STUDY ON
THE IMPACT OF SUB-CLUSTER TRAINING



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Universal education and literacy is an established goal of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). There has been a substantial expansion in education, particularly that of girls over the last few years. New innovative approaches have been adopted to increase education coverage among the population.

In order to ensure universal primary education in the country, the GoB, among others, has undertaken a program called comprehensive Primary Education Development Program (PEDP). The Second Primary Education Sector Project (SPESP) is a part of the greater PEPD. The SPESP has been built on the experience gathered during the implementation of the first Primary Education Sector Project (PESP). The SPESP is now operating in three divisions of Bangladesh under the name 'Development of Primary Education in Chittagong, Sylhet and Barisal Divisions (2nd Phase)'.

To enhance the skill and capability of teachers, continuous efforts have been undertaken through different projects since 1980. One of the ideas experimented, was Cluster Training. It was initially introduced in seven districts in 1983 and from 1986, all the primary schools of the country were brought under this program. UNICEF, which had been supporting this program since 1986, took an initiative in 1989 to conduct a study to evaluate the success of Cluster Training, to identify the problems of implementation and to find solutions. Also, workshops were organized to deal with the study findings. Consequently, it was decided to conduct the training at Sub-cluster level (GoB 1995).

The Sub-cluster Training is an improved version of the Cluster Training. The program was first introduced in 4 Thanas (Upazillas) of 4 Divisions in1992 and was further expanded 1n 1994. Currently it is also operating in three Divisions under SPESP. As per provisions, this training is to be held in each Sub-cluster once in every two months by rotation. Training is to be delivered primarily by the Assistant Upazilla Education Officers (AUEOs) and sometimes by Primary Teacher Institute (PTI) instructors with active participation of concerned teachers.

Although it can be assumed that Sub-cluster training has had some positive impact on quality of teaching-learning and overall school performance, it is not yet clear how much and wide-ranging this impact is on quality of education in primary schools, and what future actions need to be carried out for further improvement. This proposed study has been designed to address these issues.

Study Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to assess the impact of Sub-Cluster Training on the quality of education in primary schools. The specific objectives are:

- To identify the intended changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practice, and assess the extent to which they are achieved.
- To identify methodological and contextual factors that affect the impact of training, the most effective forms of training for various purposes, and the types of content that respond best to different methods.

- To make recommendations, on the basis of the above, about how the overall training input can be most effectively managed to achieve the greatest positive impact, and
- To establish a basic procedure and set of instruments for assessing the of in-service training programs.

Methodology

The present study follows the framework of "After-Only-Without Control" Research Design.

The major activities in the study included were literature review, interview, group discussions, case studies, classroom observation, etc.

The major variables explored were school related Information, respondent characteristics, policy framework of sub-cluster training, organization of sub-cluster training, management of sub-cluster training, major strengths and weaknesses of sub-cluster training, and impact of sub-cluster training.

A four-stage random sampling method was pursued. At the first stage Districts, and at the second Upazillas, where Sub-cluster training are being conducted, were selected. After that, a representative sample of Sub-cluster schools at the 3rd stage and at 4th stage respondents were selected for conducting the study. There are a total of 21 districts in Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions. 50 percent of the districts (11 districts) were randomly selected. While selecting the districts care was taken so that at least two districts are included in the sample from each Division. The total sample size with head teachers, assistant teachers, DPEOs, UEOs and AUEOs was 759; and a total of 176 schools under 44 Sub-Clusters were covered.

The data collection instruments included were: Checklist for school-level basic information (school characteristics); three separate sets of questionnaires/interview scheduled (one set each for Head Teachers, Assistant Teachers, and Education Officials); discussion guide for conducting group discussions with the Sub-cluster Training participants (teachers and SMC, PTA office bearers), case study guide, and classroom observation guide.

This study was conducted by Human Development Research Centre (HDRC) in close collaboration with the Project Implementation and Management Unit (PIMU).

The field data collection work was undertaken by six teams with a total of twenty one field staff. The field staff comprised twelve Field Investigators (FIs), six Field Supervisors (FSs), and three Quality Control Officers (QCOs).

A five day long intensive training was imparted to the field staff, at the HDRC HQs, prior to their deployment in the field. All the members of the core team conducted the training sessions.

The data management activities comprising registration of administered instruments, data processing (coding, editing, edit verification, etc.), computer data entry, and data cleaning were carried out in-house at HDRC HQs. The computer packages, for entry, editing, and analyzing the data, used in this connection are MS word, SPSS, etc.

Key Findings

Organization of Sub-cluster Training

The Sub-cluster Training was introduced in majority of the schools between 1994 and 1996, and the majority of the teachers participated in Sub-cluster Training for more than 25 times. An overwhelming majority of the Head Teachers and assistant teachers reported that they attended the Sub-cluster Training regularly. The decisions on dates and venues of training mostly come from the respective AUEOs. Almost a half of the respondents reported to have never been consulted by the AUEO in selecting the dates and venues. An overwhelming majority of the respondents are of the view that stationery were provided with, the same being true for entertainment. They were, however, of the opinion that the Sub-cluster training budget was inadequate. They suggested increase in the budgetary provisions for refreshment, training materials, travel allowance, and training allowance. Both the Head Teachers and Education officials reported that guideline for holding Sub-cluster Training were provided. All the respondents reported that the mode of instruction in Sub-cluster Training was student-teacher centered, and that a variety if training materials and aids were used. Different types of co-curricular activities, ranging from 'singing songs' to 'performing religious rites', were practiced by the participants during Sub-cluster Training sessions. It was reported by the respondents that the demonstration lessons were followed by lesson review exercises, and open discussions were held very often.

Management of Sub-cluster Training

On planning and scheduling of training and presentation of next class as well as topic of the class, it appeared that the AUEO and Head Teacher of relevant schools were the decision makers. It was reported by the Head Teachers that, supervisory visits during Sub-cluster Training sessions mainly came from the UEO followed by DPEO. The respondents stated a number of monitoring mechanisms that were followed in Sub-cluster Training. They also answered in affirmative on the question whether training needs were assessed before Sub-cluster Training. On question as to how the performance of the trainees are evaluated, Head Teachers and Educational Officials mentioned variety of criteria ranging from 'observation of teachers, to 'group discussions'. The respondents also observed that pre- and post-evaluation was there and the Head Teachers stated different mechanisms for this, ranging from 'oral test' to 'use of evaluation format'. The respondents identified a variety issues regarding problems of management of Sub-cluster Training. They suggested some measures to overcome the problems, of which 'enhancing the training budget' and 'provision for training materials' are quite pronounced.

Teaching-Learning Situation under Sub-cluster Training

A Sub-cluster Training session is supposed to be participated by, besides teachers, SMC and PTA chairmen and members, guardians, community/opinion leaders, etc. It was reported by the Head Teachers, that the participation of the SMC and PTA members and chairmen is very low. The respondents identified inadequate training materials and aids, inadequate logistic support facilities, irregular or low participation of SMC and PTA members and chairmen, non-use of appropriate materials, lack of attention and interest among some of the participants, training manuals not being properly followed during training, etc. as the problems of Sub-cluster Training. The suggestions for solution of the problems include supply of adequate materials and aids, ensuring adequate logistic support facilities, regular monitoring and supervision by higher education officials, ensuring participation of all, etc.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Sub-cluster Training

According to an overwhelming majority of the respondents, the Sub-cluster Training is better that any other teacher in-service training forms. Opportunity for sharing ideas and experiences, continuity and consistency of training, the rotation system, provision for demonstration class, exposure to better teaching-learning methods and materials, opportunity for person to person contact, are some of the reasons given by the respondents to support their view. Almost all the respondents were also of the view that the teachers gained more from Sub-cluster Training. Although the majority of the respondents did not find any, some however, identified some reasons for failure, if any. The most prominent reasons are poor organization and management, weak and inexperienced trainers, same trainer in all training sessions, poor rewards, poor monitoring and supervision system, etc.

According to the respondents, the strengths of Sub-cluster Training are: teachers' exposure to new methods and techniques, regularity and continuity in training, practical oriented training, congenial training atmosphere, combination of various forms and methods, on the spot solution of problems, convenient training venue, etc. The weaknesses of Sub-cluster Training, as identified by the respondents are: smaller budget, inadequate materials, irregular monitoring and supervision, same trainer, weak and inexperienced trainer, space and accommodation problems, etc.

Impact of Sub-cluster Training

It seems, Sub-cluster Training has had a very positive impact on quality of both teaching and learning in schools. So far as intended changes in Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) is concerned, the Sub-Cluster Training also seems to have contributed positively. According to the respondents, teachers could improve their quality because, they were trained with appropriate training methods and materials. They could know the art of identifying weak students and solving their problems, could make class more attractive and enjoyable to the students, and could clarify hard topics/subjects in a very easy manner. The teachers also could contribute to improving the teaching quality of others. Opportunity for sharing ideas and experiences, identification of deficiencies of the teachers and solution there of, the effectiveness of the demonstration class, etc. are some of the reasons for this.

The results of classroom observation show that a bulk majority of the schools conduct relevant discussions on the subject/topic, administer attendance register, have clean and well ventilated classrooms, have necessary furniture. Also, in an overwhelming majority of the classes, the students get the opportunity to actively participate in the class. However, only in half of the classes appropriate teaching-learning materials and examples are used. During the observation the relevant teachers reported shortage or lack of appropriate materials and aids. Some even reported hiring of some materials from other schools. It has also been observed that, the teachers of relatively more successful schools use more appropriate methods and materials compared to those in not-so-successful schools.

Sub-cluster training not only contributed in improving the quality of teaching, it also helped improving the quality of learning in school. This has been reflected by regular attendance of students in school, more student attention and participation in the class, improved student discipline, better student performance in the class and examinations, etc.

The Sub-cluster Training, however, does not seem to have created the desired positive impact on ensuring necessary community support in school activities.

Recommendations

The ideal Sub-cluster Training system should incorporate the following:

- Continue the existing rotation system that ensures holding of Sub-cluster Training in all schools by turn.
- Ensure holding of Sub-cluster Training once in every two months. OR Ensure holding of Sub-cluster Training once in a month with 50% of the teachers of a school attending a training session alternately.
- Ensure that the decision on selection of date, venue, and topics is taken by the AUEO in consultation with the Head Teachers in the monthly coordination meeting.
- Ensure adequate and timely supply of training materials at the training venue.
- The Head Teachers should take extra initiative to ensure proper participation of the teachers.
- The Head Teachers should try to ensure greater and enthusiastic participation of SMC and PTA chairmen and members.
- Enhancement of the training budget that duly addresses the travelling, refreshment, materials, and training allowance related problems.
- Ensure timely disbursement of fund and establish a sound system (audit) that ensures proper use of fund.
- Ensure the use of expert and experienced trainers (multiple trainers, if necessary).
- Ensure an effective monitoring and supervision by higher education officials.
- Develop a sound system of evaluation of the achievement/performance of participants in the Sub-cluster Training.
- Establish a sound incentive system that rewards better performing teachers.
- Ensure that the teachers can effectively apply their training gains in the class (adequate and appropriate materials, proper supervision of schools, favorable teacher-student ratio, etc.).