

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

Soon after achieving liberation in the year 1971, educationists, planners and administrators in Bangladesh observed that primary education in the country had been facing acute problems, both in terms of quantity and quality. It was also recognised that the existing system was resulting in large scale wastage and stagnation at the primary level. The country also visualised the potential of primary education for inducing the growth and development of the individual as well as of the society. In accordance with these observations, the Government of Bangladesh made clear commitments for the development of primary education in the country. Thereafter, the nation has indeed witnessed considerable expansion of primary education facilities, thereby making it more easily accessible to a larger section of the population. Attempt has also been made to streamline and strengthen the administration of primary education by completely nationalising the system at the primary level. Another major event during this period was the work of the National Education Commission, which has endeavoured to specify the goals and ideals to be pursued and the direction in which the nation should move for achieving these ideals. It is on the recommendation of this

Commission that a National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee was set up for giving concrete shape to the curricula for school education, both primary and secondary. It is this curriculum suggested by the Curriculum Committee in 1976 which continues to be in operation in the primary schools of Bangladesh.

While the progress made in terms of quantitative expansion and administrative reorganisation has been appreciated by all sections of the society, improvement in the quality of education has remained as enigmatic as ever. It is needless to say that the quality of education depends greatly on the nature of the curriculum and its implementation. An important criticism made against the NCSC Curriculum has been that it lacks an empirical base as it is not rooted in actual conditions prevalent in the primary schools of Bangladesh and the real life experiences of the community where the system is in operation. Such an empirical base can be provided only if the curriculum is subjected to continuous evaluation through research studies. This is not an altogether new observation. In fact, the National Education Commission has made explicit recommendation to carry out curriculum evaluation studies on a continuous basis. However, it is an unfortunate fact that the NCSC curriculum has been implemented without being subjected to any such systematic evaluation. The NCSC curriculum has now been in operation for more than five years. But no scientific study has been conducted till to date either to analyse its objectives and contents or to assess the actual

status of its implementation in the primary schools of Bangladesh. It is essentially to fill this gap that the present study was formulated. The study has addressed itself to some fundamental questions related to primary education curriculum in Bangladesh. An attempt has been made in the following section to present the major findings and conclusions of the study. These have been presented under five sub-heads corresponding to the five specific objectives of the investigation. In order to facilitate easy reference, specific objectives of the study are mentioned below:

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To evaluate the present Primary Education Curriculum in Bangladesh in terms of its objectives;
2. To examine whether the textbooks and other curricular materials prescribed are according to the conditions laid down by the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee and their appropriateness to achieve the set objectives of Primary Education;
3. To ascertain the status of implementation of the curriculum and instructional materials in the primary schools of Bangladesh with regard to the following aspects:
 - (a) Physical Facilities,
 - (b) Time-table,
 - (c) Students and Teachers,
 - (d) Teaching Aids and Materials,
 - (e) Teaching Procedures;



4. To study the assessment procedure followed in schools and by the teachers for measuring the achievement of the students; and
5. To study the problems involved in implementing the curriculum.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

I. Evaluation of Objectives :

The findings in this section are presented, essentially, in a comparative perspective. Objectives specified by the NCSC have been compared with those formulated by the National Education Commission and also with the primary education objectives specified by two external sources namely, the NCERT in India, and the UNESCO.

- i) There appears to be a contextual gap between the framing of objectives by the NEC and the preparation of the curriculum by the NCSC. The NEC and the NCSC worked and submitted their reports under totally differing socio-political conditions. It would have been more appropriate if the NCSC independently, made specific statements regarding the objectives of primary education. The report neither makes any such statement nor does it clarify whether the NEC objectives are to be taken in toto without any further elaboration or modification. The need for such a clarification arises because of the controversial decision of the NCSC to introduce the study

of English at the primary stage which does not get justification in terms of the objectives specified by the National Education Commission.

- ii) It was found that the objectives of the NCSC and the NCERT were similar in character but different in perspective, particularly in their implications for the way in which these objectives were to be achieved. Further, the objectives of the NCSC were also similar to those specified by the UNESCO, although the objectives of NCSC lacked clarity and direction.
- iii) A comparative analysis of the objectives specified by the three sources namely the NCSC, the NCERT and the UNESCO revealed another significant difference. All the three sources emphasised the objective of imparting values. However, the NCSC considered religious education to be the main channel for achieving this objective, whereas the objectives specified by the other two sources do not provide any scope for imparting religious learning.
- iv) The comparative analysis also revealed that there was close concurrence in the emphasis laid on work-experience and vocational skills, in the objectives specified by the NCSC and the NCERT. However, such an explicit reference to vocational orientation at the primary level is absent in the objectives specified by the UNESCO document.

II. Curricular Content and Materials :

Findings and conclusions reported under this section are mainly based on a detailed analysis carried out with respect to the contents and their organisation in the curriculum guide, syllabus textbook and teachers' handbooks.

- i) Examination of the prescribed curricular contents revealed that there was some gap between the curricular content recommended by the NEC and that prescribed by the NCSC. The NEC did not find any necessity for learning any language other than mother-tongue (Bengali) at the first level of education. In spite of this, the NCSC introduced English from Class III. Secondly, the NEC did not make any explicit recommendation for introducing religious education. However, the NCSC made religious education a fullfledged subject throughout the primary school and advocated it to be used as the main channel for imparting values.
- ii) A commendable innovation brought in by the NCSC was the introduction of the contents of social studies and general science in an integrated fashion as Environmental Studies (Paribesh Parichiti). Through this attempt, the NCSC provided scope for making the subject of Environmental studies more meaningful and realistic; it also reflected modern thinking with regard to teaching of Environmental Studies. It may be added that the NEC had made no specific recommendation for adopting such an integrated approach.

iii) The syllabuses of all the subjects prescribed by the NCSC appeared to be the outcome of systematic efforts put in by the concerned experts. In general, each syllabus consisted of nine major sections, namely, (1) introduction, (2) Objectives, (3) Contents, (4) instructional aids and materials, (5) teachers' work, (6) activities of the students, (7) evaluation techniques, (8) procedure for preparing textbooks, and (9) procedure for preparing teachers' handbooks. They also specified the scheme for allocation of teaching periods for the respective subjects in different classes. Objectives of various subjects and the corresponding subject matter had been clearly spelt out.

It was the opinion of a large number of teachers that the syllabus in mathematics was somewhat difficult for the children of age group 5+ to 9+. Also, the syllabus prescribed for the Environmental Studies was, at times, beyond the capacity of the children; and there was overemphasis on information; in consequence, the processes of scientific observation, analysis, etc., are not properly highlighted.

iv) The textbooks prepared by the Textbook Board were mostly according to the contents included in the syllabus prescribed by the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee. However, a closer examination

of the content and their organization in individual textbooks indicated the scope for further improvement. For instance, a more concerted effort should have been made to integrate such areas as art, craft, music into the contents of the mothertongue textbooks as recommended by the NCSC. Also, there is need for greater care and caution in the choice of contents so as to develop a national feeling among the children. It would be more desirable to avoid explicit and emphatic references to regional and communal aspects.

While the mathematics textbooks successfully introduced the concepts of modern mathematics, they seem to lack in their emphasis on inculcating skills and abilities directly useful in the daily life of the children. There is also a need for better gradation and coordination among the contents included in the textbooks of different classes. Further, concepts from modern mathematics and certain traditional topics, even outdated ones, have been presented in such an unrelated fashion that the organization of contents in general, lacked a unified perspective.

Although some serious attempt has been made to present the contents of environmental studies textbooks in an integrated way the attempt is not complete and wholly satisfactory. There is still greater scope to integrate the knowledge related to social and physical environment

of the children in a more meaningful manner. Another important drawback is that the contents are highly urban-oriented and do not relate to the physical and social environment of the majority of primary school children who live in rural areas. The contents in both social studies and science textbooks overemphasised knowledge objectives and thereby underplay the importance of such vital objectives in the affective and psychomotor domains, such as development of scientific attitude, acquisition of skills of observation and experimentation, inculcation of civic rights and responsibilities, and development of a feeling of human unity and brotherhood.

- v) A major drawback of all the textbooks was related to their physical aspects. The paper used as well as the binding was highly unsatisfactory, considering that the books were to be used by very young children, often hailing from such poor homes that even a safe storage cannot be ensured. Printing also lacked clarity in some of the textbooks. This was particularly true of the illustrations given in the textbooks, which invariably were in a single colour and were least appealing to the children. It may be noted that the NCSC had made a specific recommendation to include a large number of attractive multicolour illustrations in every textbook.
- vi) An important recommendation of the NCSC was that all the textbooks should be written in spoken Bengali and a uniform spelling should be maintained in all the text-

books. In fact, the textbooks have been written in spoken Bengali. But, a number of discrepancies could be observed with regard to spelling particularly in the mothertongue textbooks. All the same the teachers seem to have remained oblivious of this recommendation, as one of the question papers given at standard V final examination mentioned a specific instruction that "Use of spoken language along with literary expression should be strictly avoided in answering the question".

- vii) The teachers' handbooks prepared by the Curriculum Development Centre with the assistance of UNICEF were not only according to NCSC guidelines but also of high quality in terms ^{of} both content and production.

III. Implementation of Curriculum :

Observations in the section are based on the data collected through an information schedule and a questionnaire given to all the 478 teachers working in the hundred schools surveyed which were spread over ten Thanas of Dhaka Division.

- i) Proper implementation of the curriculum can be ensured only if necessary physical facilities are provided in the primary schools. However, findings in this regard were most shocking. The schools were mostly overcrowded. On an average, each school had not even four rooms as against the expected norm of seven rooms per school.

The average classroom student ratio was as low as 1: 92. Nineteen per cent of the schools had no furniture at all. Majority of the schools had no provision for supply of drinking water and had no arrangement even for toilets.

- ii) The schools were invariably understaffed. The average student ratio was 63:1 and in certain schools it was even more than 100 students per teacher. A redeeming feature was that the teachers in the surveyed schools mostly fulfilled the requisite academic and professional qualifications. Only 2.72 per cent were non-matric and 18.6 per cent were untrained.
- iii) It was found that the schools prepared their time-tables in an arbitrary way according to their convenience. The time allocation given by the NCSC for different subjects was not being followed in any of the schools. It is worth nothing that the Thana Education Offices did not bother to issue any guidelines in this regard at all. In fact, in most of the schools, the total time devoted to each subject was only half the time prescribed by the NCSC.
- iv) Possibly because of differences in staff position of various schools, wide discrepancies were observed in the weekly workload of teachers. While some teachers had the workload of 25 to 30 periods per week, many others had to take more than 36 periods per week. This obviously created dissatisfaction among the teachers

and affected their academic work in the school. With such heavy workload, it is not surprising that very few teachers took interest in organising and participating in activities outside the classroom.

- v) Most of the schools which could barely manage to satisfactorily organise classroom instructional programmes, had no resources, human as well as physical, available for organising other activities such as, physical education, games, sports, art, crafts and so on. It was found that none of the schools had teachers trained for imparting physical education. Many of the schools had no playground and nor did they possess equipment for conducting games and sports.

Only six per cent schools had anything called a library that too with a meagre collection of books and with no separate room. Only four per cent schools had facilities for and conducted work-experience activities.

None of the schools had arrangement for medical examination of the children even once a year. Also, only one out of hundred schools provided midday meals/tiffin for their children.

- vi) It was found that most of the schools did not have necessary teaching aids and materials required for imparting instruction in different subjects. Many of them did not even have such basic aids as maps, globes and charts. Nor did the teachers make any effort to

prepare and use improvised tools in their teaching.

The recommendation of the NCSC to use community resources to make teaching effective remained only on paper.

- vii) Teaching techniques adopted by the teachers were mostly traditional, non-innovative and uninspiring. Most of the teachers taught their lessons through stereotyped lectures. Very few teachers, at least occasionally, used such techniques as discussion, demonstration and assignment. The NCSC recommendation that teaching of art, craft and music should be integrated with that of mother tongue was followed by a very small number of teachers. The situation was more disappointing with respect to the recommendation for integrating work-experience activities with teaching of environmental studies.

IV. Assessment Procedure :

Three sources were utilised for collecting necessary information for this section. One source was school information schedule data on which were collected by the investigator through personal observation. The second source was a questionnaire administered to the teachers. The third source consisted of the question papers used at the end of standard V which were subjected to a detailed analysis.

- i) The National Education Commission recommended for integrating evaluation with instructional work by adopting a continuous evaluation programme. It was recommended that in all the schools periodical tests should be conducted at least once a month. As against this, it was found that 30 per cent of the teachers conducted no periodical tests at all. Even of the remaining, many conducted tests once in three or six months only.
- ii) Again contrary to the recommendation made by the Commission, in 96 per cent of the schools, students were promoted solely based on their performance in the annual examination. It was surprising that although every school conducted atleast one terminal test in addition to the annual examination, the results of the terminal tests were completely ignored, while making decisions regarding promotion.
- iii) In the primary classes it is quite obvious that the children will not have fully mastered the skills of articulate expression, particularly in the written form. Also, the objectives of education would be to achieve an alround growth of the personality, rather than only acquiring academic knowledge and skills. Evaluation in such a complex setting would naturally demand the use of a variety of approaches. However, it was found that this expectation was not fulfilled in any of the schools.

Teachers did not adopt any other technique than oral and written tests. In fact, quite a number of them depended exclusively on written testing procedures.

- iv) Another recommendation made by the NSSC but largely ignored by the schools, was regarding progress report. As such majority of the teachers reported that they did not prepare and maintain progress report for each individual. Even among those who prepared such reports it was only a small percentage of teachers who sent the reports to the parents for their perusal.
- v) Analysis of question papers set in the final examination brought out certain important points. For instance, the mother tongue question papers were invariably overloaded with questions on Bengali grammar and encouraged rote memorisation among the students and ignored several basic language skills.

The biggest drawback of mathematics question papers was that they totally lacked content validity. The questions had been set keeping in view neither the content areas nor the objectives specified in the syllabus. In fact, reference to some of the topics which have received considerable emphasis in the textbooks and syllabus found no place at all in the question papers.

The question papers in environmental studies — social studies as well as science — generally covered

covered the prescribed contents and objectives. They also contained considerable variety in terms of item types. Yet, it was observed that the questions were oriented to test only the knowledge base of the students and ignored other aspects, such as, analytical thinking, logical reasoning, problem solving and so on.

V. Problems in Implementing the Curriculum :

Findings regarding the problems involved in implementing the curriculum were based on data obtained from two sources, namely, teachers and supervising officers. Information from these sources was collected with the help of a problem checklist and interview schedule.

- i) The problem of greatest intensity perceived uniformly by all the personnel concerned, was regarding inadequate physical facilities. As a matter of fact, information collected by the investigator personally through school information schedule also showed that most of the schools lacked even certain basic physical facilities such as, drinking water, toilets, etc.
- ii) The second problem perceived was regarding timetable. It was pointed out that the timetable was too rigid. It was responsive neither to the local needs of the community where the school is located, nor to the differential requirements of various subjects to be taught in the differential requirements of various subjects to be taught in the different classes.

- iii) A third major problem faced by a majority of teachers was the non-availability of appropriate teaching aids and materials.
- iv) A number of teachers felt that they were over-burdened with respect to classroom teaching load. However, the supervising officers did not support this contention of the teachers and felt that the average teaching load was not so high as to affect their academic activities.
- v) Many teachers also complained about lack of community support, unsuitable environment, inappropriate teacher training programmes, excessive syllabus and lack of proper training in evaluation techniques.

POSTSCRIPT

Bangladesh is no doubt a small and a still young nation. Yet, it has behind it a rich and long heritage in all respects, including education. A perusal of the history of the region even during modern period reveals that the (undivided) Bengal had always been a fore-runner of many innovations in education within the Indian sub-continent. It is well-known that this was among the first regions in the sub-continent through which Western (English) education made its entry in the sixteenth century. The history of Bangladesh since that time to this date is heavily punctuated by a series of political changes including a number of bloody upheavals. However, quite fortunately enough, all the leaders irrespective of their political

and administrative affiliations and subordination have bestowed considerable attention on the status of education in the country. This is quite evident from the fact that an unprecedented number of official bodies — Commissions and Committees — have studied the existing system and made appropriate recommendations for its improvement. Yet, paradoxically, today Bangladesh continues to be among one of the backward regions within the subcontinent with respect to both quantitative ^{and qualitative} aspects of education. Infact, the lesson to be learned from this historical experience is that it is not enough to make proclamations and recommendations, nor is it productive to invest resources without proper planning. Thus, it calls for making plans and taking actions based on concrete evidences collected through systematic research studies.

It may be mentioned, at this point, that educational research is a relatively new phenomenon in Bangladesh. This is particularly true of researches in the field of primary education. Even the few studies conducted on primary education in Bangladesh focus on the quantitative aspect. Understanding and improving qualitative aspects would require investigations dealing with the curriculum of primary education. Viewed in this background, the present study attempts to bridge this crucial gap with respect to primary education in Bangladesh.

Attempting to conduct a curriculum research study in the absence of an already set tradition of research did pose some

complicated problems. First of all, with no precedence of such research, the investigator had to independently develop a rationale for the study in terms of its value for development of primary education in the country. Secondly, the usual guidance a researcher would get through review of previous studies, in deciding the direction and scope of the investigation was completely absent. It was under such dilemmatic conditions that the present investigation had to be conceived and implemented. Looking back, it appears that at least some aspects of the study could have been carried out in a different way. Nevertheless, the real value of the study can be known only when its findings are translated into remedial actions and implemented in the primary schools of Bangladesh. The study has brought to light some vital characteristics regarding the Curriculum - its objectives, contents, and implementation, which is being currently used in the primary schools of the country. But, the study, definitely, does not and cannot give a final verdict on the curriculum. Rather it only marks the beginning of research studies with respect to this area. There are a number of research problems to be investigated, some of which can be derived directly or indirectly from the findings of the present study.

A problem highlighted through the present study is about the inadequate physical facilities available in the primary schools. This has been pointed out as one of the factors affecting the quality of instruction. It should be

interesting to conduct indepth investigations for finding out how and to what extent the physical facilities really affect the instructional work carried out in the school.

Several critical observations have been made regarding the textbooks, their contents as well as physical qualities. It should be worthwhile to analytically study the whole process of production followed by the Textbook Board, identify the problems faced and work out alternative strategies which would help improve the quality of textbooks.

In fact, the findings of the present study regarding the textbooks are somewhat global in nature. This is because, the study had in focus the whole curriculum and its implementation. Therefore, as the next step, a study or studies may be taken up with the purpose of subjecting each of the textbooks into a detailed content analysis.

A general observation made in the study is regarding the discrepancy between the recommendations of the National Education Commission and the prescriptions of the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee with regard to introduction of English language. It is argued that the introduction of English at the primary level is not called for and has unnecessarily overburdened the students. Perhaps, it requires a more elaborate scientific study to establish the truth or otherwise of this statement.

It has been pointed out that some of the very important specifications made in the curriculum have remained unimplemented. Some of these are compulsory physical education programme, integration of instruction in art, craft and music with mothertongue teaching, organisation of work experience activities, provision of mid-day meals, periodical medical examination, supply of audiovisual aids, continuous evaluation and reporting of students' progress and so on. These failures at the implementation stage only represent the symptoms and not the causes. It would, therefore, be necessary to undertake studies for diagnosing the actual causes and planning out remedial measures to overcome the problems.

Yet another problem identified relates to the teachers' inability to carry out certain activities in an efficient and effective manner. Many teachers were found to be unaware of and unequipped with regard to use of modern techniques of teaching and evaluation, preparation and use of improvised teaching aids, and utilization of community resources. This actually points to the need for inservice programmes of teacher education. However, it was also found that many teachers consider the existing programmes of teacher education to be overtheoretical and nonutilitarian. Thus, there seems to be an urgent need for making a thorough investigation of the existing pre-service and inservice teacher education programmes and arrive at a new model for training teachers for the primary schools of the country.