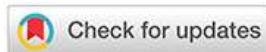


## WILL NOVEL EDUCATION POLICY STIMULATE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN BANGLADESH: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE UNITED STATES



**Mohaimenul Islam Jowarder**

*Development Studies, Bangladesh University of Professionals - Bangladesh*

**e-mail:**

mohaimenulislamvisa@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to understand how the novel education policy, which is to be implemented in 2025 in Bangladesh, will foster business management opportunities and the probable lessons from the United States. This study conducted a mixed methodology analysis followed by a purposive sampling method. 200 students from primary to higher secondary levels and 20 teachers were selected. We also conducted Four Focus Group Discussions with curriculum experts who were directly involved with developing this method in Bangladesh. An exclusive interview with the President of Hyundai Motors Asia assisted in exploring the context in-depth. The study revealed a positive response from students, ranging from prospective career opportunities to rising interests to implement their acquired knowledge, eradicating the fear of science as well as emphasizing becoming small business entrepreneurs and believing in stimulating business opportunities. Further research is encouraged to assess the impacts of this educational reform in diverse employment sectors in-depth.*

**Keywords:** Education Policy; Business Management; Bangladesh; United States

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## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has been long dependent on decades-old books produced by scholars to educate learners even in the 21st century (Austin et al, 2008). For a long time (Khondaker et al, 2019), there have been many changes in the country, but the educational structure and curriculum remain unchanged (Ivey, 2017). While the world has marched towards progressive and inclusive education (Leatherdale, 2019), Bangladesh still lagged. Though there have been attempts to reform the existing curriculum implying it has become obsolete and completely theoretical (Malak, 2013), the results were not achieved (Prodhan, 2013). Most of the textbooks in Bangladesh have been written before 1990 (Rahman et al, 2017) and were still in circulation until 2012. This is when the government decided to experiment with the “Creative Thinking” method but did not achieve the expected result. Within two years of its implementation, the curriculum was scrapped (The World Bank, 2018). Experts from diverse countries were consulted (Bean et al, 2018) but for some unknown reason, the national textbooks were as before (Ahmed, 2018). The concept of 2012 was borrowed from the United States (Bowles & Gintis, 2011) but the government remained adamant (Butler et al, 2015) (Darling et al, 2017). It was after the COVID-19 pandemic that the people and national officials understood the necessity of reformation. As a result, in 2023 the government announced the reformation of the entire education policy in Bangladesh at all levels, from primary to higher secondary, to meet the demands of globalization and focus on a more practical curriculum. This was the first time the students along with the teachers could visualize the implementation of practical knowledge-based applications (Datnow, 2020) in textbooks rather than memorizing obsolete formulas (Garner et al, 2017). Educational experts and curriculum developers from all levels congratulated this historic revolution as Bangladesh will enter the stage of practical knowledge in 2025 (Ladson, 2021).

This is novel research as no prior study has been conducted to explore the perceptions of students and teachers, the two direct elements of education curriculum, in the context of curriculum reformation and its impacts on employment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Why this education reformation is historic in Bangladesh context?

Since 1976 (Davies, 2013), Bangladesh has been following the textbooks for all school levels which were written before the British period (Desimone, 2009). One minor revision was conducted in the 1973 Educational Board (Desimone et al, 2002), followed by another revision in 1976 (Diamon & Spillane, 2013) which remained constant since 1996 (Dillon et al, 2011; Dodman et al, 2019). What makes this curriculum reformation historic is the emphasis on obtaining practical knowledge (Gorski, 2016). Until the 3rd grade, students have been exempted from all sorts of exams to develop their skill of practical thinking. The public response towards this historic educational change was well received by society. Both the government as well as the society considered this a historic leap as, for the first time, the nation understood the importance of practical knowledge (Hargreaves, 1994). Renowned curriculum experts believe that this will revolutionize the industry by completely transforming the teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Hoogland et al, (2016) showed that teachers make the most appropriate decisions when they are given the preference of implicating practical resolutions. Even the Mathematics book was transformed based on experts' recommendations as research has shown that students exhibit the best ability when they can perform freely without any theoretical context (Horn et al, 2015). Instead of memorizing, this curriculum put the teachers in charge for

the first time to demonstrate how to approach an equation from a diverse perspective (Jacob et al, 2014). Not only the traditional Bangla medium, which is the native tongue of Bangladeshi Citizens, but the English medium has been transformed as well (Alam, 2018; Ali, 2014).

## **METHOD**

In this research, a mixed methodology approach was implemented followed by a purposive sampling method. The primary data was collected from field visits. We selected 200 students from primary school to higher secondary schools in Bangladesh to understand their responses. 20 teachers from diverse schooling levels were selected to know their responses.

To perceive the context practically, Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 10 curriculum development, 6 of them were directly involved with the Ministry of Education, government of Bangladesh. Among them were Professor and curriculum expert Muhammad Zafar Iqbal and Professor Kaykobad, the duo behind the implementation of the novel “creative education system” in Bangladesh back in 2010. They worked for 4 years before introducing the historic creative system in the education sector. It was believed their insights would be most accurate since they have been first-hand expecting this reform and the correlation of employment since the 2000s.

It was also conducted an exclusive interview with the president of Hyundai Motors of Asia in Bangladesh, Mutassim Daiaan, the director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO expressed his hopes along with the prospects this historic reform may bring.

It was interviewed the teachers and students, and verbatim expression was implied to maintain the precision of the narratives. The secondary data was obtained from scholarly articles, conference proceedings, book chapters, government reports, and relevant publications. The participants were informed adequately, and ethics was maintained. We followed the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

We divided the findings among students and teachers including curriculum developers’ segments as well as an exclusive interview of the Hyundai President in Asia to understand the employment scenario in light of this emerging context. We will go through the results thoroughly for a holistic understanding of different communities. As most of the curriculum practitioners are faculties employed at diverse colleges and universities, including them in the teaching community provides a holistic framework for understanding.

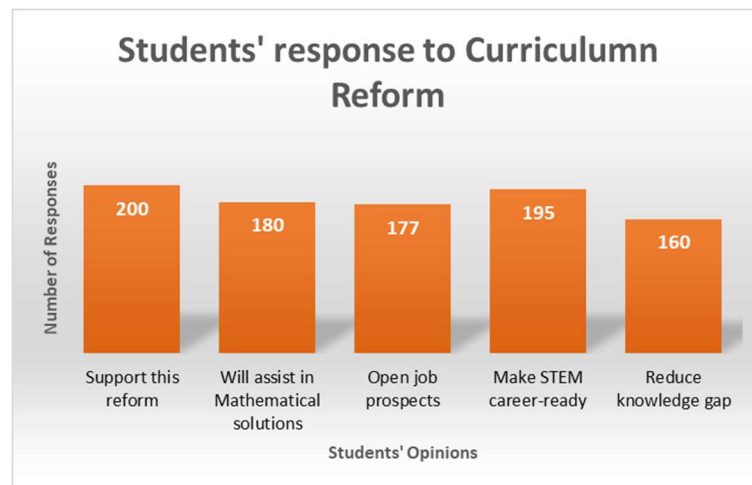
At first, it was explored the understanding of the students and their interpretation of the educational change. As students directly are impacted by any education reform, it made sense to put them into the first perspective for knowing the existing contexts.

### **Students’ Perception:**

Students are the first-hand experiencers of any educational reform. We interviewed the students and from their observations discovered that they were very supportive of this reform. Abdullah Nahar, a student of class six from Dhaka School stated:

“We have been learning the old knowledge without even understanding them. We simply memorize and write on the exams. With this transformed and practical approach, we are excited that we can devise our resolution to mathematical equations.”

From the 200 students, we interviewed and analyzed their findings and the response was cordial. The below figure visually illustrates the opinions of the students about this historic transformation.



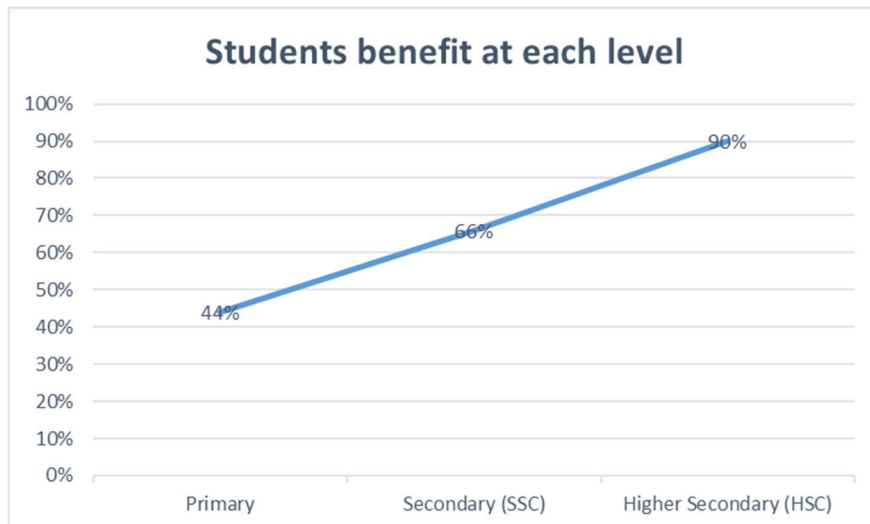
Source: Author

**Figure 1**  
**Bar chart showing students' response to curriculum reform**

From Figure 1, we can observe an overwhelming positive response from the students from all levels. Out of 200 students, all have supported this reform while 90% believe this will open a new beginning for Mathematical solutions. For decades, Bangladeshi students have been memorizing math formulas without ever learning them to heart (Hamid & Honan, 2012). In our interviews, we have found some intriguing aspects such as many students believe this educational change will make them STEM career-ready. It is a historic achievement since Bangladesh has been traditionally known to ignore the practical implications of knowledge (Hamid et al, 2013). Nonetheless, more than three-fourths of the respondents believe this change will likely reduce the existing knowledge gap between diverse sectors, such as the English medium (Jahan, 2018) and the Bangla medium (Islam & Hasim, 2019). A majority of them believe opening novel job opportunities will bring a revolution in business since students would be experienced beforehand by gaining practical knowledge.

In Bangladesh, the schooling levels are divided into three stages namely, primary, secondary, and higher secondary respectively. We also wanted to know which level of students would likely benefit most from this change in the coming years. The response of the students is visually demonstrated in the Line chart below: in Figure 2.

In Figure 2, we can observe the opinions about which schooling level would benefit most from this educational reform in a line chart depiction. From the figure, it is evident that students at the primary level are believed to be less likely to benefit from this curriculum. However, we see a progressive trend with increasing levels. This confirms the students' response in Figure 1, where we obtained a positive response from the majority. As the benefits of education increase over time, according to curriculum experts and prominent educationists, the findings correlate with the respondents of the participants where 90% of students in higher secondary level are believed to benefit from this employment-focused curriculum.

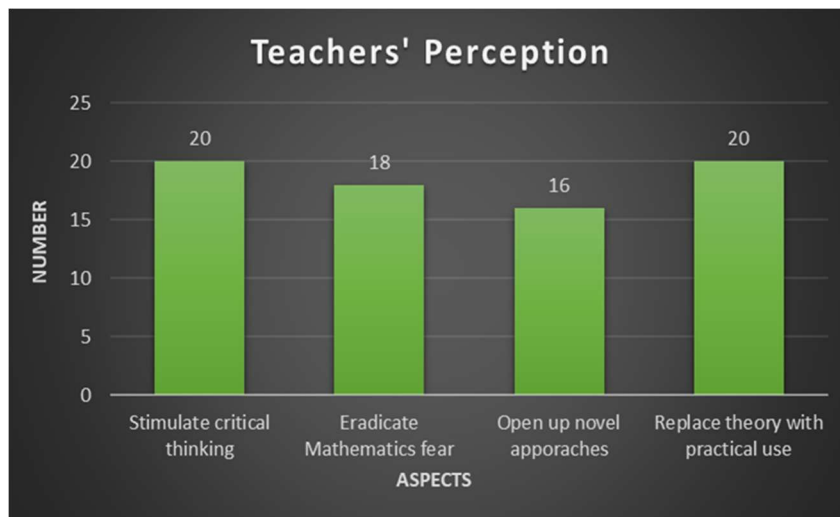


Source: Author

**Figure 2**  
 Line chart depicting education level benefits

### The teaching community

Teachers and curriculum developers are the makers of the nations. Without understanding their perception, it is impossible to feasibly implement any change in the education curriculum. We have talked with 20 teachers from diverse levels and all have recognized this transformation as a step towards modernity. Notably, even the teachers have also read the same textbooks that a class one student reads (Khatun, 1992).



Source: Author

**Figure 3**  
 Teachers' perception of educational change

From Figure 3, we discover a variation of perception among the school instructors of different levels. For instance, 100% of the participants believe this novel curriculum will stimulate critical thinking ability as well as replace the theoretical approach with pragmatic implementation while a significant portion considers this approach as a novel strategy to reduce fear about Math and opening novel solutions. Notably, Mathematics has been a feared discipline, especially in Eastern countries since it requires a lot of

schooling and sometimes private tuition. Most students in our focus group discussions shared they never tried to understand the formula. They only memorized and passed the exam. Many even stated they decisively ignored to selection of 'Science' as the major group when promoted to secondary-level schooling due to complexities regarding these subjects.

We have also interviewed the experts to get their professional insights. Since they were directly related to the development of this curriculum, we wanted to know their expectations and how they view this stage of reformation in education.

Dr. Kazi Shahidullah was one of the key curriculum experts who directly contributed to this development. Holding a PhD in Curriculum Development, he stated:

*"This novel curriculum will not replace the existing textbooks overnight. We must understand that it takes a generation to reap the benefits of education. Since our educational policy will undergo major reform in 2025, the effect will benefit the later generations. It would take a minimum of 10 years before we can see our children using practical knowledge to solve real-world concerns. We want the children to bear the fruits of knowledge so that they are not looking for employment but can create themselves when needed. We are optimistic this curriculum will completely transform the education as well as employment industry by the end of 2030."*

Muhammad Zafor Iqbal, a prominent researcher, and educationalist, has been the leading voice of reforming educational policy. Since 2000, he has been trying to change the educational curriculum and worked closely with the government. He stated:

"It is a major victory for the people of Bangladesh who want to apply their knowledge. We can call ourselves successful when our students start reflecting this knowledge in their lives. We expect the community to embrace the change. While many may revolt since it will uproot the traditional culture of memorizing, in the long run, our society will produce an intelligent generation. Education is not about bookish knowledge but about making one worthy of self-dependent. This is what education is and the community will experience the transformation after 2030 we believe.

The other experts also aligned with the statements. Most of them believe this will completely transform the country, however, it would take a significant time before students can adapt to the method. This is why they have taken a 2-year gap to implement this method. From our Focus Group Discussions, we have found experts are optimistic about the future. They also believe this reform will completely transform the educational sector as well as have a significant impact on the employment industry in the foreseeable future.

### **Perspective of the Employment Industry about Business Prospects and Probable Lessons from the United States**

Hyundai has recently opened its first-ever SUX manufacturing factory in Bangladesh. It has created 5,000 jobs and in the coming months, this factory expects to create more than 10,000 employments when operation at full-fledge. Many universities are opening novel disciplines such as automobile manufacturing to prepare graduates for this employment acceleration.

We requested an interview with the President of Hyundai Motors and were gracefully invited. When inquired about the present and future context, the CEO Mutassim Daiaan stated:

*"Bangladesh is a small land-locked country with a vast human population. While they have been following the ancient curriculum, the outputs were not adequate. Consider*

*China for example. From the 1960s to the 1980s, China deemed its population as a burden. However, everything changed when they invested in education.*

*Today, China is the number one producer of all manufacturing products. Every country in the world has direct relationships with China. China exports more than 37% of the raw materials globally in all industries and even the semiconductor industry is heavily dependent on China. More than two-thirds of the semiconductors developed commercially have been the results of universities located in China. It is an astounding fact that universities are conducting world-class research and are impacting the global commercial sector. Education is the NUMBER ONE prerequisite to successful employment in any country. The United States is the prime example of this educational investment.*

*We have provided the Bangladesh government with 100 million as a charity because we believe this is our corporate social responsibility (CSR). Not only will this assist in making the curriculum we are describing relevant to the industry but will also inspire students to learn rather than memorize. We believe many international conglomerates will follow in their footsteps and within a few decades, Bangladesh will become a force to be reckoned with in the international employment industry. Bangladesh should take lessons from the United States as well since they have shown the world how to become a superpower by investing heavily in education."*

In our research, we have identified several key perspectives from the stakeholders' community. It was evident in the research that students were most excited since they wanted to learn the practical discipline and want to establish their business. As they will directly benefit from this program, it was understandable they want to explore this novel curriculum and broaden their knowledge horizon primarily by setting up SME businesses. Undeniably, this is a revolutionizing moment for the education sector in Bangladesh. From our interviews and analyses, we have found that the majority of the students were optimistic since they wanted to learn real-world solutions. In this aspect, educational reform will revolutionize the generation and completely transform the existing horizon of knowledge by venturing into unknown territory with the capabilities to solve practical concerns from rational and critical analysis. Many respondents stated they were searching on the web about US implications when they first introduced job-focused policy which stimulated the small and medium businesses to prosper.

Confirming our findings from students, similar results have been observed in the teaching community as well. Notably, they were excited because of the replacement of obsolete learning methods as well as the fear of math being removed. Most Asian countries display a cultural ignorance of Mathematics due to complex equations (Bertrand & Marsh, 2015), although, the situation is improving lately. Globally, it has been known that Bangladesh has been implying an ancient method with virtually no change. This always made the educational achievement questionable since they were based on memorizing phrases. With the advent of rationality, teachers from all levels expect a change and expect sincere assistance from developed countries, particularly the US, to show them how to become self-dependent using setting up businesses.

In our analysis, we have also found an exploding in employment since 2022 in the Bangladesh economy. Hyundai Automobile Industries, for the first time in the history of the Indian subcontinent, has opened its first factory to produce luxury SUV vehicles.

The curriculum experts, however, were moderate in their expression. While they were joyous to get this approach approved by the government, they reminded us that educational reform takes generations. While a child will start with this novel curriculum, it might be high grandchildren who would understand the educational value of the contents of the reformed textbooks. From their perspectives, it would take a few

generations before the method can be rooted in society as a replacement for this long-standing educational curriculum.

Probably the most impactful statement was made by the President of Hyundai Motors Asia. Businesses are the most vital sector which relies on quality education to obtain the required manpower. This setup of this manufacturing industry by Hyundai is a testament that Bangladesh is on the right track by eliminating bookish knowledge and emphasizing on practical knowledge. We can observe the phenomenal rise of China in the global market and as an economic superpower. Notably, this policy will also promote the development of businesses in Bangladesh. For the first time, students are inspired to undertake business management challenges.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Bangladesh is undergoing a major educational change since the passing of this novel curriculum. While this will take effect in 2025, society is excited as this is the first time practical knowledge has been emphasized with a rise in SME enterprises. With the globalization and rise of practical knowledge, we can expect that future generations will obtain useful insights from the United States, a proven nation, which they could use to set up business opportunities. This research revealed an overwhelming response from students and the teaching community alike. While it may take time to reap the benefits, we must begin this educational change immediately. Scholars from all levels have high hopes and with the world focusing on practical implementation, stakeholders forecast an optimistic future. As this research is novel, more studies are encouraged to be undertaken that would evaluate the results and impacts on an extended basis.

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