
UPE IN THE ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS

LEAD PAPER BY MRS Q J A KHAN

I deem it a great privilege to say a few words before this learned gathering regarding the efforts undertaken in our region towards UPE. I am really thankful to the organisers for selecting such a beautiful place like Lesotho as venue of the seminar. This is my first visit to this part of the world and I especially consider myself fortunate in getting a chance of coming to the mountain kingdom.

I now wish to report in brief on the Regional Seminar on Universal Primary Education in Asia and the Pacific which was held at Dacca in Bangladesh from December 3 to 14, 1979. In this seminar delegates from the following countries participated:

Asian Region

Bangladesh
India
Sri Lanka
Malaysia

Pacific Region

Fiji
Hong Kong
Solomon Islands
Tonga and
Western Samoa

The theme of the seminar was "problems and solutions in the implementation of UPE" and the objectives were:

- to gain an overview of current and planned action related to UPE in member countries.
- to analyse the findings of the Commonwealth survey or "Progress Towards UPE" with regard to what countries mean by UPE and to examine constraints in its implementation.
- to determine what preparatory steps are essential to the successful implementation of UPE.
- to investigate alternative strategies for implementing UPE.
- to examine how Commonwealth regional co-operation might assist progress towards UPE in Asia and the Pacific.

The agenda included country reports providing an overview of action related to UPE in member countries and other lead papers relating to "Educational and Administrative Implications to UPE", "Strategies for UPE and a Consideration of Alternatives", "Commonwealth Co-operation in relation to UPE".

Delegates were divided into two groups representing small states and large states for the purpose of discussion.

Country papers were presented and, in summary, the main trends in progress towards UPE were as follows:

- (a) India, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa have reached or are close to the 85 per cent target for UPE.
- (b) Three of the countries represented by Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands and Tonga practise compulsory attendance at Primary Schools.
- (c) All the countries use formal schooling as the main vehicle for universalisation. India has the greatest degree of non-formal and organised complementary programmes.
- (d) India, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Western Samoa charge fees for schooling. In Bangladesh although tuition is free, pupils have to buy text books and other necessary materials.
- (e) All the countries which have yet to achieve UPE have it as a declared aim of the Government.
- (f) Major constraints experienced in implementing UPE include cost, lack of physical resources, drop-outs, teacher supply and retention, administration, irrelevant curriculum and its revision, community involvement.
- (g) According to most countries UPE should provide a minimum of five years education with the following goals:
- (i) - to enable children to communicate effectively, orally
 - to read with understanding written or printed material, the content of which is within their intellectual grasp.
 - to carry out the basic kinds of calculation required in daily living.
 - (ii)- to help children to acquire such manipulative (psycho-motor) skills as are necessary for undertaking socially useful and productive work.
 - (iii)- to calculate in children the attitudes and values needed to become working citizens.

Major discussions and recommendations were:

(a) Political will

Firm political will is essential for successful implementation of UPE. The policy should be clear and well defined. The message should be vigorously and persuasively conveyed to all strata of the people in order to mobilise enthusiasm and gear all agencies to appropriate action. It should be backed by adequate, realistic and continuing budgetary support.

(b) Pupil retention

Measures must be taken to attract and retain pupils. For example teachers should be made available to the children in remote areas. Where there is no school, a special allowance should be made for such teachers. School meals may be arranged according to the needs of the society, particularly for children in rural areas.

There should be enough flexibility in school time-tables to allow lessons to be presented in as relevant a manner as possible. Shift systems should be used in places where there is shortage of accommodation. There should be flexibility in the age of children entering and leaving school.

(c) Teacher supply

Teacher supply and retention should be dealt with by new policies of recruitment, developing in-service education and using a variety of methods of teacher-training. Recruitment of greater numbers of female teachers is necessary to enhance enrolment and retain girls at schools. Auxiliary teachers should be recruited from persons who are likely to be dedicated to their work. The case of using imams of mosques and other retired government servants should also be considered to serve in the "feeder" schools to meet the need of critical expansion.

(d) School buildings

Fullest utilisation of the buildings should always be the aim. Where shift systems are used, the duration of each shift should not be more than three hours. If shifts are longer, separate sets of teachers should be used. School buildings should be designed to make use of local buildings materials and community co-operation in their construction. Churches, mosques, temples, community hall, homes and even courtyards may be used for educational purposes. Low-cost buildings with at least a recommended minimum of equipment should be provided.

(e) Curriculum

The curriculum should be relevant and school work should be related to life experience. Appropriate local variations should be reflected in the curriculum and common core subjects should be included to reflect the national needs.

The curriculum should be under constant review. Practising teachers, teacher educators and inspectors should all be involved in curriculum development and the materials should allow for any geographical and cultural variations that may exist within the country. Where curriculum development is active it is important that teachers should be trained how to teach the new curriculum.

(f) Administration

UPE requires a strengthening of effective local and central administration. At local level, encouragement may be given to local community leaders to take greater responsibility for their schools. At Government level, the inspectorate should be strengthened in quality and machinery should be established for the collection and retrieval of essential data.

(g) Evaluation

Built-in evaluation procedures should be so designed as to improve all aspects of learning and teaching. Informal supervision by local people may be helpful and measures of internal evaluation should also be strengthened.

(h) Research

Research programmes should be devised which support UPE efforts.

(i) Finance

More money should be supplied to primary education at the national level possibly from the secondary and higher education sectors.

(j) Language of instruction

Although it is wholly appropriate that the national language should be the eventual medium of instruction in schools, it should be the right of every child to begin learning in his mother tongue.

(k) Formal and non-formal methods

Combination of formal and non-formal approaches to education should be considered in the battle to achieve UPE.

(l) International Assistance

International agencies have a particular role regarding implementation of UPE. They can help with the provision of research expertise, planning assistance in the design and erection of physical facilities, support for incentive programmes, introducing innovations in teacher training, developing low-cost instructional materials and developing instruments for evaluation.