

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

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The future contours of education in Bangladesh

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External links are also vital and need continuous attention and nurture. According to Salehuddin Ahmed (economist, governor), "Education and training offered in formal institutions need to be recast to make these more relevant to the needs of the using sectors [employers, government] by establishing closer links."

THE FOUNDATIONS

Mirza Azizul Islam (educator, adviser) opines that "education is a lifelong journey, not a destination. Beyond the terminal degree, students should be encouraged to be [continuously] inquisitive about developments in diverse fields—social, political and economic."

In the current climate of globalisation, new forms of "global citizenship" have developed in which students are being prepared for entering the global workforce (Ng, 2012). While the implied standardised knowledge carries the risk of cultural imperialism, neo-colonialism, and spread of epistemological hegemonies (Rizvi, 2007), foundational excellence is a sine qua non. Halimur Khan suggests that in the early years, students must emerge with:

- i) Strong reading, writing, speaking skills
- ii) Quantitative and analytical skills
- iii) Digital and basic technology skills
- iv) Critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation orientation
- v) General awareness of global issues
- vi) Citizenship, integrity, courtesy, empathy, civic leadership, service to society

With progression to upper classes, learning should align with employers' interests and students must become problem solvers, communicators, teamwork-efficient, and technically adept (Apps, Big Data Analytics, Quantum Computing, Artificial



Intelligence, Virtual Reality), in addition to attaining subject area skills.

Fazlul Aziz (educator) calls for instilling love for the country, importance of democratic norms, respect for people of every stratum of life, and the importance of honesty. Without moral foundations and a sense of history and social knowledge, we cannot imagine a better social order. To achieve this, responsibility lies not with teachers alone but also guardians, employers, government, and the students themselves. Learning must also be acculturated, lifelong.

MODERN LEARNING METHODS

In the last 50 years, the science of teaching and learning has evolved with particular groups in mind: pedagogy for children and andragogy for adults. Salehuddin Ahmed (former Pro-VC) counsels our universities to change from being simple certificate-issuing factories to becoming actual places of learning. Passing exams through rote memorisation should become passé as we are producing "operators" and "the compliant"—not thinkers and leaders. The following are important:

- i) The minds of children and the youth are most receptive; they must be influenced early on.
- ii) At all levels, modern methodologies of teaching must emphasise participation, problem solving, innovation, entrepreneurial thinking, and experiential learning. The lecture method has become decrepit.
- iii) Both teachers and management need to be more student centric, listening to them carefully and consciously. Teachers and students can shape each other in an environment of co-creation of knowledge.
- iv) A university cannot be run as an NGO or a "business" with a profit motive: It must encourage freedom of thinking, writing, and speaking which represent the essence of a university.

TECHNOLOGY

Learning will be redefined in a world where the answer to every question is only one Google, Siri or Alexa search away. Pointless memorisation should soon lose its significance while analysis and problem-solving rise in importance.

The world of 4IR and commensurate

technologies must become intimately familiar to our students as in many Asian countries. Policy initiatives are needed to increase technology adoption as early as possible in all places of learning.

Because of AI and new algorithms (e.g., IBM's Watson), even lawyers and doctors are becoming redundant. Many fields that currently provide lucrative employment opportunities are vanishing rapidly. How our huge manpower base can be made more responsive to changes in a technology-aggressive world must be clearly understood and shared.

Mahreen Mamun (educator) contends that with the help of digital media, while cost cutting is possible in many areas, it can be also used for teacher development and teacher education as a whole new paradigm. Government and policymakers must find innovative ways to train the teachers and monitor them with the help of new digital platforms so that learning and teaching become more modern, transparent and accountable. It is never easy to change a system,

especially one that has many ingrained features. Hopefully, the pandemic has helped jolt the system to reboot our thinking about adopting new ways of teaching and learning.

NATIONAL DATABASE

Little is known about the causes of variation and differences in the quality of education imparted across academia. Part of the problem lies in our educational administrators—from the ministry down to the institutional level—having little interest or understanding of the use of data to manage their ambit of operations. A simple piece of information—how many classes were missed by teachers at a school, college or university—can trigger effective managerial responses to correct the system. But administrators are blissfully unaware of even basic operational problems and difficulties. Most of our institutions are run by intuition, guesswork or sheer bull-headed arrogance that cannot be challenged. Systems are reactive, not proactive. Efficiency and effectiveness—both suffer egregiously.

A set of national experts must be assembled to chart out information needs of the system: What data should be gathered, from whom, at what frequency, to what purpose, and disseminated to whom—these are basic issues that remain unaddressed. In the hands of the team, supported by an able IT staff, it should become easy to monitor the heartbeat of the system, especially key indicators, so that outliers and irregularities can be brought into alignment. At a well-known institution, classes were being missed by faculty regularly and students were not getting their money's worth. Once data began to be gathered, the problem dropped dramatically.

INCENTIVE STRUCTURES

Teachers have been roundly blamed for many of the woes of the education system. Are they fully to blame?

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