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BRAC's Cost Recovery Model in Education

A Quick Exploration of Process and Perception

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Acronyms

AM	Area Manager
BEP	BRAC Education Programme
BM	Branch Manager
BPS	BRAC Primary School
BRAC	An NGO, formerly known as Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPS	Government Primary School
KG	Kindergarten
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PECE	Primary Education Completion Examination
PO	Programme Organiser
RM	Regional Manager

Abstract

Stakeholders' perceptions were explored regarding cost recovery model of BRAC Primary School (BPS) during the first two weeks of June 2016. Field work was done in 13 branches of BRAC Education Programme (BEP) where 37 field staff, 27 teachers and 36 parents were interviewed, and eight FGDs were conducted with parents and staff. The respondents perceived the new model from their own perspectives which varied from one area to another and from one group of respondent to another. Introduction of monthly tuition fee was broadly accepted by majority of the parents and a good portion of staff also accommodated them with the new concept. However, both of them made some suggestions for keeping BPS competitive with the other primary education provisions in the market. Finally, eight-point suggestions were made for further development of the model.

1. Background and Objectives

BRAC has been contributing in school education sector of Bangladesh through its unique non-formal primary education model and various interventions in secondary schools including subject-based short courses for the teachers. Since its inception in 1985, BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has been providing free services. Its primary education programme promoted education among the disadvantaged groups of students and contributed achieving the universal primary education.

It has already become 31 years that BRAC provided free services in education. Financial support for this came as foreign donation from various development partners (institutions and governments). Over the period, economic status of Bangladesh has upgraded. It achieved the status of lower middle income country in mid-2015. It is expected to be the full-fledged middle income country soon. As a consequence, foreign donation has decrease. In this relation, BRAC needs to think about sustainability of the institution and the services it offers.

The BRAC management thought to experiment various cost recovery models for different programmes. In the case of education, BRAC has decided to charge admission fees and monthly tuition fees, and not to provide any teaching material free of cost to the students of BRAC Primary Schools (BPS). Cost recovery provision was started from January 2016. The new model has implication to the parents of the students of BPS, the teachers, the programme staff and the community. Each of them has to be fit in with the new system for the sake of continuity of the programme. However, many challenges have emerged in implementing the cost recovery model.

It is therefore, important to learn how the programme staff, beneficiaries, and community in general perceived this change and how they are coping with the new system. What mechanism they adopted to cope with, if any. Quality of education is no less than important. The teaching-learning provision after adoption of new model and the perceived impact of it on quality are also important for exploration. Realizing the significance of these, an effort was therefore made in this report to address the following objectives.

- explore the new model dissemination process and financial operations;
- analyse BRAC staff perception regarding the model;
- examine community people' perception about the model; and
- explore plausible impact of the model on the quality of education.

2. Method

A qualitative approach was followed which helped to explore the perception and process related issues more intensively. Convenient as well as purposive sampling techniques were used for selection of study areas and to identify the respondents. Informal interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were carried out to collect data. Programme Organisers (PO), Branch Managers (BM), Area Managers (AM), Regional Managers (RM), parents, community people and teachers were interviewed. FGDs were conducted with parents and programme staff. Data were collected from 13 branches of Dhaka, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Rajshahi divisions (Table 1). Urban and rural areas were considered in some branches. The purpose of covering different divisions and contexts was to capture variability (if any) and ensure authenticity, validity and acceptance of information. Table 1 shows number of interviews and FGDs by division.

Table 1. Study area and number of participants in interviews and FGDs

Division	Number of Interviews						Number of FGDs			
	PO	BM	AM	Teacher	Parent	Local People	With staff		With parents	
							No.	Participants	No.	Participants
Dhaka	9	9	3	22	17	3	2	6+6= 12	-	-
Chittagong	7	3	2	2	4	1	-	-	-	-
Mymensingh	-	-	1	2	5	2	2	8+6=14	2	6+11=17
Rajshahi	3	-	-	1	4	-	-	-	-	-
Total	19	12	6	27	30	6	4	26	4	17

Branches: Dhaka division: Manikganj, Kamrangirchar, Bosila, Adabor, Savar, Tangail, Rupganj, Munshiganj and Narsingdi; Chittagong division: Comilla and Bandarban; Mymensingh division: Sherpur, Jamalpur and Netrokona; Rajshahi division: Bagha

In total, 37 programme staff (19 POs, 12 BMs, 6 AMs), 27 teachers, and 36 parents and community people were interviewed. Four FGDs were conducted with staff and two with parents. Numbers of participants in them were 26 and 17, respectively. The field work was done during the first two weeks of June 2016. The messages provided by the respondents were analysed qualitatively. Findings are presented under themes related to the objectives.

3. Findings

3.1. Model dissemination and financial operation

This section presents the ways of introducing the cost recovery model to the programme staff and the parents, the financial operation process in the field and some advantages and disadvantages of the model.

3.1.1. *Introducing the new model to the frontline staff*

In most cases, the programme staff came to know about the cost recovery model a few months prior to receiving the official circular from the head office. However, they didn't disclose the information to the parents before the official circular was sent to them. One of the POs said, they started to know about BRAC's new thoughts about introduction of tuition fees from the last December/January. The circular arrived in March 2016 instructing them to charge monthly tuition fees from January. Fund crisis due to country's lower-middle income status and consequently BRAC's move towards cost recovery strategy were mentioned in the circular. It asked the POs to explain these reality to the parents.

It seems that while the Branch Managers and upper level staff had a clear understanding about the situation, the POs were not clear about the situation. Some of them were found hopeful about revert back of the crisis, i.e., 'fund crisis was temporary'. It became a bit completed where both the PO and the teachers were well aware about the cost recovery model but they told the parents it as a temporary situation.

In most cases, no formal meeting was held with the field staff to motivate them or to guide them how to implement the new strategy. Mostly the AMs discussed the matter and provided some guidance to the BMs and POs when they visited the branches under their supervision. In some cases, the AMs talked over cell-phones to BMs and POs. They also discussed the issue if they had any meeting. For instance, a Regional Manager had a pre scheduled meeting on pre-primary schools with his BMs and POs. After completing the main discussion, the RM gave a briefing on the cost recovery model. The RM explained them that BRAC did not have enough funds to run the schools free, so monthly tuition fees were introduced. He said, 'this is our duty now. Because if we want to continue our job we'll have to do this.' Then he tried to provide some tips so that they can motivate the parents. It seems that not enough effort was given to motivate the field staff who were responsible for implementing the new policy. One PO said, 'no one asked us before taking the decision, nobody listened to us.'

3.1.2. *Taking the model to the parents*

Although the POs knew, but they did not disclose the matter to the parents until they got the official circular. They were worried about students' migration from BRAC schools to fee-free schools such as the government. General meetings were organised to inform the parents. The message was a bit clear to the parents –education in BRAC primary schools is not free anymore, they have to pay tuition fees from now. Initially the parents denied to pay fees. They complained for late dissemination of such information. Some of them said, they had to know it at the beginning of the year. In some schools, no students attended the classes the following day of the meeting. In such a situation a second general meeting had to be arranged. To tackle the situation the staff had to adopt various techniques to convince the parents. In most cases, they sat with the parents in small groups, talked individually with some. Sometimes they invited local political leaders or influential people in their meeting with parents on the fee collection issue. Some parents had to be visited several times. In some cases, the staff offered a revised tuition fee which was less than the one announced earlier. The POs met with some well-off parents (because they are likely to pay fees) a prior the meeting with all the parents to discuss the overall situation and request them to help convincing the other parents. In a different case, the PO collected tuition fee as registration fee for primary education completion examination (PECE). She disclosed the fact that when the registration was over, the students' could not move to the other schools. When all these efforts were made to retain the students in BPS, some of them moved to the nearby government primary schools, some in the madrasas and some dropped out.

3.1.3. Fees collection process

In paper the teachers are not liable for any monetary transaction. In fact the circular clearly states that the teachers shall not collect tuition fees from the students, the POs will collect money from parents in the parents-teacher meetings. In reality, the teachers were found heavily involved with the process. One of the POs said, 'it is not possible for us to collect the tuition fees without the help of the teachers because of two reasons. First, all parents do not pay fees on a fixed date; second, the teachers are closer to the parents. Some parents wanted money receipt but did not get any. This increased their doubt about the authenticity of charging fees from the BRAC central authority. The BMs informed that money receipt will be given to the parents soon. A general practice was to write down the amount of fees received against each of the students in a register book. POs also signed there when they received the money from the teachers. The BMs deposited the money to the accountants taking it from the POs. BMs got money receipt from the accountants. The BMs reported to the respective AMs about how much money they collected every month. The information is flowed to the Regional Manager (RM) and then to the Programme Manager (PM).

Tuition fees are supposed to be collected by the first twenty days of each month. Not all the parents paid timely. The POs and the teachers had to visit their homes to convince them to pay the fees on time. Teachers also asked the students in the classrooms to pay their dues. Parents of all the students of a small number of schools paid tuition fees timely. In majority schools, a section of parents did not pay the fees every month. Around 70% of the parents of urban schools paid on time. Interestingly, some parents paid in advance, considering seasonal variation in their income. As the circular to charge tuition fees from January went to the field offices in March, in most cases the parents denied to pay the tuition fee for the month of January. No financial dishonesty was reported to be found in this regard. However, some POs from urban areas made a general comment like 'there is a chance of mismanagement if financial activities are there.' They could not show any example. It was an assumption only.

3.1.4. Advantages and challenges

There is a correlation between ease of collecting tuition fees and experience and quality of teachers. Relatively more experienced and good quality teachers were easily able to convince parents about the new phenomenon and collect tuition fees. Both the field staff and parents acknowledged that the reason of sending children to BRAC schools is mostly because of teachers' quality of teaching and their goodwill in society. Better performance of BRAC school students' in PECE also attracted parents to send their children to BRAC schools.

This new policy of cost recovery was also facing some challenges. The government has decided to provide stipend (*upabritti*) to all students of government primary schools. Therefore, the field staff were found worried about retaining of students in BPS. Fee-free schools of other NGOs were also seen as threat to fee paying BPS. For instance, other NGO operated schools in the Hill Tracts districts were not only fee-free, students also got free teaching materials, dresses and food. Hence, parents are more interested to send their children to those schools instead of sending them to fee paying BRAC schools.

As a consequence of the new model, in some areas, teachers started to demand a higher salary and landlords were nagging for increased house rent. In some areas, former BEP staff along with former teachers of BRAC schools started their own schools using BRAC's name and fame. They were using BRAC's model and teachers, and were paying the teachers a higher salary than that in BPS.

3.2 Perception of field staff

Staff perception about the new model is important because they are the key persons to implement it at the grassroots level. This section presents BRAC staff perception.

3.2.1. Not so motivated workforce

Unlike many other innovations of BEP, cost recovery model did not start with joy in the fields. It was rather a 'bad news' to most of the field staff. Observing income, asset at individual level and more on the communities, the

field staff had an initial feeling of parents' inability to afford tuition fees for their children's education. They were found worried about meeting the financial targets set by the higher management and also about losing job for that reason. Some of them, especially who had some years of experience, commented that this model is clearly a disagreement with BRAC's stated values. To some, it is an 'organisational hypocrisy'. However, a few of them were found motivated; they had a feeling that BRAC had no choice except doing this. According to them they were trying hard to make the new initiative successful.

3.2.2. Managing change was difficult with the time given

The field staff were getting unclear ideas about the change (from fee-free to fee-based) from December 2015. Sometimes they were confused hearing many things from here and there. They were not informed until the final version of the BEP Financial Management Policy 2016 was available to them by the end of March. Many of the field staff opined that they were not given enough time to develop personal understanding and to mobilise community. Referring to head office, they asked if making a decision takes this long time; how much time they actually should get to make this change happen.

3.2.3. Job depends on the ability to collect tuition fees

Most staff, from PO to RM, had a feeling that their jobs are no longer secured like before. They felt that their job is now depending on how successfully they are able to implement the cost recovery model, in their words 'reaching the target of collecting tuition fees.' A staff, who was previously assessed to be a 'good performer', now has high chance to be assessed as a 'weak performer' only because of not being able to collect the targeted amount of fees. According to them, it is never possible to collect 100% of the targeted fee. Some opined that annual performance will be measured based on this. As a result, they are much concerned about collection of tuition fees rather than about supervision of schools and pedagogical support to teachers.

3.2.4. A good portion of the parents are supportive to the new initiative

A rough estimate of the field staff shows that about 70% of the parents were interested to share responsibility with BRAC for the sake of quality education of their children. These parents took the idea of 'tuition fees' easily. About half of these parents were either former graduates of BPS or had other members in the family with similar characteristics. They liked to be with any initiative of BRAC because of their predispositions and the image that BRAC has already created in their minds.

3.2.5. There are 'rumour spreaders' as well

Considering BRAC activities in the area of education for the past three decades, a sense developed in the mind of the common people that BRAC cannot charge tuition fees. Some of them indicated the possibility of collective corruption of the teachers and the POs. They opined that teachers and POs are collecting money from the parents for their personal benefits. Some of them said that if they do not comply with this demand of teacher and PO, they will automatically stop charging fees. These people had a tendency to align other people with their thoughts through spreading these rumours. They encouraged others not to pay tuition fees. Some of them willingly talked over cell-phones with their friends and relatives residing in other villages and asked how BRAC schools are running in their places. In order to make their claim stronger they used the differences among *Shishu Niketan*, BPS and BPPS or fee waiver/non-waiver students/schools. These people were said to be involved in creating groups within the schools and the field staff found them very influential in changing people's mind. It was also reported that financial condition of these people was relatively better. They were more interested to teach BRAC a lesson.

3.2.6. Tuition fees added financial burden to very poor families

BEP field staff observed a number of families who send their children to BPS, were unable to provide food to their family members. Such children were present almost in every school. Some of these families had no land for cultivation and had inhabitable housing; they were begging for livelihoods and were selling labour on a daily basis. Charging of tuition fees in BPS impacted their lives badly. The situation was more serious for those who

had more than one child in BPS or one in BPS and the other in another school.

3.2.7. Students' dropout increased

Field staff including teachers pointed out that they got a hint of dropping out of those students who did not pay all their fees from previous month. It was informed that 10 students of a BPS stopped coming to school together after charging fees. All efforts to motivate their parents and re-join the students failed. A few of them certainly were of poor background but it did not sufficiently explain why the other students who were from relatively financially stable families also dropped out.

3.2.8. Fee waiver not meeting actual needs

Most POs and teachers (who have a deep understanding about the community) mentioned that they are not happy with the number of students they are offering tuition waiver. There was a waiver on only 8-9% students of class V and around 20% students from classes I to IV altogether under every branch. They reported to have a feeling that their upper authority wants to bring less number of students under waiver facilities. They expected tuition waiver policy to set considering diverse needs of communities and urged to make staff to follow set criteria (not as another indicator for their performance measurement).

3.2.9. Waiver to some students of any school may affect their academic success

Teachers said that tuition waiver for some students indicates that their families are unable to afford tuition fees. These students will be placed in a separate list. They were found afraid of creating division among the students. Probable harassment of these students by the majority was also mentioned by the teachers. Parents of the students not getting tuition waiver may also raise question about this. Field staff also said this as a problem plaguing to lower self-esteem and under performance for students who got tuition waiver.

3.2.10. Cost recovery model would be more appropriate for the rural areas

POs of the urban areas, who are also experienced in working in rural areas, opined that the cost recovery approach can be more feasible in rural context if a good number of tuition waiver is considered in each school. They saw challenge of establishing such schools in urban areas because of density of schools and existence of both fee-paying and fee-free schools. According to them, the approach may be sustainable in both urban and rural areas if BRAC collect half of total expenditure from the schools.

3.2.11. Challenges vary by school and area

Some parents are really poor but interested to pay tuition fee. Some are not so poor but demotivated to pay. Some do not pay and demotivate others to follow them. Some AMs and BMs showed their rigidity towards fee model although they managed to have less overdue in their branches or areas. Some of them just command their POs without considering their actual experiences in school and in the community. Under such a combination of the factors mentioned earlier, challenges are very unique in nature and deserve to be analysed case by case.

3.2.12. This model will not be successful in the short term but positive changes likely to occur gradually

Some staff argued that acceptance of cost recovery model will increase next year when a new cohort of students will be admitted in BPS because they would not have the experience of free education. Some of them said that there is no need of turning down of this model. They informed that parental awareness to quality education is increasing, failing to ensure quality compared to existing players in the market will leave long term negative impact on BRAC image. Some opined that Tk. 200 can easily be charged as monthly tuition fee if quality of teaching-learning can be maintained. Again, some suggested that charging more than Tk. 100 as monthly tuition fee will induce huge drop out of students. Some of the POs opined that fee-paying schools can be operated but the model is in need of fundamental changes like better physical infrastructure, full responsibility given to PO omitting provisions of branch managers and reducing number of schools they

supervise.

3.2.13. Some staff do not see any prospect of new model

Some staff are seriously concerned about the viability of the model in the long run since country's education structure at primary level is changing and government facilities are increasing to attract more children. Some staff even wished to leave this job especially those who seemed not to be interested to come out from 'comfort zone' and take this challenge.

3.2.14. Some POs were not feeling good with their present role and community perception about them

Being a pro-poor development worker as well as their recognition in the society as *Shikhhakarmi* (education worker) it was a great source of motivation and satisfaction for the POs. As they felt, it has started to change and general people including the parents do not see them different than microfinance POs. Some of them mentioned the following point.

Boss der sath dekhahol eprothom kotha hochhe overdue koto? [When we meet our bosses the first question they raise about existing 'overdue']

Aapni to BRAC er atoato taka loss korechen. [You have incurred a lot of loss for BRAC.]

The words 'overdue' and 'loss' are key here which the education POs did not like to be used with them. They felt uncomfortable. These POs perceived them as superior than others which they did not see in the recent change.

3.2.15. Teachers pointed out diminishing of their respect in the community since they started collecting tuition fees. It was reflected in some of their statements.

Aage rmato somman aar nei teacher der. [Respect to the teachers no longer belongs as before.]

Aage ora aamader dekhle bhoy peto, ekhon aamra oder dekhle bhoy pai. [Previously the parents were used to be wearied about us but now we are scared of them.]

Therefore, the morale of the teachers hampered. Both the POs and the teachers opined that as BRAC has started to charge tuition fees, teacher salary should be increased accordingly.

3.3 Community Perception

Community personnel and parents are playing an important role in this regard and due to their awareness and motivation about education we observed their mixed perception and attitude. The key findings are presented below.

3.3.1. Message was not well communicated to the community.

Community saw BRAC as a pro-poor organisation working for the empowerment of poor. This has grown in their minds for the past four-and-a-half decades. Free education provision went well with their thoughts. It was difficult for some to believe that BRAC can charge tuition fees to primary students. With this believe they blamed teachers and POs for working against BRAC philosophy and making money. They also mentioned education of the poor children. It seems that provision of fee-waiver did not reach to them.

3.3.2. The education quality of BRAC School is better than any other institutions, therefore even after charging fees they prefer to send their children in BPS

Some parents were seemed to take introduction of tuition fees positively. They argued that quality of education in BPS is better than government schools or kindergartens and the BPS students do not need the help of private tutors. They were found aware of huge cost involved in private tutoring. With the same line, some parents saw BPS as 'money saving' provision. BPS students' better performance in PECE was also mentioned by them. One of them said,

I have two daughters, the elder one was in government primary school but she didn't perform well in PECE because in government school the quality of education is very poor. The class size is very large there. The teachers don't teach well. So we have to spend money on private coaching. Here in BPS, we don't have to pay for coaching. So, if the tuition fees remain the same as it is now, it will not be a problem for me to send my child to BRAC School.

Some parents said, if they had another child they would send him/her to BRAC Schools because the schools are situated nearby their home. In other words, the parents feel secured sending children in BRAC schools because it does not require crossing the risky highways.

3.3.3. Charging fees after three months is blackmailing and against commitment

On the contrary, those parents who were negative about introduction of tuition fees complained for not informing them at the beginning of the year. One parent said,

My husband's opinion was not to send our daughter to BRAC School if we are to pay for it. However, I managed the money by cutting some household costs which I didn't tell him. He still knows that my daughter is getting free education.

3.3.4. Poverty is not the key reason for inability to pay

Socio-economic status of most of the parents was poor; however, their opinion on introduction of tuition fees was not similar. Dual attitude was observed in Chittagong slum areas. In one slum, the parents were found ready to pay tuition fees; a few of them however had no problem to pay more. Their main concern was to ensure bright future of their children through educating them. Parents in another slum were very aggressive in this regard. They, at a threatening voice, said that they would not pay any to BRAC school rather would send their children to the government primary schools (GPS). These parents seemed not to be aware of quality education.

If we have to pay tuition fees, why should we then send our children to your school? We can send them to kindergartens. We will have to pay nothing in government primary schools; instead we will get Tk. 100 per month.

Some of the guardians were found ready to pay more because now a days Tk. 100-200 is not big enough even for doing a simple thing, they said. BRAC is charging Tk. 75 in this slum school. The parents said, they would continue sending their children even they need to pay more, say Tk. 100-150. One of the parents said,

Once we had to buy rice paying Tk. 12 per kg but now we pay Tk. 50 to buy the same amount. Are not we eating? We are! Once we got free education from BRAC but now the situation is different. Money is required to run a school. Should we stop educating our children? Ofcourse not! We have to continue their education. The value of education is more than a Crore taka.

3.3.5. The school house owners demanded more money for renting out their houses

When the school house owners came to know that BRAC started to charge tuition fees they started to place their demand of increased house rent. Their logic was that they were taking less amount from BRAC as it was providing free education to their children. As BRAC is now earning money from its school programme they

are now unable to do any favour to BRAC. Some of the owners, who had children in BRAC schools, were demanding free education for them. One of them expressed his feeling by saying the following.

My two children are studying in a BRAC school. The teacher asked me to pay Tk. 200 per month for each of them. I rent out my land to BRAC to build school house. BRAC pays me Tk. 300 per month. If I earn only Tk. 300, how can I pay Tk. 400 for my children's education?

3.3.6. Parent's perception depends on the quality of the BPS

The POs mentioned that the guardian had a positive attitude about BRAC education. They knew that the teaching-learning activities of BRAC schools are better than others. Students learn through hands-on activities. When they were told about the tuition fees, they positively responded and said, BRAC schools are good. Their children would be educated there. Additionally, the POs mentioned that the children of rich family study in the kindergartens.

They informed that though they had to struggle for buying the study materials, they happily provided those to their children. About the tuition fees they opined that they could understand the increased value of goods, so, BRAC is taking money - it's okay.

3.3.7. Parents demanded more facilities in schools along with more qualified teachers in exchange tuition fees.

Many guardians had a tendency to compare infrastructure and other facilities of BRAC schools with other types of school. Major complain was about lower educational qualifications of BRAC school teachers. They also noticed that a portion of the government school teachers had Master degree. The other group of parents noticed that the kindergartens and the government primary schools had electricity and the students use table and chair or bench for study purpose. On the other hand, in BRAC schools, students sit on mats and there is no provision of electricity in most schools. Some of them noticed that BRAC school's classroom is dark and exhausted in the summer season and because of floor mat children make them dirty and scar their knees. It was understood that these parents would be willing to pay tuition fees if some of these demands can be fulfilled.

Some of the community members even did not recognise it as a school because of its poor infrastructure. According to them the kids would experience back pains very soon as they did not have high benches and always became grounded for writing. Another group of parents regretted that, they were paying money but there was no improvement of infrastructure. There were no fan or light and sometimes they got injured in knee because of the friction of hard jute carpet they sat on. One guardian's opinion was that 'taha diya poramu polapaner hatu chulbar laiga?' Such kind of reasoning illustrates their dissatisfaction regarding the school infrastructure.

3.4 Effects on Quality of Education

Regarding the quality issues the respondents had different perceptions which are presented in the following sections.

3.4.1. Community people generously admired the quality of BRAC's education

Responses from all the sources gave an impression that teaching-learning provision in BRAC schools was the strongest reason for wide acceptance of this in the society. According to the field staff, regular monitoring of classroom activities had differentiated BRAC schools from others which also helped to maintain a certain level of quality. Community people also recognised that BRAC provided better education than others. They mentioned some strength like discipline of the students, group study, sincere teachers, etc. One mother told, 'government provides free education as well as scholarships. If anybody needs money they would go to those

schools but for good education they would have to come to BRAC.’ The statement revealed how much faith the parents had on the quality of BRAC schools.

3.4.2. Staff has a realisation not to compromise with the quality of education

Recognising quality of education as the key to fee paying model, most of the staff strongly pointed out that there should be no compromise with it. They, however, mentioned that recent restless condition due to losing of job of many staff and start of fee collection from the students had an adverse effect on their mental condition which resisted them to work with a fresh and motivated mind, but they were trying to remain committed to their job. The staff also said that demand for better quality of education would increase due to introduction of tuition fees.

3.4.3. Communities in most cases got a sense that fees received from students would be spent for quality improvement

This is no doubt a recognition of trust on BRAC. They also believed that such an initiative was certainly for the betterment of their children’s education. A portion of them, however, knew that some were struggling to pay, but got an understanding of the need of the new phenomenon. They, in most cases, requested BRAC to fix tuition fees as less as possible considering poor peoples’ economic conditions.

3.4.4. BRAC will have to compete with other schools in the question of quality

The field staff, in general, got the sense of competitiveness among various provisions of primary education in the country. They were found aware of increased competition in future. These staff felt the need of increased capacity of BEP in order to win the competition. In this connection some of them mentioned the facilities/benefits provided by others. Like the government, the World Vision, in the hilly areas, provides free education with scholarships. They suggested to increase some facilities along with quality.

3.4.5. Introduction of tuition fees created awareness among parents and accountability of field staff

Both the staff and the teachers mentioned that after introduction of tuition fee, the parents became more conscious about their children’s education. They observed that parents participation in monthly meetings and asking them about progress of education of their children have increased. Parents wanted an assurance of proper education of their children as per their payment. The staff also took it very positively and appreciated parental awareness. Their accountability has also increased.

3.4.6. Teacher’s involvement in tuition fee collection hampered classroom teaching

Although the teachers were not basically responsible for collecting tuition fees; in practice, they had to do this. The staff argued that the teachers had better acceptance and exposure to the communities, without their help it was not possible to collect fees. Teachers were found dissatisfied at this. Their argument was related to hampering classroom teaching. As they mentioned, taking tuition fees from the students became a major tension for them instead of teaching. A portion of daily contact-hour is spent for this. Loss of concentration in classroom teaching, as a consequence of this, was also mentioned by the teachers. Most of the teachers saw this practice as a strong barrier to maintaining quality of education. Moreover, if the teachers ask the students for tuition fees, the students sometimes keep themselves absent from school.

3.4.7. POs were struggling to maintain the quality of monitoring and supervision

POs were supposed to visit schools on a regular basis, stay in the classrooms for sometimes and provide pedagogical feedback to the teachers. These were considered as very important component of BRAC model. After being involved in tuition fees collection they could not properly do their above mentioned job. One of the POs mentioned that,

.....now I always think of collecting money. Earlier parents and other members of communities considered us as their friends. They also respected us. But in these days people look at us differently. We have lost our friends as well as respect. Parents consider us as money collectors. When we meet them they think we may ask for tuition fees. I have some target of collecting tuition fees; so I am to do this. If I can't do, I feel bad. I have experienced high blood pressure and cannot sleep well because of this tension. Earlier I monitored the lesson plan, students' attendance and other quality issues like classroom teaching-learning but now I primarily go for collecting money. The previously mentioned works became secondary tasks, it hampers the quality.

On the other hand, some of the POs were found very much motivated and ready to take the new challenge. Number of such POs was less and most of the POs perceived this as an assigned duty. They tried to motivate the parents but their own motivation regarding tuition fee collection was questionable.

3.4.8. Parents were not satisfied with the contents taught in BRAC schools

It was found from the parents' FGDs. They basically compared the books used in BRAC schools with those in the nearby Kindergartens (KG). Kindergartens students read several English and general knowledge books but BRAC school students read only one English book and no general knowledge book– was their major complain. Their understanding was that students in BRAC schools learn less than those in KGs.

3.4.9. Providing free materials may be useful to motivate the parents and create a better learning environment.

The parents commonly said against introduction of tuition fees and withdrawing the provision of free materials together. They suggested to go one by one. The programme organisers also had a similar voice. According to them, if BRAC could provide free materials in its present model then the educational environment could be better because they could motivate the guardians showing those materials. It would reduce some pressure on them as well.

3.4.10. Increasing facility for staff could help to promote quality of education

Increase of staff facility also came in discussion. One of the POs said, due to recent change in BEP her movement to communities has increased. She was given a bi-cycle to use in her work. She found using bi-cycle was time consuming. Instead, she proposed to allow to use a motor-cycle to save time. Thus, she will be able to spend time for monitoring of classroom activities. She also requested to increase the number of refreshers training for not only for the POs but also for the teachers.

3.4.11. Some of the staff pointed out decreasing trend in education quality

This was mostly because of increasing workload for collecting tuition fees from the parents visiting them at home and teachers spending time with the students on the same ground. An Area Manager described it in the following way: 'we were 10 out of 10 when it was free education, now we can get at most 8'. She also added, 'still we are better than others, but it's falling. Teachers and staff are not being able to give their full concentration on educational aspects because of the fee collection activities.' According to her, appointment of a separate staff for collecting tuition fees would help BPS to go back at previous standard.

3.4.12. AMs and BMs also felt the need of qualified teachers and monitors as the pre- condition to quality education

Likely to the parents, the AMs and the BMs pointed out the poor educational qualifications of the teachers. Some of them raised question about qualifications of some of the POs, who were unable to help teachers dealing with the students of grades IV and V. One BM specifically said that, some teachers in his area were particularly poor in some major subjects like Mathematics, English and Science. While talking on this they particularly compared with the government schools and the kindergartens.

4. Conclusion and suggestions

It's too early to make any comment on the success of the fee-paying model of BPS. The present investigation gave some hints regarding staff and community perceptions, and how the initial days of implementation of the new concept were. The stakeholders perceived the new model from their own perspectives which varied from one area to another and from one group of stakeholder to another. Introduction of monthly tuition fee was broadly accepted by majority of the parents and a good portion of staff were also accommodated them with the new concept. It will take few more months to be habituated by all concerned. Both the groups made some suggestions for keeping BPS competitive with the other primary education provisions in the market. Following are some suggestions that the programme may consider for further improvement of the level of acceptance of the new model.

1. An immediate attempt should be taken to increase staff motivation so that they can work with a homogeneous standard keeping the existing gaps behind. Central as well as regional level workshops can be organised for this. Another such attempt may be required before start of the next academic year.
2. Educational qualifications of the teachers and the programme organisers need to be increased for the sake of competitiveness as well as keeping BPS acceptable to the majority parents. Appointment of more qualified staff and teachers should be seriously considered. This may also require increase of teacher remuneration.
3. Some incentives in terms of educational materials should be provided to the students at least for the next two years. This will help decrease parental shock regarding the present change and increase their motivation to continue sending their children to fee-paying BRAC schools.
4. Considering parental strong dissatisfaction regarding the infrastructure of BPS it is important to create some more facilities in the classrooms. Chairs or benches, electric fans and lights, spacious classrooms are some of the urgent demands. This should be met up for the sake of children's health and their educational productivity.
5. One or two new educational components can be introduced in BPS curriculum which will visibly show its difference with other schools and will become comparatively attractive to the parents. Regular dedicated period for games and library works can be suggested as two important activities that need to be launched in every school.
6. The teachers and the programme organisers should be dedicated to improve the quality of education; and teachers, in particular, should focus only on classroom teaching activities. Appointment of a separate staff for dealing with the matters related to tuition fees would help the teachers and staff do their duties effectively.
7. Situation analysis in terms of socio-economic profile of the parents needs to be seriously done before opening a new BPS. If the schools are opened in an area where relatively well-off families live, it will ease getting more parents willing to pay tuition fees.
8. Grade-wise tuition fees may vary but it should be the same throughout the country. Variation in it may create a bad sense about BRAC. There should be tuition waiver to certain portion of students in every school. This may be 20% or so considering the economic analysis. If more than one sibling admit in a school one of them may automatically be given fee waiver. Some fully free schools (like as before) may be continued in the selected marginalised areas.