

# Production Oriented Education

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**W**HAT is Education? So far no clear-cut single definition of education is available. Literacy is not education. It is a means to education. One may term 'knowledge' as education. A carpenter who made a chair, may be a masterpiece; a person who repaired/made a motor for your ceiling fan at 'Dholai Khal' but cannot write their names, we call them illiterate. But they are productive. Whereas persons who crossed school, college and university, obtaining diplomas and degrees, may remain unproductive, yet we call them 'educated elite' though they are a burden on society.

The basic principle of education means learning to read and write for communication and understanding which is similar everywhere all over the world. We call it primary education and it is an essential part of all education systems everywhere.

Why Education? We say education is the backbone for a country's development. If it is meant for development, our education should be production-oriented. By production-oriented I want to mean 'earn as you learn'. We are poor. Traditional formal education has a gestation period, say 16 to 30 years. We cannot afford that time to make our education productive. We have been hearing for long that our education system is defective. But very little has so far been done to make it efficient and effective.

Education policy and systems vary from country to country depending on the socio-economic backgrounds and needs. Our education policy and system should be so designed that it can develop our socio-economic conditions based on our backgrounds and needs, making it productive right from the start. To do that, alongside primary education, we need 'incentive-oriented education system' that generates employment and earnings. I think informal vocational/technical education with employment, formal primary and secondary education, side by side, may go a long way in this respect, particularly for the illiterate poor, both adolescents and the adults. Such a system may guide our education towards development. Most of the NGOs, if not all, have educational programmes and pro-

jects. They should concentrate on this aspect of education to achieve tangible practical results worth the money they spend.

The drop-out issue: The drop-out problem, particularly in primary education, is a burning issue in our education system. It has tremendous negative impact on the national economy. The main reason behind this I think, is not poverty alone; ignorance of importance of education on the part of the parents also plays a vital role. Child marriage may be another factor, but I think it is reducing gradually, though slowly. Educated women in cities and towns are forcefully vocal against it. As an incentive that can overcome both ignorance and poverty, primary education with employment for the very poor of the rural community may perhaps be started.

Yet, there may remain many 'ifs' and 'buts' in it. To tie them up in the system, certain conditions may be necessary such as discipline in studies and their respective work so that they can keep up the standard of their learning and do not fail. If any one fails, provisions of punitive measures should be there to make them careful, so that they value the job.

There should be no 'dirty politics' in it. This thought provoking idea should be taken seriously by the NGOs and other institutions concerned to make it effective and sustainable. It may not be as easy as we think and say. The experts should ponder over the issue and chalk out plans and programmes and undertake certain pilot projects. Particular emphasis should be given for attracting female students, providing special effective facilities.

Education should be taken seriously achieving tangible results and must make on-going sustainable programmes. Political games should not be played and money wasted in the name of education that yields nothing. We do not want that, we want positive results and I think it is possible to achieve that if we follow the moral aspects of the universal education system.

The factors behind drop-outs and absenteeism are many. I shall try to enumerate and explain only a few of them, based on a research by Save

the Children (UK). All children work. Some more, some less, some for money and others without money. The vast majority of the children of Bangladesh live, work and study in rural areas of the country. Many of those who go to schools have the added burden of working for the family which is a major cause of absenteeism. If education and jobs can go side by side right from the beginning. At least for the rural poor people then there could be a possibility of reducing absenteeism. Provisions have to be made at schools for jobs by technical and vocational training, and thereby generating income thereby for paying students, keeping a margin of profit. Such an incentive may attract rural poor people to education. But, it requires thorough research by the experts, implementing a few pilot projects to see and evaluate results. It may be difficult, but it is a vital issue in the field of our education.

Children's Work: Most of the village children is farming families, both boys and girls, have a lot of work to do throughout the year and particularly in the sowing and harvesting seasons, when they are compelled to absent themselves from school. This is true of both poor and very poor families. The role of the boys is much greater in cultivation, while that of the girls in housekeeping, tending fowls and some after-harvest agricultural work. Educationist and experts should do some serious research work on it to investigate the possibility to assimilating these 'children's work with education and employment generation for earning an income while learning, even while they work on their own land and houses. Of course proper evaluation and monitoring should be a part of the system. There should be clear-cut demarcation of 'education' and 'agriculture' to avoid confusions in allocation of funds in the budget in these sectors. If education is our highest priority, it should get that treatment, and that treatment should not be 'abused' in any manner or form.

School Working Days: The schools are scheduled to remain open for over six months in a year, but in

practice they are not. The number of official and unofficial holidays in a year exceeds 250 days. Other than weekend Fridays (52), there are 80 days of declared holidays, which include over a month of Ramadan vacations. The schools are expected to remain open for the remaining 207 days. This never happens. Over and above these, the teachers have some holidays of their own, besides absenting themselves from their teaching duties. In addition to these there are natural calamities, mainly of floods and cyclones. These factors, and some others tend to limit real school working days further, which cannot be logically and practically justified with courses of studies as per curriculum. The initial attempts to reduce the problems may be incentive-oriented employment generating vocational and technical education system, with an effective and sustainable policy for the very poor children to start with.

English Medium Education: In urban areas there are a few groups and classes of people who want and need English medium education, such as foreigners, rich and well-to-do desiring to send their children abroad for higher education, etc. There are however, certain provisions for the foreigners, arranged mainly by themselves. For the local people there are English medium kindergartens, meaning garden for very young children of play groups growing like mushrooms.

The Montessori system for children of three to six age groups, was developed by an Italian lady Marie Montessori. It was once very popular in this country. But it involved a wide range of materials and equipment which enabled children to learn by themselves. Perhaps because it is so capital intensive, it is no longer popular among people who go into the business of running schools.

Coaching, private tuition and 'education business' should be reviewed and there should be clear guidelines and control in this respect. Notebook business should be 'banned' at least at primary level. At the secondary level, it should be drastically curtailed and carefully monitored and reviewed occasionally.

(To be continued)