

EVALUATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION STIPEND PROJECT: A STUDY OF TANORE UPAZILA UNDER THE DISTRICT OF RAJSHAHI

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Abstract : Basic problems associated with imparting Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) have been established in this study. It is argued that many factors contribute to the performance of students. In the face of rapid quality deterioration it is very important to know what determines the quality in primary education in Bangladesh. Bangladesh government has taken many initiatives to improve the quality of primary education. One of the initiatives is PESP. The study has tried to find out the problems of distributing the PESP and at the same time tried to understand whether it is properly implemented or not. govt.'s expectation was to increasing enrollment (100%), reducing drop out, 100% completion of primary education, achieving scholarship as to the expectation, standard marginal fitness of the students etc. The study has used social survey method to collect basic information and reviewed some related documents. The study has found that under PESP 93% students were enrolled in the study area. 7% students dropped out in the study area. The present status completion rate is 64.20%. TIB found only 4.20% students had achieved their marginal fitness in 2009. The findings show that PESP is failure to achieve its target though govt. is continuously expanding fund for the PESP. So, some policy implications and recommendations have been given through this study so that PESP may be more effective to achieve its goal within year.

Introduction

The Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) aims to increase the educational participation enrollment, attendance and performance-of primary school-aged children from poor families throughout

Bangladesh by providing cash payments to targeted households. Initiated by the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) in July 2002, the Primary Education Stipend Project began its first official year of operation in January 2003, with the goal of supporting more than 5 million students. The main purpose of the study is to describe the result brought by the PESP. The study also has described whether the project has been implemented properly or has the result been achieved targeted by the GOB. The study tried to find out the present situation of the PESP and at the same time its impact on the objectives of it. In this study the evaluation of the PESP has been discussed considering its field level findings. The article has been organized into five sections. Introduction provides the concept of FFE and PESP of Bangladesh. Background of PESP provides a brief description of it. Current status of PESP, describes its progress. PESP component discussion and analysis, provides more descriptive information, presents issues of concern. Findings and Recommendations to the proper authority and last conclusion, which reviews the preliminary findings and summarizes concerned. Education is one of the most important forms of human capital investment. Yet, not all children have a chance to go to school. The fact that parents make decision for their children implies that some children from poor families are likely to be poor in the future if their parents are unable to invest in their education. Primary education has always been high on the priority of the government initiatives have made remarkable success. The enrollment of female students is now equal to that of male. The net enrollment has increased gradually up to 87 percent in 2007 from 75 percent in 1996.¹ The participation and passing rate in the primary scholarship examination has significantly increased. The dropout rate has decreased in the primary schools under these projects. The Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) aims to increase the educational participation, enrollment, attendance, persistence, and performance of primary school-aged children from poor families through out the country by providing cash payment to targeted households. This project was initiated in 2002 and it began first official year of operation in January 2003, to support more than 5 million students.² This article primarily provides the description of PESP as well as raises issues that will be required for further investigation and analysis. The main intention of the study was to examine the impact and results of the project. At the time of review of this report, it had been found that the PESP was in the running stage, especially stipend money was distributing

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among the beneficiaries. But no progressive reports were found or had been prepared. As a result, little data had been collected from the secondary sources. Data of this article were collected through a series of interviews with the national PESP director and headquarters staff and review of documents existing. Analysis of this study was drawn on various studies that have assessed similar programs or examined related issues as references.

Hypothesis of the study

* Primary Education Stipend Project has increased the enrollment rate and decreased the drop out rate.

* Enrollment of girl's students has been increased.

* Primary Education Stipend Project has improved the quality of education.

Sample size and study area

Tanore Upazila of Rajshahi district was selected as the study area. On the basis of population, there was sufficient number of government and non-government primary schools in the study area than other Upazila of Rajshahi district. 500 students under the PESP of Tanore Upazila were taken randomly as the sample size of the study.

Data collection

Data were collected through questionnaire. Interview technique also was used to collect data.

Background of PESP

Bangladesh has received national and international recognition for its strong commitment to development of primary education and the impressive gains, it has made towards achieving primary "Education for All" over the past two decades. Bangladesh sustains one of the largest and most complex primary education systems in the world comprising to up to eleven different types of primary schools (with government schools accounting for 61 percent of enrollments).³ According to the most recent GOB information (statistics), in nearly 18 million students were enrolled in over 80401 primary level institutions, resulting in a gross enrollment ratio of 97.5 percent with no disparity between boys and girls.⁴ Since 1990, student enrollments have increased 30 percent, the number of primary level institutions has nearly doubled (Mainly in the non-government sector), and the significant gender gap has virtually disappeared.⁵ A significant numbers of students of primary school-aged children remain out of school. Bangladesh government estimate of the net enrollment rate (86.6) indicates that about 2.5

million children age 6-10 were not enrolled in primary school in 2001; other estimates suggest that at any one time the number of out-of-school children is closer to 4 million.⁶ Nearly 2 million of the students attending primary school fell outside the official age range, primarily due to over-age enrollment. The repetition and the drop out rate were high (33%). It resulted in an inefficient cycle time of 6.6 years. Over 30% of the children who entered primary school did not complete all five grades.⁷ Students assessments have found that those who do not complete the primary cycle, perform on average at a third grade achievement level and lack essential problem-solving skills; only 5% of class V students were able to pass the Primary Scholarship Examination. Attendance rate was uniformly low, only 58%.⁸ These problems are acute in the rural areas in Bangladesh. Especially among the socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Such as; ethnic minorities, slum dwellers and the poor. Survey of Education Watch 2001; found that 65% of primary school-aged children from the poorest households were enrolled in primary school, compared with 89% of children from the wealthiest households.⁹ This survey also found that the enrollment rate of remote area was only 20%. Children who were not enrolled in school were 88%. Similar patterns of disparity are evidenced in drop out, repetition, completion and attendance rates.¹⁰ The government of Bangladesh has instituted several programs that attempt to redress the negative effects of poverty on primary schooling. The GOB introduced a Food for Education program (FFE) in July 1993. The main feature of the program is to provide a free monthly food grain ration contingent on the family being judged as poor and having at least one primary- school-age child attending school that month. The aim of FFE program was to use targeted food transfers to encourage poor families to enroll children in primary school and to keep them there. The expectation was that the program would have three benefits; enhance human capital and hence reduce long-term poverty, provide nutritional gains and improve the targeting of government food subsidy programs. From its beginnings in 1993 as a large-scale pilot program, by 2000 the FFE covered some 17,811 primary schools (27 percent of the total) and 2.1 million students (13 percent).¹¹ The FFE program provides a free monthly food grain ration contingent on the family being judged as poor and having at least one primary-school-age child attending school that month. The primary word committee and the School Management Committee jointly prepare the list of beneficiaries. The family can either

consume the grain and/or sell it. If one primary-school-age child from a designated poor family attends school the household is entitled to receive 15 kg of wheat or 12 kg of rice per month.¹² To be eligible for the maximum of 20 kg of wheat or 16 kg of rice, the household must send more than one child and all primary-school-age children to school.¹³ The enrolled children must attend 85 percent of classes in a month to be eligible and records on this are kept by the teachers and submitted monthly to the Thana (local government) offices. They and the School Management Committee then arrange with the Ministry of food for the grain to be delivered to a nominated warehouse for collection by the beneficiary family using a ration card. Due to concerns about the loss in teaching time for food distribution, the government in February 1999 relieved teachers of this responsibility and instead assigned the task to private dealers.¹⁴ Previous evaluation of the FFE program indicated that it has had a substantial effect on enrollment in primary school. In a survey of Bangladesh schools in 1996 Alam et.al (1999) found FFE schools had increased enrollments of 19-30 percent prior to the introduction of the FFE compared to 2-5 percent in non-FFE schools. After the introduction of the FFE the comparable figures were 13-14 percent and 1-6 percent, respectively. The FFE program used a two-step targeting mechanism. First, 2 to 3 Unions (districts) that are economically backward and have a low literacy rate are selected from each of the 460 rural thanas. All government, registered non-government, community (low-cost), and satellite primary schools, and one Ebtedayee Madrasa (religious-based primary school) in these selected unions are covered by the FFE program. Second, within each selected union, households with primary-school-age children become eligible for FFE benefits if they meet at least one of the following four targeting criteria:

1. A landless or near-landless household that owns less than half an acre of land;
2. The household head's principal occupation is day laborer;
3. The head of the household is a female;
4. The household earn its living from low-income artistic occupations.

Only as maximum of 40 percent of the students in each FFE school can receive the subsidy. Thus, if some schools have more than 40 percent of the students who are eligible, some of these students do not receive a subsidy. In this situation, the decision on who should receive the subsidy is made by teachers, and it may change over

time. In other words, if a child from a FFE eligible household enrolls in a FFE school but does not receive food subsidy for one year, he/she could receive a subsidy in following years if others drop-out. Teachers Endeavor to select the least poor households when they are faced with potentially eligible households beyond the 40 percent figure.¹⁵ It is not clear the extent to which they succeed. Ultimately, the FFE was implemented in 1255 unions, covering 27 percent of the country. The World Bank's 1998 Poverty Assessment found that the FFE did raise enrollment and attendance rates, but that it suffered from high levels of leakage (it cost 1.59 taka to transfer 1 taka in benefits) and was poorly targeted (50 percent of the beneficiaries came from households above the lower poverty line). Increase in the assistance, until the program was discontinued in June 2002. Conscious that FFE Program was too expensive to extend to the remaining three-quarters of the country and concerned about discrimination, the GOB initiated another incentive scheme the Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP), in April 2001. Eligible pupils received 25 taka per month during the two years of project implementation, despite questions raised about the effectiveness of such a low stipend amount. The FFE program and the PESP were implemented separately. However, following extensive review, in December 2001 the ECNEC determined that both the FFE program and PESP should be terminated and replaced by a single cash-based stipend program for the entire country, implemented and managed by one unit.¹⁶ Then PESP quadrupled the monthly stipend amount, introduced bank-mediated disbursement procedures, and targeted children from poor families throughout rural Bangladesh. While the new PESP was conceptualized under the previous government, the new administration finalized the design and expanded the size of the PESP to cover more than 65,000 schools and 5.5 million students, at an estimated cost of Tk. 331472.70 lakh.¹⁷ The PESP is planned to continue beyond its June 2007 completion date (Project proforma).

Current issues of PESP

The new PESP effectively started in July 25, 2009 though it was not officially approved until August 2002. It is now continuing to provide stipends (at the new level) to the primary school students who were

participating in the precursor PES Project and to students from the FFE Program (terminated in June 2002).¹⁸

Table-1: Stipend Distribution and Beneficiaries (July-December 2002)

	July-September 2002	October-December 2002
Allocation Amount	156,016,500/-	1,339,447,701/-
Amount Distributed	1,376,687,226/-	1,292,997,451/-
Percent Distributed	87.7%	97.7%
No. Students enrolled	1,531,836(100%)	nd
-Male	751,455(49.1%)	nd
-Female	780,381(50.9%)	nd
No. students benefited	608,070(100%)	nd
-Male	297,126(48.9%)	nd
-Female	310,944(51.1%)	nd
Percent of students benefiting	39.7%	nd
No. of families benefited	600,172(100%)	nd
-Single student families	589,111(98.2%)	nd
-Multiple students families	11,061(1.8%)	nd

Source: Report on Progress of Distribution, First Installment Allocation (July-September 2002), PESP, PIMU.

PESP and PIMU report shows that 2,669,684,677 taka in stipend funds had been distributed (about 92 percent of allocation). The July-September installment reached over 608,000 students and nearly 601,000 households. Most households had only one student enrolled in primary school, and roughly equal percentages of boys and girls benefited. Since the PESP was in the process of scaling up, it is difficult to interpret these figures or use them to assess future progress. From January through March 2003, the PESP was engaged in admitting new participating students into the program, primarily to be selected from among the entering grade 1 classes. The PIMU trained its 52 PESP monitoring officers and conducted national seminar in Dhaka city for 250 divisions, district and some upazila education officers to orient them to the program, introduce them to selection criteria and conditions, and enable them in term to organize training sessions. At the upazila level, one-day workshops were conducted for 100 SMC members, head teachers, bank managers, and upazila Education Committee members (UEC). Policy guidelines, describing the program and spelling out duties and responsibilities for the various actors involved in the PESP, were prepared and distributed.

By the end of March 2003, 355 upazila (out of 469) had submitted stipend registration information for 47,571 primary level institutions. Of the 10,570,922 students enrolled, 4,180,274(nearly 40%) students had been selected to participate in the stipend program. The total number of families participating was 4,122,571, with more

than 98% having one student enrolled in the primary school. The amount anticipated for disbursement was 1, 242, 12,850 taka (\$21,984,528).¹⁹

Objectives of PESP

FFE was replaced PESP. It was designed to provide cash assistance through a stipend program to poor primary school students and their families throughout rural Bangladesh. Though it was formulated in a new dimension, it was then remain problems of its proper distribution as most of the students are of the poor families and they live below the poverty line.

The official objectives of the PESP are to:

1. Increase the enrollment rate among primary school-aged children from poor families.
2. Increase the attendance rate of primary school students.
3. Reduce the drop out rate of primary school students.
4. Increase the cycle completion rate of primary school students.
5. Enhance the quality of primary education.
6. Alleviate poverty.

MOPME officials have included some additional objectives of PESP

1. Eradication of child labor.
2. Empowerment of women. 5.5 million students from the poor families of rural areas of Bangladesh were estimated as the targeted beneficiaries who are enrolled in eligible primary schools. The estimated 65,051 primary schools eligible to participate in the PESP are:
 1. Government primary schools (37,671).
 2. Registered non-government primary schools (19,428).
 3. Community schools (3, 2680)
 4. Satellite schools (4, 095).
 5. NGO-run full (grades 1—5) primary schools approved by the government (1,971).
 6. Ebtedayee Madrasas recognized by the government with a minimum of 100 students (3,710). Identification of 40% of students enrolled in grades 1—5 from the poorest families and their selection for participation in the PESP will be conducted at the school level, by the SMC with assistance from the headmasters. Proposed list will be reviewed and approved by the UPEO and countersigned by the UNO. There are some criteria of selection of the eligible students for PESP. Selected students must maintain 85% monthly attendance and attain a

minimum of 50% marks on the annual examination administered for each grade. To continue to participate in the program, a school must demonstrate at least 60% student's attendance, and 10% of its grade 5 students must sit for the primary school scholarship Examination.²⁰ Qualified every student will receive 100 taka per month and 125 taka per month for more than one student.²¹ Six national designated banks will disburse the stipends on a quarterly basis to authorized parents/guardians on a pre-determined date at the local bank branch or at a temporary distribution post established at a convenient location within 5 kilometers of the school site. Stipends will be disbursed to students' parents or legal guardians who present the proper PESP bank issued identity card. Preference will be given to issuing cards to the mothers of the selected students. Upazila Education Officer and Assistant upazila Education Officer will carry out of the duty of keeping record, monitorial work and implementation of PESP. PESP monitoring officers, assigned to DPEO, will maintain quality control and oversight of upazila PESP operations. DPEO will supervise the PESP monitoring officers and prepare progress reports for their respective Divisional Deputy Director and the Central Project Implementation Management Unit and Directorate of Primary Education (DPE).

Table-2: Status of enrollment before PESP in the study area (1999)

Total 6+ children	Enrolled children	Enrollment rate
500	370	74%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi. The table shows that the enrollment rate before PESP was 74% in the study area.

Table-3: Status of enrollment after PESP in the study area (2002)

Total 6+ children	Enrolled children	Enrollment rate
500	465	93%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the enrollment rate in the study area is 93% in 2002. So, it is noticed that the rate has increased significantly.

Table-4: Present status of enrollment in the study area (2009)

Total 6+ children	Enrolled children	Enrollment rate
500	415	83%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the enrollment rate in the study area is 83% in 2009. So it is noticed that the rate has decreased significantly.

Table-5 Status of dropout in the study area before PESP (1999)

Total enrolled children	No. of drop out children	Rate of drop out
500	96	19.20%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the drop out rate in 1999 (Before PESP) was 19.20% in the study area.

Table-6: Status of drop out in the study area after PESP (2002)

Total enrolled children	No. of drop out children	Rate of drop out
500	51	10.20%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the drop out rate has been reduced for PESP in the study area. Before PESP it was 19.20% but at present it is reduced 10.20%.

Table-7: Present status of drop out in the study area (2009)

Total enrolled children	No. of drop out children	Rate of drop out
500	35	07%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the drop out rate is 07%. So, the drop out rate has been increased in the study area though PESP is running.

Table-8: Completion of primary education before PESP (1999)

Total student enrolled in class one	No. of students passed class five.	Completion rate
500	321	64.20%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the completion rate is 64.20%. So, the completion rate has been decreased in the study area.

Table-9: Completion of primary education after PESP (2002)

Total student enrolled in class one	No. of students passed class five.	Completion rate
500	366	73.20%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the completion rate is 73.20%. So, the completion rate has been increased in the study area.

Table-10: Present status of completion of primary education (2009)

Total student enrolled in class one	No. of students passed class five	Completion rate
500	315	63%

Source: Upazila Education Office Tanore, Rajshahi.

The table shows that the present status of completion is 63% in the study area. It was 64.20% before the PESP. After PESP the completion rate increased significantly but it is decreased at present.

Table-11: Marginal fitness of the students (2009)

Total students of class attended in the final examination	No. of students obtained Marginal fitness	Fitness rate
500	21	4.20%

The table shows that 21 (4.20%) students could achieve their marginal fitness out of 500 students. So, it is unexpected and disreputable for the nation. For this, quality is not increasing but quantity is increasing in primary education in our country.

Findings

In the PESP project of GOB, 7 objectives had been included to be implemented. Among these objects, enrollment has been increased significantly. Though it is an important project for the development of primary education, some irregularities have been found in its distribution. Interviewing the guardians, local elites, beneficiaries and officials, it has been found that the amount of stipend money is insufficient for the poor students.

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, most of the families are poor. So it is difficult for the SMC and teachers to find out poor students from the numbers of families. Students those who are deprived to get stipend money, are not agree go to school next day. Guardians think that they are cheated by the SMC and teachers. So they stop their children to go to school and engage them in their family works. So, it is found that some students go to NGO schools and some remain in house. Thus, increases the drop out rate in primary education. The stipend money which is the guardians get from the project, do not spend it properly for educational expenses for their children. It has found that guardians spend the money for their familial purposes but not to buy books, pen, paper or other educational purposes. As a result, stipend money makes a saddest impression on the students mind. To select legal beneficiaries, sometimes SMC members harass the teachers. It creates the clash of interest to the teachers and SMC. It is very destructive for the primary education. Banking system delays the distribution of money. Guardians should have to go to distance for withdrawing the stipend money. They go to the fixed place timely but officers go there lately. So, they suffer for time consuming. Sometimes, it creates familial difficulties of the guardians. If any guardian fails to take the stipend money in the due date, they become the victim of harass of the officials. It has also

found that a female guardian was divorced and did not hand over the guardianship to the student's father. She withdrew the money and spent it as her will. In a non-government primary school, some irregularities were found in respect of selecting the poor student. An SMC member took 500/- as bribe for selecting the name of a student as a beneficiary. Besides, in that school 3 students were not eligible for the PESP yet they had been selected as beneficiary. The stipend project is beneficial only for economic aspect of the students but not quality oriented. In the scholarship examination 30% students could not pass in any subjects among the students who got stipend. It proves that stipend project can't bring any benefit to develop quality of our students. Every student who gets stipend must attend 85% classes. But it a formal matter only. It has been found that a beneficiary did not attend his classes more than 3 months in a government primary school yet he had been given the stipend money. Distribution is depended on the will of SMC and teachers. They maintain resister and shows it Hal fill. In a camp it had been found that a portion of stipend money was spent for the officials in respect of their lunch and transportation. Objectives of the PESP have been implemented partly. Only increasing enrollment, primary education can't be developed. It should be quality concerned. The amount should be increased as students' need. It should be distributed properly so that the money can be used for educational purposes.

Recommendations

- Objectives should be moderate i.e. it should be included that the main objective must be quality concern.
- Irregularities should be removed by distributing duties to the proper authority.
- Bank officials should not involved but local elites.
- Total students of the rural areas should be included in this project.
- Supervision should be enforced so that guardian uses the money for educational purpose. If found otherwise, take necessary action.
- To select eligible students only land comes to the consideration. It may not be. Income level of guardians should be considerable. (When all students will be included, the problem will be solved automatically).
- Stipend money should be distributed in every school so that guardians may not be harassed by any officials.

- Changing guardianship should be flexible. If female guardian dies or divorces her husband, then guardianship should change immediately so that stipend money can give the children on the fixed date.
- To remove bribery tendency of the respective persons, strict supervision should be enforced.
- Stipend money should be distributed to the consideration of good result of the students.
- Teaching materials may be supplied in place of money to the students.
- Some NGO run schools and non-government primary schools are withdrawing stipend money making false list of the students. They should be marked and take necessary action against them.

Conclusion

The study was designed to under stand the weaknesses of PEDP in Bangladesh. One of the hypotheses was that PEDP has increased the enrollment rate in primary education. The hypothesis was proved positively one year later after starting the project. The enrollment rate was 74 % (1999) before the project. It was increased 93% (2002) in the year of 2009 it has been decreased and it is 83%. Though the hypothesis positively proved after the project, it was disproved later.

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