How can our new graduates stay ahead in the tough job market?

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

I entered the job market when I was a graduate student at Dhaka University and have switched jobs many times since then. What I found kept me going are the hard skills and knowledge I acquired in Bangladeshi and American universities, but also some other softer skills including writing, critical thinking, and a curious mind. What does that tell the younger minds of today? The answer is: Get a good education, invest in some solid technical training, keep an open mind about new frontiers, and be a life-long learner.

We are at the threshold of a very critical transition in our country and the world. As we fight to overcome the damage done by the Covid-19 pandemic and restart and recalibrate our economies, this is a golden opportunity to ask what we can do to prepare ourselves better for the jobs of the next decade. One thing is certain. New technologies will emerge more rapidly now in the new era that will come in the wake of the pandemic and the changing work environment. Innovative approaches to working and living will make the world in 2030 a different one than the one we had envisaged before the pandemic. And we all need to adapt to this new world. Bangladesh's challenge is to transform our education programmes and skills development infrastructure to deliver the talents needed for an innovative, digitised and post-agricultural economy in the forthcoming Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Is our educational system preparing our youth and young adults for the future? I can only chime in with Prof Selim Raihan and Sunera Saba Khan, who express their doubts and follow it up with a relevant question. "There remains a big question mark for Bangladesh in terms of structural transformation. How can Bangladesh transform from the current state of low value-added activities to high value-added activities?" Their recent report titled "Structural transformation, inequality dynamics, and inclusive growth in Bangladesh" came out at the onset of the pandemic lockdown and was published by The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER). Raihan and Khan look askance at the current landscape in Bangladesh, given that public education and health spending as percentages of GDP are among the lowest in the world.

One does not have to be a genius to predict that technology will play an important role in all our existing and burgeoning sectors, including RMG, transport, communication and manufacturing. Besides, new frontiers will emerge as the economy of the future takes shape. Medical science, biotech, information technology, alternative sources of energy, robotics and automation will lead the way. We can get a sense of what the future society would look like from the race to develop autonomous vehicles, the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence, the growth of solar and wind power, new methods of carbon sequestration, application of machine learning in every area, and the phenomenal growth in tools to respond to future pandemics, climate change and supply chain disruptions.

Bangladesh has been growing very fast in terms of GDP and per capita income but our economy has not seen the structural transformation that one would expect from this phenomenal growth. We are in the same league as China and Vietnam in terms of export of manufacturing products. However, our job growth has mostly been in the informal sector. Jobs for the educated youth are still a "hit or miss", meaning the families which invest in their children's higher education find that the returns are not very high. Jobs are not abundant and they don't pay well. What that means is that a bachelors or even a masters degree does not guarantee a good entry-level job or job security.

The biotech industry will grow fast in the coming decade in the wake of the recent pandemic and it will move fast to develop new therapeutics and technologies to reach patients faster. At a time when we face a devastating global pandemic, a new life

PHOTO: COLLECTED

science community will emerge in South and South-East Asia, tapping into the region's life science ecosystem and intellectual capital to discover new approaches to prevent and treat illnesses.

Turning to "Intelligent Work" in the coming years, the greatest job growth will occur in the following occupations: health professionals, health aids, STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) professionals, technicians, and wellness. According to Gartner, a research and advisory firm providing information, advice and tools for leaders in IT, almost 30 percent of human-based jobs shall be replaced by robots by the year 1925. Also, by 2030, jobs that make use of new technologies, which include software developers and information security specialists, will increase by 37 percent. McKinsey's report indicates that "The development of automation technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), could compound and accelerate both innovation and workforce transformations."

Educational institutions in Bangladesh will play a key role to train the future workforce and enable them to "future proof" their careers with qualifications in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). They also need to fortify our students for the economy of 2030 with five key skills—Mental Elasticity and Complex Problem Solving, Critical Thinking, Creativity, People Skills, and Interdisciplinary Knowledge.

Computer occupations are expected to see fast job growth as strong demand is expected for IT security and software development, and as new products associated with the Internet of Things (IoT) are developed. By 2030, as every product, service and process becomes digitalised, the product "cloud" may become more valuable than the product itself. In the current job market in the IT sector, we already hear some buzzwords such as search engine optimisation (SEO), cyber security, machine learning, AI, blockchain and bitcoin.

Bangladeshi universities need to consider amalgamating the new technology into their liberal arts education. Our graduates, even those majoring in the humanities, increasingly need more computer science experience to succeed in an evolving job market. I want to see English, history and biology students, for example, to have some understanding of how AI can be applied to their fields.

However, experts also warn that while machines are very good for consistency, performance, predictability, efficiency and safety, they can't match humans' skills in ingenuity, novelty, art, creativity, emotion, and to address variability and provide context.

Societies will need to determine what is wanted from human intelligence, how best human intelligence can work with AI, how human and artificial intelligence can complement each other and, as a consequence, what new knowledge and skills must be acquired and cultivated. Our experience over the last three decades has revealed that the benefits of new technologies can be reaped only if they are put to the service of original, visionary ideas developed by humans. According to some researchers, the skill that most clearly distinguishes innovators from non-innovators is creativity—more specifically, the ability to come up with new ideas and solutions and the willingness to question ideas.

What skills do our future generation of "smart workers" need? Skills are the ability and capacity to carry out processes and be able to use one's knowledge in a responsible way to achieve a goal. They involve mobilising knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands. The OECD Learning Compass 2030 distinguishes between three different types of skills. These are: cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, which include critical thinking, creative thinking, learning-to-learn and self-regulation; social and emotional skills, which include empathy, self-efficacy, responsibility and collaboration; and practical and physical skills, which include using new information and communication technology devices.

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School librarians should be given 'teacher' status

PRODIP ROY *and* RAJESH KUMAR DAS

BANGLADESH celebrated National Library Day on February 5, 2021. According to the British Council and the department of public libraries, the day aims to celebrate libraries nationwide to promote library culture at the grassroots level. However, there is a need to discuss National Library Day in relation to school libraries' connections to national education policy goals and its implications for student success.

According to the National Education Policy 2010, the library is included in section 20, saying that "the environment and quality of education of an educational institution is reflected through the lively use of its library. The importance of library and information centre is undeniable informal or life-long education and training, research, policymaking, planning, and acquisition of learning". However, the efforts of school librarians are poorly understood and not given proper importance in Bangladesh. Since the school librarian recruitment, there is a massive conflict and confusion surrounding their roles. The role of assistant librarian was removed from the third and fourth-class employees list in the partial amendment order issued on January 8, 2013. In this order, the assistant librarians were treated as teaching staff. On the other hand, the revised regulations of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board issued on December 22, 2016, stated that "librarians, assistant librarians and any staff appointed for office management or part-time teaching shall not be considered as teachers." Since then, the assistant librarians have been struggling with their position status, and they are demanding the return of their teacher status through a government order.

We have had the privilege of conducting several discussion sessions with many high school librarians, headmasters and higher secondary education officers, and learning from the existing literature published over the few years about the school library and the current role of school librarians, in Bangladesh and other countries in the world. About 15,000 assistant librarians are working in MPO registered secondary schools across the country. They run the school library as well as teach various subjects like a general teacher. In every government document, the participants claimed that assistant librarians are considered third-class employees and non-teaching staff at educational institutions. The names of the assistant librarians have been kept in the attendance register of the organisation's non-teaching staff. The assistant librarians were excluded from the school management committee's voting rights in a circular dated January 1, 2017. As a result, thousands of assistant librarians are demoralised and unable to concentrate on work properly. In these discussions, we focused on whether school librarian(s) were involved in school leadership and curriculum teams, and what were their primary responsibilities? How are they placed in terms of collaboration, accessing information, learning and teaching? What is their recruitment, salary and position status?

> *In recent years, governments, professional bodies and organisations have shifted their attention to school libraries, which play an integral role in supporting students' educational development. Many reviews and research can be found discussing the value and role of school libraries, the links between librarians and improved student literacy, the contribution of school librarians to 21st century education, and the future of these libraries.*

Based on our findings, every MPO registered educational institution in Bangladesh's private and public sectors has an assistant librarian position. Starting in 2010, the assistant librarians hired in the next few years were considered teachers and they conducted regular classes. Suddenly, the orders and regulations issued once by the Ministry of Education and another time by the Board of Education started treating assistant librarians as non-teaching staff. The assistant librarians were extremely unhappy with these orders. After that, they contacted the officials of all education administration levels and applied for their teaching status. Unfortunately, they did not get back the teacher status yet. Eventually, they resorted to the High Court to resolve the matter.

Since the establishment of the National Education Policy 2010, the position of school librarian was created in Bangladesh. As a result, the number of higher secondary level libraries in Bangladesh is the highest so far. In recent years, governments, professional bodies and organisations have shifted their attention to school libraries, which play an integral role in supporting students' educational development. Many reviews and research can be found discussing the value and role of school libraries, the links between librarians and improved student literacy, the contribution of school librarians to 21st century education, and the future of these libraries. Because of the changes in the education system, school libraries and qualified librarians are a timely topic. School libraries' importance has grown significantly in recent years in every developed nation. Several studies have shown that cooperation with a school librarian will make a difference to academic achievement and should be involved in the school's teaching, learning, and curriculum preparation. For example, recent research using South Australian schools' data revealed that having a trained teacher-librarian can lead to better student literacy performance.

In Australia, school librarians are often called teacher librarians, meeting the International Federation of Library Associations' recommendation of dual ability in the form of "recognised teaching qualifications and qualifications in librarianship". In Bangladesh, a school librarian holds recognised graduate qualifications and qualifications in librarianship. That means the school librarian has dual qualifications. Thus, the school librarian's salary scale should be equivalent to a senior teacher who is accredited the capability of a school librarian.

In our discussion, the participants from all levels agreed that school librarians also undertake various other school duties, including conducting regular timetabled library lessons and performing different teaching roles regularly.

Regarding linking the role of school librarians to curricular and learning needs, we can refer to the current circumstances in the US, the UK and Australia. School librarians create strong links between their educational programme and curricular and learning needs in these countries. However, in Bangladesh, the school librarians are deprived of school curriculum activities. They are not eligible to be a member of the school curriculum as they are not part of teaching staff. This is a big contradiction between the role of school librarians and the ability to be involved in school administration and decision-making.

One of the most significant outcomes of our discussions with secondary school librarians, headmasters and education officers is that everyone strongly believes that all school assistant librarians need to be given the status of teachers due to the nature of their roles and current responsibilities. We cannot ignore the contribution of school libraries and librarians. We demand a clear guideline and policy about school libraries and librarians in relation to teaching and learning. The teaching staff and assistant librarians should work collaboratively, like in other countries. The authorities need to ensure that school librarians attend teaching, learning, and curriculum sessions for greater student success. This is not just a problem of assistant librarians, but a national issue concerning the development of library culture from the school level. Thus, it needs a permanent and immediate solution from the government to make future National Library Days more successful.

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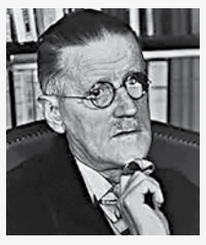

JAMES JOYCE
Irish Novelist
(February 2, 1882--January 13, 1941)

Poetry, even when apparently most fantastic, is always a revolt against artifice, a revolt, in a sense, against actuality.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Is inclined
6 Ran, as color
10 "Love Story" actor
11 Make baskets
12 Oinker, to tots
13 Rocker John
14 Singer Redding
15 Train course
16 Little lie
17 Ram's mate
18 TV's "-Haw"
19 Collapse
22 Remini of TV
23 Rowing needs
26 Deb's wear
29 Suitable
32 Game caller
33 Garden visitor
34 Further
36 Took wing
37 Suspect's defense
38 Wed in secret
39 Diner pages
40 Drying need
41 Proofing note
42 Mimics

DOWN
1 Complete
2 Monogram unit
3 Like good handwriting
4 Gift attachments
5 Shrewd
6 Composer Bartok
7 Gate feature
8 Conjure up
9 Tightly packed
11 Horror movie beast
15 Binary base
17 "Pollock" star
20 Research site
21 Old horse
24 "Parks and Recreation" actor
25 Street cleaner
27 Was a pioneer
28 Stair posts
29 Lathers
30 Bay
31 Binding need
35 Border on
36 Movie dud
38 Seventh Greek letter

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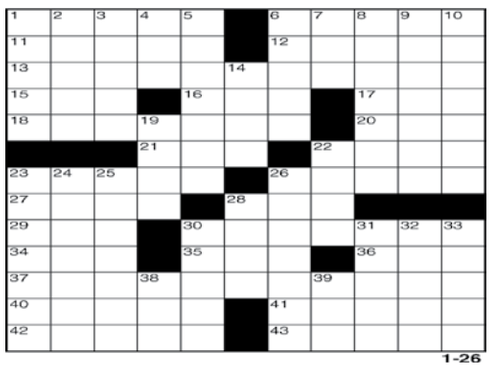

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YESTERDAY'S **ANSWERS**

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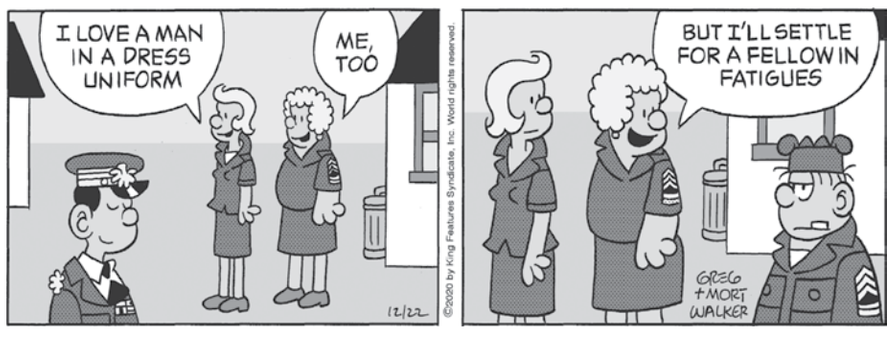
BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT