

# Start-ups that are transforming the future of education

**KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

Education. Many would agree that education is the backbone of a prospering nation. For a developing country like Bangladesh, education – for a long time – was more of a challenge than a success story. Almost 50 years since its independence, we have come a long way. And our education sector is enriching itself even more now, thanks to brilliant ideas and entrepreneurs.

There may be different methods in delivering and receiving education. However, what cannot be argued with is the fact that it is a basic human right, and it does not discriminate. Two start-ups, Study Buddy and Mymensingh Welfare School, work to provide education to those who need it the most, and in a very special way.

“Growing up with a sister having multiple learning disabilities, I wanted to come up with a solution for differently-abled children. My sister couldn’t cope in mainstream schools lacking proper governance and resources. When she passed away, I felt the urge to do something for children with special needs immediately. In a few months, with funds and support from many opportunities, I founded an edtech social venture to provide an alternative learning platform to children with learning disabilities and their parents,” introduces Sheikh Inzamamuzzaman, founder and CEO of Study Buddy.

Study Buddy aims to ensure equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for children with learning disabilities. But it is more than just that. The start-up targets to improve entire communities, especially parents and educators, to help and empower kids with learning disabilities. It proposes development of multiple intelligence among children.

Similarly, in 2017, Manas Kanti Saha and Urmi Saha established Mymensingh Welfare School, or MWS.

MWS has a simple approach. Through education, therapy and intervention, it aims to ensure inclusion of children with special needs.



“In Bangladesh, people with disabilities have insufficient opportunities to be included in mainstream education, economy and society. They don’t receive early intervention and proper planning to combat against their disabilities. Their potentialities and hidden skills are not being discovered by institutions or any experts. That’s why near about one tenth of the total population are at risk of economic exclusion,” explains Urmi Saha, Coordinator, MWS. Here, experts have been trying their best to find out the nature of disabilities to offer early intervention, positive parenting and strategic way of individualised education, to discover potentialities and to train children for economic and social inclusion.

Regardless, there are challenges in trying to serve for the good.

Inzamam mentions difficulties and technical issues. Especially during the pandemic, many students are not provided with the technology that online courses require, and thus fail to catch up with their classes. A change in the environment -- from traditional classroom and face-to-face training to computer-based, virtual training -- affected the learning experience.

On the other hand, MWS is located away from the capital. There, lack of awareness about their cause and their goal to establish a non-profitable platform turned

people away. Lack of skilled and empathetic manpower was also a big challenge. “But we never lost hope. We tried and tried to motivate the parents of the learners of Mymensingh Welfare School,” Urmi says.

Both Study Buddy and MWS dream of proper institutional facilities in the future, so that they can serve more children with disabilities. And in hindsight, a nation can also become disabled if it does not go with the times. That is where ANTT Robotics come in.

ANTT Robotics is a start-up geared towards STEM learning as part of education. It aims to enlighten the present generation with knowledge of programming and robotics to prepare them for the 4th Industrial Revolution.

Founder and VP, Innovation Thajid Ibna Rouf Uday shares, “The education system in Bangladesh has been maintaining the conservative approach for a long time, what was missing was the evolution of the education system according to the developing world. And we wanted to address that problem.”

ANTT Robotics aims to mobilise their services in the shortest possible time. However, according to them, the social stigma and perception towards science and technology, and inaccessibility of technology in rural areas, has been factors that result in slow progress.

UNDP Bangladesh and Youth Co:Lab, the largest youth social entrepreneurship movement in Asia and the Pacific co-created by UNDP and Citi Foundation, play an integral part in the growth of these start-ups, which include bootcamps and knowledge sessions, and more.

*An extended version of this article is available online. Read it on The Daily Star website, or on SHOUT on Facebook and @shoutds on Instagram.*

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## The Fault with Our Paragraph Writing

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“Write a paragraph on traffic jams.”

Have you been asked to do so in school? I was too. My teacher sometimes asked me, “Write a SHORT paragraph on a winter morning.” A short paragraph! A paragraph on traffic jams or winter mornings! Today when I teach my students, it makes me think because the way I used to write paragraphs and how my teachers graded them violated the very definition of a paragraph.

Here is what the Cambridge Dictionary says about the definition of a paragraph: “A short part of a text that begins on a new line and consists of one or more sentences dealing with a single idea.” Oxford Learner’s Dictionary has been a bit more specific about the definition -- “a section of a piece of writing, usually consisting of several sentences dealing with a single subject. The first sentence of a paragraph starts on a new line.”

From these two credible definitions, we can assume that a paragraph should be very short, since it is part of a text. Often it is not more than a couple of sentences -- 3 is the best and 8 the maximum, according to dictionary.com. A paragraph should start with a new line of the idea. And then



it should introduce a second new line, but only if you intend to write a second paragraph. However, we are asked to write “a paragraph” in the examination. Isn’t it confusing?

Secondly, a paragraph should contain only one “single idea” which means I can only reflect one idea on a particular topic. It could be a reason, a solution, advice or a piece of information. Surprisingly, I wrote all the ideas in a single paragraph during

my school days. More surprisingly, my teachers graded them a solid A. Even today, many textbooks, guidebooks, and notebooks to academic solutions keep the practice going. If we look at such a paragraph from a book available in the market, we are confused about the definition.

At first glance, you can see it has more than three paragraphs sometimes, although the question was to write a paragraph. If you look and read closely again, you will

find that the so-called paragraph contains multiple ideas, including an introduction, causes, effects, and solution. Also, it has a lot of sentences. And the truth is all school paragraphs in all books are really very similar. Don’t they therefore violate the definition of a paragraph?

Writing paragraphs is important to invent new ideas, to help students be creative, and let them think in their own ways. It’s always appreciated that they should focus on new ideas and produce something of their own through writing. But, asking them to write a paragraph is not an appropriate question pattern and so, the trend should be changed.

Instead of asking the students to write a paragraph, we can be more specific in this regard. We may ask them to describe something they have seen, explain something they ponder, inform us something they like or dislike. That way they are free to write their own thoughts and create different ideas using several paragraphs on a single topic.

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