

**PROBLEMS AND MISCONCEPTIONS FACING THE PRIMARY
LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH:
AN ANALYSIS OF CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGIC
PRACTICES**

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a portrayal of the issues and concerns usually being ignored or bypassed to either a greater or lesser extent in the literacy curriculum and instructional practices in Bangladesh at the primary level. The study is broadly based on a naturalistic inquiry method over a period of four years. Views presented here have emerged through a passionate and exhaustive involvement with the design, development and dissemination phases of an intensive language education development project and its subsequent mainstreaming in an alternative education system dedicated for the disadvantaged children-community. My work there has encompassed setting curricular goals, selecting pedagogic approaches, designing instructional strategies and materials, setting assessment arrangements, developing follow-up indicators, and formulating monitoring, research and evaluation demands. This opportunity has enabled me to develop a deep understanding, coupled with a pragmatic view of what aspects are absent from the current educational practice in Bangladesh, particularly in respect to literacy. Numerous issues, both in policy and practice, need to be addressed with more focus to increase the rate of change towards more effective outcomes for learners. Putting emphasis on mechanistic aspects of language learning, bias towards dominant identity in content selection process, a pervasive content-driven pedagogy and assessment practice, disproportionate instructional priority on lower order cognitive skills and mismatch of curricular intention with teacher-training curricula are some areas where problems prevail. Possible strategies are been suggested to overcome these challenges.

Key words: Communication, meaning, comprehension, critical reflection, creativity.

Introduction

Virtually in all primary education systems, language teaching occupies a significant place, and more than 50 percent of the time and effort are spent to teach basic literacy and numeracy (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991), since these are the basic tools to acquire further knowledge and skills in other areas. Linguistic abilities help develop cognitive abilities, a wide range of research in brain development, cognitive psychology, language and education has confirmed that (Briggs & Elkind, 1973; Evans & Carr, 1985; Wells, 1986). Research also validates that mother-tongue has a crucial role to play in the early acquisition of cognitive abilities (Cummins, 1987; Krashen, 1987; William & Snipper, 1990, UNESCO, 1953, 2003). However, it has long been a challenge for researchers and

educators to develop an effective method for literacy teaching that enables children to acquire adequate literacy skills (Torgesen et al., 2001). In view of these findings, both Bangla and English language curricula at the primary level deserve much more attention in terms of pedagogic planning and resource allocation. If there are problems and misconceptions in this area, this will surely have an inevitable knock-on effect on learners' achievement of competencies in other faculty or subject areas.

However, studies, both national and international, indicate that many of the primary graduates are failing to learn language skills that they can use effectively (Snow et al., 1998; Ahmed et al., 2005). Studies also identify various causes contributing to this low acquisition of basic literacy including

unavailability of appropriate and adequate educational materials, trained teachers with modern pedagogic knowledge and adequate contact hours to foster an intellectual climate (UNESCO, 1996). Beyond all these input issues, little is however known about the process issues that can address the problems more effectively with appropriate alterations of curriculum-focus and pedagogic intents for learning. More effective ways for stimulating pupils' thought, imagination and creativity and make them aware of the manifold purposes that language serves, need to be explored. This paper will attempt to identify issues that make the language curriculum less effective in Bangladesh context and offer suggestions for overcoming these challenges.

Methodology

Being an active participant in the design, development and dissemination processes of an intensive language education development project; I employed my natural inductive instincts to explore and interpret 'the various interactive processes' (Bell, 1993; p. 8) taking place in the educational setting. My passionate and exhaustive involvement with the project for over a period of four years permitted me to be an inclusive part of the process. Hence, I took a purely phenomenological stance in investigating the reality along with its context, since, I believe that 'contexts are not simply the scene of action: through their unique distinctive enabling and disabling features, contexts influence the nature of social action taking place within them' (Harley, 2005; p. 38). My natural identity as a phenomenologist allowed me to have a holistic and naturalistic perspective, looking at the whole context as it develops (Kane, 1995) and constructed through everyday tasks (Kemmis, 1995). This also fits into my epistemological position as I believe that knowledge is not objective but socially constructed, coming as a result of the 'interaction between people' (Kane, 1995; p. 21-22). Therefore, the subsequent views and concerns emerged are presented here as anecdotal reports in qualitative subjective statements.

Using the emerged 'critical consciousness' as a lens, this article looks at the general literacy practice that is dominant and widely practiced. However, this article does not provide a detailed and comprehensive review of the materials and methods used in the primary schools; rather it

highlights the areas that deserve more attention with new foci, informed by both linguistic and educational theorizations from current understanding.

Major Findings

The following sections, 1–9, identify major areas where problems remain embedded in misconceptions and/or ineffective practices. Strategies have also been suggested that have been proven to work in resolving these.

1. Content focus versus skill focus

One of the prevailing misconceptions about literacy curriculum and instruction in Bangladesh is the view of seeing it as more of a *content set* rather than an array of *language skills*. All the associated pedagogic practices are therefore focused on covering content. This results in emphasis on memorization of facts, definitions, grammatical rules, and even of answers to comprehension questions and reflective questions by the learners. By doing so, learners try to please their teachers and examiners, but they do not become competent users of language who can process verbal and written inputs and manipulate these accordingly. Though there is a set of outcomes or competencies specified by the NCTB¹ curriculum, the pedagogy in practice does not necessarily focus on, and at most times, remains ignorant of them. Even if some skills are aimed to be developed, the central focus of instruction still tends to be upon mere skill-drill with substantial memorization and repeated practice instead of trying to bridge connections between the oral language experiences to the written or visual world of literacy.

In the realm of a content-driven pedagogy, teachers find themselves under greater pressure to cover all the lessons of the textbooks², the pressure being much higher in grade V partly due for meeting the primary completion examination demand. Nevertheless, the teachers, the trainers and the test designers 'all need to remind themselves that the goal of teaching and learning is to achieve the competencies, not to completely finish a textbook' (Malone, 2006; p. 6-7). An effective alternative can be, and of course should be, teachers choosing

¹ National Curriculum and Textbook Board

² There are a total of 29 lessons presented in each of the grades III & IV Bangla textbooks and 30 in the grade V.

fewer lessons from the books and spending more time engaging learners to dig into the lessons for meaning. Also, emphasis on reading for pleasure should be encouraged since without having adequate access to good quality materials with a focus of meaningful reading, learners will 'fail to learn that texts have meaning for them, and fail to learn how to get that meaning from the texts' (Malone, 2004; p. 17).

Another long-term solution to this is to avoid the manifestation of conventional collective belief of education where transmission of knowledge is viewed as education. This manifestation is not only minimally functional, but also to some extent, counter educative. A more appropriate philosophy of education is, 'Don't teach the dictionary, teach how to use it' (Shukla, 2008). And there is an increased need, as Alvermann (2001) identifies, to 'treat texts as tools for learning rather than as repositories of information to be memorized (and then all too quickly forgotten)'.

2. Correctness & accuracy versus meaning & communication

The main purpose of using language is to *communicate* one's needs, necessities, feelings, thoughts and ideas to others. The 'unit of meaning' is the basis for such communication, while much of the language instructions in classrooms are focused on the 'unit of sound or symbol'. Such focus leads to shift instructional priorities towards the mechanistic aspects of language at the cost of reflective, imaginative and communicative ones. Being *correct and accurate* in acquisition of language skills becomes the main agenda. As a result, what frequently done in classrooms are hand-writing drills, discrete vocabulary lessons, systematic alphabetic knowledge, spelling lessons and grammar drills. These activities de-contextualize the language learning process and fill the learners with frustration and boredom. In such mechanistic climate, often there are no activities where the learners can share their views and experiences that are emotionally important to them. Children are allowed to speak only occasionally, though their 'development of oral ability is closely linked to success in the development of reading and writing skills' (ibid; p. 8). They are often stigmatized if they come up with wrong spelling in their writing or wrong grammatical orders in their speech. As a result, very little meaningful listening, speaking, reading or writing occurs in the

classroom that has an immediate social purpose and/or cultural relevance. *Inter-personal communications, meta-cognitive processes and affective learning* are too often excluded and ignored.

An analysis of NCTB competencies shows that most of them focus on correctness and accuracy³ (ibid). Classroom tasks and follow-up reading activities therefore do not necessarily focus on *meaning, communication and reflection*. A fundamental rethinking is necessary about the purpose of learning language, and the purpose of being literate. If it is to communicate within a social setting, the professional setting being an extension of that, a fundamental reshaping of present language pedagogy is then an utmost necessity. However, our education system has been consistently unable to arrange curricula and pedagogy to respond appropriately to this social purpose of learning language. Instead substantial amount of time, effort, resources are used for learning rules and reproduction of knowledge constructed by others. Consequently, the school system has been unable to equip its graduates with necessary language skills that they will need to employ in their social as well as professional lives. Some of these skills include communicating thoughts, offering opinions and reasons behind it, recognizing logically valid statements, giving logical arguments, analyzing other's views and taking a stance on them, finding desired information, asking questions to obtain information and so on. Do we promote acquisition of these skills through our language curricula? We need to ask ourselves in the 21st century age of information and rapid change, "is our curriculum or the language curriculum in particular, responsive enough to meet the societal, economic and intellectual demands that it should?"

When instructional priority is given to correct and accurate responses, students' inquisitive nature in learning a language is severely hindered. This inhibits the process of natural immersion into a language-situation. An effective strategy to address this problem could be to devise activities that are socially, emotionally and culturally relevant to the learners, such as, asking – who loves you most in your family? What makes you think that? Describe something about her/him. Which cricket player do

³ 82% of the grade I and 73% of the grade II competencies focus on accuracy and correctness.

you like most and why? Which song is most popular in your community? What are the most common birds seen your locality, list 5 of them etc. In this way, the amount of opportunities for students' meaningful talks can be increased within the classroom setting. Classroom constructed materials and other materials collected from the locality can create the potential to generate meaningful listening and speaking opportunities, which can further be complemented by learners applying keen observations and deduction skills to identify and explore local environment and cultural practices. Story telling sessions followed by retelling, rephrasing and enacting the stories can allow learners to think about the story plot, characters and bridging connections with their own experiences. All these can lead to the formation of meta-cognitive skills. In introduction of reading and writing, it is important to emphasize that these are not simply recognizing/employing of sound-symbol connections, but is a process of deriving/conveying meaning to others. So starting with the unit of meaning is the most valid way rather than starting with teaching how to read out letter-symbols or writing them.

3. Comprehension, reflection and creativity

Similar to *communication*, another area being excluded from the focal point of language curriculum and instruction is *comprehension, reflection* and *creativity*. Little scope is created in present classrooms to channel creative ideas and alternative thoughts, and reflect upon concepts and issues presented in the classroom. Hence a substantial amount of instructional time and effort is used for reproducing others' thoughts without any critical reflections on these. Even if a student offers an alternative answer to a specific problem, teachers tend not to accept it because of their narrow understanding of curriculum objectives and the pedagogic culture that they are accustomed to. *Critical thinking ability* and challenging the status quo are not nourished through the educational processes. Thus the practice remains the same as it was 10 or 20 years ago limiting any ability to respond to needs that are emerging today.

If we take a holistic look at the education scenario, it is not *creativity* that dominates the practice, it is the *reproduction* that does. This uncritical mass of reproduction leads the system to incapacity in every sphere and infuses easy shortcuts in the system resulting in heavy reliance on coaching and

notebook culture that in turn creates practices that are anti-educational, unethical and rather demoralizing. As a result, after all the privileged years of schooling, students leave the school system without the ability to write something meaningful on their own, or constructing meaning out of a text that they encounter in their further academic or social life. Eventually, they are neither able to offer alternative solutions to emerging problems, nor can they come up with innovative or creative ideas when they are required to do so. This is a rather dim picture in the professional world, where even university graduates fail to write a report with clarity, follow instructions accordingly from manuals or procedures or able to be creative in presenting their ideas and communicating views. The problem becomes more apparent in the usage of second language for communication purposes while the problem remains much more implicit within the mother tongue usage.

If these are to be resolved through literacy curricula, more space should be created to respond to text applying higher order cognitive skills. Since comprehension has been referred to as a complex phenomenon by neuro-psychologists and linguists (Graves & Liang, 2008); comprehension strategies need to be more explicitly taught and individual interpretation of texts need to be valued inside the classroom. Children need to be taught different reading strategies, for example, scanning, skimming, locating information throughout the text etc to solve different reading problems. All learning experiences do not necessarily lead to learning, unless subsequent opportunities for *reflection, application, correlation* and *consolidation* are created (Shukla, 2008). So these areas need to be emphasized within classroom practices as well as with associated assessment strategies that focus on valuing creativity and comprehension in lieu of uncritical mass of reproduction.

4. Scarcity of appropriate materials and strategies

As adults and specialists, we decide what is to be taught and learned in schools. The content selection process is mostly randomized, often influenced by our own political interests and socio-cultural perceptions of what is valued. The process is not critically *research-informed* and *participatory* by engaging learners and teachers in the process. We do not think of the nature and conditions of

learning and what strategies make learning successful and sustainable for young learners often enough. For example, the text 'Biday Hajj' in grade V Bangla textbook ignores the religious minority groups' interest. Also use of vocabulary, theme of the text and the text-length in 'Shokher Mritshilpo', 'Amra Tander Bhulbo Na' are not age appropriate. And contextual reality of rural areas in 'Jogajoger Ekal Shekal' has been widely ignored. As a whole, most of the texts ignore the level of maturation of the learners in this grade, and require an intermediate to advanced level of vocabulary knowledge. In reality the students situate themselves at basic or elementary levels of linguistic competence. Also the materials are linguistically and developmentally inappropriate, and are socio-culturally insensitive. As per social constructivist learning principles, the content should be selected from the immediate social and cultural experiences of the children, so that young learners can make connections with their prior experiences and the classroom experiences. This enables students to reflect upon and apply learning beyond classroom situations while retaining a high level of interest throughout the learning process.

In addressing the problem of content-selection, *learners and their socio-cultural context* should be the main focal point, not subject experts' views. Also, changing needs of learning should be reflected in the curricula, as indicated by Dickinson (2008), 'the content of what is needed to be taught must focus on what students need to learn in this century'. After selection, the content should be arranged in proper articulation, for example, from concrete to abstract, from specific to general; and should be at appropriate length and difficulty level. Most of the current language texts in NCTB textbooks demand an intermediate level of proficiency requiring very rich vocabulary and knowledge of complex grammatical structures, but not sequenced in an appropriate manner (Fulton, 2008). Text arrangement does not show the necessary sensitivity to and concern for text-length and difficulty level, which makes the task of teaching using these books much harder. A range of appropriate reading materials sequenced with appropriate text-length and difficulty level are one of the prime solutions for helping learners in their attainment of expected language skills, and in the sustenance of their interest into becoming self-directed learners beyond classroom situations. So library provisions need to be added with schools with serious consideration. The content, materials

and methods chosen should be culturally sensitive, contextually relevant, gender-equitable and differentially catered so that greater inclusion and efficiency in the classroom processes can be retained.

Different genre of writing such as fiction story texts, narratives, drama, comic formats, and some non-fiction expository texts including science information, history texts should be carefully presented, so that exposure to these ensures balanced development of learners in cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective skills. In arranging different genre in the books, fiction texts should precede non-fiction texts, since research shows that fiction texts can help students connect their immediate experiential world to the one presented in the story and can develop social empathy and other important social skills⁴. This again seems to be ignored in current language textbooks. Instead, experts tend to prioritize information-texts filled with ideological abstracts, geo-political interests and a static mass of science and history information which is not effectively connected to the child's experience.

5. The textbook culture versus the use of multi or hypermedia

In content driven curricula, textbooks play a crucial role and key implementers tend to expect every single answer to be within the textbook. However, an authentic literacy situation should take into account the multiplicity, complexity and diversity of the application of language skills in the broader socio-cultural milieu (Bergeron et al., 1996). Heavy reliance on textbooks should be replaced by an assortment of different media and classroom constructed materials, so that greater authenticity is ensured. However the predominant culture in literacy classes in Bangladesh as well as in other developing countries is to rely heavily on the textbooks, ignoring the potential of other materials and media to complement literacy learning. Also in most cases the approach, content, language presented in the textbooks are not appropriate, linguistically and culturally. A vast amount of research shows that educational materials are not compatible with local realities jeopardising the educational provisions in developing countries

⁴ A team of Toronto university researchers has recently confirmed this, Keith Oatley, Professor of Psychology being the leader of the research team.

(Lotherington, 1998; Louisy, 2004; Crossley et al., 2005). Also poorly designed learning materials fail to attract and retain students' interest, motivation and learning (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991).

The discrepancy between home and school language is another issue that contributes to alienation among the rural or disadvantaged population-group. The usual marginalisation of rural identity in curriculum reinforces the power hegemony, since it has been essentially identified that the way 'school knowledge is structured and articulated, it never allows the rural child to have an edge over the 'privileged' urban ones' (The Probe Team, 1999; pp. 72). In fact 'children who grow up to imagine that their lifestyle and culture are inferior to those of the urban middle class, cannot but be considered as having a low self-esteem' (Pimparé, 2002; pp. 9). So, curricular accommodations to local socio-cultural values, expectations and activities are needed to aid cultural survival of the groups that are deemed vulnerable. The need for relevant cultural orientation and pedagogic reorientation in curricula is an issue of concern in developing country contexts.

If we take a closer look, we can see that the NCTB textbooks mostly illustrate urban settings, characters and examples marginalizing the rural population; reinforce gender stereotypes and use pure standard language that is mostly alienating for young and rural children. For example the lesson on ordinal numbers in the grade V English book (page 46) is arranged in a way where different places, such as bookshop, university, shopping mall, library, and apartments in different floors of a multistoried building are used to teach ordinal numbers. This shows how unaware we are about rural realities and how insensitive we are in selecting and arranging contents, where our own reality is emphasized by marginalizing rural people's concerns and experiences, even though they form the majority of our population. Another lesson on the use of capitals talks about a 'language learning center' where the central character Margaret from Australia tells about her mother-tongue, her interest to learn a foreign language and then describes the setup at the language learning center (page 83). Is it a culturally sensitive text? Have the concerns of rural people's experiential world been taken into account? They may have never been exposed to such kind of language learning center and really do not know what it

means. This unawareness to whose reality should be taken into account of the textbook designers have resulted in lesser engagement with texts, and accordingly lower learning rates, and less meaningful developments in the usage of capital letters or ordinal numbers or anything presented in the textbooks. In this way, the specialists' inability to be responsive to local realities severely hinders the meaning making process and the subsequent attainment of language skills by learners.

A cultural shift needs to be initiated to alter the view that textbooks are the only source of learning. Materials brought from the locality such as posters, leaflets; classroom constructed materials and materials of different modes including concrete objects, visuals, charts, cultural themes can be used to generate meaningful conversations and application of different skills to construct meaning. Different media should be carefully arranged wherever possible, since the new generation will continue to find literacy learning more meaningful as they respond to text-messaging in mobile phones, surf the internet and write emails to people and so on (Alvermann, 2001). These newer areas need to be identified and brought to the classroom situations wherever possible, if literacy instructions are to be consistent, meaningful and authentic with the manifold and emerging uses of literacy skills (Boling et al, 2008).

6. The pedagogy and instructional culture

Didactic forms of teaching inhibit the process of language skill acquisition where what to learn and why, with much clarity of tasks to be carried out and certainty of goals to the students and teachers, are not made explicit. This makes the whole teaching-learning process a rather routine work of carrying out routine tasks without much space for *innovation, creativity* and *ownership* of the process. Much of the class time is dedicated to skill-drill, demonstration and lecturing which do not seem to be effective to engage and stimulate students adequately. But cognitive psychologists and educationists have pointed much earlier that, learning language is not only a cognitive process taking place within intra-individual level, but is a social process emerging from purposeful interpersonal communications (Vygotsky, 1978; Street, 1995; Gee, 1996; Vosniadou, 1996; Salomon & Perkins, 1998). But surprisingly there frequently is no *discussion, dialogue, debate, negotiation, interaction* – the strategies that could actually boost

up the degree of engagement in literacy tasks leading to greater self-confidence and independence in learning (Costa & Liebmann, 1995; Boling et al, 2008). Opportunities for exploration and observation of social and natural situations followed by oral or written presentations, can help improve the degree of *participation*, *engagement* and *satisfaction* of the learners as a whole, leading to help them becoming self-directed life long learners and critical thinkers. Also a certain amount of autonomy on teachers' and students' part to dare to make errors can help identify the difficulties and inhibitive factors in classroom practice. As a whole, an active pedagogy needs to be encouraged where teachers as reflective practitioners will constantly be looking for innovative strategies that help develop a high interaction of learners with tasks and texts rather than a transmission model of teaching that encourages passive learning.

7. Assessment strategies for assessing skills

If a curriculum takes skills or competencies as its expectation standards, then it should be coupled with consistent assessment arrangements, which are linked to the attainment of these skills or competencies. But the dilemma in the current pedagogic practice is that, even if the curriculum claims to be a competency-based one, the associated assessment procedures are still designed to assess content knowledge, not skills and conceptual understandings. For example, a usual item in the question paper of Bangla primary completion exam is to ask learners to write a few lines of a poem which they have read from the textbook. To be able to successfully respond to this item, a fifth grader needs to memorize all the poems in the book. An example of one such item ask the students to write the last 10 lines of the poem 'Shiksha Gurur Morjada' which is a 41 line poem. Have the test designers considered what they wanted to measure when they ask a fifth grader to write the last 10 lines of a 41 line poem? Does this item really have anything to do with any of the language skills that the learners need to acquire or master? Accordingly, assessment remains as the strongest factor that drives the whole pedagogy in practice with all its backwash effect. So if assessment-focus continues to be on testing content-knowledge, no matter what reforms are brought to curriculum and instructional design; these will irresistibly remain the same.

Another problem is that the teachers receive little support in implementing the curriculum and in teaching these highly difficult textbooks. The reality is there is no or little training offered to the teachers along with the usual absence of enough supervisory support. Similarly, no instruments are provided to carry out the assessment-task, such as, an assessment tool or inventory against which the teachers can keep records of individual learners' gradual progress of the attainment of a particular skill or competency. Hence all the good intentions are missing from our classroom practice with the inevitable compromising effect on what is taught and how.

8. Teacher training curriculum and methods

If the school curriculum is changed; so too must the teacher training curriculum and methods. However, there remains evidence of teachers' lack of knowledge of curriculum changes, and many of the teachers even do not know what competency means and what 50 competencies are defined in the national curriculum (Bangladesh National Education Commission Report, 2003; p. 17). This results into substantially skewed teaching practice as the teachers do not understand or do not even know the reason behind the new methods. The risks in untrained or poorly trained teachers taking classes are the incorporation of incapacity in all spheres of the national life. So a transfer of focus from curriculum reform to quality pedagogy enhancement is an urgent requirement. There should be adequate opportunities for short and long-term training provisions at the disposal of all teachers. These should not only cover all necessary technical knowledge and skills of instructional approaches, but also the delivery mode in the training sessions should be consistent with the pedagogic preference suggested for classroom interactions.

Much of the curriculum expectations are not met in classrooms, because the purposes of *meaning making*, *comprehending* and *responding to texts* accordingly are not valued by the teachers. The reason behind this is in part because these are not equally valued in teacher training sessions. For example, lessons on 'how to conduct activity-based learning' are discussed in the teacher-training sessions in a non-interactive fashion, where the teachers have no say over the trainer, eventually leading the teachers to take same role in classrooms, and leaving no room for student-voice.

So there may appear to be activities and group-interactions in classrooms, but these in reality may not be engaging or participatory. The teacher training curriculum thus needs to be changed with the methods used being consistent with its content, illustrating the rationale for setting instructional priorities, the purpose of particular method and technique along with the teaching pattern to be carried out.

9. Policy-practice fragmentation

This is one of the crucial problems that shape all our practices in education, including literacy instructions. In a highly centralized bureaucracy, curriculum is designed without enough participation of different stakeholders and the dissemination process is almost ignored. Much of the good intentions espoused in the curriculum framework are evaporated while coming down to earth and leaves nothing but an irony for the end-users, i.e. the teachers and the learners. The irony is that high expectations are stated in the curriculum document without outlining any particular program for how to improve student learning to attain the anticipated outcomes. All good policy intentions are there at the center in isolation. But the periphery remains the same, since no concerted coordinated efforts are taken to bring the enabling conditions in the system including adequate and appropriate teacher-training and staff development who enact the curriculum at schools. For example, communicative approach in English language has been introduced without minimal support available to teachers through teachers' guides or necessary training packages.

There will certainly be no solutions to remaining and emerging problems if all efforts are concentrated towards the upper dissemination ladder while the actual implementation is enacted by the lower ladder part. A shift in focus is hence required and capacity building initiatives must be taken to ensure at least minimal implementation of the intended curriculum. A minimum level of flexibility to adopt a range of effective instructional strategies aiming for 'fitness of purpose' and 'fitness of context' rather than a one-size, non-differentiated instructional prescription could improve the total education scenario. A cultural shift of education management and academic supervision to 'what is the child learning?' rather than 'what is the teacher teaching?' in the development of major educational policies is also

recommended (Boyle et al, 2002). Lastly, the crucial focus of all our efforts needs to be on pedagogy, on how to help and extend support to teachers, rather than the usual concentration of curriculum content and textbook production. Curriculum is the education issue that often gets the highest level of concern in any educational context and undergoes substantial reform-undertakings, with leaving little or no room for capacity development and appropriate quality assurance mechanism. Policy today needs to respond to the problems that the schools confront, if practice is to comply with the high quality learning outcomes defined in the policy-documents.

Conclusion

There exist more subtle problems and dilemmas within Bangladesh's literacy scenario, where expectations remain high but implementation issues are typically ignored. However the aforementioned are some that need urgent attention if we are to survive as a productive nation.

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