-25 percent of the budget for teaching learning materials are wasted during this process.

2.2 Corruption and irregularities at the administration level

Negligence of duty by the administrative officials: Administrative officials often do not play their role transparently. A section of the officials does not come to the office on time, some do not come to office regularly, but they ensure their full attendance by manipulations including connivance of the higher authority. Some of them do not visit all the schools – the schools situated at remote area are visited rarely. Some officials allegedly collect conveyance bills from the teachers while visiting the school. Some officials do not take the due disciplinary actions against teachers, if any, because s/he takes bribe from them.

Corruption at the Upazila Education Office: Teachers become victims of corruption at the Upazila Education Office. As already mentioned above, they are forced to pay bribes for getting services regarding time scale, area bill, efficiency bar cross, certificate attachment, leave adjustment, pension, and loan from GP fund.

Corruption and irregularities in recruiting teachers: Significant progress has been achieved in recent times by the Government to establish transparency and ensure competitive select on the basis of merit. Nevertheless, illegal transaction of money for selecting candidates still exists for choosing suitable posting places by the government school teaches. On the other hand, illegal transactions

still occur in the name of donation for getting appointment as a teacher of a registered primary school.

Corruption in training for the teacher: Different types of trainings are provided to the teachers for skill development. A number of corrupt practices were revealed in the Certificate-in-Education and Sub-cluster Training. On an average teachers are forced to pay Tk 1,000-1,500 as different sorts of subscriptions during these training. On the other hand, the teachers are not always aware of their entitlements.

Corruption in transfer of government school teachers: Regarding transfer of government school teachers corrupt practices still exist. While observing five transfer related cases within an upazila, evidence of transaction of bribes was available. The minimum bribe was Tk 2,000 and the maximum bribe was Tk 12,000.

Corruption in getting registration of non-government primary school: Bribery is frequent in obtaining permission to set up non-government primary school and getting registration for it. Two case studies revealed that the initiators had to pay bribe for getting permission of establishing school and getting registration at the cost of Tk 22,200 to Tk 62,900. Another case study reveals that bribe was not required as there was influence from high level government officials.

Corruption in getting monthly payment order (MPO) of registered primary school teachers: For getting the monthly payment order (MPO), teachers had to pay bribe. In two case studies out of three it was found that in one case Tk 25,000 was given as bribe, while Tk 35,500 was given in another case for getting MPO.

Corruption in getting pension: Teachers suffer a lot at the time of processing retirement benefits including pension. They are bound to give bribes at the Upazila Education Office, District Education Office and Upazila Accounts Office for getting pension and other entitlements; otherwise the concerned officials do not process the file. This amount varies from Tk 800 to Tk 27,000 depending on both parties' bargaining power.

3. Recommendations

Recommendations for policy level

- For improving the quality of education services the teacher-student ratio should be targeted to reach 1:30 by 2015.
- For reducing the drop-out rate the class timing may be determined locally and the practice of providing tiffin for the students can be introduced.
- Teachers should be recruited for teaching specific subjects and their capacity should be increased through subject-based skill training.
- Teachers should be preferably recruited on the basis of their home village/union and placed nearest to it.
- Vacant positions should be filled up by promotion of qualified candidates or direct recruitment. For creating scope of promotion for the teachers a new tier between assistant teacher and head teacher can be created such as assistant head teacher.
- The salary and benefit structure of the government school teachers should be reviewed with urgency and must be made consistent with cost of living.
- The differences among the government, registered and community school teacher in terms of salary should be reviewed.
- The salary and benefit structure at the entry point as assistant teachers should be determined on the basis of educational qualification.

- If fees/subscriptions have to be collected it must be determined locally for specific purposes on the basis of consultations with the guardians, teachers and upazila level education officials. However, all such payments must be on the basis of receipts, and all collections and expenses must be properly documented.
- Written tests for recruiting government school teachers should be held in a district different from the candidate's home district.
- Registration through tests should be introduced for ensuring the quality of primary level teachers.
- People with field level experience should be placed at the management level. For those with lack of such experience field visits and appropriate trainings should be mandatory. Vacant positions in management level should be filled up through promotion of deserving candidates and direct recruitment.
- The primary education budget should be increased to meet the higher costs including contingencies, but more so for training and capacity building of teachers and other measures for ensuring higher quality education.

Recommendations for administrative level

- A display board should be hung at the Upazila Education Office informing the duration of completing different tasks to reduce the harassment of teachers by the clerk.
- An office assistant may be appointed in each school to relieve teachers from being engaged in non-academic activities.
- The training materials and training allowance of sub-cluster training for the teachers may be distributed through the Upazila Resource Centres.
- Actual costs of transporting books from the upazila office to schools should be covered.
- The Head Teacher should submit and receive conveyance bills for going to Upazila Education Offices for official purpose.
- Upazila Education Officers should be paid actual cost of visiting schools.
- Teaching-learning materials should be supplied by a vendor selected transparently free from anyone's influence.
- Gender orientations should be provided to male teachers, guardians and managing committee members to reduce negative attitude towards female teachers.

Recommendations for school level administration

- Guardians and students should be made aware about their entitlements from school and the pre-requisites for such entitlements.
- Mothers' gathering, SMC, parent-teachers' association, welfare associations, courtyard meetings and guardians' meetings should be arranged regularly for increased interaction between guardians and teachers. The experience and expertise of non-government initiatives can be a source of learning and assistance in this regard.
- Female representation should be ensured through inclusion of 50% female members in the SMC, parent-teachers' association and welfare association.
- Trainings should be provided to the members of SMC, parent-teachers' association and welfare association.
- Monitoring and supervision by the Upazila Education Office should be increased, but must be objective and professional.
- A Code of Conduct for everyone involved in primary education should be adopted with built-in mechanisms for monitoring, and strictly observed including zero tolerance to corruption, negligence of duty and other irregularities and violations.