Promoting Transition to Secondary Education: How SSCOPE Provides Second Chance to Drop-Outsand Vulnerable Children for Post-Primary Education

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Abstract:*In Bangladesh, low transition rate and high dropout rate is a critical issue in secondary education. Government has taken many initiatives to address this issue. But still, after completing primary cycle many students enroll in secondary education but drop out before completing secondary education. So,we have chosen as our research topic the issue of transition to secondary education, particularly how to provide a second chance to drop-outs and vulnerable children and youth for post primary education. The purpose of our study was to explore the SSCOPE project of IED, BRAC University to find out which factors lead to dropout, and how the SSCOPE project addresses these to promote transition to secondary education through different supportive activities. We also wanted to know how key stakeholders perceive these initiatives.This research is important because it addresses a key problem in secondary education and this study will help educators to take the successful interventions and initiatives that influence student enrollment and continuation at the secondary level. We used the qualitative research approach. We collected data through interviews, focus group discussions and document review. Through this study,we have found that many students could not access and continue secondary education due to their socio-economic and family background, educational cost, school related factors, child labor and gender discrimination. The findings show that to promote transition in secondary education the SSCOPE project developed learning centers, trained teachers to make lessons attractive and engaging, provided the necessary facilities such as low cost education, clean and attractive classrooms, sanitation facilities for girls, schools near the homes of students, safe learning environment, building parents' awareness, and counseling adolescents on sexual and reproductive health and gender issues. All these initiatives helped to promote interest and motivation among the disadvantaged families and children to be admitted for a second chance and continuing post-primary or junior secondary education. The project has developed this low cost model of post-primary education which can be replicated and expanded.*
Keywords:*Secondary Education, Second Chance, Drop-Outs, Vulnerable Children, Post-Primary Education*

I. Introduction

Education is a key tool for national development of a country and it is a basic human right of every individual ((Raynor, J., & Wesson, K.,2006). Education is important for every person in a nation. Education enables a man or woman to realize their potentials and goals. No country can be developed unless everybody is educated to meet the challenges (Lewin, K. M. (2011). Most of the developing countries have focused on primary education, but though secondary education is a crucial stage in the education system it has been neglected in many countries ((Shohel, M. M. C., &Howes, A. J. (2007). But, to achieve the goal of Education for All (EFA) governments should take different interventions to increase access and completion in secondary education also. Secondary education in Bangladesh consists of two main streams – general and madrasa. Secondary education serves mostly the adolescents and youth, who play a vital role in their families and communities. But at the secondary level low transition and dropout is a critical issue in our country. The Education Watch studies in 2005 found that of the students who enrolled in class six, 47.8 percent continued up to class ten and 39.8 percent could cross the barrier of test examination, while 20.1 percent passed in the school final (Education Watch, 2005). Although students' enrollment in primary school has reached a satisfactory level, but transition to secondary is not keeping the same pace. Different issues are related to the problem of smooth transition to secondary level. Both government and non-government sectors are providing some special programmes, particularly for the disadvantaged children and youth, to increase access or transition to secondary schools. The Institute of Educational Development at BRAC University (IED, BRACU) has started the SSCOPE project (Second Chance for Post Primary Education) since March 2009 (IED, BRACU Project Implementation Manual, 2009). This is an interesting programmewhich is the focus of this study. Recently, the SCOPE project included some more components in the programme which aresexual and reproductive health rights and gender (SRHRG).Now, the project is called "SSCOPE", meaning Schooling, SRHRG, and Counseling of Post primary Education (Islam, 2013). However, this study is focused on the objectives and activities of the previous SSCOPE project, which stands for Second Chance for Post Primary Education.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In our country, the secondary education system is faced with several difficulties and that has effects in both the short and long term. The main problem in our country at secondary level is low transition rate to secondary education, and high dropout rate of youth (Hussain, F., &Naumi, F. (2010). Transition means changing from one step to another step. Transition from primary to secondary education in 2004 was around 83 percent. Education Watch 2005 reports out of school children as 28 percent. BANBEIS 2005 reports that in secondary education in 2003 completion rate was 16.6 percent, dropout ratewas 83.4 percent and survival rate was 49.4 percent (Ahmed et al., 2007). According to a report released on 17 December 2007 by the Campaign for Popular Education about 80 percent of secondary level students drop out from school, while the Education Board, 2007 shows dropout rate at secondary level as 39.65 percent (Islam &Pavel, 2011). Clearly, there are a lot of discrepancies in the information about dropouts at the secondary level, and these points to the problems existing in the education system.The Bangladesh education system faces challenges including inflexibility, an insufficient number of schools, lack of skilled teachers, and low resources. In addition to these, there are the issues of equity, access and educational quality, and challenges faced by female students. Still now, female students face socio-economic and religious and cultural based discriminations (Rashid, M. M. (2011). In rural areas where resources are insufficient, boys receive preference for access over girls. Also, girls are expected to play an important part in household work whereas boys do not share these responsibilities. But it is not possible for a country to fully succeedif half of the population, that is the women, falls behind (Hussain&Naumi, 2010).

As shown above, high dropout from primary education and low transition to secondary education is a main problem in our country. For this problem many adolescents/youth do not get access to secondary school (Rahman, M. M et.al,2010). SCOPE project of IED aims to address this problem and has been running several activities to reduce this problem for some years. These need to be studied to see how these have been influencing the access to secondary education for these children (Hossain, A., &Zeitlyn, B. (2010).

1.2Research Questions

Thequestion which is the overall reflection of our studyis'**How does SSCOPE help out-of-school children and youth to gain post-primary education and how do they transition to secondary education?'**

Key questions

a. **Key question 1:** What is the background and context of SSCOPE and its objectives and strategies?
b. **Key question 2:** What are the activities of SSCOPE and how do they promote a second chance for post primary education? How are these viewed by the key stakeholders?

Sub-questions

a. **Sub-question 1.1:** What are the objectives of SSCOPE and how are they to be achieved through the project activities?
b. **Sub-question 1.2:** Who are the beneficiaries and how are the schools selected?
c. **Sub-question 2.1:** What interventions are made and where do they take place, in school or out of school and why?
d. **Sub-question 2.2:** How do the key stakeholders, such as project personal, community, parents, learners view the initiatives of SSCOPE and whether this has helped to increase access to secondary education?

1.3Research Methodology

This study followed a qualitative research approach because the qualitative approach provides a strategy for understanding the work and perceptions of different stakeholders. We conducted our research in one selected SSCOPE school, one govt. primary school and the Institute of Educational Development (IED), BRACU. Our research participants were students, teachers, parents, and community people, program personal of SSCOPE and team leader.We went through the process of collecting data using different methods like interview, FGD and some document review.

1.4 Ethical Issues and Concerns

As qualitative researchers, it was important for us to be sensitive and respectful to the participants' culture, life styles, language, context and environment. We also tried to avoid dominating tendency and behaved well toward them, helpful to the informants and maintaining proper time. We assured the participants that the collected data would not be disclosed and we would maintain confidentiality and these data would only be used for our research purpose. We took their interview in their selected time and places. We sought permission from the participants by a consent letter for collecting information, and for using tape recorder during the interview. We explained our goal to the participants and how this information would be used. Moreover, we showed patience and listened attentively. We also informed the participants that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The researchers also had ethical responsibilities to maintain transparency and record information accurately.

1.5Limitations of the Study

Every study has some limitations. This study was about how SSCOPE activities try to ensure out-of-school children'stransitionto secondary schools (EQ Review. (2009). The SSCOPE project is operating in 39 schools at 9 different urban areas, but we conducted ourstudy on only one school. So, our study findings should not be used for generalization. Time wasalso very short. On the other hand, we also faced difficulties to review literature about post primary education for out-of-school children in the context of Bangladesh, as this is a new area of intervention in our country.

II. Results and Discussion

2.1 Results

The results section is presenting and illustrating the findings of this study that have been collected by in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). We conducted two FGDs, one with parents and community people and another with students, four interviews (one program personnel, one SSCOPE team leader, one head teacher in primary school and one SSCOPE teacher). The study was guided by two key questions and four sub questions. The findings were categorized under different themes, which are discussed below. The categories are the following: 1) SSCOPE project activities: 2) support for transition to secondary school and 3) different stakeholders' perceptions.

2.1.1 SSCOPE project activities

The SSCOPE project head office is situated at IED, BRAC University. There are project personnel based here in Dhaka who help to ensure that the project objectives are carried out. To carry out the activities smoothlysix different groups(such as: operation, teacher development, learning group, sexual and reproductive health rights and gender, psycho social group, management information system and monitoring groups) work at IED. They constantly keep on-going communication with all field level staff and stakeholders. At the field level the project has 9 branches, 39 centers and 10 staff. They work in the field and this is followed up by the head office.

The project leader takes any initial decision by discussing with all the group members. Every week each group leader sits together with the team and discusses different issues such as where support is needed, what the present condition of the field is, what problems they face and how to overcome the problem. The group leaders then discuss the meeting issue with their group members. The team members then discuss this decision with field researchers. The field researchers discuss this issue with the teacher and social counselor. In this way each decision is spread to the field level (Interview # 2, 04/07/15).

The SSCOPE project has recently undergone some changes. Now SSCOPE stands for Schooling and Counseling for the Children of Post Primary Education. At present the school is focusing on admitting BRAC NFPE graduates who have recently completed primary level education.The SSCOPE education system is similar to BRAC non-formal education, but for secondary level education.

All this data show that the SSCOPE project is well set up and has staff working at the head office and the field level to achieve the project objectives. They have also brought some changes to the project name and activities based on their experience in the field and needs of the learners.

2.1.2 SSCOPE school and facilities for learners

SSCOPE has set up its school near the houses of the learners so that they cannot drop out due to school distance, and there is no need for transport. They also provide free materials, and build parents' awareness. Every month they arrange meeting with head office to field level officers. One participant said that, "Every staff meeting we discuss our success and failure and take decision what we will do next month and what initiative we will take" (Interview # 1, 03/07/15).

This data shows that the SSCOPE project has set up low-cost schools with the required number of teachers who are qualified, and there is regular communication and meetings between project staff and the teachers to ensure that the decisions of the project are implemented.

Most of the students said that if the project did not help they could not continue their study. School provides them all things without money such as books, exercise book, pen, geometry box etc. and they only pay 150 taka per month. Even they have no need for private tutor because the teacher teaches them very well. They do not need to study at home because all the lessons are completedin school. They got admitted to this school because in this school only 50 students are admitted but in other schools the number of students is more(Focus group # 2, 08/07/15).

This data show that the SSCOPE project provides certain benefits to the learners, both financially as well as in terms of mental and academic support, to help them continue in school and not drop out.

2.1.3 Counseling activities in SSCOPE school

SSCOPE project introduced counseling activities sinceApril 2013. They have introduced some social welfare counselors known as ShomajShongee who work for those students who come from disadvantaged family or face different family crises. So, mental support is needed for them to concentrate in the class.ShomajShongeeisstaff of the school. They work at school 4days in a week and conduct one hour session regarding emotional well-being and deliver information on sexual and reproductive health, rights and gender to the SSCOPE school students. The qualification of ShomajShongee is minimum HSC level and age range is 19-25 years. They provide service to the adolescents in group sessions, individual sessions and at parents' meeting if necessary. The counseling team provides training for ShomajShongee such as communication skill, stress management, anxiety management and time management (Interview # 2, 04/07/15).

Referring to the counseling activities, the students said that in school they have a ShomajShongee madam for their mental health development. They tell her all of their problems and she tries to give help to solve the problems (Focus group # 2, 08/07/15).ShomajShongee always encourages students. She provides students mental and emotional support.She behaves towards the students as a friend and always tries to make them happy. Most of the participants of FGD said that "it is great initiative for SSCOPEto recruitShomajShongees in school" (Focus group # 1, 06/07/15).

2.1.4 Role of community in SSCOPE school

The project involves parents as active participants in the school. About this, the program personnel said that, "every month we arrange meeting to inform parents their child's strength and weakness and how they can help their child for further improvement. The community people help them to search a suitable school, to conduct survey and give information for selecting the teacher (Interview # 1, 03/07/15).

This data highlights that the role of the community is recognized as very important in bringing about changes in the educational opportunities for the disadvantaged children. The community makes the parents more conscious of their responsibilities towards their children's education. The community takes this role quite seriously and gives their time and ideas to help the SSCOPE project succeed in its objectives.

2.2SSCOPE support for transition to secondary school

2.2.1 Reasons for low transition to secondary school

The reasons why children do not transition to secondary were brought out in the interviews. After completing primary education all students could not get opportunity to be admitted to secondary education for economic condition, poverty, social security, facilities given in primary school are not provided in high school, high cost of secondary education, schools are not available, very few primary attached to high school, school distance, most of the parents are illiterate and lack of parents' awareness (Interview # 3, 07/07/15).

According to the SSCOPE team leader, "some of the reasons behind no transition are, one is poverty, one is school, we have not enough school for smooth transition, and for gender discrimination" (Interview # 2, 04/07/15).On the other hand, the SSCOPE teacher said that poverty is a main reason for low transition. One big problem is that parents want to involve their children in income earning work. From every 100 students who complete primary level, only 60 or 65 students are admitted in secondary school (Interview # 4, 09/07/15).

2.3 Different stakeholders' perception about SSCOPE

The stakeholders mostly gave very positive perceptions about what the SSCOPE project is doing for promoting transition of poor children in secondary education. These perceptions are discussed below.

Parent's perception

From the FGD most of the participants stressed that due to their living conditions and poverty, they would have no opportunity for continuing their children's education if the project had not helped them. They appreciated the care and support given by the teachers and the social counselor to their children. They said that, the parents of the children studying in the SSCOPE School are very poor and they live from hand to mouth, so they have no ability to buy things necessary for their children's education purpose. They mentioned that the teacher and ShomajShongee all are very good and teach their children very well. If the SSCOPE School did not start, their children could not be admitted to another school, because the expenditure of secondary school is very high. But SSCOPE school provides all materials free for students. The parents want their children to be educated but they have no way. If the SSCOPE School helps to continue their children's education up to SSC level they would be very grateful to SSCOPE (Focus group # 1, 06/07/15).

Teacher's perception

The teacher in the SSCOPE School also expressed similar views. The project provides everything free, but in other high schools, student pay admission fee, monthly salary and tuition fee. It is not possible for poor

parents to bear this cost. He thinks it is a good decision of IED to start such kind of program. The students that are admitted in SSCOPE School, among them 75% students would drop out if SSCOPE did not help them, because they could not get admitted in any school due to their financial problem. The poor children can study till grade 8. The parents are happy as the (study) cost is low. Most of them stop their study if SSCOPE didn't open their school. As group work is used as a teaching method, the competent (good) students can help the less competent students. The length of the session needs to be increased, especially for Math and English. The students will get more time to learn if the school turns into one shift instead of two shifts. Extra schools can be established to meet the necessity / demand of extra students. The vocational education can be introduced along with present curriculum. It would be better if a guide is developed for each subject. As a lot of student cannot afford education after grade 8, the schools need to extend up to SSC (Interview # 4, 09/07/15).

Student's perception
In the FGD with students, most of them said that, the teachers take care and teach them very well, for this reason they understand well and no one fails to understand or repeat class many times. They need not buy anything as all things are provided from school. If they studied in another school they would spend more money. They suggested that if their class duration is increased it would help them for clearer understanding. They also want to study in this school up to SSC, because many children drop out after completing grade eight. If they drop out after completing eight then with this knowledge they would not be able to help society (Focus group # 2, 08/07/15).
The suggestions made by the students come from their aspirations for higher study and to become contributing members of society. The project has inspired them to continue their studies.

2.3 Discussion
In the discussion section, we would like to express my own experiences and key learning from the research based on the findings which were brought out in this study. This study examined how the SSCOPE project of IED, BRAC University is working to promote transition at the secondary level for the disadvantaged children. we are discussing the findings through my conceptual framework which is based on literature that we reviewed on programs that promote education for disadvantaged groups, particularly for students at the secondary level. The factors that are important for consideration in providing educational opportunities are discussed below.

2.3.1 Educational cost
The literature review, as well as the study findings, showed that dropout is a main issue for low transition to secondary education. Many factors are responsible for increased dropout such as students' starting school late, repetition, lack of interest, school distance, educational cost and school environment. The SSCOPE project recognizes these and tries to find out dropout children through survey to bring them back to school and give them a second chance education.

2.3.2 Awareness-raising of parents
Poverty is not the only issue related to low transition. Students' family background is an important factor which related to low transition. If parents are homeless they live in rented house or slums. They are not stable. If any adverse situation occurs they leave the place and discontinue their children's education. Uneducated and not conscious parents are another factor. Children from these types of families are also likely to dropout from mainstream schools and transition is thus hampered. Literature review also supports this factor. According to (Sanagavarapu, P.,2010),children who are homeless and have parents who are not educated,such as those living in urban slums, do not get opportunities to continue their study.

2.3.3 Girls' education
Gender discrimination is another important factor that hinders transition to secondary education. If the family socio-economic condition is not so good, parents prefer to educate their sons. The girls are involved in household work. They get less opportunity than boys. Many obstacles exclude girls from education such as school distance, early marriage. If school is very far from the house, parents have no interest in their daughter going to school because they feel insecure. It also increases early marriage. The SSCOPE project emphasizes on girls' education to promote women and girls' empowerment. So, they set up school near the students' house so that the issue of school distance does not prevent girls from attending school.

2.3.4 Flexible and child-friendly school
In our country, a lot of children do not continue study due to their involvement in child labor. As found in the literature review, in 2006 there was about 3.2 million children in child labor in Bangladesh (UNESCO,2012).

Literature review ((Evangelou et.al, 2008)) showed that most schools do not have adequate facilities, classrooms are not clean or safeand there is lack of skilled teachers. SSCOPE schools try to ensure that the school facilities are sufficient and clean, and there are sanitation facilities for girls, which are seen as very important to retain girls in school for long periods.

III. Recommendations

The study indicates some strategic actions that can be taken to promote higher transition to secondary education and ensure quality education. Based on our research findings, we would like to present the following recommendations:

➢ Need to increase duration of teaching time because students need more time for their better understanding
➢ Need to increase more provision for second chance schooling
➢ Need to provide students technical education for their better future
➢ To ensure their higher education SSCOPE school should be extended up to SSC level
➢ Number of students should be increased

IV. Conclusion

This research was conducted on the SSCOPE project which stands for Second Chance for Children of Post-Primary Education. This was a qualitative research. The study was conducted to know how SSCOPE is promoting transition in secondary education through different activities for dropouts or out-of-school children and youth to achieve secondary education. We collected information on the important factors related to transition to secondary education and how the project was helping this. We took the views of different stakeholders such as program personnel, team leader, primary head teacher, SSCOPE teacher, parents, community and learners. Our purpose was to find out how SSCOPE implemented its activities to provide education to dropout and disadvantaged children. Most of the children dropout after completing primary cycle or get admitted in secondary school but do not complete secondary cycle. This study found that the poor children faced challenges to be admitted to secondary school due to poverty, social insecurity, school distance, passing primary with poor knowledge and skills, child labor, and parents inability to bear educational cost.The findings of the study reflected that the different stakeholders have positive perceptions about the SSCOPE School. SSCOPE provides all materials free for the students, does not require admission fee, tuition fee, or school dress, has flexible school timings, school is near the students' house, teachers are friendly and skilled, and the school is child friendly and gender friendly. Also the project started counseling for mental health development of the students. If IED of BRACU did not start the project, many children would dropout from primary school because their parents could not bear the higher educational cost of secondary education. As a result of SSCOPE's activities, disadvantaged children get the opportunity to continue their study and dropout children get the opportunity to be readmitted to school a second time. All these initiatives of the SSCOPE project have helped to promote interest and motivation among the disadvantaged families and children to be admitted in the SSCOPE School to get a second chance for post-primary or junior secondary education, and for further higher education. Finally, the SSCOPE project has developed this low cost model of post-primary education for the disadvantaged youth. It should be further developed, expanded and replicated so that the poor and disadvantaged children of our society can get the opportunity for higher education.

Acknowledgement

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