

## CHAPTER I

### EMERGENCE OF THE STUDY

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Creation of a sound primary education system appears to be a basic component of any strategy for social, political and economic development of a country. In fact, it is primary education which develops the basic innate abilities of a person to live a full personal life as an individual and as a member of a family, and an economically productive life as a worker, and a socially useful life as a citizen (Hug, 1975). Education at this stage moves the children into a coherent moral, intellectual and affective universe (Faure, 1972), creates an awareness among them about their past and helps in developing a conception of the future. Education at the primary level acquires special importance as it provides an opportunity for capturing and nurturing talents at the early stage of growth, thereby contributing to the development of a national pool of ability (Islam, 1975).

Many studies regarding the role of schooling in economic development have shown that primary education plays a vital role in national economic development in developed as well as developing countries. Further, Schultz (1963) points out that primary schooling is perhaps

the most profitable of all levels of schooling since it entails the lowest cost per year of schooling. The education at this level has a pervasive value in reducing cost and in improving the productivity of the economy, as the rate of return is higher in this than in any alternative investment. It would be more appropriate in the context of the situation in the developing countries to say that more and better elementary schooling should be relevant to the needs and realities of life in the country, where the rate of illiteracy is very high and the per capita income is low. In a country in which the level of economy is low, if the level of schooling is raised substantially and rapidly, it becomes a substantial source of growth, assuming of course, that the education provided is of the type and quality most relevant to development and growth of the nation. It is seen that primary education contributes to the productivity of the labour force, and at the same time it creates an enlightened and responsible citizenry. The value of primary education as an instrument of social change, lies in its capacity to contribute towards equalization and expansion of economic opportunities, in promoting educational and social mobility, in creating social concern and civic responsibility, and in instilling cultural and moral values.

It is in this context that universal primary education is viewed as an imperative factor in preparing the future

citizens for the task of national development. So, atleast with regard to primary education, one can safely say that it should be made universal as early as possible and that no stone should be left unturned to achieve this goal. In fact, at the level of government policy, educational planners throughout the world have been giving a high priority to the achievement of universal primary education. This is well in line with the directive Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has been proclaimed in the article that "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory."

It may be observed that most of the developed countries like U.K., U.S.S.R., U.S.A., Japan, have already attained a high level of schooling. It is also true that developing countries, in general, have not succeeded in their efforts to bring each and every child to school. However, it is important to mention that most of the countries, irrespective of their economic status and political ideologies, have taken the provision of universal primary education in the form of a constitutional guarantee.

## 2. PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a new-born developing country. She achieved her independence through a long drawn struggle. With the struggle for freedom, the people of the country witnessed a conscious shift in values and became conscious of the crucial role of education in materialising these values and imparting them to the younger generation of the country. It is fully recognised that education is an important factor enabling the emergent country to cope with the demands of the modern world and to achieve a fuller and better life for her people by reconstructing the national economy. Bangladesh is a large agrarian society wherein the majority of students do not go past class V. According to the National Census conducted in 1981 only 22 per cent of the people in Bangladesh are literate. The illiteracy level is as high as 87 per cent among women and 70 per cent among men. It is needless to point out that a well organised primary education system is perhaps the easiest and cheapest way for Bangladesh for converting itself into a literate nation and lifting her people out of their ignorance. After all, primary education acts as a tool for extending man's awareness as it confers a guaranteed access to knowledge and opens up opportunities for wider experiences and greater intellectual activity. It is a matter of common observation and judgement that in the present day modern world economic survival and

growth depends greatly on farsighted policy choices, on a wise application of science and technology, and an intelligent participation of the people in political and economic activities.

Under these circumstances, primary education has to be a carefully planned activity, which involves taking the six-year old child and graduating him five years later, equipped with the basic learning skills and with added useful knowledge which he can practically make use of in his immediate environment. In particular, he should be stimulated to continue reading and studying on his own so that he may continually improve his quality of life.

Realising the instrumental role of primary education for the growth and development of an individual as well as his society, Bangladesh has also evolved major policies for creating a thrust towards universal primary education. It is pertinent here to present some of the major policy statements made by the Bangladesh Government at different stages and to trace the extent of success achieved in their implementation.

There are three statements in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (Government of Bangladesh, 1972) which have a bearing on education and are of special

significance for primary education:

The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of

- establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children at such stages as may be determined by law;
- relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve these needs;
- removing illiteracy within such a time as may be determined by law.

Following the direction implied in the constitutional provisions, the First Five Year Plan (Government of Bangladesh, 1973) spelt out detailed steps whereby primary education could become more equally and easily accessible. Primary education was to receive 18 per cent of allocations for education and was seen mainly as a level where the child would acquire basic skills. Eight major objectives were specified in the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) for fulfilling the constitutional directives relating to primary education:

- i) The total enrolment will go up by about 2.5 million from a base of 6 million to 8.5 million.

- ii) The percentage of the primary age-group students attending schools will increase from 58 per cent to 73 per cent in 1978.
- iii) Ninety per cent of the boys of the primary age group will be given access to primary education during the plan.
- iv) Participation of girls will be accelerated. At present 40 per cent of the girls of primary school age-group attend schools; this will be raised to 55 per cent during the plan.
- v) The curriculum at the primary level will be revised to make it more relevant to the real life obtaining in the country.
- vi) Text books as well as writing and instructional materials will be supplied to all children free of cost or at subsidised rates.
- vii) Drop-out rate will be reduced from 63 per cent to 52 per cent by undertaking supplementary and non-formal measures such as well designed educational programmes through radio and television. Innovative measures such as provision of feeder schools, child feeding, female teachers, sports and recreational facilities and synchronisation of holiday with crop seasons, will be introduced to reduce drop-out between class I and class II, where the problem is more acute.
- viii) Educated housewives will be encouraged to teach in the primary schools.

### 3. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ASPECTS: AN OVERVIEW

In pursuance of the steps spelt out in the First Five Year Plan, the Government decided to take over the management of 6,509 primary schools and issued necessary orders and guidelines for 'nationalization' as a first step, on July 1973. Subsequently, by Act, No.VIII of 1974, entitled 'Primary Schools (taking over) Act, 1974' the Government made provision for the nationalization of 36,165 primary schools including those which had already been taken over. The number of students in these primary schools was estimated to be 8.7 million, of which 5.6 million were boys and 3.1 million were girls; 91 per cent of the total students belonged to rural areas. There were 1,55,141 primary school teachers of whom 1,47,387 were male and 7,754 were female. This was of course an excellent step taken for the improvement of primary education.

However, the major targets of primary education set for the First Five Year Plan period have remained unrealised even when extended over the Two Year Plan (Government of Bangladesh, 1978) up to 1980. In fact, it has been observed (Firdous, 1980) while reviewing the draft second Five Year Plan that the nation achieved practically no growth with regard to primary education during these periods. For instance, the eight year period from 1973 to 1980 did not record any increase in the enrolment figures at all, which

remained to be 58 per cent of the total population of the particular age-group. This can be easily seen in the figure presented in table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 :** Enrolment of 5 to 9 age group population

Year	5 to 9 age group population in lakh			Enrolment in lakh			Percentage of enrolment to total population in age group 5 to 9		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1973	53	50	103	40	20	60	75.5	40	58
1978	60	58	118	47.6	21.4	68	79.2	36.7	57.2
1980	63	61	124	48	22	70	76.6	36	56.5

In fact, the figures presented show a significant decrease in the enrolment of girl students over the period. On top of this low enrolment, is the problem of wastage and stagnation. Even among those enrolled it was found that only 32.5 per cent completed their primary schooling. In this connection, a study conducted by the Institute of Education and Research (1977) has shown that the highest number of drop-outs was in the lower classes, pointing out the need to strengthen the programme in these classes. In another study (NFRHRD, 1979) on enrolment in rural Bangladesh, it has been found that only 38.74 per cent of all school age population go to school in rural areas and the rest 61.26 per cent remain outside the school; and, again, the participation rate varies from one social class to another. The study also

showed that the socio-economic background of the families seems to have influenced their childrens' participation in school. More than 83 per cent children of day-labourers did not go to school; other groups with similar poor performance were the children of fishermen, barbers, blacksmith etc. About 75 per cent of these groups together did not go to school. The participation rate of girls was much less than that of boys in all the groups. Further, it is worthwhile to mention that on the basis of distribution of population and that of primary schools it was found that on an average, there was one primary school to cater for the educational needs of 393 primary school age children in the country. Taking Bangladesh as a whole, each Thana has, on an average, 93 primary schools. There are on an average 4.24 teachers in each school and teacher student ratio is 1:45 (FREPD, 1979).

It is frequently pointed out (Firdous, 1980) that, in Bangladesh, a child on completion of the primary schooling finds himself or herself most useless in the productive field even in comparison to one who has not at all participated in schooling. This is because the uneducated one can work with his father in the field whereas the educated one can neither do the same, for he has not practised field work, nor is he suitable to be employed in any other productive job. Hence a guardian without the capability to give higher education to his children finds it better not to educate them at

all even in primary school. Thus it is argued that children who are being trained through our school system are not fit for any work, apart from the fact that there is a big gap between working life and life in the school. The UNESCO Report 'Learning to Be' (Faure, 1972) states that education suffers basically from the gap between its content and the living experience of its pupils, between the system of values that it preaches and the goals that are set up by society, between its ancient curricula and modern science. The net result of schooling today is that the children drop out. Why do they drop out? Because they want to work and they have to work. The urgent need, therefore, is to bridge this gap and to devise a system where working and learning can be combined.

#### 4. CURRICULUM FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that while the reconstruction of schools, increasing of teachers, and equipment are needed for the improvement of enrolment of children, the development of an appropriate curriculum is also indispensable for improving the quality of primary education in Bangladesh. It is the quality of education that affects the system in the long run. And the quality of education is directly linked with the quality of curriculum. Curriculum is an academic investment made in order to cater for the needs of the society and the individual child. Suitable content experience would make the child who undergoes

schooling a worthwhile person in the society. If the content experiences of the teaching-learning situation equip the child for adapting to change, to the unknown, then a majority of the people can contribute to the development process.

In Bangladesh, as in most other developing countries, it is a crucial task to the curriculum framers to decide the curriculum for the primary school children taking into consideration their real life situations and the developmental role of primary education. Because, in Bangladesh, the primary school age children form 16.25 per cent of the total population and 91 per cent of them are in rural areas. Also, a majority of the children are of poor health. In fact, it has been reported (FREPD, 1979) that the average height and weight of Bangladeshi children show a decline over the past 15 years. Furthermore, some of them may have developed less mental capacity because of severe malnourishment suffered during the first two years of life.

By and large, the children learn their life roles from observation of their own parents who themselves are in most cases illiterate and fail to realise the value of formal education. Moreover, in a basically agricultural society such as Bangladesh, where the birth rate is high but the per capita income is low, children's capacity for manual labour which adds an extra hand in the agricultural task is valued higher than their capacity for intellectual work and learning.

Thus a majority of the children in Bangladesh are growing up within such a context of life.

Keeping in view the above considerations, the Government of Bangladesh felt the need to improve and to revitalize the primary education curriculum and to make it up-to-date and relevant to the purpose it has to serve. For this purpose, the government constituted a National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee at the end of 1975 on the basis of the recommendations of the National Education Commission (Government of Bangladesh, 1974), with a view to improving the curriculum and syllabi at different educational stages. The National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee completed its task of revising the curriculum for primary education in 1976 and this revised curriculum for primary education in Bangladesh has already been introduced in the schools since 1978. It is necessary to mention that in the educational ladder of Bangladesh, primary education consists of classes I to V meant for children of the age-group 5 to 9 years.

The National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee (Government of Bangladesh, 1976) recommended the content areas for various stages of school education in Bangladesh. The subject or content areas to be covered during the primary stage are listed in the following:

1. Mother tongue - Bengali
2. Mathematics
3. Environmental Studies
4. Physical Education including health education.
5. Arts and Crafts including freehand drawing and manual work
6. Music
7. Religious Education
8. English (only from Classes III to V).

In the report of National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee, the detailed syllabus of each subject of each class in the primary level is preceded by the specific instructional objectives and followed by the guidelines of content, using teaching aids and methods, assessment procedures, preparing text books and teachers' hand book etc. The instructional objectives of each subject and each class have been provided in the syllabus in considerable detail. Then, for fulfilling or achieving those objectives detailed content have been prescribed for each subject. A list of teaching aids have been given against each item of the content to be used in the classroom. There is a mention in the curriculum of the activities to be performed by the teachers and the learners in teaching the contents of each subject in each class which can be referred to as the method of teaching. It suggests, further, to assess the students achievement daily, monthly, and annually for replacing and

reorganising the existing evaluation system. The results of the assessment have to be recorded on cumulative basis and this information given to the parents of the learners once in a month. Guidelines have been given in the curriculum regarding the principles of preparing textbooks and teachers' handbook relating to language style, exercise, spelling, get up, printing, size of the textbooks etc. The curriculum guide contains quite a good number of important suggestions in respect of period for each subject per week and the length of each period, with the help of an explanatory chart on the allocation of time. It further provides suggestions for work experiences and the utilization of local resources of the students to provide them a first hand experience of their own society. Keeping in view the implementation of the curriculum, the report suggests that the curriculum for teacher training should change and it should be in line with the realistic and progressive purview of primary education.

The work carried out by the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee regarding the framing of a new curriculum for primary education is definitely a laudable attempt. The committee has endeavoured not merely to prescribe the content outline but has also provided valuable suggestions and guidelines for a successful implementation of the revised curriculum. Yet, the curriculum frame work prescribed has its own detractors, also. There has been considerable criticism regarding the adequacy and appropriateness of the curriculum content

prescribed by the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee. Apart from this, it is needless to say that the real test of a curriculum lies in its successful implementation in the real life settings that prevail in the schools. Regarding implementation of the curriculum also, there have been a number of criticisms from various corners including teachers and parents. However, there are no factual evidences collected through a systematic study to support or refute the curriculum being implemented at present in the primary schools of Bangladesh. It should, therefore, be worthwhile as well as highly useful in its implications if such an attempt is made for studying the existing curriculum in a scientific manner. The present study is an attempt in this direction. Detailed background and rationale as well as specific objectives of the study are given in the following.

##### 5. RATIONALE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

There is a wide spread belief that quantitative expansion in education inevitably results in deterioration of quality. But if the conditions necessary for qualitative education are established, quality can be maintained even if quantity increases. Research on Curriculum is one of the necessary conditions for maintaining the quality. It is one of the most potent tools for reforming the curriculum also. Although the concept of Curriculum is implicit in the earliest educational prescriptions and programmes of all civilised

societies, curriculum as a field of systematic inquiry emerged only during the early 1920s.

The school curriculum is in a state of continuous change all over the world today. Even in advanced countries of the world, it is criticised as being inadequate, outmoded and not properly designed to meet the needs of modern society. Against this background, school curriculum reformers in many countries in the Asia and Oceania region have been seriously engaged in reorienting their curricula according to their set national goals of education (UNESCO, 1980) and Bangladesh is not outside of this process. In this process, the inadequacies of traditional procedures for curriculum formulation through adhoc committees have become all too obvious. These procedures tend to cast the curriculum in a rigid and compartmentalized mould, leaving little room for systematic tryouts and for incorporating new insights derived from research or experiences of teachers; and, on the one hand, they delink the formulation of curriculum from the materials and methods in which any curriculum finds its concrete expression, while, on the other, from the evaluation procedures by which the outcomes are adjudged (UNESCO, 1980). Further, curriculum has now a growing corpus of techniques which, in its own right, calls for systematic research, so that revision of curriculum can be worked out. Also, a coordinated programme of improvement can be implemented on the bases of the findings of experts instead of being rushed through haphazardly and in a piecemeal fashion.

It is unfortunate that no systematic research relating to curriculum for primary education has been carried out in Bangladesh. The curriculum for primary schools have been revised from time to time on an adhoc basis (NIER, 1970<sup>2</sup> and Government of Bangladesh, 1974). It was not preceded by careful research, not based on adequate expertise and not followed by such necessary supporting measures as the preparation of learning materials, the orientation of teachers or provision of the needed physical facilities. This fact has been highlighted by the National Education Commission of Bangladesh (1974) through the statements presented here in a collective form:

"In the developed and progressive countries of the present world, extensive researches and explorations pertaining to curricula and syllabuses at the different stages of education have been in progress. With the change of time and the expansion of the horizon of knowledge, great reforms have been introduced in the field of education. But unfortunately, the waves of such educational reforms are yet to reach the shores of our bank. The text books which were written over a decade ago and the syllabuses that were framed during the time are still followed with slight modifications here and there. Such conservative, out-dated, traditional and low-standard materials fail to meet the requirements of an advanced education system needed in a developing society. The commission also adds that the present education system in any country is

encountered with different problems. Attempts at solving them have often met with disappointment. The main reason for this is the lack of realistic, goal-directed and problem-oriented research in the field of education. To meet the needs in the near future, the Commission strongly recommended conducting of research, undertaking of survey works, and collecting of information pertaining to various aspects of primary education. Different branches of research in this field should include such aspects as curriculum and syllabus, textbook, school building, teaching materials and aids, examination system or evaluation as well as wastage at different levels of education system."

In response to this recommendation, the Government of Bangladesh brought about a reform in the curriculum and syllabus of primary education through the NCSC which has already been put into practice. At the time of preparing the curriculum, the curriculum and syllabus committee clearly put a set of conditions there, to be fulfilled by the management as priority in creating a favourable environment for implementing the curriculum.

However, no systematic attempt has so far been made to bring qualitative improvement in primary education through curriculum research. In the absence of any empirical study on primary school curriculum in Bangladesh, it has also not yet been possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing curriculum as prescribed by the National Curriculum and Syllabus

Committee. Even the facilities for implementing the curriculum in the primary schools of Bangladesh are not known due to the lack of systematic research. Therefore, a study of the curriculum for primary education in Bangladesh would be of great value, because, it is on the basis of such a study that an appropriate plan of action may be undertaken for the improvement of the quality of primary education.

Mere change in curriculum and syllabus for the sake of modernization and their revision to make it up-to-date is not enough to achieve the desired goal of primary education in the country. With it, development of the necessary infrastructure at each school for an effective implementation of the curriculum is of equal importance. Otherwise, all the curriculum reform attempts will go in vain, and result into a futile exercise of the experts. Periodical revision and reform of curriculum and syllabus must be carried out to make it fit for the children of the country, fit for the national goals and for the contemporary world; and at the same time all possible measures have also to be taken to develop the resources for their proper implementation. The resources for the implementation of the curriculum of the primary school, includes teachers, textbooks and other materials and equipment, physical facilities, teaching aids along with teaching methods and evaluation procedures. The quality of primary education also depends on the adequacy of these materials and facilities. Now the question is to

what extent these materials and facilities are available in the primary schools of Bangladesh. The question is of vital importance in determining the effectiveness of the curriculum and the quality of primary education in the country.

Therefore, a thorough inquiry about the status of the curriculum for the primary schools of the country is necessary to give a satisfactory answer to the above question. The present investigation, "A STUDY OF THE CURRICULUM FOR PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH" is an attempt to answer certain questions relating to Primary Education Curriculum in Bangladesh. Some of these questions are: How far are the objectives of primary education in Bangladesh reflected in the prescribed curriculum? To what extent are the specified objectives of curriculum in consonance with the objectives of primary education set by experts from other parts of the world? What are the contents needed for achieving such objectives? How far are these objectives reflected in the prescribed curricular content? How far is the content able to bridge the gap between theory and practice? How is primary school curriculum being implemented in the schools? What problems do teachers face in implementing them? How do the teachers assess their pupils' achievement in the schools and in the class room? The present study is conducted with a view to answering some of these questions which can be presented in terms of the following specific objectives.

6. 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.

7. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Detailed discussions regarding such aspects as context of the study, theoretical framework, methodological procedures

and so on have been presented in independent chapters that will follow the present one. However, before presenting such details it is necessary to mention a few important points regarding the scope and limitations of the present study.

This study is primarily intended to make a comprehensive evaluation of the curriculum relevant to the whole of primary education. Accordingly, as far as analysis of objectives, curriculum guide, and syllabi are concerned, all the five standards namely, classes I to V, and all the subjects taught in these classes have been taken up for evaluation. However, with regard to evaluation of textbooks and teachers' handbooks, two subjects namely, English and Religious Education are not included. As such, English is introduced as a subject of study only from the third standard, whereas all other subjects are compulsorily studied from Std.I. Regarding Religious Education actual implementation of instructional programme involves a complex arrangement as children belonging to different religions in every class are to be imparted instruction with respect to their own religion by teachers of respective religion. Thus, there is no uniformity either in the content or in the organisation of instruction with regard to Religious Education. Further, an attempt by the investigator to analyse the programmes in all the religions singlehandedly would appear not only to be overambitious but also highly presumptuous. It is essentially for such reasons that analysis of English and Religious education textbooks were kept out of the purview of this study.

Again if the findings of the study regarding implementation of the curriculum should reflect the situation characterising the whole of Bangladesh, the ideal approach would have been to study this aspect taking a representative sample of schools spread over all parts of Bangladesh. This would require taking a sample of schools from among 36165 primary schools located in 478 Thanas of the four Divisions in Bangladesh. However, it can be easily seen that the volume of work involved in such a large scale survey would place very high demands on human resources as well as time and finances. Therefore, it was considered prudent to confine the study of implementation of the curriculum only to the schools located in the 130 Thanas of Dhaka Division. It is needless to mention that the findings in this respect would therefore be directly applicable only to schools of Dhaka Division, although they may hold some general relevance for the schools in other parts of Bangladesh also. This limitation is also applicable with regard to the evaluation of assessment procedure and analysis of problems faced in the implementation process.

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