MAKING TEACHERS MORE EFFECTIVE

---Prof. Quazi faruque ahmed

To make teachers creatively effective in the learning process of the young learners-boys and girls, has turned as a formidable challenge in recent years. The two-day seminar organized by UNESCO, Bangkok and Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) on teachers’ effectiveness, as a part of their continuous engagement is an important initiative in that direction. The two background papers prepared by the two organizations are not only rich in content, both are eye-openers and suggestive of remedial actions. The problems are manifold and those are more or less common in the Asia-Pacific Region although each country has its own features and limitations. Still a common thinking/consensus to face the challenges is felt by the educationists and policy makers of the region. The seminar in Bangkok on teachers’ effectiveness aims to highlight the shifting of the focus of post-2015 education agenda from equitable access to quality learning. A number of countries including Asia-Pacific region, have been trying to define teacher quality in terms of teacher effectiveness. i.e. the capacity, motivation and professionalism of the teaching force having decisive effect on student learning and learning outcomes. “The more developed economies have made efforts to attract the best teachers into the profession, improve teacher status and learning, strengthen teaching of 21st century competencies, address school leadership, and support teacher accountability through monitoring and evaluation. The majority of countries in the region are however, still lagging behind in terms of teacher qualifications and training. According to the 2012 EFA report on Asia-Pacific, the proportion of trained teachers in the region remains largely insufficient in most countries, and in some, its is even declining, with a greater gap at secondary level” (UNESCO- KEDI Regional Policy Seminar Guideline)

With my background as a teachers’ representative in leading position in teachers’ organizations for long, involvement in National Education Policy (2010), proposed Education Law, Teachers’ Benevolent Fund, conducting survey and research on teaching profession, participation in the national and international forums on teachers’ development, my preference necessarily is on the rights, obligations and development of teachers. I consider the Global Monitoring Report 2013/4, UNESCO-ILO Recommendations of 1966 and 1997, concerning the status of teachers, problems and prospects of teaching profession within our country and in the regional and international arena, relevant from that standpoint. In this connection it needs to be noted that Bangladesh in recent years has achieved tangible progress in a number of areas which include access in education, gender parity in admission at the school level, free distribution of text books numbering several crores, stipend for the girls, digitalization process in education, inclusion of teachers’ representatives in policy making. Formulation of a widely accepted Education Policy, Skill Development Policy, Technical and Vocational Education TVET, extension of social safety network, engagement of women in multifarious jobs and professions add to it. But much more progressive, time-bound steps need to be taken on priority basis. Otherwise the pace of progress will be slowed and there will be more obstacles in moving forward. Our common experience in the region is that much good is said, but less good is done/ seen in practice. On the other hand due to non recognition or inappropriate cognizance of the impediments faced by the teachers also contribute to their passive role in becoming effective, helpful and creative. As a consequence a, subdued mentality develops among them. UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova has rightly said: “Evidence shows that education quality improves when teachers are supported, it deteriorates if they are not,.......” (Foreword: Global Monitoring Report 2013/4)
Present scenario: Problems & Suggestions

1. “At the end of the first decade of the 21st Century, many countries around the world are facing what has been described as a recruitment and retention ‘crisis’

“Teaching is no longer a career for life and no longer for first career entrants prepared for the job in traditional ways”

“While teachers who experience more autonomy feel more satisfied in their work and are more motivated and feel more competent” (Future of Teaching Profession by John MacBeath, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education 2012)

2. Data on women’s representation in education unions, including data from previous Education International (EI) surveys, consistently shows that women constitute the majority of the teaching force and the union membership, but they are underrepresented in the union leadership. (Education International E.I).

3. Common Missteps
Angela Minnici is a principal researcher in the Education Program at the American Institute for Research. She focuses on teachers evaluation and development. In an article published in the American Educator, spring 20214 she has extensively dwelt on the common missteps which need to be avoided. To mention a few:

(1) Teacher evaluation systems alone are inadequate to improve teaching quality and increase student achievement.

(2) Teachers need to believe that their evaluation will help them and achieve success with their students. Mistrust among educators exists for many reasons. The lack of trust is very likely to affect the success of the evaluation systems, so steps are needed to begin rebuilding trust. The first step is ensuring that teachers and their unions are substantively involved in the design and implementation process.

(3) Frequent communication is prerequisite for the successful implementation of teacher evaluation system. Communication plans that outline in a number of ways to reach teachers, parents, the community, and stakeholders. Communication also must be designed specifically to inform educators throughout the implementation process.

(4) “Relying on principals to do all work. The role of the evaluator in these systems requires new skills and more time, and many principals have not received adequate training to carry out this new role. These systems will require new approaches to implementation, such as redistributing administrators’ current work or rethinking staffing roles, including the role of teacher leaders in the evaluation process.”

4. Criteria for Effective Teacher Evaluation

Prof. Linda Darling-Hammond, Stanford University, in her article under the title: ‘One Piece of the Whole’, refers to criteria for effective teacher evaluation which include:

(1) Evaluation should be based on professional teaching standards and should be sophisticated enough to assess teaching quality across the continuum of development, from novice to expert teacher.

(2) It should include multifaceted evidence of teacher practice, student learning, and professional contributions that are considered in an integrated fashion, in relation to one another and to the teaching context. Any assessments used to make judgments about students’ progress should be appropriate for the specific curriculum and students the teacher teaches.
Evaluations should be knowledgeable about instruction and well trained in the evaluation system. The evaluation team should include experts in the specific teaching field.

Evaluation should be accompanied by useful feedback, and connected to professional development opportunities that are relevant to teacher’s goals and needs, including both formal learning opportunities and peer collaboration, observation, and coaching.

The evaluation system should value and encourage teacher collaboration, both in the standards and criteria that are used to assess teacher’s work and in the way results are used to shape professional learning opportunities.

Expert teachers should be part of the assistance and review process for new teachers and for teachers needing extra assistance.

Panels of teachers and administrators should oversee the evaluation process to ensure it is thorough and of high quality, as well as fair and reliable. Teachers and school leaders should be involved in developing, implementing, and monitoring the system to ensure that it reflects good teaching well, that it operates effectively, that it is tied to useful learning opportunities for teachers, and that it produces valid results. (Courtesy : American Federation or Teachers- AFT)

Bangladesh context:

i. “Qualified teachers are essential for proper and quality education. To ensure the quality of teachers, it is essential to recruit qualified teachers through scientific and transparent recruitment process on one hand, and on the other, quality teachers’ education and repetitive demand-driven training is imperative to develop the professional excellence of the teachers.”

ii. “The existing teachers’ training system of our country is very traditional, insufficient, certificate based, loaded with theoretical knowledge, incomplete in practical learning, based on rote learning and conventional testing system.”

iii. “The proper dignity of teachers everywhere from the primary to the highest level is a very important factor. The status of teachers of all levels requires to be re-evaluated through in-depth examination since they are supposed to inspire the meritorious students to be interested in the teaching profession by discharging their proper duties.” “A separate pay scale will be introduced for teachers of all levels to enhance their financial benefits”. (Bangladesh National Education Policy 2010).

iv. Gender issue in teaching need to be addressed properly. Ensuring congenial atmosphere for the female teachers in the educational institution as well as in the teaching profession itself, deserve due attention.

World Bank view:

- Although teachers are one of the principal resources available to the education system, it appears that they are not being utilized in the most effective manner in Bangladesh. The current system does not attract, constitute, and retain the best professionals.

- Teacher’s lack of their subject knowledge is negatively affected with students’ learning and they are not encouraged to be innovative with their pedagogical approaches or to learn from their peers through any learning networks. Additional years of experience in teaching also are not correlated with higher student learning, mostly due to low motivation levels.

- Many teachers do not have much effective training, and also because the current curriculum and testing procedures encourage and reward rote learning, the most common teaching style in Bangladesh is lecturing
and reading textbooks. Teachers also do not get much time on task sometimes because of teacher training, meetings, and tardiness but also because of the limited contact hours available during the academic year. Contact hours in primary school are much lower than international norms (900-1,000 hours per year) as a result of many holidays, double-shifting (where schools teach different students in two different-shifts), and teacher’s other time-consuming responsibilities. The annual total contact hours in grade 1 is 861 in a single-shift school and 595 hours in a double-shift school, resulting in 30 percent fewer schooling hours for children in double-shift schools, which make up about 90 percent of primary schools in the country.

- There are several systemic constraints to improving the quality of teaching and learning; first, the extensive examination system limits incentives for innovative and high-quality teaching and learning. Bangladesh has a well-established system of examinations at all levels.

- Second, the absence of robust performance standards for institutions and articulation of competencies for students pave the way for large variations in performance across schools.

- Third, incentives for good performance are non-existent or minimal, rendering good policies ineffective. Incentives for good practices and disincentives against bad practices are essential for good standards to lead to positive outcomes. The evidence on the interface between policy and practice and the incentives for high performance in Bangladesh is weak. (‘Seeding Fertile Ground : Education That Works for Bangladesh;’ World Bank, September, 2013)

5. Teachers’ effectiveness: Who is responsible?

This question needs elaboration. A learner in the class, listens to/ interacts with the teacher. He/she better knows who is what as a teacher. But when the question of evaluation of learning in the Institution comes by the authorities even by the Parents, credit goes to the head teacher. Again the teacher is least consulted in the change of the syllabus but he/she is made liable for the outcome of the learners. On the other hand in the learning evaluation system also the teacher is not the key player. But he/she is made liable for it. Politicization of education is another factor and interference is also rampant in many places. True a few teachers get involved in partisan politics. But most of the teachers are apart from it. Still teachers are blamed en masse.

6. Teachers’ limitations:

i. Adherence to the old ideas and reluctance to accept new ideas, new vision, new technology.

ii. No serious effort to expand own knowledge base. A good number of teachers is unwilling to get updated. Reading habit outside the text books are also not always the practice.

iii. Not only students, teachers’ co-curricular activities also need to be patronized.

iv. Unwillingness to accept the onward march of society is found among a good number of teachers who are either reluctant or opposed to teaching reproductive health/sex education among the learners in the class room.

v. A good number lack adoptability in inclusive education and teaching in a multicultural environment.
vi. A section of teachers also fail to accommodate the special needs of the learners, who include the disabled and autistic.

7. How teachers can be made truly effective

(1) Self assessment programme of teachers on their performances.

(2) Deficiency make-up provision for those who need it.

(3) Strong motivational Campaign to morally boost up the passive teachers through concerted efforts. Low levels of teacher motivation are strongly related with poor teaching and low education quality.

(4) Teacher student appropriate ratio in class room.

(5) Active involvement of teachers organizations in the Campaign.

(6) Formation of National Teachers’ Council (NTC) comprising representation of teachers from primary to higher education level.

(7) Teacher-parent school management greater collaboration.

(8) Autonomy, adequate time and provision in the preparation of the teacher.

(9) Incentive, recognition and inspiration.

(10) Effectively addressing gender issue in case of both the learners and the teachers.

(11) Effective use of information Technology by and for teachers

(12) Pre service and in service training.

(13) Proper allocation of fund for education.

8. The change factors which need to be considered:

i. Transformation of the image of the teacher from GURU to a professional.

ii. The gap in the generation of new and old teachers.

iii. Replacement of the retired teachers by new ones.

iv. Recognition of change of values in the societies of all the regions of the world.
9. FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPING A TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

(In addition to the recommendations already made in the report/article addressed to the UNESCO, Bangkok- KEDI Regional Policy Seminar,;sent earlier from Dhaka on 2nd August, 2014)

1. Planned campaign and institutionalization (some sort of) programmes at National, Regional & Sub Regional levels.

2. Promotion of bilateral relationships as a part of Regional programmes of Asia-Pacific countries.

3. Common Regional Data Bank and Website, to collect, disseminate, exchange of information, law, rules, decisions and proposals in the Region/Sub Region.

4. Regional Advisory Committee of Education Ministers, Education Secretaries, Committees of Teachers, Parents, School Managing Committees Members (selective) Assistance from UNESCO may be sought.

5. Mechanism to know teachers’ performance from concerned students.

6. Schemes to adopt to multi-culturalism, know each other’s language, classics, culture etc. To start with, learning of language, International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka (opened by the then UN Secy Genl Kofi Anan) may be used for that. Simultaneously forums/venues of different countries of Asia-Pacific may also be utilised.

7. Consideration of proposals from the participants of this Seminar. *

*(Proposals Submitted by me as a discussant in the after lunch session on’ Strengthening International and Regional Cooperation in Teacher Effectiveness: Developing a Teacher Effectiveness Framework’ Hotel Marriott, Bangkok on 5th August, 2014)

Conclusion:

The world is changing fast. To keep pace with it is not easy. The globalised world disseminates information quickly, but does not provide resources. Education, specifically telling appropriate education is the mainstay of creating resources, where quality assurance is the prerequisite. But for years together quality education is planned without addressing, practically without involving the teachers, the change bearers. It is proper time all concerned and stakeholders accept change for a better future. It is worthwhile to mention here that even in the face of various unfavourable circumstances, limitations and constraints, teachers world over are rendering valuable contributions in the on-going and far-reaching development programs of education. Now under a new world scenario and national/regional urge for new brand of competencies, teachers need to be convinced for more proactive role to attain these achievements. That’s why the pertinent question is heard worldwide: how to make teachers more effective, ensuring the satisfaction they deserve.*

*Prof. Quazi Faruque Ahmed, member National Education Policy Committee, Bangladesh & Chairman, Initiative for Human Development (IHD) Dhaka. prof.qfahmed@gmail.com/ihdbd@yahoo.com