

# ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

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## The future contours of education in Bangladesh

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For example, new recruits are thrust into classrooms with little to no preparation, few resources, poor facilities, and lacking in support for the job (s)he needs to do. The budget to build human capital is also woefully inadequate.

In the military or the government, competencies are developed with continuous training. Banks and corporate bodies are also investing in the same. Why are our teachers so neglected? More than 95 percent of the education budget goes to support remuneration (though I took a slightly different position on this in an earlier op-ed). The rest is for development? This is what our education planning bodies are capable of designing? It must also be acknowledged that there are poor teachers at all levels. Some are arrogant and neglect their duties as a teacher. The Student Experience Project (reported in the Daily Star) reveals the gamut of issues that students face from teachers. Even if these teachers are given the proper support, will they try to improve? No one believes they would work harder if poor teachers are rewarded equally as excellent teachers (in raises, promotions, opportunities, etc.).

The incentive structure must change. In higher education, for example, Saleemul Huq proposes that university authorities must reward research and innovation as must the national government by providing funding. He exhorts that, as a country, we will remain underdeveloped as long as we remain dependent on international consultants to supplement knowledge. We must thus generate our own body of knowledge (research) relevant to our own context. Competitive incentives must also be considered by advocating open-door policy in recruitment for our

universities. With a blend of foreign teachers, cross-fertilisation rather than in-breeding will make our education system stronger, more resilient, competitive, and innovative. We emphasise that East Asian countries—South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, (and now) Malaysia, etc.—gained in recognition and ranking (rather quickly) by inviting foreign faculty to their campuses. While costs will be an issue, it is preferable to see it as value (results/costs) addition. A good place to start is our diaspora scholars who have gained in knowledge creation and delivery and wish to give back.

The subject of incentives is complex and consideration must be given not just to the individual level (faculty), but also to the group level (department), stage of education (BA, MA, MPhil, PhD), institutional level (university), and partners (government, private sector—for their involvement and contributions).

### GOVERNANCE

Governance is the piece that ought to tie all other pieces together. Sadly, some see governance in the education system at all levels as abysmal. In public universities, it is believed that teachers are appointed based on their political inclinations. Some misuse their freedom and do not even take any classes; instead of being fired, they still get paid. Promotion criteria are obsolete where teachers can become full professors with lacklustre teaching and poor research contributions. In the private universities, the quality of education varies widely. Almost all founders brazenly influence the university administration and faculty members in ways that are not conducive for quality education. In these universities, research is not given due importance—it is considered to be unprofitable.



Raihan Jamil (educator) contends that “certain [faculty] of higher education are not interested in education at all. These individuals have little interest in teaching or learning, and the students become direct victims.” They must be culled from the system if we want education to rise in efficacy and stature.

Corruption at various tiers of the education system is also widespread with fees, coaching, unfair practices, misuse of power, and a plethora of ills that fill the pockets of many teachers and degrade the profession. Unless

good governance intervenes to weed out these crass anomalies in education, not much will change for the better.

### CONCLUSIONS

The single greatest national asset today is our youth—the windfall termed demographic dividend. If we are able to educate them better, we can indeed transition to a significantly elevated knowledge-based economy delivering sharply heightened benefits to the citizenry. This will require setting a clear and measurable purpose of education, with ownership that serves our national interests, integrated as

a faultless supply chain all the way to the (global) market, with strong foundational education, taught using modern methods (replacing lectures and exams), augmented with 4IR technology, coordinated and aligned with an efficient data system, invigorated with proper incentive structures, and managed by professionals, to shift to an enviable paradigm that builds human capital to its limits.

As Fakhru Alam (educator) contends, “Our education system, ideally, must be places for learning creatively and for fostering creativity. Places where merit is measured at every step and then rewarded... Places for the common pursuit of higher forms of knowledge and inculcating humane values and not for self-centred learning.”

To build an education system that is purpose-driven, self-correcting and innovative, there will be challenges: we must meet them resolutely, collectively, ambitiously, creatively, and boldly—most of all with ownership, purpose and a mission that are in line with national aspirations, truly enlightening, and delightfully liberating.

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*Author's Note: In putting together this article, I turned to my friends, colleagues and students for insights. Many of them (noted in the text) responded with thoughtful suggestions. As a result, it reflects collective wisdom. Their thoughts blended with mine resulted in a sort of a roadmap, with a warning that the devil is in the details!*



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