PRACTICES OF INNOVATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Bangladesh has had endemic problems of being unable to keep enough children in school long enough to ensure mass literacy, let alone completion of primary education. The Bangladesh Government struggled toward its goal of "cent percent literacy" with a raft of policy changes. The historic average of 50% primary school attendance has been pushed up to 80% in this century but further progress has been limited. The Bangladesh Ministry of Primary and Mass Education knew that major innovation was needed to make school attractive to children and simply required that State schools innovate. This research was a case study of primary schools in two local government areas, using qualitative methodology, to see how these new policies were working in practice. The data indicate that Ministry policies have been largely ignored and have had little impact in the vast majority of the schools. To some extent, the Ministry policies are unrealistic in the rural and poor areas mostly served by State education. Single computers were dumped in rural schools without the software or training to create multimedia classrooms. Old school buildings had neither the space nor the staff to support libraries and gardens. Teachers endorsed Girl Guide chapters, honesty shops, humanity walls, complaint boxes and elected student councils but were not willing to put in the extra time and labor to administer them. To make the new Ministry policies work in practice, the Ministry needs to facilitate and coordinate implementation, supplying resources, incentives, assigning responsibility for implementation and assuring accountability for results.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the basis of civilization. "The motto of education is to change the behavior of the human being and make them fit for earning some skills to attain bread and butter for life" (Nuruddin, 2008). Primary education is fundamental to the development of a country because it:

1. constructs the foundation of the basic skills of the children;

2. builds founding blocs of their values, codes, morality; and

3. reduces intra- and inter-generational discrimination (DPE, 2018).

Consequently, the Government has placed a high priority on primary education and its quality (MOPALJ, 2011). To achieve quality primary education and ensure 100% enrollment by 2014, Government has changed policy and introduced new schemes, like free textbooks, subsidies for the families of girls at school and examinations in Class V, VIII and X, instead of only Class X, so children acquire qualifications on the way to the end of secondary school and not merely one qualification at the end (MOE-2010). The result was a marked increase in enrollment rate and a reduced drop-out rate from 50% to 19.6% by 2018 ((DPE, 2018). Drop-out rate has long been the Achilles heel of the State education system in Bangladesh.

From class one to five, historically, students have gradually and continuously dropped out at the end of each year. By the end of five years of primary education, half the children who started Class I together have usually disappeared from the classroom (Roy, 2013). Thus, getting and keeping children in the classroom until everyone has a secondary certificate has been regarded as the greatest challenge for education policy (Chowdhury, 2018). Getting and keeping children in primary education requires innovative practices in schools, community participation and quality of administrative and teaching staff in qualifications, experience and professional exposure. We are living in a knowledge-driven society, in which innovation is essential to create effective schools (Akpan, 2016).

Therefore, the Upazila education offices – the representatives of the Minister of Primary and Mass Education at the local level - are pivotal to ensure innovative practices, working with teachers and stakeholders, in the primary schools under their respective jurisdictions. Yet most of these local education officials are quite reluctant to introduce innovative activities and showcase their primary schools. The purpose of this research is to study what is going on at the local State primary school level, to see if innovation and showcasing is going on at a sufficient rate or to discover the problems preventing it.

WHAT "INNOVATIVE PRACTICES TO RETAIN LEARNERS" MEANS AT THE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL

The methodology to make primary schools innovative enough to attract and keep children is, among other measures (Akpan, 2016):

a. Make the primary school look attractive, eye-catching and modern

b. Enhance student, teacher, administrator and community relationships – historically, in Bangladesh, students and teachers were distant from one another, the officers were bureaucratic, leaseholders and

isolated in their offices and the schools were like central government islands in their communities

c. Use innovative practices in teaching and learning – historically, in Bangladesh, teachers even in primary schools lectured to huge classes from the textbook and there was little participation by children beyond taking notes and being interrogated by the teacher at random (Kazuzuru, 2019)

d. Discover and meet the expectations and aspirations of the society and stakeholders of the primary school

e. Focus on motivating and achieving student excellence – historically, in Bangladesh, teachers regarded their job as done if they arrived in the classroom on time, lectured and marked examinations, but most took no personal interest in their students' achieving good results, unless their parents were paying the teacher extra as a private coach

f. Create a supportive learning environment for all learners in primary school to form them as patriotic and good citizens – historically, in Bangladesh, teachers regarded this job as done if they raised the flag and sang the national anthem with the children every day.

Innovation at the primary school does not just mean changing policies, or infrastructure or teaching and testing methods or how teachers, administrators, parents, children and community members think about their roles, individually and vis-à-vis one another: it means all of the above and more. Such innovation is really calling for a revolution in every aspect of primary schools and the people in and around them (Arshad et al, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used mixed methods and mostly qualitative approach. Explanatory sequential design has been used for data collection and analysis. The researcher has been collected quantitative data by surveying from primary school head teacher and selected schools from two Upazila of Charghat in Rajshahi and Sundargonj in Gaibandha. The sample for the study was determined by stratified and simple random sampling. Total schools were (12 and 42) 54 in both study areas. In addition, FGD and use of key informants was applied to collect more in-depth information to supplement the survey data. Simultaneously we went through some secondary data to have content analysis. Conduct a review of the literatures and previews research related with this research have been used some of statistical tools like mean, median, mode and statistical package of social science (SPSS) software.

THE CONCEPT OF INNOVATION

The word "innovation" is derived from the Latin verb innovare, which means "to renew" (Walter, 2008). Innovation is a purposeful, organized and risk-taking change introduced into any social system to ensure efficiency and increased productivity. In economics, innovation is the economic application of ideas, technology and processes in new ways to gain competitive advantage and/or improve productivity (OECD. 2016). In education, innovation is the introduction of new ideas, methods, strategies and techniques for doing things into a school system to improve both external and internal efficiency of the system.

Moreover, innovation is a process in which new practices are introduced into a school to replace old or ineffective ones.

TYPES OF INNOVATION

There are four types of innovation in the literature, which are applicable to primary school management (Riastini et al, 2010):

1.   Service Innovation: Service innovation involves the introduction of a new service that greatly improves the management practices in schools, for example a complaint box, a school uniform or online payment of school fees,

2. Process Innovation: This is the implementation of delivery of a new service. Process innovation in a school is intended to reduce unit cost of service delivery and to improve learning quality. For example, use of ICT in teaching-learning is an example of process innovation.

3. Marketing Innovation: Marketing innovation involves the implementation of a new marketing method involving significant changes in product design of students.

4. Organizational Innovation: This involves implementing a new organizational method in the school management practices. This type of innovation is intended to increase student enrollment and teacher and staff satisfaction as well as to improve human relations. One example of organizational innovation is reducing the number of administrative officers and another is motivating teachers to perform better by creating performance-based incentive schemes. The ultimate aim is to increase productivity, commitment and involvement among students (Akpan, 2016).

OVERALL INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Innovation in primary school is a highly controversial issue in Bangladesh. Innovations could help enhance equity in access to education, as well as equality in learning outcomes. Yet most of the teachers, officers and school authorities in Bangladesh are resistant to change.

PRESENCE OF MUSEUM, BOOK CORNER, LIBRARY AND LANDSCAPING

In Greek museum means "seat of the muses", a philosophical institution for contemplation (Walter, 2008) which played an integral role in preserving the heritage of a country. Exhibits tell stories about how a nation and a culture came to be. Without such exhibits, those stories could be forgotten. A book corner is a place where books and exhibitions can be displayed in a classroom or public place. A library is a place in where large numbers of reading materials, books, periodicals, newspapers, etc. are cared for, with temporary access for students in the library or by borrowing (Holmberg, 2009). The poor achievement of learners in examinations in Bangladesh could be associated with insufficient access to books and other materials than the textbooks (Olubor, 1998). Traditionally, State schools had no libraries or book corners except in rare cases where these were made up as an exhibit, for show, but not for use by children. The MOPME has declared that all GPS authorities will establish book corner, museum, landscaping, and library in their schools to make learning joyful (MOPME, and DPE, 2018).

In practice, however, most of the head teachers in State schools are very much negligence about this imposed duty. Figure 1.1 shows that 98.75% of primary schools have no museum and only 2.47% have their own library. 65.39% percent of schools have book corners but their decoration and number of books are very poor. Head teachers claim that lack of space, lack of budget and teachers' unwillingness to administer the book facilities as an extra duty make the MOPME mandate impossible to implement.

Figure 1.1: Presence of Museum, Book Corner, Library and Landscaping
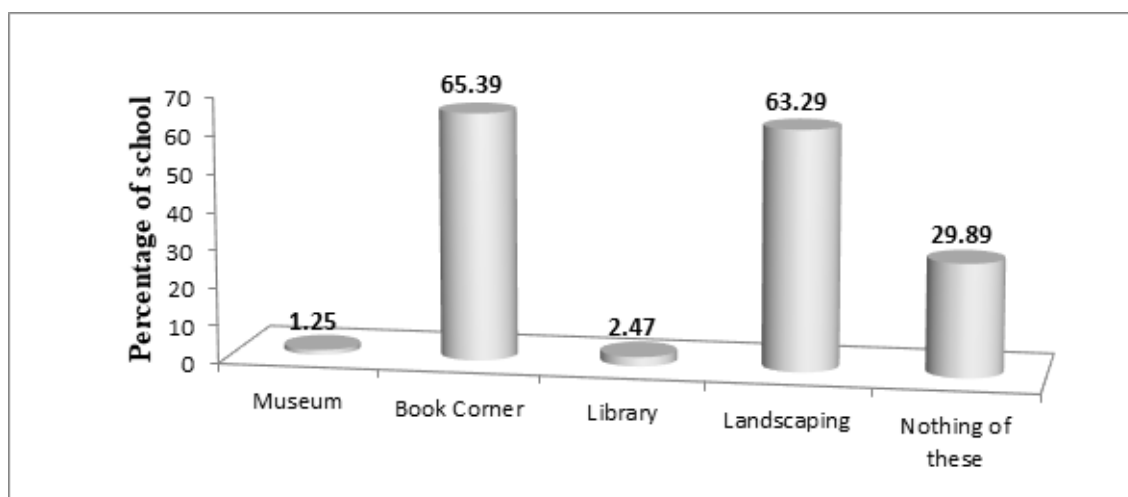
[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

63.29% t of schools have landscaping, which encourages children to come to school but 29.89 % of schools have neither museum, book corner, library nor landscaping. All the teachers, officers and students of class V supported these ideas in principle, saying that children can learn history better with such physical representations. It is true that primary children's abstract thinking capacity is not well-developed, so reading or hearing about something does not make much of an impression but, if they see something, they can understand it better. Thus, the results illustrated in Figure 1 are sad. The Government's expressions are right but they do not know how to get the policies implemented at school primary level in Bangladesh. They need to provide resources and incentives to make implementation possible, as well as holding administrators accountable for not carrying out the policy.

EXISTENCE AND USE OF LAPTOP COMPUTERS AND MULTIMEDIA

The multimedia classroom offers many advantages, allowing the use of computer-assisted learning technologies (CALT). In multimedia teaching-learning, teachers can play roles of facilitator, mentor, problem setter and guide rather than simply struggling to control the class and keep them focused on reading or writing something (Singh, 2014). The effect is to improve learners' interest, comprehension and memory of the topics taught by participating in activities and by colorful, clear depiction of relevant concepts, as well as making the learners more ICT-competent (Akpan, 2016).

Special-needs children, who often do not respond to traditional instructional methods, often respond better to CALT because it holds their attention better (Zainuddin, 2017). Seeking these benefits, the Government of Bangladesh has provided laptop computers and multimedia in primary schools. However, most of the primary schools do not use these resources in their classroom in practice (DPE, 2018), as illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Existence and Using of Laptop and Multimedia

Variables		Frequency (%)
Did the school have laptops for use in the classroom by their teachers?	Yes	74.52
	No	25.48
Did the school have multimedia for using in the classroom by their teachers?	Yes	25.09
	No	74.91
Did teachers use multimedia and laptops in their classroom?	Yes	07.31
	No	92.69

[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

Respondents report that the supply and use of multimedia in schools and classrooms are as limited as the DPE statistics suggest. 74.52% of schools have received laptop computers for teachers to use but 74.91% of schools did not receive multimedia programming to use these computers in delivering lessons. Thus, only 7.31% of schools used their laptops and multimedia in the classroom. Respondents explained that not only did the Government fail to provide all the equipment needed but they also did not provide necessary training for all teachers to use the equipment provided to create multimedia classrooms.

AVAILABILITY OF STUDENT PERSONAL SUPPLIES

School uniforms are actually a significant financial burden on often-poor parents in Bangladesh, copied from the practice in the English public schools of the 18th century, which were patronized only by the wealthy. Thus, school uniforms are a kind of colonialism (Zainuddin, and Subri, 2017).

Yet wearing a uniform has become a badge of pride in Bangladesh schools, perhaps another kind of colonial thinking. In colonial times, wearing evidence of admission to one of the few schools created by the British for the most intelligent Indians did confer a great deal of status to the wearer and his/her family. Yet today, education is meant to be for everyone so this ascribed status to the uniform is illogical (Kekare, (2015).

Still many Bangladeshis believe that a school uniform creates an identity for a student which plays an important role in creating collective consciousness, feelings of belonging in the school and equality among students, so that some do not acquire status by wearing more-expensive clothes and accessories. Thus school uniforms are often thought of as contributing to quality primary education to achieve SDG-4 (MOPME, 2019). Clean school uniforms train students to dress well and feel pride in their appearance. This is thought to improve their punctuality and attendance. The students, who have tiffin boxes with water pots, can eat in school. If they go home for lunch they often go to sleep there and do not come back for the rest of the day. Such students, who are fully-equipped and eating in school, will not suffer from feelings of inferiority and discrimination in the school environment (Kazuzuru, 2019).

The Government of Bangladesh has declared that all State school students should be in neat and clean uniforms and wearing school bags, bringing snacks in tiffin boxes, and carrying full water pots (MOPME, 2019). However, this colonial picture is not always possible in today's Bangladesh, especially in the poor and rural areas which most State schools serve.

Figure 1.2: Availability of Uniform, School Bag, Tiffin Box, and Water pot
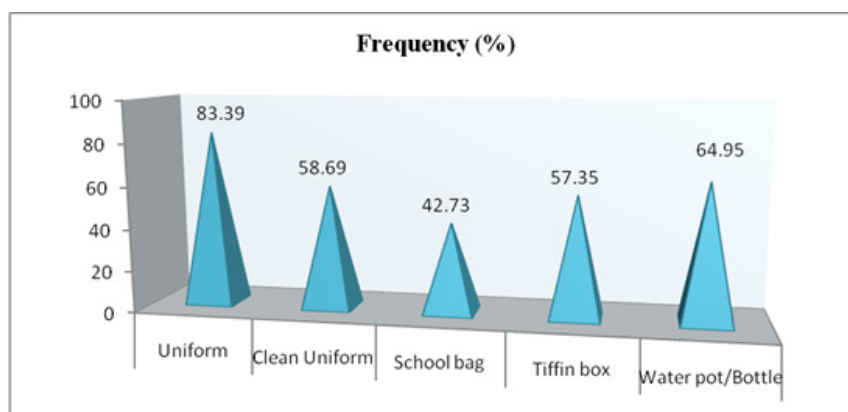
[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

Figure 1.2 illustrates that significant numbers of State primary school children do not meet the Government's colonialist ideal: 16.61%, 41.31%, 57.27%, 42.65% and 35.05% do not have uniforms, clean uniforms, school bags, tiffin boxes, and water pots/bottles, respectively, on a regular basis. Here is where the colonial vision of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education collides with the realities of life for most poor and rural Bangladeshi children today. What if the parents have no money to buy a school uniform, limited water and washing powder to wash it, nothing to put in the tiffin box, only impure water to put in the water pot (which can easily give the child cholera or other diarrheal disease) and no money to buy a school bag or tiffin pot or water pot? Then the Ministry's colonialist vision becomes another way to discriminate against the poor. The wealthier one's parents are, the more likely one is to fully comply with these Ministry requirements, with a water pot full of mineral water, a tiffin box full of fast food, a crisp uniform washed daily by the servants and a fashionable school bag bought in the supermarket. In fact, the Ministry, complaining about lack of attendance and dropping out among rural and poor children, ought to first consider what it asks of them. Many such children may have dropped out or missed the road to the school out of sheer embarrassment about how far short of the Ministry requirements they must fall.

The Ministry can answer that most European children fully comply with the Ministry require-ments. What they leave out is that the State usually provides the uniforms, in some cases laundered weekly, free school lunches and clean tap water, nor is a school bag required (most parents can afford them). On the same ideology that led the Bangladesh Government to provide free textbooks in 2009, the Ministry needed either to raise their budget or lower their demands.

COMPLAINT BOXES

State primary schools face increasingly difficult discipline problems, especially since not only prohibiting corporal punishment but criminal-ly-prosecuting teachers who use it since 2011. Among the most common problems are truancy, bullying and even criminal activities which parents and teachers are not aware of (Arshad et al, 2019).

Victims of such activities are often driven out of school, by fear or by force. Setting up a complaint box is one way to address disciplinary problems in schools. If any student has discovered any inappropriate behavior or is being bullied by others in school, this complaint box can serve as a useful channel to report the incident to the school authorities. Therefore, the Government has instructed all State schools to set up complaint boxes. To allow students to provide information about inappropriate behavior. In theory, if local administrators can take sufficient action to protect victims, these victims can complete their education, in school, in safety (DPE, 2019).

FIGURE 1.3: DID THE SCHOOL PUT IN A COMPLAINT BOX?
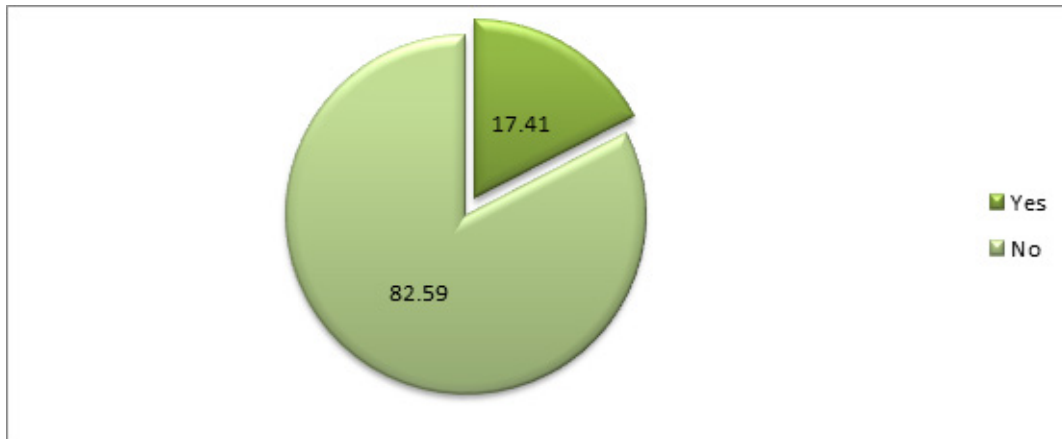
[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

The survey result indicates that 82.59% of State schools have no complaint boxes. It is not clear whether complaint boxes will actually change the law and order situation in the State schools (they do not have a great record overseas and complaining somewhat goes against Bangladeshi culture – most crime among adults is also never reported) but we will never know so long as the Government policy to use them remains a dead letter in most schools.

INNOVATIVE SHOWCASING

Innovative showcasing can change attitude and environment in a primary school (Curzon, 2004). Honesty shops in schools, patronized only by students, have no shopkeepers or security and children drop the price of their purchases into the cashbox, seen only by their peers (DPE, 2019). A Humanity wall is a wall where children can donate old clothes to poorer children anonymously merely by sticking the donation on the wall (Islam, 2016). Students learn honesty and humanity from their textbooks, but such innovations drive the lessons home by letting the students practice what they have read about. The Directorate of Primary Education requires all State schools to use such innovations (DPE, 2019).

Table 1.2: Innovative Showcasing in School

Variables		Frequency (%)
Did the school display an innovative showcasing of humanity wall?	Yes	07.34
	No	92.66
Did the school introduce innovative showcasing of honesty shops?	Yes	11.56
	No	88.44

[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

Table 1.2 illustrates that Ministry policy for Humanity Walls and Honesty Shops are honored in the breach by the rare occurrence, in less than 12%, of these innovations in State schools. Yet values like honesty and humanity have a significant meaning in political, socio-economic and public life (Kadir, 2015) and Bangladesh society has grave deficits in these matters.

Respondent teachers acknowledged that "Practicing humanity and honesty is a technique to become a good human being too" Respondent students too say that these are great ideas which would build their self-confidence and free them of the need to bargain: "This is for the first time in our life that we have the opportunity to show our honesty and humanity." Yet school head teachers say that they have neither the space nor the staff to make it happen, nor will teachers volunteer time to administer this "technique to become a good human being".

BEAUTIFICATION OF SCHOOL

Gardens foster a sense of community, bringing teachers and learners together, and reduce the risk of depression. Both gardening and the garden environment are good for student mental health. Planting a garden requires teamwork, patience and perseverance which are important skills for students to practice. Consequently, the MOPME (2019) has ordered that every school have a garden with seasonal flowers and arrange flower pots for beautifying primary school premises generally, which advances Sustainable Development Goals-4.

Table 1.3: Beautify School by Gardening and Flowerpot

Variables		Frequency (%)
Did the school authority beautify the school area by gardening?	Yes	17.93
	No	82.07
Did the school authority beautify this flowerpot with seasonal flowers?	Yes	7.81
	No	92.19

[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

Table 1.3 shows that school gardens is another Ministry policy which remains in the minds of Dhaka bureaucrats not in the schools. Only 17.93% of State primary schools have gardens and only 7.81% have flower pots around the school premises. Respondents give the same response as they do about the other unimplemented policies: no gardeners, no space, no garden walls and no budget. Again the Ministry has to raise their budget or reduce their vision.

STUDENT COUNCIL

Student Councils can develop skills of leadership and service in primary schools. Students practice democracy and learn to respect democratic values and others' opinions, building tolerance. Student Councils can also help teachers in the teaching-learning process, to increase enrollment in 100% and decrease dropouts to zero, to ensure communication with students, their parents, and to develop a positive educational environment. Therefore, the Government has ordered all State primary schools to establish elected student councils indirectly elected by all children in the school (DPE, 2019).

Table 1.4: Existing Situation of Student's Council in School

Variables		Frequency (%)
Did the school have an elected student council by all children?	Yes	92.48
	No	07.52
Did the existing student council work properly in school?	Yes	18.76
	No	81.24

[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

Table 1.4 shows a high compliance rate, 92.48% of State primary schools having but these are ghost councils, with only 18.76% being active. Respondent teachers and officers were supportive about the potential of the councils to assist the students, the schools and the community. However, the teachers did not assist their elected students' councils in their schools in different school activities, so the councils became moribund.

"HOLDEY PAKHIR ZHAK" (GIRLS GUIDES)

The Ministry of Education actually requires a Girl Guide chapter in each school, led by a female teacher (MOPME, 2019). The chapters are open to girls aged 6-10. .

Table 1.5: Introducement of "Holdey Pakhir Zhak/Girls Guide" in School

Variables		Frequency (%)
Did the school have"Holdey Pakhir Zhak/Girl Guides" for girl students?	Yes	14.49
	No	85.51
Did the school have trained female teachers as a "Guider/ Wise Bird"?	Yes	05.67
	No	94.33

[Source: Field Survey, 2019-2020]

Table 1.5 shows that the vast majority of State schools have no Girl Guides chapter and no trained female teachers to lead them if they existed. Respondent students, teachers and officers agreed that both Boy Scouts and Girl Guides are necessary to develop students' character, maturity and commitment to the school, to avoid dropping out. Yet no one seems to be taking up the cudgels.

CHALLENGES OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Innovation contains the idea of output, of actually producing or doing something differently, making something happen or implementing something new. Innovation almost always involves hard work; persistence and perseverance are necessary as many good ideas never get followed through and developed. Thus, in Bangladesh State schools, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education-required innovation has remained a dream and a bounced cheque. The main problems are:

a. Lack of adequate land, structural and cosmetic physical educational facilities, budget of primary school for innovative management

b. Lack of adequate training of primary school related officers, teachers and stakeholders on the practice of innovative activities in school

c. Lack of adequate laptop with multimedia for all schools and training of primary school head and assistant teachers on the use of ICT facilities

d. Lack of plan, vision, clear goals and objectives of primary schools

e. Lack of electric supply, physical teachers, gardener, scavenger and necessary staff; and

f. Most of the officers, teachers and school authorities are indifferent to practice this in school and their tendency is to resist any innovative change.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Innovation can be broadly thought of as new ideas, new ways of looking at things, new methods or products that have value. In this period of global competitiveness and knowledge-driven society, where emphasis is on quality education in terms of quality inputs, processes, output and outcomes, educational officers

and teachers should adopt or adapt innovative practice in primary school teaching-learning processes. Innovative practices are necessary for improvement of school performance, productivity and quality education at primary level in Bangladesh and to attract and retain all primary school-age children in school.

This study suggests some recommendations to ensure innovative practices of primary school become reality in Bangladesh. Government should ensure necessary land, budget and physical educational facilities and multimedia and laptops in all primary schools with electricity. Head and assistant teachers should be encouraged to get ICT training and to develop interest in the use of these tools in the teaching-learning process. Seminar, conference and workshop should be arranged periodically for primary education related officers, teachers and school authorities on innovation practices in school. Primary education officers and head teachers should invent yearly vision of school. Government should recruit necessary teachers, staff, gardeners, and scavengers. Government should also motivate them to practice innovative activities in school.

It can be summarized as: resources, incentives, responsibility and accountability. So long as the MOPME conceives of itself as a producer of documents and generator of great ideas rather than a coordinator and facilitator of action to implement those documents and ideas, MOPME and DPE staff will continue to live in a dream world and have little effect in the real world.

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