

Bangladesh Educational Assessment
Pre-primary and Primary Madrasah Education in Bangladesh:
RECOMMENDATIONS

BEPS

Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity

CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL

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Pre-primary and Primary Madrasah Education in Bangladesh: Recommendations

A. Overall Recommendations

1. Engage all stakeholders (including government officials, donors, civil society organizations and NGOs, political parties, religious leaders, and representatives of Alia and Qawmi Madrasahs) in a forum for the modernization of Madrasah education. There was a clear consensus among all stakeholders that the Madrasah system required reform and modernization. The subject of Madrasah education, however, is significant to various groups in the society. Their inclusion in a collaborative process will ensure clarity of purposes and may produce firm commitments.
2. Provide incentives to increase female teacher hiring in Madrasahs. Female students account for almost 50 percent of all Ebtidai Madrasah students, yet female teachers account for only three-and-a-half percent of all teachers. At the same time, half of the country's population are women; hence, no sector, including education, could attain prosperity and development without female participation. Increased appointment of female teachers in Ebtidai Madrasahs can only improve the quality of education provided to both male and female students.
3. Conduct further research on promising Madrasah examples in order to expand and replicate their models. Some outstanding examples of Madrasahs seemed to produce skilled human-power technically, academically, and morally. Further, some Madrasahs exhibit efficient models of vocational training and self-sufficiency. Additional research may be conducted on those Madrasahs so that their examples can be replicated.

B. Recommendations for the Government

1. Assign Ebtidai education to the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. There does not seem to be one specific administrative unit within the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in charge of Ebtidai education. The Madrasah Education Board is concerned with designing curricula and distributing books to Ebtidai students, but it is not responsible for the performance of Madrasahs. Other officials, mainly at the Ministry of Education, oversee some administrative and financial aspects of the Ebtidai Madrasah system.
2. Designate a high-level official to be in charge of Ebtidai education. Given the importance of Ebtidai education, and its reach into the society, and given the desire of all stakeholders to modernize it, it is necessary to assign a high-level official at the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education to be in charge of it. This will help with coordinating

modernization efforts and with allocating resources effectively to both primary and Madrasah education systems.

3. Systematically include up-to-date Ebtidai and Qawmi Madrasah information in the BANBEIS database. At present it is very difficult to find information about Ebtidai Madrasahs. This is an outcome of the lack of centralized supervision of Ebtidai education. Further, information on Qawmi Madrasahs is almost absent.

4. Conduct a national equivalency examination at the end of the Ebtidai level (after Grade Five). This will ensure at an early stage that Ebtidai students are developing at acceptable rates, and will ensure compliance with government standards in students' early educational years.

5. Open the Ebtidai examination to all fifth grade (or equivalent) students from Alia and Qawmi Madrasahs, with government incentives to the latter in order to encourage them to incorporate more of the national curriculum in their system.

6. Develop more government incentives to assist students in appearing at and passing the Ebtidai examinations.

7. Invite Egypt's Al-Azhar officials to share with Bangladeshi Madrasah officials their experience in integrating the Al-Azhar educational system into the national education system from kindergarten to university.

C. Recommendations for Qawmi Madrasahs

1. Provide incentives to Qawmi Madrasahs to receive Alia status, and to incorporate the national curriculum. Because students coming out of Qawmi Madrasahs have only limited knowledge and expertise (mainly in religious subjects), they are receiving fewer job opportunities than Alia Madrasah and primary school students. If they incorporate the national curriculum as Alia Madrasahs, new avenues will be opened for their graduates.

2. Explore possible lessons and policies to be drawn from the experience of home schooling in the United States which may be customized for the Qawmi Madrasah system. Qawmi Madrasah teachers and parents generally have a unique view of the type of education, and school atmosphere, that they want for their children/students. The Qawmi Madrasah system may benefit from lessons learned in the United States from the home schooling model in which parents or communities maintain complete supervision of students' teaching and instruction without compromising the implementation of the national curriculum.

D. Programmatic Recommendations for Alia and Qawmi Madrasahs

1. Provide modern educational and recreational support to Madrasahs' orphan services, and make that support contingent upon introducing modern technical and vocational education. Orphan service is one of the largest social services provided by Madrasahs,

yet such service suffers from pervading poverty and lack of resources. Support in this regard would be beneficial both educationally and developmentally to a severely needy population.

2. Encourage the current trend towards modernization of Alia Madrasah curriculum. There is clear eagerness in Alia Madrasahs, and even in some Qawmi Madrasahs, towards modernization. In almost all the Madrasahs visited during this research study, both students and teachers alike asked for modern equipment such as computers and science laboratories. A few Alia Madrasahs have already introduced computer science.

3. Increase the participation of Madrasah teachers in teacher training seminars. Many parents and students expressed concerns about the quality of teacher preparation and effectiveness. There is only one small training center for Madrasah teachers, where only theoretical short trainings are offered. Teacher training may be enhanced along with technical and vocational practical training to teachers.

4. Introduce and encourage more participatory approaches to education and teacher/student interaction. Almost all education in Madrasahs is based on directive hierarchal models. Participatory models and approaches that encourage self-expression are almost totally lacking.

5. Increase awareness about the negative consequences of student physical and public punishment in Madrasahs. Students cited punishment, and public humiliation, as the most disliked aspects of Madrasah life. This aspect obviously interferes with their ability to develop positive perceptions of self and of the Madrasahs. Such practices in Madrasahs are notorious throughout the Muslim world. New awareness of how to deal with students without resorting to physical punishment must be addressed as a priority for the sake of students' healthy development and growth.

6. Provide vocational training as part of Madrasah services, and make it suitable to the local economy of Madrasahs. Madrasah students, teachers, and parents expressed the need to focus on vocational training in order to prepare students to contribute to local economies. Many of those students probably will not attend higher education, and it is in their direct interest to be prepared technically and vocationally to be productive members of their communities.

7. Provide recreational facilities in all Madrasahs and encourage extracurricular activities. In a sizeable number of Madrasahs in Bangladesh, with their large student populations, there are little or no extracurricular activities. They are sorely needed to shape students into deserving and fit citizens.

E. Recommendations for Pre-primary Madrasah Education

1. Include information on pre-primary Madrasah education in the BANBEIS database. Although this is the national database on Bangladesh's school system, it includes hardly

any information on pre-primary Madrasah education, despite the large number of such educational facilities nationwide.

2. Provide some type of supervision to pre-primary Madrasah education via the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. The logical place for pre-primary Madrasah education is within that ministry, as its services directly relate to primary and Ebtidai education. In addition, pre-primary Madrasah education is a large mass informal educational system that could benefit from coordination with the other educational systems in the country.

3. Review the status of Furkania/Hafizia educational facilities. The strong focus in such facilities on residential Quran memorization seems to deprive many children of the opportunities afforded them by Alia Madrasahs and primary schools. This perhaps is the most alarming aspect of the Madrasah system, as it confines children to years of Quran memorization, after which they lag behind their peers in all aspects of their development.

4. Explore ways to replicate the model of before- or after-Madrasah Quran memorization classes introduced by some Alia Madrasahs, instead of the current full-time Furkania/Hafizia model. Several Alia Madrasahs now provide early morning and afternoon Quran memorization classes. Those classes do not interfere with students' normal Madrasah education. It would be beneficial to children if more Furkania/Hafizia facilities could be re-designed as before- and after-Madrasah classes.