

Bangladesh Educational Assessment  
Time to Learn: Teachers' and Students' Use of Time  
in Government Schools in Bangladesh  
RECOMMENDATIONS



BEPS

Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity

CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONALE

*In collaboration with*

CARE, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, AND GROUNDWORK

# **BANGLADESH EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT**

## **TIME TO LEARN:**

### **Teachers' and Students' Use of Time in Government Primary Schools in Bangladesh**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

While student attendance is problematic, the key to increasing the amount of contact and instructional time initially lies with making structural changes and acting to regularize school operations so that contact and instructional time is maximized. In particular, this means that the pivotal problem of teacher attendance must be tackled. Suggestions for dealing with these issues—the school calendar, the school day, the teachers, and even the students—have been presented at the conclusion of each section in Chapter IV. Many of these suggestions are obvious and this study is not the first to make them.

However, the real challenge in Bangladesh is how to make the ostensibly well-developed education system work as intended. In general, the problems of low contact and instructional time are not caused by a lack of policies, rules, regulations, supervisory procedures and/or trained personnel, but rather by the lack of meaningful observance, practice and enforcement of these provisions. Many of the operations of the primary education system seem to be driven by the desire of the local-level education personnel to maximize their own personal benefit, to the exclusion of the development and learning achievement of the education system's intended beneficiaries—the students. Until these priorities change, it is unlikely that many of the suggestions made will be successfully implemented. There will always be a way to find a loophole or to mime compliance. A different system of accountability, incentives and penalties must not only be put in place, but enforced.

One way to increase the chances that structural and operational reforms are observed and acted on is to involve the beneficiaries of primary schooling, specifically the parents and community members, in managing the school and holding its personnel accountable for their actions. Such increased involvement would mean a restructuring of the way SMCs and PTAs operate, who is to participate in them, how they disseminate information to the community and the parents, how often they meet, and a broader definition of their responsibilities and authority. In order to realize a fully accountable, school-based management system, a new concept of decentralized school management needs to be developed in which SMC and PTA membership is broadened, they become accountable to the community (not the UPEO), and they take on new decision-making roles.

The elected Union Council could work with revitalized SMCs and PTAs in improving school-based management. Head-teachers, teachers and local education authorities could work with the SMCs and the PTAs to provide information on what is happening in the school, so that they and the community would be able to suggest and undertake actions (disciplinary if necessary) to improve school contact hours, and regularize teacher and student attendance. Local and school-based decisions about hours of operation, vacation periods, and other considerations to adjust the calendar to suit local needs (taking into account harvest season, flood season, and other factors)—within government parameters—could improve student attendance.

Re-defined and re-energized SMCs and PTAs are essential if schools, teachers, and the education system are to be held accountable for providing the prescribed contact hours. Numerous studies have made very credible suggestions about how to improve the school inspection and supervision system, but the entrenched system has exhibited very little change. If, however, the

SMCs and PTAs are re-tooled to become vital, informed and empowered elements in local school management, this could impact on the quality of the bureaucracy at the upazila level. Such re-vitalized PTAs and SMCs might very well make not only the teachers and head-masters in the school more accountable for their actions, but might hold the local education officers more accountable as well.

Several Bangladeshi and international organizations have worked successfully with communities to improve educational opportunities for primary school-aged children. In addition to the well-known community-based activities of BRAC, other groups—such as Save the Children/USA and CARE-Bangladesh—are currently working with SMCs, PTAs and communities on school-based management, with support from USAID. In addition, the government's Primary Education Development Plan II (PEDP II), to begin implementation in January, 2004, includes the idea of establishing School Learning Improvement Plans (SLIPs) in each school and an Upazila Primary Education Plan (UPEP) in each upazila. The upazila plan would go beyond a simple compilation of school plans and would look at all educational opportunities—government, non-government and NGO-sponsored—in the upazila with the idea of mapping out a program to involve all children in some kind of schooling. However, if the SLIPs and the UPEPs are to be more than just additional paperwork in the bureaucracy, more real responsibility must be given to these bodies to make the schools and the teachers more accountable to the community.

Another way of promoting reform is to offer alternatives to the formal government primary school system, essentially introducing some form of competition that may attract the “custom” of the primary school-age children (and their parents) and the attention of educational authorities. The well-known and extensive system of nonformal education centers run by BRAC and other local groups provides quality primary education at a low cost, and is often preferred by many families. However, enrollment in these centers may be constrained by bureaucratic rigidities that prevent the same level of certification and access to public secondary schooling.

In other countries, distance education has provided alternatives. One notable example is the Telecurso program in Brazil, which has condensed the primary and lower secondary school curriculum into a series of popular television broadcasts set in the workplace. The program, developed and financed by the private sector, is offered free of charge to all users and the government has allowed the students to sit for an equivalency exam that provides successful students with access to the next level of education. In Honduras, *Educadores* is a radio-based schooling program that goes through ninth grade, aimed specifically at underserved rural areas.

One option in Bangladesh is to use radio or television-based programs to provide remedial instruction for government primary school students, covering and reinforcing the curriculum with more innovative methods than found in the average classroom. Another option is to develop junior and higher secondary schooling programs that students in non-government schools, such as BRAC, could access to further their formal education. This would essentially remove the constraints on students enrolled in nonformal primary school programs, and make them more attractive to other school-aged children, thus introducing an element of competition and pressure on government education personnel to retain students through better school operations if per capita resource allocations—an area of concern to school personnel—are to be maintained.

Sufficient contact and instructional time is a fundamental requirement of a well-functioning and effective education system. Based on the research undertaken by this study—in combination with other studies—it is apparent that Bangladesh's students in government primary schools receive less time than intended, less time than they need to learn, and less time than they deserve. Changes in policies and regulations will not be sufficient; action must be taken to reform the way education personnel view and perform their supervisory, management and—most of all—instructional tasks.