

CHALLENGES OF POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Primary education improving is a basic human right in Bangladesh and it is announced free and compulsory for all citizens. For improving primary education several times Governments has taken various initiatives through education policy, education commission, and task force report to achieve the goal of compulsory primary education in Bangladesh. In this regard, Governments have taken so many projects to implement primary education policy. But the very important aspect of primary education in Bangladesh is policy formulation and implementation and it is regarded as problematic. The process of policy formulation has not been done properly due to lack of democratic values and influence of powerful elites in administration. The implementation process suffers from lack of efficiency in administration as well as lack of political will and commitment. The rigid ideas of bureaucracy also hampers in policy implementation. In the study, it has been explored and analyzed the challenging factors of policy formulation and implementation of primary education in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Primary education¹ is compulsory for all children in Bangladesh. Education is considered important instruments for the political, social, cultural and economic development of our country. The efficient educational process helps to people who are socially and politically conscious. The Government of Bangladesh recognizes the fact that for the achievement of sustainable development its population must be provided with a sound basic education. To achieve this goal, the government has taken various steps through primary Education Development Program in this regard. The government has set up a target towards Education for All (EFA) by the year 2000 and later, it has been extended to 2015. The National Plan of Action (NPA-I & II) has taken to achieve the goal of Education for All (EFA) by the year 2000 and then 2015 is being implemented. From the international conference (Jomtien, Thailand 1990) the government is

committed to achieve Education for All. For fulfillment the goals the government passed the Compulsory Primary Education² Act 1990 in parliament. The goals and objectives were Education for All. In this regard, the government of Bangladesh has formulated a number of Education Commissions and Committees as well as National Education Policy-2000. The commissions recommended taking necessary initiatives in order to achieve the goals regarding primary education.

Beside this, the government has taken two National Action Plans (NAP-I & II) to achieve the goals. The improvement of primary education is being run through different projects and program. The financing of projects are allocated by internal and external sources. The allocation of government budget for each year is the internal source of financing and the support of the donors treated as external.

The government of Bangladesh has already taken five fifth year plans from 1973 to 2002 and major plans were focused on Education for All (EFA). The plans provide different guidelines and strategies to attainment the goal in primary education. To ensure the commitment of Jomtien and Dakar Conferences and National Action Plans every year the government is adding Annual Development Plan (ADP). The plan is implemented with the efforts of government as well donor partners. But the aim of the goal is not achieved in proper way within a framework of time. The major problem is in policy formulation as well as implementation stage. The study has been analyzed the factors of policy formulation and implementation process in primary education of Bangladesh.

Background

After independence, the government of Bangladesh took different steps regarding primary education through different plans and programmes. The five year plan is one of them and government has already taken five fifth year plans. All of the plans have given importance on free and compulsory primary education to all children of Bangladesh. The target of first five year plan was enrolment of 6 million to 8.1 million, attendance was from 58% to 73% and access of primary was from 76% boys and 40% girls to 90% and 55% respectively (Directorate of Primary Education 1999:8).

A significant aspect of the Second Five-Year Plan (1980-85) was foreign investments in primary education. At that time, two important projects (Universal Primary Education)³ were undertaken by IDA at forty-four Thanas⁴ in Bangladesh 1981, the Directorate of primary education was established and Assistant Thana Education Officers (ATEO) were recruited

to strengthen field level supervision and inspection. Management training for teachers and staff were introduced to develop administration in primary education. Uniforms were distributed among students freely. Infrastructural facilities were created for schools and it was a significant development in primary education.

The meaningful contribution of Third Five Year Plan (1995-90) was nationalization of schools and establishing Management Information System (MIS). During this period 8,519 schools were constructed, 5,000 schools were repaired and 2, 15,000 pairs of benches were supplied. A total of 1,000 primary schools were nationalized and 4,000 teachers appointed (Directorate of Primary Education 1999:9)

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95) gave the highest importance to primary and mass education. Education was identified as a vehicle for the development of human resources. A new Division (Ministry) entitled- 'Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED)' was created in 1992 for strengthening the primary education structure keeping it in tune with the requirement of modern times, and for eradication of illiteracy. A significant policy undertaken in the Fourth plan was to make education compulsory.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) was the latest step to development of primary education in Bangladesh. During this period NGOs and community based school were encouraged by the Government. The goal of this period was to set up a school in each and every village. Beside this, different steps were taken to develop primary education. As a result Bangladesh had achieved commendable success in increasing enrolment and attendance and reducing dropout rates.

The government has also formed several education commissions⁵ and task forces in different times to recommend for the improvement of education system of Bangladesh. These are Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission in 1974, Kazi Zafar Ahmed Commission 1977, Mazid Khan Commission 1985, Mofizuddin Ahmed Commission 1988, Shamsul Haque Education Commission 1997⁶ and Task Force on Primary and Mass Education in 1993 deeply thought about primary education and made positive recommendations. The Qudrat-e.Khuda education commission recommended to extend duration of primary education from five to eight years, quality of education as well as to strengthen institutional capacity. But none of these education commissions report were considered for full implementation.

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 was the largest conference regarding basic education⁷. At this conference about 1500 participants including delegates from 155 governments, officials and specialists from 20 inter governmental bodies and 150 non governmental organizations participated(Nath 1997:12).The participants of the conference reaffirms that education is a fundamental right for the people including men and women of all ages throughout the world and the key goals of the conference was universal access to education by the year 2000.The conference was also given importance regarding the quality of education.

In Delhi Declaration, held in 16 December 1993,the leaders of nine most populous developing nations⁸ of the world agreed with the goals set in 1990.They determined to implement the goals and make international collaboration to raise their support for the effort of these countries substantially to expand basic education services(Titumir 2004:37).The another international education conference held in Dahar, Senegal 2000 and the main commitment of the conference is free and compulsory primary education of good quality and Education for All(EFA)by the year 2015.The conference has given special emphasis on girls ,vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Bangladesh also aims to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which require the country, among others, to attain universal primary enrollment of 90 percent by the year 2015.

A National Plan of Action-1991 (NPA-I) was also prepared to meet the goals set by the World Conference on Education for All(EFA).In this action plan, the government fixed Bangladesh's target towards education for all by 2000 AD. The government has prepared the post-Dakar National Plan of Action (NPA-II) for 'Education for All' (2003-2015).The second National Plan of Action is an extension of the NPA-I covering the period 1991-2000 which was adopted as a follow up of the world Conference on EFA in 1990.NPA- II has identified five major operational goals to be reached by the year 2015:

- a) Expanded and improved early childhood care and education for survival, growth, learning and development
- b) Universal and free access to basic education for all children with special emphasis on excluded groups;
- c) Universal access to basic learning opportunities and skills programmes for all young people and adults;
- d) Achievement by all learners of nationally defined, objectively measured levels in literacy, numberacy and life skills; and

- e) Elimination of gender disparity in primary and lower level by 2005 and full and equal access to and effective participation in basic education of women and girls.

The goals of the plan are to be implemented step by step within three phases. In first phase (2003-2005), the second phase (2006-2010) and the final phase (2011-2015) and the target of net enrollment is 83%, 92% and 100% respectively.

The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) decides upon policy matters and generally directs activities related to EFA. MoPME is accountable for implementing the program according to government and other development partners' procedures and guidelines, and for overall transparency and accountability in using projects funds. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) implements and manages projects and activities related to primary education. The Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) is responsible for management and implementation of Non-Formal Education. At the regional level, divisions and districts play the role of key supervisory and support roles in implementing projects. The Upazila⁹ primary education office plays an important role in implementing education policy through various development projects as part of decentralizing the planning and management functions at Upazila level. The effectiveness of policy implementation depends on coordination and cooperation by every districts and Upazila administration along with concerned organizations¹⁰ and development partners. The financial source of primary education is from development of government budget and support from donor agencies /countries. All policies are highly dependent on government budget and external donors (Titumir 2004:42). Different international organizations and developed countries are the foreign partner in primary education of Bangladesh. They are contributing at financial, technical and administrative support through different projects and programme in primary education.

Objectives of the Study

A policy issue in primary education is a crucial aspect in developing countries like Bangladesh. The formulation and implementation of primary education policy is the highest priority both of government and foreign donors. The primary education is progressing from a long time but it is not satisfactory because some sort of problems in policy formulation and implementation stage. The aims of the study are:

- a) What are the factors influenced in policy formulation and implementation and how these factors influence in it?
- b) Examining the problems of policy formulation and implementation of primary education in Bangladesh
- c) How does policy formulation and implementation have an impact on development of primary education as well as socio-economic development process in Bangladesh?

Sources of data

The study is mainly conducted by using secondary data. Besides, the sources of data are from different books, journals, and daily news papers, relevant documents from government and non government organizations. Internet websites were used to conduct the study.

Theoretical Concepts & Variables

The Policy formulation and implementation process are the vital stages in policy issues. In the developing countries these stages face a lot of problems. Different factors of formulation and implementation of education policy in Bangladesh are considered the conceptual framework given by Grindle and Thomas (1990). They also have presented their ideas in the context of socio-economic and political conditions of developing countries. According to Grindle and Thomas (1990:1164), policy implementation will be successful when institutional strength and political will are working actively.

Generally, the reform issues come in parliament as an agenda by the politician for implementation. In the implementation process decision making is an important stage and political and bureaucratic officials play important role regarding this. The primary education policy is not implemented fully because of institutional weakness of Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and its concern organizations. There is another reason, lack of political will and commitment and the on going political culture of Bangladesh.

From policy issues to implementation stages reaction or response may come from public or bureaucratic arena. According to Grindle and Thomas (1990:1166), policy reform initiative may be altered or reversed at any stage in its life cycle by pressure and reactions of those who oppose it. At the same time they have mentioned that resources like political, financial, managerial, technical are needed to mobilize in order to sustain a policy initiative. At the time of policy formulation at primary education sector in Bangladesh, the elites of the society make pressure and establish

their dominance for their own interest. The interest of common people is ignored there. As a result, it is difficult to achieve the target of common goal.

According to their study, policy implementation is unsuccessful because of changing actual policy issues, takes new decision during implementation process and removed from policy agenda by donor countries/agencies. In this case, bureaucratic and public reaction affects in implementation process. Moreover, the primary education sector of Bangladesh is supported by donor countries/agencies and they indirectly influence the policy formulation process. The administrative inefficiency, mis-management, and accountability are problematic factor at policy implementation in Bangladesh. It needs to be mentioned that coordination, cooperation, and autonomy have impact on policy implementation in Bangladesh. The challenges of policy formulation and implementation in primary education of Bangladesh are analyzed on the basis of above theoretical concept.

Challenges of Policy Formulation and Implementation

The primary education policy is the key factor of development in primary education of Bangladesh. The recommendations of education commission are based on education policy of Bangladesh, guidelines of the constitution and reflect the commitment from international conference. The main purpose of education commission is to introduce a suitable education system in Bangladesh. Several governments have made education reform commissions from the beginning of independence of Bangladesh. The Qudrat-e-Khuda education reform is one of them and most of the commissions reports have been made in the light of this commission. But the recommendations of the commission report were not fully implemented due to political change and culture of Bangladesh. As a result it makes difficult to implement primary education policy in Bangladesh. Moreover, it is said that the recommendations of the Qudrat-e-Khuda education commission is not fully implemented within this long period. *“Since the 1970s, five Education Commissions were formed by the successive governments (in 1972, 1977, 1984, 1987 and 1997) but either the commissions failed to submit their reports or the reports were not implemented”* (Mujeri 2003:22).

The national education policy-2000 which includes compulsory primary education for all children between ages 6 to 10. But lack of political will as well as political culture it was not approved or implemented. *The national education policy which was formulated in 1997, and which recommended*

compulsory education for children between grades 1 to 8 grades has not been approved nor implemented (Frederiksson 1999:13)

Resources are crucial element in policy implementation at primary education in Bangladesh. The policy implementation is also depending on proper resource utilization. The financial resource is the key factor in policy implementation and it comes from government allocated budget at each and every year and donor agencies/countries. The primary education policy in Bangladesh is not implemented sharply because of lack of financial resources and its proper utilization. Sometime resources are misused or mis-managed by politician and bureaucrats. *“With an allocation of under \$20 per year per child in the government primary schools, primary education is definitely under-resourced in Bangladesh. Public expenditure in education as the share of GNP is one of the lowest in the world here. Improvement of pupil achievement will require the commitment of substantially larger public resources and better use of these resources”* (Chowdhury 2001:51).

Technical resources are technology, equipment and infrastructural development and it helps to make sure policy effectiveness at primary education. The government and donor agency/country are working together on infrastructural development through different projects/programmes. The main purpose of the projects is to attainment the goal in primary education. But the projects are not implemented at proper time due to mis-management in primary education administration. Sometime it faces lack of resources. The lack of political will and resource constraints could not achieve required progress in primary education programme in Bangladesh (Titumir 2004:38). The administrative resources are skill manpower, training and efficiency in administration and there have some lacking in administrative resources also. These lack of resources and proper practice of resources make problem in policy implementation at primary education in Bangladesh.

According to Education for All Assessment 2000, there has been progress of primary education since the Jomtien Conference in 1990, but not enough. The goals of Jomtien have not been reached, among the many reasons Education International (EI) mentioned two reasons, and the resource deficiency is one of them. *“Primary education has not been provided with sufficient resources. The report mentions that the lack of funding is a part of a widespread financial problem. The resources needed are simply not to the governments. It is also mentioned that funding problems are the result of lack of political will.”* (Frederiksson 1999:64):

It is very important to institutionalize development programs within the organizational and administrative framework of MoPME and DPE and to implement projects through the line structure. The study of World Bank (2004:20) mentioned 3 types of problem in primary education, and lack of institutionalization is one of them. According to study of World Bank, policies and administrative arrangements that can keep the system from performing at an acceptable level e.g. the “shift” system, weak organizational capacity, centralized management, and inadequate funding arrangements.

In Bangladesh every sector is politicized and primary education is not exception to this. Government interferes every stage of management process. The most cases in recruitment, promotion and transfer is based on political dominance. According to transparency International Report 2004, education sector is the most corrupt in administration of Bangladesh. The politicized and corruption in primary education administration affect at policy implementation process. *Corruption and politicization are manifested in all parts of education system- recruitment and management of personnel, construction and maintenance of facilities, production and supply of textbooks, subvention to non-government institutions, distribution of food for education and public examinations(Chowdhury 2001:51).The effectiveness of the school system in south Asia is hampered by political interference, corruption, over-centralization, a lack of school autonomy, underdeveloped managerial capacity, and poor information systems (Haq1998:82)*

The political culture plays a dominated role in policy formulation of Bangladesh. Major policies are formulated on the basis of interest of elite groups like politician, bureaucrats and businessman. In this aspect, the empowering government makes policy according to their own strategy. The opposition and the interest of general people are ignored there. In the policy formulation there is lack of democratic values in Bangladesh. This is because of lack of institutionalization of democracy in political process. The support of donor partners is significant in primary education of Bangladesh. During 1990-2000 it was 17.25 percent of the total non-formal and primary education budget. As a result they make indirect pressure on policy decision as well as implementation in primary education.

The policy formulation stage is a problematic issue of policy implementing at primary education in Bangladesh. The policy of primary education is formulated on the basis of information from local offices. But it is not accurate or valid information. The EMIS provides information regarding primary education and the higher authority¹¹ formulate policy.

Lack of institutionalization and coordination are the main problems in gathering information. *The principal factors behind the systemic ineffectiveness are the lack of informed policy formulation and planning for development, poor linkage and coordination in overall educational development, and centralized management (World Bank 2004:23).* The effectiveness of policy formulation with implementation needs interaction. The role of civil society in policy formulation and implementation at primary education is very important. But it is difficult to ensure because of highly centralized administrative structure. The participation of civil society in the policy formulation process is necessary not only as an essential component of human rights approach but also to ensure effective implementation of education programmes (Mujeri 2003:19). But the policy formulation and implementation process in primary education is inconsistent because of ineffective participation of civil society. “The policy formulation in the sector is non-participatory and messy” (The Bangladesh Observer 2004:1). Generally, there has not been an interactive and effective dialogical process of policy formulation, implementation, evaluation, reflection and critique (Alam2003:96)

Conclusion

Primary education is a very important development sector in Bangladesh and it makes socio-economic development of the country. The advancement of primary education in Bangladesh is not satisfactory. Several time governments have made a target for compulsory primary education for all but it is not progressing properly due to negative political and bureaucratic culture of Bangladesh. The policy formulation and implementation are the main problematic issue in primary education. It is not followed democratic values and proper rules and regulation in policy making. There is also indirect foreign pressure and influence of powerful elites in policy formulation. The implementation is also problematic. The institutional weakness, lack of political will as well as inadequate resources impacts on policy implementation. The bureaucracy in administration is also challenging actor in policy implementation. It is crying need to make efficiency and effectiveness in administration. Accountability and transparency must be ensured in administration and resources should be utilized properly. The factor of political commitment is very important to achieve the goal of compulsory primary education in Bangladesh.

Notes :

1. Primary Education refers to education as determined by the government, for the children of age group 6 to 10 years in grade 1 to 5 having prescribed national curriculum, textbook and school hours .The academic year begins in January and ends in December.
2. Compulsory Primary Education refers to the number of years of the age-span during which children are legally obliged to attend school.
3. Universal primary education (UPE) means full enrollment of all children in the primary school age-group, i.e. 100 percent net enrollment ratio.
4. Thana is a administrative unit and it is a part of field administration in Bangladesh.It is lower part in district administration and the whole Bangladesh is divided into 491 Thanas.Now Thana is called Upazila.
5. Education Commission is formed by some eminent persons in the society who have deep experience in education. The commission is formed under supervision of government and it recommends for improvement of education in the country.
6. The Education Commission headed by Shamsul Haq was accepted by Government as national education policy 2000.
7. According to the Jomtien declaration basic education refers to "education intended to meet basic learning needs, which in turn has been defined as the knowledge, skills,attitudes and values necessary for people to survive, to improve the quality of their lives, and to continue learning"
8. The nine developing nations are Bangladesh, Brazil, China ,Egypt, India, Indonesia ,Mexico ,Nigeria and Pakistan.This countries account for half of the world's population and 70% of illiterate adults.
9. Upazila is a decentralizing part of central administration and its previous name was Thana. Now the number of Upazila in Bangladesh is 491 and it is important part in local administration.
10. Concern organizations mean Ministry of Education (ME), Local Government Engineering Department and other related organizations.
11. The higher authority refers to The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and it is responsible to formulate primary education policy in Bangladesh.

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