

Developing a Management Point of View: Case of Education Sector Problems in a Developing country

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Abstract

This is a case study in the domain of public sector management or management in government, with particular reference to education as a sector as a whole. Bangladesh has shown persistent upward trends in development indicators during the last four decades. In the education sector also, essential quantity indicators like literacy, the female proportion of literacy, number of educational institutions, increased and improved, at all levels - primary, secondary, tertiary, and technical. But qualitative improvement remained mysteriously low, despite government intention to increase quality of teaching, learning, and administration. This paper aimed to draw an overall picture of the prevalent scenario of the education sector. Analyzing secondary sources like public media, and primary sources like citizen interactions, this qualitative study consolidated the problems of the education sector in a coherent whole. Contrary to overstated budget problems, the paper argues that many problems of the education sector are not budget problems, rather purely and simply 'management' problems, and so, can effectively be solved with basic but thorough understanding of the basic technicalities of management as a discipline.

Keywords

Education sector, management in government, citizen experience, case study in education, Bangladesh

Introduction and Context

Evidence shows persistent upward trends in development indicators in Bangladesh during the last four decades. Kausik Basu, the former *World Bank Chief Economist*, was amazed to see Bangladesh making remarkable progress in many economic and social indicators (Basu, 2018). On the contrary, Bangladesh performed consistently lower in all indicators of governance as shown in the *Governance Matters* report based on World Bank data (Kaufman, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2010; Khan, 2015; Khan, 2013). This unconventional relationship between governance and development in Bangladesh has been characterized as the Bangladesh Conundrum (World Bank, 2011).

Education is one of the sectors echoing the same conundrum. In Bangladesh, many indicators have increased, like literacy levels, the female proportion of literacy, number of schools, colleges, universities, and technical institutions, availability of free course materials, etc. (ADB, 2008; World Bank, 2013).

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However, problems of mismanagement and mismanaged reforms remain a constant impediment (World Bank, 2016). This poor management of reforms is also evident in ‘isomorphic mimicry’ of institutional reforms and ‘excessive development showing much less impact’, for example, ‘schools are built but in which children do not learn’ (Pritchett, Woolcock & Andrews, 2013; Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock, 2017).

Some of the previous studies liberal arts point of view discussing the colonial context, history and impact on education sector in Bangladesh (for example, Chowdhury & Sarkar, 2018; Roshid, Siddique, Sarkar, Mojumder & Begum, 2015; Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010). Other contemporary studies focused on particular levels and sub-sectors of education and or thematic areas like ICT in education, English language in Education, etc. (For example, Siddik & Kawai, 2020; Rahman, Nakata & Nagashima, 2019; Kono, Sawada & Shonchoy, 2018; Khan, Hasan & Clement, 2012). These and other studies investigated the education sector from a variety of important dimensions, interventions and associated statistics available. Despite all these, studies containing real life citizen experience and ground level realities are rare. There is a room for studies that can be used as policy mapping in education that starts mapping from bottom up, from citizens and media reporting citizen experience.

What is the citizen experience in the education sector? With this central question, the author started examining media reports. Author perused more than five leading newspapers and compiled a shortlist from many articles. Items with repeated nature were deliberately excluded and items of varied nature were included to illustrate the full range or collated view of the problem. Many things improved in quantity, but qualitative improvement remained mysteriously low, despite government intention to increase quality, along with quantity. Perennial gaps remain in the management of resources, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and strategic analysis of the basic problems in the education sector, like elsewhere.

The objective was NOT to identify the statistical distribution of any particular type of problem (literacy rate, dropout rate, graduation rate, etc.) across the institutions or measure the attitude and perception of the people regarding education sector problems or conduct factor analysis. Rather, the objective is to understand the pattern, type, scope, and nature of education sector problems, which have become very common across the country and can be categorized ‘as a matter of management’ (or lack of it).

I. Case Development Methodology

Since our objective is to understand in-depth, the nature of the problem, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate (Creswell, 1994; Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Case development is a particular type of qualitative approach where *systemically detailed examination* combines various methods of inquiry to understand the phenomenon within a particular context (Yin, 1994, 2003; Creswell, 1994; Scappens, 1990). Case study research not only explores but helps to understand the world within a particular context, uses multiple methods for collecting data.

In the present context, the education sector is a case where many instances of the education sector have been consolidated to understand the overall problem of management in governance for aiding understanding and analysis.

This approach seemed more appropriate than another education sector-specific metrics study, which is abundant from government, non-government, and donor sources. To understand the main problems in the Bangladesh education sector, both primary and secondary information was gathered as follows:

Secondary sources: Media reports (leading newspapers) on education from 2010–2020 in two distinct phrases are taken into account. Leading newspapers were randomly selected and articles related to education were selected up to the point that all levels of education and all types of problems are represented in the sample.

Primary: field visits, observations, and citizen interviews were undertaken on-site and off the site. An ethnographical approach was followed to understand the nature of the study problem (Yin, 2003; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). For example, living and observing in the setting for an extended period were done to build the case.

In line with the objective of insight-rich observations, *non-probability sampling* was deployed. This required conversational interview with small sample of respondents (here around fifty citizen participants), but with *logical relationship and with purpose* (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012) to generate *theoretical saturation from theoretical sampling* as evident in *grounded theory* approach, where researchers collect, codes, and analyzes the data from the ground, simultaneously (Glaser & Strauss, 2014, 2017).

These fifty citizens were ‘randomly’ selected at ‘convenient’ locations representing ‘purposefully’ the different categories like parents, non-parents, ex-parents, teachers, administrators, etc. Thus, rather than the sample size, theoretical saturation was considered as more important, a situation when no *significantly new and relevant data is left* for further sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Saunders et al., 2012).

II. Observations and Analysis: Secondary Sources

The first phase covered the period from 2009 – 2012 having a sample of reports from the leading dailies. We did the same for the current period, as of 2019, but did not repeat all types of problems, because most of these remained almost the same in nature; only the name of the district and sub-district (Upazila) might change. However, for the second phase, the study selected media reports from 2016 to 2020, relating to ‘teacher shortage’ only, just as one instance, to make the point that we needed to develop the ‘management’ view of the problem.

The first phase (2009-2012):

- *People with qualifications of class v and class viii will run educational institutions (managing committee).* Source: *Prothom Alo*, September 3, 2009
- *12 govt. and 70 non-govt. schools have no headmasters in 9 upazilas in Noakhali district.* Source: *Daily Star*; October 11, 2009
- *Government plan special incentive for English teachers.* Source: *New Age*, December 6, 2009:
- *16,000 non-govt. primary school teachers are going to get special consideration.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, July 19, 2009

- *Most government schools run without headmasters and assistant headmasters.* Source: *Daily Star*; July 23, 2009
- *School running with only 1 teacher in Nandail, Mymensingh district.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, April 1, 2010.
- *67 teachers have been appointed with fake certificates in Kishoregonj district.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, October 2, 2010.
- *Bachelor (honors) course was introduced 12 years ago but no teacher has been appointed so far in Magura Government College.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, March 23, 2010.
- *Porshuram (Feni) Govt. College: No teacher available for nine subjects including English.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, November 2, 2010
- *Government loans to good but insolvent students on the anvil.* Source: *New Age*, January 29, 2010.
- *Primary education system in crisis: Bashkhali upazila, Chittagong district.* Source: *Daily Purbokone*, March 8, 2011.
- *Gohinkhali Govt. Primary School, Golachipaupazila (Potuakhali): No Headmaster for 12 years; Teaching going on by a hired teacher.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, March 27, 2011.
- *Only one teacher for 96 students at Brikbanupur (Raujan, Chittagong) Govt. Primary School.* Source: *Shamakal*, April 19, 2011.
- *The School at Sonadia, Moheshkhali (Cox's Bazar District) is running with only one teacher.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, February 24, 2011.
- *Classes cancelled for Fair in the school playground, fair organized by political party student wing, vulgar show in the name of cultural programs.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, March 11, 2011.
- *Schools in the rural area face an acute shortage of English teachers.* Source: *Dhaka Mirror*; March 15, 2011.
- *Jarailtoli high school, Ramuupazila, Cox's Bazaar district: 15 teachers and staff are not getting any salary for 3 months.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, March 20, 2011.
- *No female teachers in 50 govt. girls high schools in the country.* Source: *Amar Desh*, April 19, 2011.
- *Vandaria (Pirojpur district) government college: teacher shortage.* Source: *KalerKontho*, February 28, 2011.
- *Tardy recruitment system keeps 3677 posts vacant in 253 colleges.* Source: *Daily Star*; March 9, 2011.
- *Teacher crisis at Chittagong University; some departments are having acute shortage; student-teacher ratio up to 46 to 1.* Source: *Jugantor*; April 8, 2011.
- *Department of computer science, Chittagong University: Teacher in study leave without approval for 5 years.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, 2011.

- *Waiting for President and Prime minister's approval: More than 1500 medical college teachers are awaiting promotion after 8-10 years.* Source: *Jugantor*; February 23, 2011.
- *Intense Teacher Crisis in College of Leather Technology: requires 80 teachers, has only 6 teachers, new admission postponed.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, 2011.
- *Technical education has become certificate oriented due to crisis of teachers.* Source: *Prothom Alo*, April 27, 2012.

Then we move to second phase media reporting and review the situation in the education sector management. In this phase we collect news items in the education sector during 2016 to 2020.

The second phase (2016-2020):

- *College teacher shortage: The teachers must realize sincere execution of their duties is more important than trying to get city postings.* Source: *Independent*, September 22, 2016.
- *Teacher shortage plagues 60pc Bangladesh pry schools.* Source: *NewAge*, July 6, 2018.
- *Teacher shortage cripples public college in Feni: The institution—which has about 1500 enrolled students—is basically situated in an abandoned building, and there isn't even a principal appointed.* Source: *Dhaka Tribune*, July 4, 2019
- *6500 teachers shortage in Chittagong Division; 1260 headmaster shortage.* Source: *Azadi*, Sep 15, 2019
- *Teacher-shortage hampers education in 13 Naogaon pry schools.* Source: *Financial Express*, March 12, 2020.
- *Teacher shortage hinders studies at century-old Bagerhat school.* Source: *UNB News*, February 03, 2020.

Reports from the second phase show that the nature of the problem in the education sector, remained similar between ten years (2009 and 2019). For example, in the teacher shortage problem category, the basic problem of HR planning remained the same despite well-known, visible, and indicator-based improvements.

In the past, many non-government schools recruited teachers at low wages, whenever they needed. Now they demand nationalization from the government or at least MPO (monthly pay order, a budget allocation from government to pay the salary part of the teachers and some non-teaching staff) facility. Many of them actually are not qualified as per NTRA (national teachers' recruitment authority) criteria. But they have been serving for many years and presumably providing low quality education. This is a problem of *the regulatory environment of management* in the education sector, talent acquisition problem, and a recruitment process within broader HRM (human resource management) within government bodies.

Ministers and Parliament Members promise informally about government intention to improve education and the facilities or conditions for all in the education sector. Sometimes that creates a negative impression in the end, due to a lack of *coherent planning*.

In Management terms, this is a lack of coherent vision and activities or a lack of goal alignment. The government may not be skilled at managing the huge *supply chain management* task of supplying books and educational equipment and materials timely to all schools.

School buildings and premises get destroyed in cyclones, floods, and other disasters. It takes time to repair and rebuild them. The Government cannot claim to have any sound prioritization mechanism in place. And needless to mention, it is more procedure-oriented rather than crisis management oriented.

Even government teachers with government pay scale and other benefits are not interested to work in rural and remote areas, due to communication difficulties and lack of amenities. On the one hand, there is a lack of job rotation, transfer, and promotion mechanisms. On the other hand, compensatory wage mechanism is not in practice that rewards or compensate for 'unpleasant work conditions'.

In a diverse education sector, retirement is a usual phenomenon. Vacancies are created and it takes time and process to fill those vacancies. On the surface, it may appear that there is a huge competition and a long queue for teaching jobs. But there are perennial problems of 'teacher shortages' at every level of educational institutions. But this 'staffing' need is very much predictable and is a routine HRM (*human resource management*) issue for the education sector. However, government agencies do not seem to have this basic capability of HRP (*Human Resource Planning*), or managing the *HRP process*, that keep many schools in perennial shortage of teachers and even, headmasters. There is hardly any effective succession planning to fill up the vacancies.

Apart from 'recruitment' and 'training', motivation is a major problem in the education sector. It may seem like there is huge interest for teaching jobs. But on the job, lack of motivation is found to be an everyday problem. Teachers are not present in the schools, or not committed to their 'regular' classes, administrative monitoring is poor, and all sorts of demotivating behaviors are observed. That means these recruits are not 'teachers by choice'. They just wanted the 'government job' and lifetime employment, sometimes even with the help of corrupt officials and school management committee members. This is a problem of *assessment tool or recruitment and selection procedure, ending up in poor placement or position filling*. And there are hardly any On-the-job-Training or Off-the-job training that can address the psychological issues of position placement to improve their intrinsic motivation of the job itself.

III. Observations and Analysis: Primary Sources, Citizen Experiences

In parallel to analyzing secondary sources, we observed the instances from the social setting and conducted citizen conversational interviews at appropriate places, to develop the narratives about the 'problem' related to the 'education sector from the citizen perspectives.

All those we had deliberate conversations with expressed their observations and frustrations in a free flow way. So *just quoting who said what* will not be very meaningful. Rather important and meaningful will be to provide a narrative summary and analysis of contemporary citizen discourse on the education sector:

Coaching Culture: *Without coaching centers education has become unthinkable.* Certain students need extra ‘help’ beyond regular school classes. Going to teachers who are knowledgeable in that subject has been around in our country for a long time. However, the form of ‘coaching’ as seen today is not a desired one by the citizens.

From the citizen’s survey, it emerged that among the problems people are facing in the education sector, the pervasiveness of coaching centers is the most significant one. Whether it is the urban or rural area, male or female, good school or ordinary school, lower-level classes or upper level, ‘coaching culture’ has been included with mainstream education as a part and parcel.

From pre-school to high school admission coaching, cadet college coaching, to ‘all class all subject-based coaching’, PECE (class 5) coaching, JSC (class 8) coaching, SSC (class 10) coaching, HSC coaching, etc. are common elements of today’s education scenario. After HSC, there is admission test coaching: medical, engineering, university different units (A, B, C, D, etc. At the university level, there is subject coaching, mainly for many national university (NU) degree programs. In many cases, for public and private universities, etc. there are established subject-based coaching centers (for example, mathematics, statistics, accounting, economics, etc.)

Admission hassle in the few good schools: There are only a few good schools in major cities and towns. From taking admission forms, admission coaching (often under a school teacher), taking the children to schools for admission tests, getting them back after the test, admission formalities, fees, etc. are common hassles faced by guardians and prospective students.

Total seats in all schools are not short compared with total demand. But yet people and parents undergo this hassle because most of the schools, government or private, are of low quality and show ordinary performance, year after year. The Government was unable to do anything to change the ranking of the schools. The same schools do better for years; new schools do not get better. Which ultimately makes guardians scramble for good schools.

Lack of effective control mechanism in teaching: The concept of quality in education is vague. Is it a good teacher, good students, good system, good SSC, HSC results? In most cases, the teacher’s salary is very poor. In some cases, government schools’ pay scale is much higher than non-government (subsidized) schools but accountability is almost non-existent. Some private schools are run like a for profit business, charging hefty tuition fee, and earn even more profits from forced selling school dress, stationeries, and all extra-curricular activities, but pay the teachers, even less than government or subsidized non-government schools, taking the advantage of ‘teaching experience’ craving surplus pool of young, and mostly female graduates.

Teacher shortage in English, Maths, Science: Many educated youths are unemployed. On the other hand, there are vacant posts in the schools due to a long, bureaucratic recruitment procedure. Add to that low remuneration levels, and as a result, better human resources are not available in the education sector. This phenomenon becomes more visible when it comes to subjects like English, Math, and Science.

The urban-Rural disparity in education quality: Though Bangladesh is a developing country, there have been reputed schools and colleges in rural and district towns since the British period. From these schools and colleges graduated renowned personalities of present times. But now the situation is different. Good graduates are not produced from rural areas except in a number of statistical outlier institutions.

Poor service experience with education boards: Students and parents have to visit the education boards for many reasons. For example, correcting student name, father's name, mother's name, and other spelling mistakes in the certificates, etc. There is the case of delay and procrastination, and rent-seeking behavior of the staff. However, nowadays many services have become digital.

Opening and running private (non-government) schools: For Bangladesh, it is difficult for the Government to provide public education (government schools) for all students. So, private sector participation is encouraged in principle. But when a potential school promoter goes to the education board, he finds no one-stop guideline. One has to depend on the whims of the officials. Private sector parties have to 'manage' the officials and procedural bureaucracy. The environment discourages compliance and encourages malpractice. So, schools in the private sector (non-government schools) are opened and run by profit minded investors, with little orientation with education as a service.

Notebook or Guidebook Confusion: At different times, the Government banned notebooks or guidebooks in the market. Sporadically the Government conducted 'mobile courts' (regulatory drive) to seize the guidebooks from bookshops and penalize the sellers. But it is there in the market all year round. Many guidebooks are of a high standard. Those help to supplement or complement the textbooks, which are perceived to be of the lower standard at times. Some notebooks are of such poor quality that it needs a regulatory authority to penalize them. Parents and students do not think it is a good idea to ban the guidebooks.

Governance and general mismanagement of the institutions: Governance and managing committees, if there are any, are only in paperwork and bureaucracy. Most educational institutions do not have any sound governance and management mechanism considering all stakeholders into account. In many cases, these are just pocket committees or country club committees of politicians, businessmen, and a few influential local people. So, mismanagement of school administration, logistics, and the fund is very common. This management problem can be consolidated as follows: The institutions do not provide sufficient logistic facilities for the students. They cannot ensure the quality of teaching and the teachers. They do not provide good salaries to teachers because due to the common thinking that many unemployed young graduates are easy to find with minimal salaries. The private and for-profit schools charge tuition and other fees at their will and also increase them annually at will. They do not entertain the voices of parents, students, and teachers. In a word, they do not have sound management and governance mechanisms.

IV. Policy Implication: More of a Management Problem than a Budget problem

The objective of this paper was to draw an overall picture of the problems prevalent in the education sector, and see how those fall into the 'management' category.

Most of the people working in the education sector, media, and many citizens quickly assumed and concluded that the main problem of the education sector is the budget as a percentage of GDP (gross domestic product – a measure of national income), that means lack of sufficient fund allocation in the education sector. But according to our observation and analysis, many cases are simply due to not knowing ‘how to manage the available fund’ effectively and efficiently.



Figure: 1 Different Dimensions of Education Sector Problems

As seen in the figure 1, there are many problems in the education sector or the education sector problems have many dimensions. The problems are very much well-known and repetitive. It is not problem number one, two, and three, and so on. There are *multiple dimensions of a single problem*. Again, *multiple problems have a common dimension*. So, it is better to show it as a circular network diagram rather than a numbered list.

Management in the Government seems to be lacking managerial acumen in managing the process, system, and structure. Education sector is just one case. For example, managing the process of teacher recruitment, training, retirement, and staffing the vacant positions. We observed that there are many ‘authorities’ in the education sector – education board, Education Office (thana office, district office, up to Education Directorate), DC office (deputy commissioner, Jela Proshashok, in Bangla), Divisional Commissioner office, etc. All are needed for reasons, whatsoever.

However, there are inconsistencies, overlapping, and incoordination in their work scope and approaches. There is a clear need of ‘coordination’ and ‘collaboration’, which, again, are the matters of ‘management’, not of education budget or teaching methods problems.

On the part of public management or management in government in the education sector, from ministry to directorates to institution level, we need a greater understanding of the sector and citizen level problems.

V. Conclusion and Further Research

The paper is qualitative and subjective in nature; hence, it contains thick descriptions of the scenario, which is not possible in typical quantitative indicator or figure-based descriptive studies. There are many studies and discussions in the area of education in Bangladesh, and most of them showed quantity in progress. Now it is time for serious discussions around qualitative progress.

Bottom line is, the education ministry or administration cannot improve quality of education as a service, on a systemic level, only by increasing institutions, increasing teachers or manpower, or increasing their salaries and scales. Education sector ‘management’ needs to be technically understood and appreciated, as a ‘planning and management problem’, by the Government, Education Ministry, Education Directorates, Examination boards, and other stakeholders. That means, we cannot expect a sustainable solution to the ‘education sector problems’ without a qualitative understanding of management (or lack of it) issues. The assumption is that if we can understand the problem from a management perspective, then the education sector problems can be resolved to a great extent.

Further research can help in that direction. This case-based exploratory study may lead to further inquiry. For example, how to differentiate management factors and other factors like political, social, and cultural; Can management be improved without other factors or the other factors in place as it is; what could be an implementable management framework for improving qualitative dimension in the education sector; how to reduce the negative impact of political pressures in recruitment and overall HRM (human resource management) in the education sector, how to strategize in different phases in different sub sectors of education – primary, secondary, higher secondary, tertiary, technical; and so on.

We need a closer, comprehensive, holistic, and strategic look from bottom up, in line with SDG 4, Quality Education for All (sustainable development goal number 4), amid ‘tensions, challenges, and opportunities within SDG 4’ (Wulff, 2020). COVID pandemic made it even more imperative (Spiteri, 2021). It is a ‘responsibility shared’ among individuals, education and training institutions, and regulating governments (Boeren, 2019). It is hoped that future studies will take it forward from this point.

Conflict of interest

Not Applicable

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