

Question Leakage in Public Examinations: Process, Reason and Way Forward

Executive Summary

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1.1 Background and Rationale

Structural examination is the only way to assess students' capability to enter into the next stage of the education system in Bangladesh. However, it is alleged that question paper leakage in public examinations hampers appropriate evaluation, lowers the quality of education and promotes uneven competition. The tendency of question leakage is on the rise even after a number of steps have been taken by the concerned authorities. However, there is a dearth of in-depth research on this widely discussed issue in media and other public domain. Since education is one of the five priority issues on which Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has been conducting research and advocacy to improve the challenges of governance and recommending remedies as well, this research was undertaken to identify the governance problem of question leakage as a continuation of this process.

1.2 Objective and Scope of research

The main objective of this research is to find out the process and reason of question leakage and to recommend remedies. This study focuses on the Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE), Junior School Certificate (JSC), Primary and Secondary School Certificate (SSC and HSC) examinations considering these as the foundation and the most important examinations in the formal education system especially up to HSC level. This research has examined the procedures of question paper preparation, moderation, printing, transportation and preservation, the process of question leakage and reasons, and reviewed government's initiatives in addressing the problem. However, the findings of this investigation may not be equally applicable for all types of stakeholders. Nonetheless, it provides a picture of corruption and governance problems that exists in the process.

1.3 Research Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Key informant interviews and group discussions were the techniques used for collecting primary information from officials of Education Boards and Education Ministry, officials of BG Press, teachers, members of investigation committees, experts, journalists, owners of coaching centers and photocopiers, students and guardians. Secondary sources of information included relevant laws, government circulars/orders, public reports, recommendations from Investigation Committee, published news and articles. The research was conducted during January – July 2015.

2. Significant Findings of the Study

2.1 Information on question paper leakage

The tendency of question leakage started during the SSC examination of 1979, which became rampant in the last five years. There were allegations of question leakage in 63 examinations between 2012 and 2015, of which all questions of PECE and JSC held in 2013 and 2014 were leaked.

2.2 Relevant laws

According to 'The Public Examinations (Offences) (Amended) Act, 1992', any paper containing any question set for such examination [Clause 4(a)], or any paper containing any question falsely purporting to be set for such examination or intending that the same may be treated as identical with any question set

* The report was released through a press conference held at Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) head office in Dhaka on 5 August 2015.

for such examination [Clause 4(b)] shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to four years or shall be liable to fine or both. Apart from it, ‘Information and Communication Technology, 2006’ provides punishment for the offenders abusing information technology for disseminating any document (in any form) that is confidential that includes questions [Clause 63 (1, 2)].

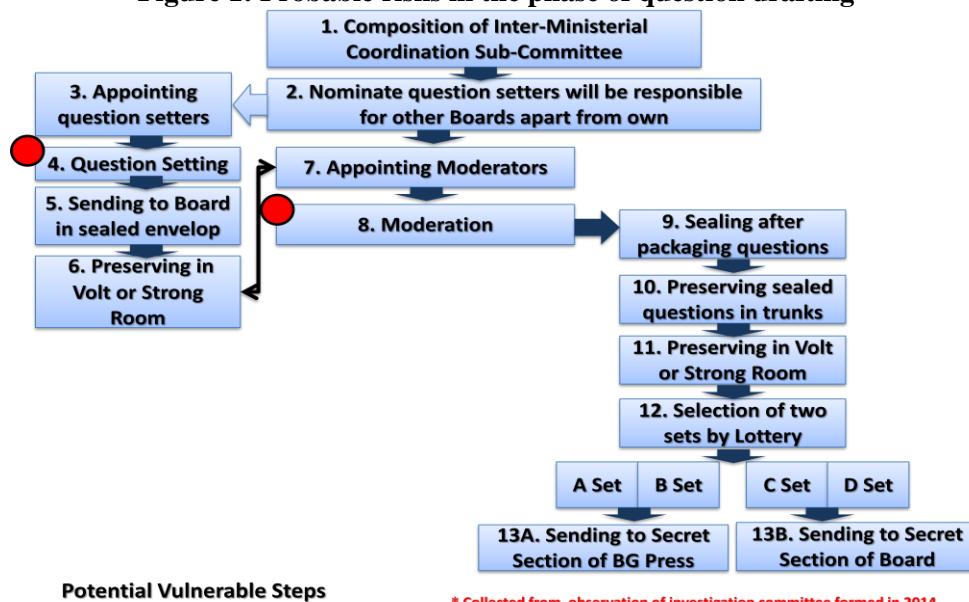
2.3 Initiatives to prevent question leakage

So far a total number of six people have been arrested and cases have been filed against four. In total 17 vulnerable exam centers and few coaching centers are kept under surveillance. One examination was postponed and one examination center was cancelled after question leakage had been proven. So far four investigation committees (two for the PECE and JSC examinations of 2013, two for the HSC examination of 2014) were formed to investigate. Apart from these the monitoring system has been strengthened in coordination with the law enforcing agency. A hotline number has been introduced for 24-hours under the management of the Ministry of Education so that anyone can inform about any question leakage throughout the examination period.

2.4 Probable process of spreading out leaked questions

The information regarding leaked questions is spread a few days prior to the respective examination. During this period some questions seem partially similar to the main question, while however, some do not have any similarity. The most authentic questions become available in the previous night of a particular examination. Beneficiaries from all levels regularly maintain networks to get hold of the leaked questions. There is a number of precedence of leaking questions even after printing the alternative set. It is observed that MCQ questions are easier to leak than others. Digitization and easy access of mobile phones create easy scope to reach leaked question at the grassroots as well.

Figure 1: Probable risks in the phase of question drafting



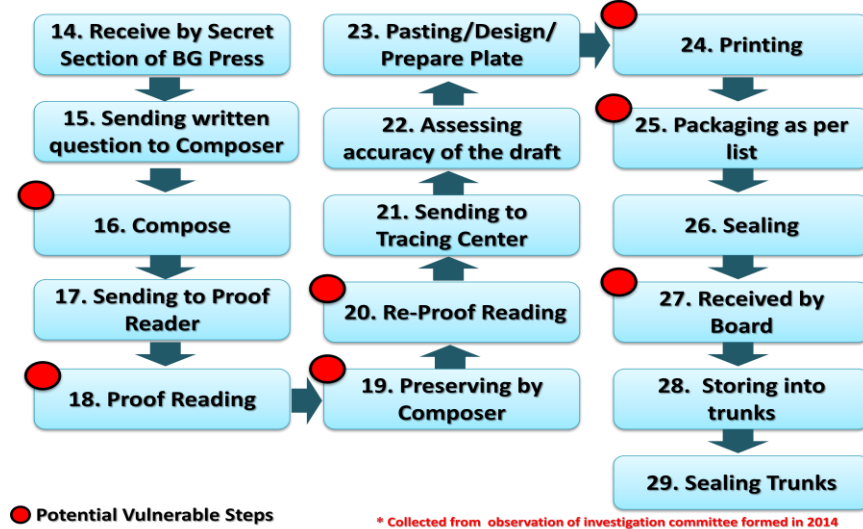
2.5 Possible risks of leakage during composition, printing and distribution of questions

Draft and composition phase: This activity begins through the appointment of teachers as question setters. The National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) for PECE and Primary and Secondary Education Boards for other examinations are responsible to coordinate this process. It is observed that the same teachers are appointed over the years for drafting and composing questions which poses a risk in creation of a syndicated effort to be benefitted financially by capitalizing the experience, e.g. provide possible questions as ‘suggestion’ through educational institutions or coaching centers. In many occasions, this syndicate remains involved in writing ‘Guide Books’ or ‘Note Books’, as they are mentioned as ‘Question Composer’ or ‘Moderator’ on the front page of the same. In addition, as a

moderator can add, deduct or change questions already drafted by setters and finalize for exams, it poses risks of leaking questions.

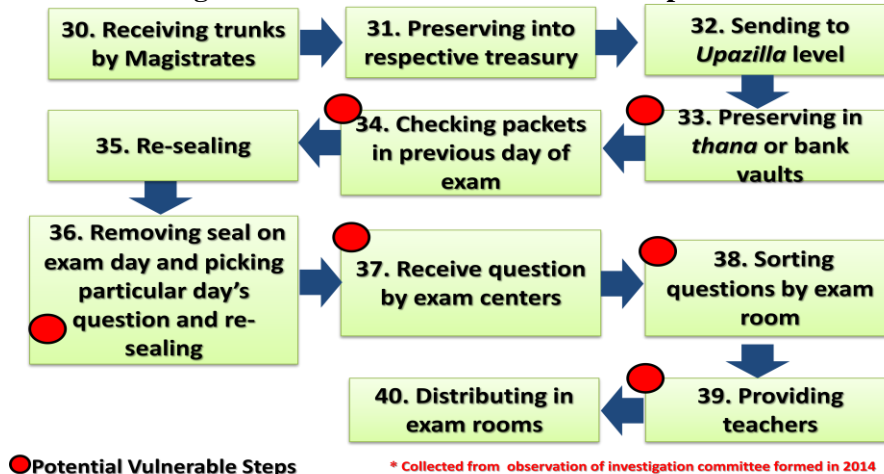
Printing phase: There are risks of question leakage through the composers as they see the questions. There is also a risk when a respective moderator is contacted for checking questions. Risks exist during proof reading as well. A section of people engaged in printing memorize questions partly or fully, individually or in a group and combine those afterwards. Yet again, while preservation and print, the responsible persons may take advantage of it. Counting and packaging question papers manually causes risks. Last but not the least, vulnerability prevails while preservation.

Figure 2: Probable risks in printing phase



Distribution phase: The research observes collusion among officials (Deputy Commissioner/ Upazila Nirbahi Officer/ bank official) responsible for preservation and distribution of question papers at the local level. There are risks in the process of checking questions kept in the vaults on the previous day of a particular examination, and during distribution in the centers. At the institutional level, a section of teachers violate rules of the timing for opening packets, taking snaps and sending to students through sms, e-mail, facebook, and/or *viber*. It is worth mentioned that in this process the question of MCQ part is easier to leak within a very short span of time. Even the questions of creative part including solutions are leaked by concerned and responsible persons.

Figure 3: Probable risks in distribution phase



2.6 Mode of distribution of leaked questions

There is a nexus among question setters of creative section and business persons involved in coaching centers and guide books. In addition, owners of photocopiers get involved in the distribution of leaked questions. It is observed that, when a student or guardian or friend or relative finds any leaked question handover after a while through mobiles, facebook, and/ or e-mail. Moreover, a section of the student wing of the ruling political party sometimes gets involved in leaking questions, and then providing it to the next stakeholder for wider distribution, in most cases which is coaching centers.

2.7 Monetary Involvement

Questions are leaked both with and without monetary transactions. According to the study such transaction can range from Tk 20 to Tk 20,000, depending on the level of authenticity, time, and nature of contract. It is observed that beneficiaries pay at individual and group levels, directly (through mobile banking or flexi load) and indirectly. Moreover, three types of contract can be there for payment – before getting questions, after getting questions and after confirmation of similarity of questions with the original one.

3. Reasons behind question leakage

Denial of incidence of question leakage by the concerned authority and claim this to be ‘suggestions’, with the added lacking in the enforcement of law encourage the involved persons to carry on question leakage. There has not been any exemplary punishment under the existing law, despite the fact that the punishment has been reduced from ten to four years in ‘The Public Examinations (Offences) (Amended) Act, 1992’. In addition, coaching centers have not been closed despite there is a government policy. Moreover, the law titled ‘The Note-Books (Prohibition) Act, 1980’ is not properly implemented. There are about 40 steps between the making and distribution of questions, which requires a large number of people’s involvement and lingers in time span that creates risks due to lack of proper monitoring and security at every level. The tendency of not disclosing observations of Investigation Committees obscures a complete scenario about the process and the persons involved, thus keeping them safe.

The limitation of logistics such as absence of digital paper counter help leaking questions, as this creates the scope for the staff of BG press have a look on the questions. In addition, extra work load of the BG Press due to two more added public examinations (PECE and JSC) every year cannot ensure appropriate coordination and supervision.

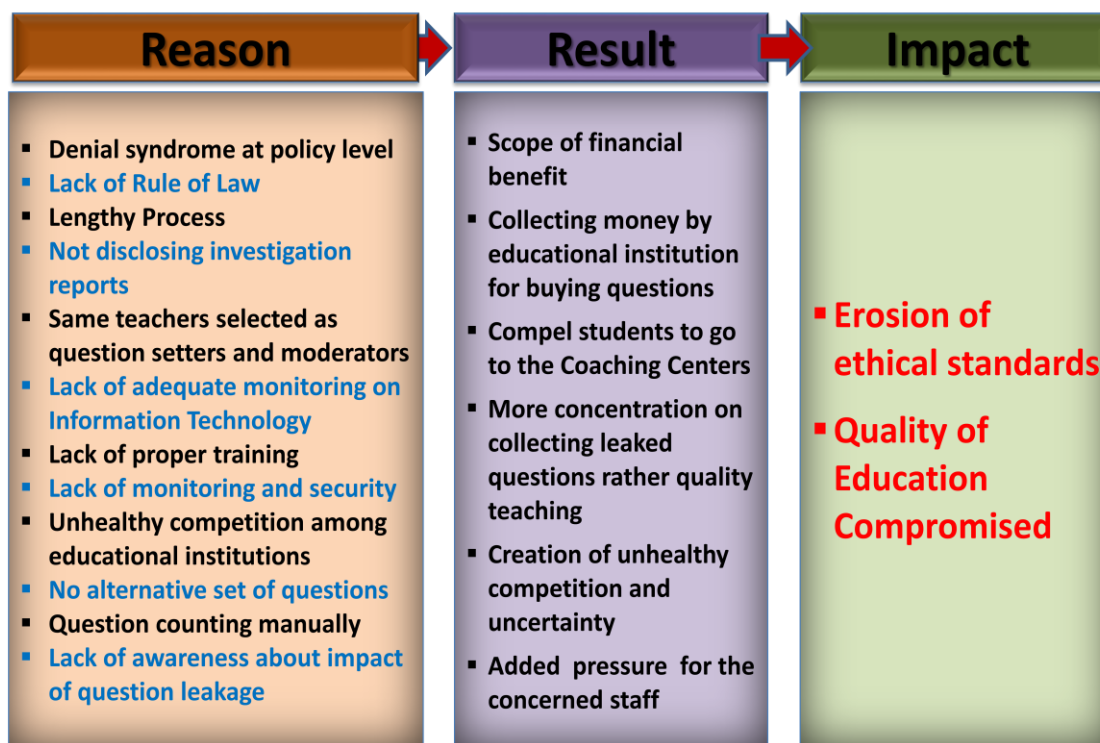
Same teachers being appointed as question setters and moderators inspire developing syndicate and question leaks as some of them are involved in coaching. Lack of adequate training for the newly introduced creative system put the teachers unskilled, and encourages them to resort to providing leaked questions to the students for better results. The ranking system of the educational institutions inspires schools trying any measure to get into the top list even at the cost of quality of education, which often derives them going for leaked questions. Besides, preparing only one set of questions (in case of PECE), lack of proper monitoring of social networking sites, and lack of consciousness among all the stakeholders especially the students and guardians play reasons behind question leakage.

4. Impact of Question Leakage

A cross-section of people enjoys monetary gains money by spreading out fake questions. A number of educational institutions collect money from students to purchase leaked questions. A section of teachers are involved in coaching centers and compel students to go to the same. A section of teachers concentrate more on collecting leaked questions rather than teaching. Comparatively less meritorious students get advantages through leaked questions. Furthermore, concerned public officials are also in great hazards due to question leakage even after discharging responsibilities appropriately.

The greatest impact of question leakage is the threat of a generation with minimum ethical standard, since the phenomenon becomes rampant and considered natural. In addition, the overall standard of education will become lower which may have an adverse impact in the near future.

Figure 4: Reason-Result-Impact analysis of question leakage



5. Way Forward

- The following initiatives must be taken with regard to proper implementation of legal provisions:
 - Clause 4 of 'The Public Examinations (Offences) (Amended) Act, 1992' should be amended and previous provision on punishment should be re-introduced. Proper implementation of punishment system should be ensured.
 - The confusion in the 'Policy to impede coaching trading conducted by teachers of educational institutions-2012' should be removed, meanwhile various incentives and motivational programmes for respective personnel of educational institutions should be commenced to create education-friendly environment and to prevent coaching trading.
 - Guide Book and other similar books must be banned according to the existing law.
- Strong monitoring over usage of Information Technology and ensure punishment under existing provision must be ensured.
- Digital process and mechanisms may be applied experimentally in question composition, printing and distribution to avoid lengthy and time-consuming process.
- The Investigation Reports related to question leakage must be made public.
- Allocation of adequate time for relevant personnel to adopt any new initiative related to education and its method and required training must be ensured.
- The MCQ system should be removed gradually.
- More than one set of questions should be prepared especially for the PECE.