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Whenever an expert is invited to an educational seminar to say something on the process of designing the curriculum for any level of education, he usually includes some chosen words, such as "life-centered education", "activity-centered education", "society-centered education" etc. In his speech, all these words are undoubtedly significant and have an immense impact upon the attempt to frame suitable curricula for the nation. But these words lose their importance and prospect if they are turned into mere theoretical expressions. We, as a nation, had the opportunity to experience the truth inherent in the above remark for a good number of years as the designed plans and programmes for national development failed to achieve the minimum success. The nation is, at present, deeply engaged in framing the structure of suitable curricula for the nation and for another time we are going to experience the inclusion of a number of alluring statements in the curricula and I hope, this time we shall see them in practice.

The Open Air Primary Education scheme has touched the nerve of the national system of education in Bangladesh as the programme has not only been designed by inserting some vital words and proposals but its success has already been tested on an experimental basis and this stage of experiment has been termed as the first phase of the scheme. As a worker in the first phase of the programme, I have experienced the programme as a deviation from all other past programmes of national development which, more or less, had turned into will-of-the-wisps.

Significance of the scheme: In our sixty-five thousand villages there are about forty two thousand primary schools in which almost seventy-eight lakhs of pupils are attending as learners. An analysis of the present state of primary education of the country will reveal that the education which

# Future of Open air primary education

DR. MD. AZHAR ALI

The primary school children are receiving is largely book-centered. The Open Air Primary Education scheme is an attempt to inject the sense of life-centered education into the mind of the budding learners along with book-centered education within the four walls of primary schools, so that an activity-oriented education programme may adorn the curricula of primary schools and herein lies the real significance of the Open Air Primary Education scheme. A few points that have been included in the curriculum for the Open Air Primary Education in support of its introduction in the primary schools of Bangladesh are presented below:

1. In consideration of the present state of primary education in Bangladesh the introduction of Open Air Primary Education is necessary, as in addition to the traditional education it is possible to impart ideas of education to the learners in open air, following new methods of teaching.

2. This new method and curriculum of education should not be limited to the prescribed books for the primary school children; rather, they will be provided with the opportunity for learning by doing.

3. In respect of quality the Open Air Primary Education will not be inferior to that of the existing system of primary education; rather, it will help them unfold their innate thinking and earn new experience. First Phase of the Programme: To conduct the experiment on the proposed pro-

gramme a period of three months from January 15, 1976 to April 15, 1976 was selected. For the same purpose about 500 primary schools, about 1,00,000 primary school children and about 2,500 primary school teachers formed the basic manpower of the scheme. The schools were mostly selected from the police stations where the Swasthvar Programme was in operation.

To launch the programme effectively an arrangement was made to provide the selected teachers with the necessary training. Four busy days constituted the period of the training. For the purpose of training the selected teachers, fifteen training centers were

selected and fifteen training officers received orientation to conduct the training programme effectively. The fifteen training officers were selected from the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dacca, the Dacca Teachers' Training College and the Department of Education of the Government of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh.

With the termination of the training programme the trainees (primary school teachers) were instructed to begin the work of the programme immediately and they were provided with necessary number of instructional booklets specially designed for the purpose and it was expected that the teachers who formed the population of the training programme will carry on the said responsibility as properly as possible. When the scheduled period

of the proposed experiment was over, the programme organising authority selected fifteen evaluating officers from the same institutions or organizations to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme. The duration of period during which the evaluating officers collected the necessary data from the schools under the police stations from where the schools were selected was full five days. That was the rainy season of the country and the evaluating officers had to undergo much trouble to collect the necessary data for the purpose.

Brief Accounts of Evaluation: For proper evaluation of the first phase of the programme three different kinds of questionnaire as well as opinionnaire were developed and by administering those the evaluating officers collected the data as regards the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. After the collection of the necessary data the evaluating officers had to attend a meeting organised by the Education Secretary in his office to have the verbal report about the prospect of the programme. From the report presented in the meeting it was understood that the Open Air Primary Education Programme had a bright future in Bangladesh.

The evaluating officers were instructed to submit a written report on the basis of the collected data. The data were tabulated in descending order in terms of their importance and an interpretation of the data was made and compiled in a written report of almost fifty pages. A few important findings of the report are presented below:

1. The Open Air Primary Education has an immense possibility in a country like Bangladesh.

2. An intensive training of the teachers who were entrusted with the responsibility for implementing the programme should have been arranged.

3. The period selected for the experimental stage consisted of the summer months and the field work suggested and included in the programme could not be attained in a desirable manner in many of the selected places.

4. The absence of adequate supervision of the programme told upon the effectiveness of the programme as a good number of primary school teachers accepted the responsibilities for making the programme a success very reluctantly.

5. Co-operation necessary for the programme from the local authorities was not enough as during this period of the training no person from the localities other than the primary school teachers was selected.

An Estimate: On the basis of my experiences in the first phase of the programme I opine with much confidence that the Open Air Primary Education Programme shall be successful if proper care is taken to implement the programme all over Bangladesh in a slow but steady manner. But to witness its success we shall

have to consider some vital factors the absence of which may bring jeopardy for the programme. Having the opportunity to play an active part in the first phase of the programme I humbly suggest the following points for proper consideration of the authority concerned if we want to make the programme a success:

1. If the second phase of the programme is designed and carried on as a pilot scheme, the persons to handle the programme should be trained adequately, and I suggest that the duration of the training should to full one month.

2. The people who will undertake the responsibility to provide the selected groups of teachers from different areas with necessary training should be selected as properly as possible and they should also be equipped with necessary orientation.

3. The arrangement for adequate supervision of the work of the programme should be made so that the people entrusted with the responsibility for implementing the programme cannot accept it reluctantly.

4. Before starting the work of the second phase of the programme general meetings of the responsible people of the selected areas should be organised so that the poor primary school teachers need not face any sort of criticism from the local authorities in performing the field work included in the curriculum for the Open Air Primary Education programme.

5. The dependence on local education officers for proper supervision of the programme should, as far as possible, be avoided. The programme should have five districts in which the programme is to be implemented. The programme should be carried on in a slow but steady manner. But to witness its success we shall

To conclude, the Open Air Primary Education programme has immense possibilities in a developing country like Bangladesh, but the above factors should be considered very carefully before launching the programme as a pilot scheme in the selected areas will provide the other areas with the stimulus for accepting the scheme with the needed earnestness. A time will come when Open Air Primary Education will replace the traditional primary education of the

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