

EDUSUMMIT 2021

The Daily Star and The Asia Foundation's Let's Read initiative jointly organised a virtual summit titled "EduSummit 2021" on January 24, 2021, on the International Day of Education. It was a daylong event consisting of seven sessions. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

SESSION 1: Lifelong Learning – Education to instil leadership values

Without inclusive and equitable quality education, Bangladesh cannot succeed in achieving gender equality and break the cycle of poverty. This session discussed the ways of becoming a lifelong learner and the importance of ensuring quality education even through the challenges posed by the current pandemic.



Kazi Faisal Bin Seraj, Country Director, The Asia Foundation

The pandemic has given us the rare opportunity to have some room for reflection. In our usual fast-paced life, we never really had much of an opportunity to pause and reflect our life and decisions. This is therefore a great opportunity for learning at an individual level. On the other hand, organisations can also use this time to analyse their existing issues and figure out how they can solve them going forward.

We must learn about the entire ecosystem and not just restrict ourselves to our own sector. If one feels like they lack skills in a certain field, they should always reach out to someone with the relevant knowledge or enrol in a course.



Rubana Huq, President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

Learning is a continuous process and it is very important to engage in lifelong learning. If you stop learning, in a way, you cease to exist. Therefore, learning new skills and gaining knowledge is an integral part of the evolutionary process.

The demand for education exists at every level in our country regardless of the socio-economic condition of the people. The weaknesses lie at the supply side further aggravated by the new challenges induced by the pandemic.

It's incredibly important to surround ourselves with critical peers and mentors. We must be humble and have great eagerness to learn.



Rasheda K Choudhury, Co-Founder, Global Campaign for Education (GCE)

COVID-19 has taught us how crucial it is to learn from one another. Leadership is not a trait that one achieves overnight. One must overcome various challenges in their journey of becoming a leader. Learning continues from the cradle to the grave and learning does not just consist of academic knowledge. Learning consists of a system of values which includes listening to one another.

People want their children to have quality education despite of their socio-economic background. It is our responsibility to reach to them and provide them with such education.

Key takeaways of the session:

This session concluded by emphasising on the importance of reaching out to the masses and creating awareness about the importance of education through the efforts of both the government and the NGOs. It was suggested that the government can send out awareness text messages to parents' phones to deter school dropouts during the pandemic. Humility, respect for diversity, surrounding oneself with critical peers, eagerness to learn, and empathy were discussed to be the five pillars building a person to be a lifelong learner.

SESSION 2: Learn and Play – Benefits of storytelling and activities in children's education

Storytelling can be considered the oldest form of teaching. This session discussed the different forms of play and how playful learning can lead to increased inquisitiveness and creativity in children.



Dr Erum Mariam, Executive Director, BRAC - Institute of Educational Development (IED)

By the time a child turns three, 80 percent of their brain is developed and by the time they are five years old, 90 percent of their brain is developed. We believe playing provides a high level of stimulation for children at this stage for

brain development. Play is essential for language, motor, and cognitive development of children. It can also encourage them to be more creative and self-confident. Besides the learning, play is also joyful. All in all, play is an essential tool for learning and thriving. Learning through storytelling will instil a love for books, reading, and knowing in children.



Sukla Dey, Program Manager, The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation's Let's Read project has created a digital platform containing books for children. Reading books is

something that should be continuously encouraged for children because sometimes we have this idea that children will engage in reading by themselves. But that is not true. The parents and the community surrounding the children have a responsibility to introduce creative learning opportunities for children. Parents need to prepare themselves to be inquisitive and ask questions to their children. This in turn increases children's understanding and makes them more creative and inquisitive as well.



Munize Manzur, Principal, Sunbeams School

Schools have an important role to play in integrating active and textbook learning. At Sunbeams school, we try to

instil various social skills in our students through play. Storytelling should be an important part of the academic curriculum to ensure that children are learning in a fun environment.

Even during the pandemic we have tried to keep the active learning part alive through online extracurricular activities. Teachers also need to be creative in their storytelling methods to better reach the students. Learning through storytelling leaves a much greater impact on the student's mind and helps better retain that information.

Key takeaways of the session:

This session broke a long-held myth that incorporating active learning for children can be expensive. Instilling creativity and inquisitiveness in children were discussed to be of utmost importance.

SESSION 3: From Campus to Professional Life – Reshaping education for tomorrow's workforce

This session discussed what different organisations look for in the youths when hiring them and what attributes these young people should possess in order to secure their dream jobs.



Niaz Morshed Elite, National President, Junior Chamber International (JCI) Bangladesh

The job market is going to be completely transformed in the

next few years with the advent of the fourth industrial revolution. The youths need to be highly goal-oriented in order to overcome the various hurdles that are going to be presented due to this evolution in the job sector. I have noticed that the youths in our country lack perseverance. They need to remember that success does not come overnight.



Upashana Salam, Manager, Marketing and Communication, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC)

BYLC believes that the youth has the potential to practice leadership even

without being in a position of power or authority. At present, there are not enough jobs in Bangladesh to be able to sustain the amount of job seekers. Therefore, we want to create entrepreneurs in order to bridge this gap. The youths of our country are lacking in certain key skills such as communications, resumé writing, negotiations, and networking. The youths are also lagging behind on the necessary technical skills.

Nazmul Karim, Head of Brand, Prime Bank There is a huge gap between the industry and the academia. This gap is not predominantly present at the policy level; our mindset also plays a huge role here. We must redefine the way internships are designed in our country. While continuing one's undergraduate degree, industry exposure is essential.



In the financial sector, we are observing a tremendous lack of digital literacy. The transition from campus to professional life is a rat race and one can easily feel burnt

out in the process. During this time, it is important to accept failures and learn how to overcome it.

When I am hiring a young person, I specifically look for someone who is eager to learn new things. Tenacity is also an important skill that I look for.



Didarul Hasan, Deputy General Manager, MM Ispahani Limited

We fail to develop critical thinking and writing skills through our education curriculum.

Sustainability is a core issue of the fourth industrial revolution. We need to put more focus into developing the behavioural skills of our youths aside from textbook learning.

As human beings, we need to be resilient and have the capacity to learn from our mistakes.

Key takeaways of the session: The session ended by advising the youths the importance of staying up to date with industry relevant skills. The experts also agreed that the existing curriculum needs to be redesigned in order to better prepare the new generation with the incorporation of more practical skills.

SESSION 4: The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Higher Education

The session discussed the modernisation of education and related policies along with their implementation.



A K Azad Chowdhury, Former Chairman, University Grants Commission (UGC), Bangladesh

Initially, the industrial revolution was about using tools

to our advantage. Now, there is a different connotation to it. The definition of education now refers to the preparation for day-to-day tasks and for future employment. Our universities equip students with great theoretical background but no practical knowledge.



Mohammad Rezwan Khan, Professor & Executive Director, Institute of Advanced Research (IAR), Bangladesh

The primary purpose of education is to impart knowledge. However, technology

has been advancing quite rapidly these days and we have unfortunately lagged behind due to our failure to cope up. We have to gone through various cycles of learning, unlearning, and relearning. As an educator, I believe we should have a set vision and plan on how to cope with the rapidly changing world. Unlike before, no technological advancement is sustainable in the long-term. Our course structures should be modified and reviewed every two years and we should also make sure that there is more investment in technology and its utilisation.

Key takeaways of the session:

The session ended with the experts in the session strongly emphasising on the necessity of vocational education. They also suggested on developing an education system through continuous feedback from students.

SESSION 5: Education for Sustainable Development – Learning to shape a better planet

The session focused on the role of education in sustainable development and how education bolsters up these goals of sustainable development.



Dr. Atiur Rahman, Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank

In the past decade, we have seen increased investment in our education sector. We are yet to ensure higher education

and vocational training for women. We must increase employment opportunities for women. We also have to integrate the impacts of climate challenges in our education system.



Korvi Rakshand, Founder, JAAGO

Education is now imparted online, which in itself is exclusionary. Many students from middle class families cannot attend classes. Currently, we

are educating four thousand students. We are trying to take classes through telephone and give homework through text messages. In rural areas, the quality of education has to be developed. Alongside increasing wages, teachers have to be trained extensively. COVID-19 has helped us become more technologically sophisticated.



Dr. Khondaker Golam Moazzem, Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

One-third of our graduates are unemployable, which leads them to take up unfair

means to make ends meet. This will not lead to sustainable development.



Dr. Nazneen Ahmed, Senior Research Fellow, BIDS

Massive changes have been seen in our education sector in the past two decades. We have been able to

ensure primary education for both male and female students. We have also introduced scholarships for female students pursuing higher education.

When we mention skilled youth to send abroad we consider the boys only. We need to construct an inclusive system that facilitates women to equally contribute to the economy.

Key takeaways of the session:

The speakers concluded that in order to ensure sustainable development, the education system should take a humanistic approach to education by excluding gender roles. The session also discussed the importance of having a fully transparent education system and the necessity of expanding the accessibility to online education.

SESSION 6: Creative Education -- Importance of arts and creativity in modern education practices

This session focused on the need for kindling interest in the arts in young people and putting a creative spin on how education is delivered in our country.



Sarah Anjum Bari, Editor, Daily Star Books, The Daily Star

One aspect of our country's university education system that I hope will change is that students will no

longer feel limited to science and business subjects. Students from other disciplines should have the option to pursue a minor in the liberal arts.

At home, parents and extended family play a huge role in nurturing children into falling in love with stories and the arts. At work, there could be book clubs or pottery workshops to encourage creativity.



Katerina Don, Curator, HerStory Foundation

Creativity has always had space in education. Stories can create emotional connections with information, which is why storytelling

can be a powerful educational tool. My idea is to create a digital Shantiniketan - deconstructing education in a sense. The concept behind Shantiniketan was that there would be no walls between subjects. This interconnectedness and the emotional connection to information is something we want to bring to a platform we're developing called "Cholo Pori," a place where you learn to play and play to learn.

Shamsad Mortuza, Pro-VC, University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB)

This pandemic has taught us that, as human



beings, we need each other, so humanities can be just as important as science subjects. As teachers, we need to create an interactive interface where we can nurture the imagination of a

child and encourage them to make sense of the world instead of merely memorising.

Learning is holistic – specialising in only one thing is not ideal. Education shouldn't be compartmentalised. Learning also has to be rewarding, so we need to engage students with good textbooks containing inviting content.

Key takeaways of the session:

The experts of the session highlighted that interest in the arts and literature as a career prospect should not be looked down upon and should actually be encouraged. It was pointed out that there should be more spaces for informal education and our examination process need to be restructured to no longer focus on grading but on whether the learning was rewarding or not.

SESSION 7: EdTech -- Innovation transforming the education landscape

This session focused on the different ways that EdTech has transformed the educational system in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic, as educational institutions have tried to adapt to prolonged closures.



Azwa Nayeem, CEO, Alokiti Teachers

One lesson teachers have learnt while teaching online is how to keep students engaged within a short time-frame to avoid them logging off

class. They now understand the importance of making learning fun and interactive.

EdTech initiatives have brought in attractive teaching resources, setting a benchmark for engaging educational videos and content. It is also crucial to take feedback from students while creating educational contents. The trend of teachers uploading videos or taking online live classes on their own initiative should never be stopped even if educational institutes reopen. Teachers need to be empathetic listeners and relationship builders, especially during this pandemic when students are going through personal issues of their own.



Mustafizur Rahman Khan, CEO, Upskill

While online learning is pushing people to learn new skills, physical connectivity is also essential. Therefore, a blended approach to learning would

be suitable for Bangladesh. When schools reopen, it might be useful to still have online classes once a week for urban schools. Online education is the future because EdTech allows us to make content delivery more interesting. Since knowledge is no longer confined in textbooks, what's crucial as we advance is the application of this knowledge. Education should, therefore, be about building curious minds.



Umama Zillur, Founder & Director, Kotha

Our Kotha At School programme partners with middle schools and high schools to teach comprehensive sexuality education. Shifting the model

online due to COVID-19 was not viable due to challenges with student engagement. Moreover, students shared that online learning negatively impacted their mental health due to prolonged screen time and minimal physical interaction. A hybrid model of learning will help ease this massive pressure on mental health. In the meantime, we are using the power of social media to spread the knowledge that we usually disseminate through classrooms. Young people want to learn from their peers, so when other young people create social media content, they understand what would work best for their peers.

Key takeaways of the session:

The last session concluded with all the speakers unanimously agreeing on the necessity of a hybrid model of learning. It was recommended that more time is spent designing online classes while prioritising students' mental health and incorporating their direct input.