

ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

A. Shuchita Sharmin^a

^aDepartment of Development Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

^aCorresponding author: shuchitasharmin@yahoo.com; shuchitas@gmail.com

© Ontario International Development Agency. ISSN 1923-6654 (print),
ISSN 1923-6662 (online). Available at <http://www.ssrn.com/link/OIDA-Intl-Journal-Sustainable-Dev.html>

Abstract: Education is a development agenda. Due to lack of reliable data the information is approximate, it is reported in different literature that there are 16.5 million primary-school-aged children (6 to 10 years old) in Bangladesh or overall there are more than 17 million students at the primary level; again it is estimated that 15.09 million children between the ages of 6 and 10 attend primary school. It can be said that somewhat 16-17 million children between the ages of 6 and 10 attend primary school. Education is their right but achieving their right to education is a huge challenge. Bangladesh's commitment to education has been clearly stated in its Constitution and development plans with education being given the highest priority in the public sector investments. Education sector allocations are currently about 2.3 percent of GDP and 14 percent of total government expenditure. Maintaining this commitment to the education sector is imperative in order to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Despite international commitments and serious efforts undertaken by the government, 2.21 million children lack access to primary education. In total, about 5.76 million children of all ages have dropped out of primary school. In such a situation the possible role of school psychologists in achieving Universal Primary Education in Bangladesh needs a rethink.

Keywords: Challenges for the School Psychologists, Commitment of Government of Bangladesh to ensure education, School Psychologists, Universal primary education

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a development agenda. The world wide concern for education as a development agenda, primarily emerged through 'Education for All' (EFA) movement. EFA is a global movement led by UNESCO, aiming to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. The movement was launched in 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien, Thailand. There, representatives of the international community (155 countries, as well as representatives from some 150

organizations) agreed to "universalize primary education and massively reduce illiteracy by the end of the decade"¹. Bangladesh conforms fully to the Education For All (EFA) objectives. The World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in April

2000, is considered to be the first and most important event in education at the dawn of the new century. By adopting the

Dakar Framework for Action, the 1,100 participants of the Forum reaffirmed their commitment to achieving Education for All by the year 2015 and entrusted UNESCO with the overall responsibility of co-ordinating all international players and sustaining the global momentum². The government of Bangladesh is working to achieve the committed goals of the Dakar Framework Education for All (EFA). The country's 'National Plan of Action' (NPA) also aims to attain the six EFA goals set in the Dakar Framework by 2015.

The Six Dakar Goals are³:

- (i) expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- (ii) ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- (iii) ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;

¹ Education For All, retrieved on 01.05.09

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_For_All

² World Education Forum, retrieved on 01.05.09

http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/wef_2000/

³ Dakar Framework for Action retrieved on 01.05.09

http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/dakfram_eng.shtml

- (iv) achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- (v) eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- (vi) improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

Bangladesh signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) on August 3, 1990. Article 28 of UNCRC asserts clearly about education right of the children. As it says:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
- (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.

3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are eight goals to be achieved by 2015 that respond to the world's main development challenges. The MDGs are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and

governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000. Bangladesh, has committed itself to attaining the targets embodied in the Millennium Declaration by 2015. Among the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), goal 2 and goal 3 relate to education.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	
Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling	2.1 Net enrolment ratio in primary education 2.2 Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary 2.3 Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds, women and men
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	
Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	3.1 Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education 3.2 Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector 3.3 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

The Government of Bangladesh seems to be strongly committed to children's advancement and to uphold their rights. Article 28 (4) of the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh declares that the state can make special provision for the progress of children. Article 17 of the Bangladesh Constitution provides that all children between the ages of six and ten years receive a basic education free of charge. In 1990, Bangladesh passed the Primary Education Act and, in 1993, it established the compulsory primary education system for children aged 6 years and above. In collaboration with the World Food Program (WFP), the Government started the Food for Education programme in 1993 with an aim to attract poor children and their families towards primary education. With the setting-up of the Primary and Mass Education Division in 1992 and the Directorate of Non-Formal Education in 1996, the Government introduced another remedy to tackle the high dropout and low attendance rates in the formal school system. Thus progress in the enrolment rates was attributed to the increase in the Government's budgetary allocation for girls' education, free primary education, massive stipend programmes at the primary level and the

Food-for-Education Programme⁴. At the primary level, the main objectives of the stipend scheme were to increase enrolment and completion rates, establish equity in financial assistance for students and improve the overall quality of primary education [8]⁵. The programme covered up to 40% of rural students attending primary schools receiving government support. In 2004/05, 19% of government primary education spending went on the primary stipends project [1]. School stipends scheme for boys had been introduced in the budget of 2008. But, in reality, still causes of frustration persist.

Despite these initiatives, however, some 2.4 million 6-10 year old children are still not enrolled in primary schools. Taking into account demographic consideration and the rate of population growth, it is estimated that to meet MDG 2 by 2015, the primary school enrolment rate should increase annually at a rate of 1.25 percentage point for girls and 1.50 percentage points for boys. While drop out rates in the primary school cycle have fallen from 38 percent in 1994 to 33 percent in 2004, the rates have been found to be higher (36%) in government schools compared to private ones (13%). Among those who are not enrolled and those who have dropped out, a significant number come from poor households and live in rural areas, urban slums, coastal areas and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) [13],[14].

As indicated by USAID the situation demands essentially addressing the following challenges.

Daunting Challenges for a Growing Population⁶

- Among those who enter primary school, only 76% complete it. It takes them an average of 6.6 years to do so.
- 6% children do not enroll, and 25% of those dropout. That means 30% of Bangladeshi children do not have a primary school education.
- The average level of primary school graduates is the 2nd grade.

- Repeation and dropout rates remain unacceptably high, especially for children living in poverty and children from minority families.
- The student/teacher ratio is 60 to 1, among the worst in Asia.
- Average student/teacher contact time is 2.5 hours per day, one of the lowest rates in the world.

II. ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

The school psychologists typically are found to be dealing with students having behavioural problems, disabilities, mental retardation, mental disorders, etc. They usually work with teachers and parents of any child with difficulty (due to many possible reasons) to develop techniques to deal with the child and his/her home and classroom behavior. Training students, parents, and teachers about how to manage crisis situations and substance abuse problems are also included in the work area of the school psychologists⁷. According to the National Association of School Psychology (NASP⁸), there are five major areas where school psychologists provide services⁹:

- (1) consultation [2],[12],[10],[16],[17],[18],[6],[20]
- (2) evaluation or assessment [1],[12],[18],[20],[19]
- (3) intervention [6],[12],[3],[15],[20]
- (4) prevention [6],[7]
- (5) research and planning [5],[9].

In professional literature numerous attempts are found that highlight the role of school psychologists as consultants of students, teachers, parents, local administrators, policy and decision makers and as resource persons to help schools in modifying disruptive behaviours by changing the class-room environment¹⁰.

Gutkin [6] mentioned several topics that could be of interest for school psychologists who wish give more

⁴ “Bangladesh Poverty Alleviation Strategy” by Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelley in South Asian Journal, January March 2006. Retrieved on 30.04.09
http://www.southasianmedia.net/Magazine/Journal/1_1_bangladesh_poverty.htm

⁵ The primary stipends programme was introduced in 2003 and replaced two earlier projects; the food for education (FFE) programme which began in 1993 and the primary education stipends project introduced in 2000 in areas outside of the FFE programme.

⁶ Current Conditions: Education, retrieved on 30.04.09
<http://www.usaid.gov/bd/programs/education.html>

⁷ “School Psychology Careers” By Kendra Cherry. Retrieved on 30.04.09.

<http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologycareerprofiles/p/schoopsych.htm>

⁸ established and formally recognized as a doctoral specialty by the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1968.

⁹ “School Psychology Careers” By Kendra Cherry. Retrieved on 30.04.09.

<http://psychology.about.com/od/psychologycareerprofiles/p/schoopsych.htm>

¹⁰ Cole Brown, Psychological needs of post-war children in Kosovo; SPI 23-2 May 2002, quoted in Al-Samarrai, 2008.

importance to education for all in their day to day work. Among others he mentioned the followings:

1. actions to develop and promote literacy (reading, spelling) among minorities (in mother tongue or official national tongue), children (especially girls) and adults (especially women).
2. non formal education towards mothers in order to promote sound psychological development (cognitive, emotional...) for young children.
3. education in post war countries (education to peace and tolerance)
4. training of teachers in countries building or re-building their school system (for example East-European countries).
5. More generally, any programme aiming to improve basic education quality and allowing all children to have easy access to education.

Calls for change in the role of school psychologists have appeared in the literature over a period of nearly 50 years. Evidence of change exists for some outstanding individual school psychologists and in a number of model programs, but not on a widespread basis [4]. The new ideas include a greater emphasis on indirect service, application of the science of psychology to define problems and design programs, an emphasis on prevention of problems, use of a systematic evaluation of services, involvement of various stakeholders in development and evaluation of services, and consideration of diversity from a broad perspective.

III. ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION: CHALLENGES FOR THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN BANGLADESH

The role school psychologist in the context of Bangladesh for achieving universal primary education can be dynamic and innovative. These may include:

1. motivating,
2. advocacy,
3. working in partnership and
4. innovative intervention for bringing change.

Motivating: Motivating students, parents, policy makers and all stakeholders to work for achieving universal primary education.

Advocacy: Using the knowledge gained through (1) consultation, (2) evaluation, (3) intervention, (4) prevention, (5) research and planning, and (6) experience for advocacy to bring appropriate changes.

Working in Partnership: Establishing credibility to have partners to work with on the way toward achieving universal primary education.

Innovative intervention for bringing change: Utilizing own knowledge of a school psychologist using innovation to bring change.

REFERENCES

- [1] Benson, A. J. & Hughes, J. (1985). Perceptions of role definition processes in school psychology: A national survey, *School Psychology Review*, 14, 64–74.
- [2] Bramlett, R. K. & Murphy, J. J. (1998). School psychology perspectives on consultation: Key contributions to the field, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 9, 29–55.
- [3] Curtis, M. J. & Batsche, G. M. (1991). Meeting the needs of children and families: Opportunities and challenges for school psychology training programs, *School Psychology Review*, 20, 565–577.
- [4] Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), (2002). *Project proforma for primary education stipend project*. Primary and Mass Education Division: Dhaka.
- [5] Furlong, M., Morrison, G., & Pavelski, R. (2000). Trends in school psychology for the 21st century: Influences of school violence on professional change, *Psychology in the Schools*, 37, 81–90.
- [6] Gutkin, T. B. & Curtis, M. J. (1999). School-based consultation theory and practice: The art and science of indirect service delivery. In C.R. Reynolds & T.B. Gutkin (Eds.), *The handbook of school psychology* 3rd ed., (pp. 598–637). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- [7] Johnson, S. B., & Dean, V. J. (2000). Role change for school psychology: The challenge continues in the new millennium, *Psychology in the Schools*, 37, 1–6.
- [8] Johnson, S. B., Johnson, C. M., & Timm, S. J. (1995). Where will—and where should—changes in education leave school psychology? *Journal of School Psychology*, 33, 187–200.
- [9] Knoff, H. M., Curtis, M. J. & Batsche, G. M. (1997). The future of school psychology: Perspectives on effective training, *School Psychology Review*, 26, 93–103.
- [10] Lacayo, N., Sherwood, G., & Morris, J. (1981). Daily activities of school psychologists: A national survey, *Psychology in the Schools*, 18, 184–190.
- [11] Morrison, G. M., Furlong, M. J., & Morrison, R. L. (1999). School violence to school safety: Reframing the issue for school psychologists, *School Psychology Review*, 23, 236–256.
- [12] Reschly, D. J., & Wilson, M. S. (1995). School psychology practitioners and faculty: 1986 to 1991–92—Trends in demographics, roles,

- satisfaction, and system reform, *School Psychology Review*, 24, 62–80.
- [13] Samarrai, S. A. (2007). Financing basic education in Bangladesh. *Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) Pathways to Access Research Monograph Series 29*, University of Sussex and Institute of Education and Development, BRAC University: Brighton.
- [14] Samarrai, S. A. (2009). Governance and education inequality in Bangladesh. *Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009. Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009, Overcoming Inequality: why governance matters,* 2008, UNESCO.
- [15] Shapiro, E. S. (1991). Training school psychologists for service delivery to children with severe emotional disturbance, *School Psychology Review*, 20, 485–497.
- [16] Smith, D. K. (1984). Practicing school psychologists: Their characteristics, activities, and populations served. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 15, 798–810.
- [17] Smith, D. K., & Lyon, M. A. (1985). Consultation in school psychology: Changes from 1981 to 1984, *Psychology in the Schools*, 22, 404–409.
- [18] Stinnett, T. A., Havey, J. M., & Stinnett, J. O. (1994). Current test usage by practicing school psychologists: A national survey, *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 12, 331–350.
- [19] Telzrow, C. F. (1999). IDEA amendments of 1997: Promise or pitfall for special education reform? *Journal of School Psychology*, 37, 7–28.
- [20] Ysseldyke, J., Dawson, P., Lehr, C., Reschly, D., Reynolds, M., & Telzrow, C. (1997). *School psychology: A blueprint for training and practice II*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.