

What we can learn from Sweden's rethink of digital classrooms



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Sweden is currently doing something that, a decade ago, would have seemed unthinkable for one of Europe's most digitally advanced societies: it is pulling back from using screens in classrooms. After years of equipping students with laptops and tablets, the Swedish government is now encouraging a return to printed textbooks, handwritten work, and reduced screen exposure—especially for younger children.

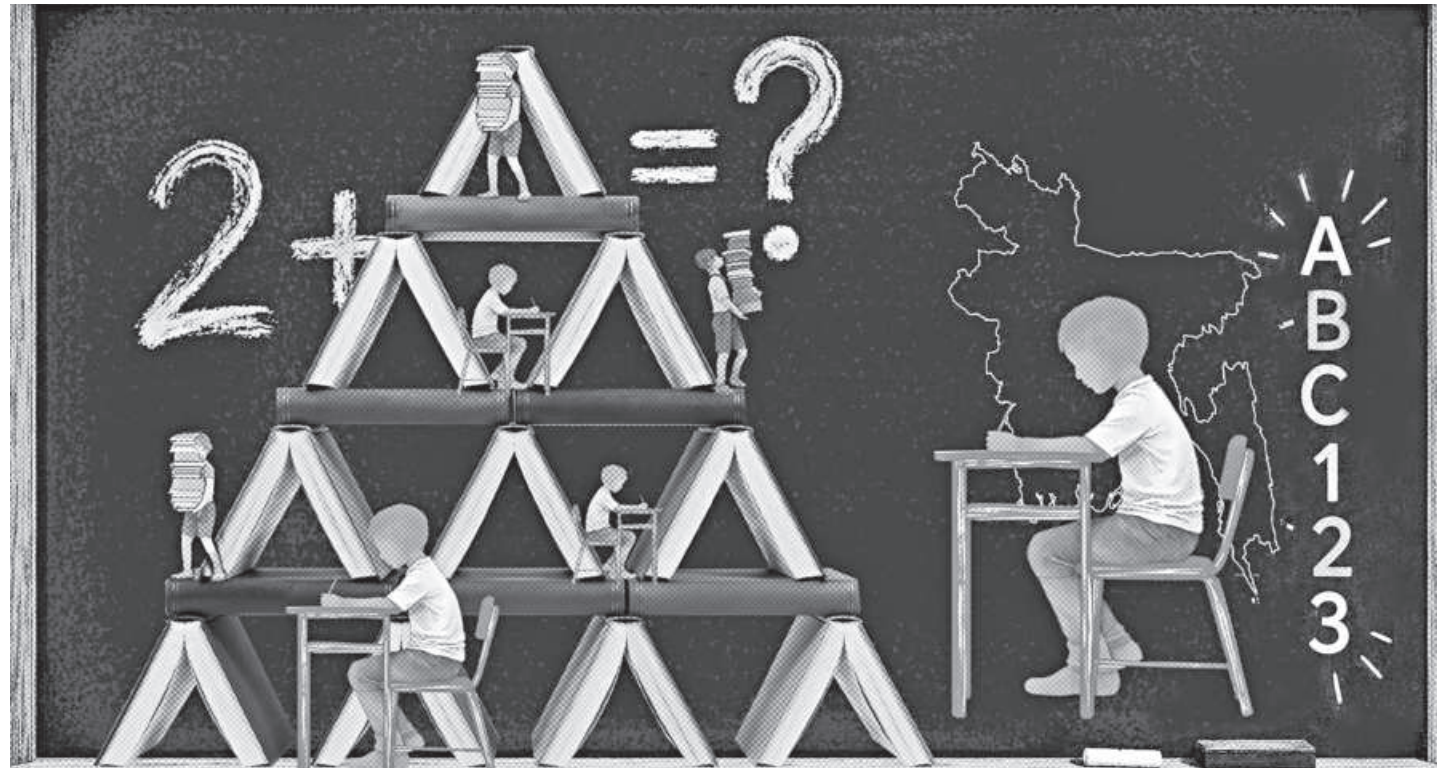
The shift reflects a growing concern that heavy reliance on digital tools may be weakening students' ability to concentrate and is affecting their reading proficiency. Backed in part by findings linked to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), policymakers argue that core skills such as reading, writing, and basic comprehension are more effectively developed through traditional, paper-based learning. This is reinforced by other evidence as well: despite Sweden's strong digital reputation, a 2023 study under the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS) found that four out of 10 Swedish students did not reach a basic level of digital competence.

That said, the recent policy shift is not being framed as a rejection of technology. Instead, it is presented as a correction to what officials see as an overextension of digital learning in schools.

Still, the move has sparked debate. Critics caution that reducing screen-based education too sharply could leave students less prepared for a labour market that is increasingly shaped by automation, data-driven systems, and artificial intelligence. In a country closely associated with global tech innovation, the central tension remains how to strengthen foundational learning without weakening digital competitiveness.

But while Sweden is trying to recalibrate after years of deep digital integration, Bangladesh is still at a much earlier and more uneven stage of a similar journey.

A recent survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics offers a snapshot of this reality. It shows that 53.4 percent of people in the country use the internet, while 88.4 percent use mobile phones. But access to devices that support deeper learning remains limited, as



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

only 11.3 percent use computers. The digital divide is also geographic, with 75.7 percent internet usage in urban areas compared to 43.6 percent in rural regions. Cost remains a major barrier, with 43.6 percent of respondents saying they avoid using the internet due to high prices.

Beyond access, the survey highlights how limited digital capability still is. The most common ICT skill is copy-paste, performed by 84.4 percent of users, a figure that effectively captures the level of everyday digital literacy. Usage patterns also reflect shallow engagement: 64.4 percent of users search for government job-related information, 49.8 percent consume sports content, and only 11.6 percent engage in online shopping.

What these figures point to is not just a connectivity gap, but also a gap in depth of internet usage. Digital tools are widely present,

but their utility remains functional. The tools required for creation, analysis, or advanced problem-solving are still limited for most users. This gap is reflected in the education system, where technology has expanded in presence but not fully in purpose.

Over the past decade, Bangladesh has invested heavily in ICT-based learning under its "Digital Bangladesh" agenda. Multimedia classrooms have been introduced in thousands

expanding multimedia classrooms, introducing smart learning environments, and increasing access to basic devices for teachers through initiatives often described as "one teacher, one tab" approaches. At the same time, the focus remains on using technology to support employability rather than fully replacing traditional classroom structures. More recently, the government moved

Bangladesh's structural limitations further complicate the picture. Most students still depend primarily on mobile phones rather than computers, limiting opportunities to develop advanced digital skills. Rural schools continue to lag behind urban institutions in terms of both infrastructure and reliability of internet access, while teachers' capacity to deliver effective ICT-based instruction varies significantly. In many cases, technology is still used mainly to replicate traditional teaching methods by presenting lectures and notes in a digital form, without fundamentally changing the underlying emphasis on memorisation and examination performance.

Against this backdrop, international assessments point to persistent weaknesses and disparity in the broader system. A 2023 World Bank report highlighted Bangladesh's continuing challenges in education, including lower learning outcomes, uneven access to quality schooling in rural areas, and limited investment in education infrastructure.

In the meantime, digital technology has already moved well beyond the classroom and into everyday life, particularly for children. Even where it is not yet contributing meaningfully to learning, it is already shaping their attention spans, behaviour, and daily routines. Many children spend long hours on mobile games and social media outside school hours. In some households, even very young children have developed a strong dependence on screens, where everyday activities such as eating or emotional regulation are tied to their access to a video playing in front of them. In fact, a 2024 study on children in Bangladesh found that around 86 percent of preschool-aged children show signs of smartphone dependence.

Technology is not only something being introduced into classrooms; it is something that has already become embedded in childhood itself, mostly outside the control of schools or learning systems.

Seen together, Sweden and Bangladesh represent different points along the same global transition. Sweden is now questioning the effects of having gone too far with digitalisation in education, while Bangladesh is still trying to ensure that digital tools produce consistent and meaningful learning outcomes at all.

Ultimately both are confronting the same issue: that technology does not automatically improve education. Its impact depends on how it is structured, how deeply it is integrated into teaching, and whether it strengthens learning or simply changes its format. In Bangladesh's case, the challenge now extends beyond classrooms—towards a generation already shaped by technology long before education systems have fully adapted to it.

of schools, teachers have received ICT training, and a national teachers' portal now connects more than 600,000 educators for sharing lessons and materials. During the Covid pandemic, this system was stress-tested at scale, with televised classes, online platforms, and mobile-based learning used to keep education running during school closures.

The current political leadership in education has also outlined a more skills-oriented and hybrid approach to technology use in learning. Education Minister ANM Ehasnul Hoque Milon's plans emphasise expanding ICT-based training for students, including short courses for programming, cybersecurity, and digital marketing, alongside stronger technical and vocational education. There is also a renewed focus on improving digital infrastructure in schools and technical institutions, including

forward with "smart classroom" initiatives to modernise secondary education, including smart boards, recording facilities, and digital infrastructure in selected schools.

However, this raises questions about priorities in a system where many classrooms still lack basic tools such as functional blackboards, adequate lighting, ventilation, and teaching materials.

Additionally, while smart technologies can make classrooms more engaging, they cannot replace skilled teachers or structured instruction. Traditional teaching allows for a slower, more gradual learning experience that helps students engage with ideas while also fostering direct, face-to-face interaction with teachers. In contrast, screen-based instruction can sometimes encourage passive consumption and contribute to cognitive overload, particularly among younger learners.

How to solve the street vendor crisis sustainably



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Often in urban Bangladesh, footpaths are cleared of street vendors so that pedestrians can move about comfortably. But it only takes a few days or even hours before they start coming back, crowding the footpaths again. Although street vendor eviction from footpaths ensures that people can walk around without worrying about getting injured, thousands of vendors end up losing their livelihoods overnight. This issue is a failure of governance.

Dhaka alone has 300,000 to 500,000 street vendors, and more than 80 lakh Dhaka residents rely on them daily for affordable food. The informal sector makes up around 40-43 percent of Bangladesh's GDP and accounts for over 84 percent of the entire labour force. It is time policymakers figure out how to make this sector a productive one rather than a persistent headache.

This issue is not unique to Dhaka and has already been addressed through established models elsewhere. The situation Singapore faced during the 1960s and 1970s closely resembled what Dhaka faces now. Instead of evicting hawkers indefinitely, the government relocated them to purpose-built hawker centres with proper sanitation, electricity, and waste management. These centres became popular community spaces showcasing diverse cultures and cuisines, eventually earning UNESCO recognition as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020.

India adopted a legislative route with the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which protects vendors from arbitrary eviction, mandates

citywide registration, provides identity cards, and designates vending and non-vending zones. Crucially, it created Town Vending Committees with actual vendor representation, helping reduce extortion and enabling formal taxation. Implementation across India's thousands of cities has been slow and uneven, but cities that applied the law seriously have seen real improvements.

Kuala Lumpur also turned its night markets into tourist attractions without disrupting daytime pedestrian movement. What unites all the successful cities is the principle of time-sharing where pedestrian zones are kept free of vendors during peak hours but used by vendors during off-peak times.

In the case of Bangladesh, before arriving at the solutions, the reasons behind repeated failures must be understood.

First, vendors return because they have no other way to survive. Expulsion without providing an alternative is not a solution, but rather a postponement.

Second, political interference distorts enforcement. In many Dhaka neighbourhoods, local political networks profit by collecting informal fees from vendors in exchange for protection from authorities. Any meaningful reform must break this extortion cycle. Otherwise, formalised vending zones will simply reproduce the same corruption in a new setting.

Third, the absence of legal recognition leaves vendors permanently vulnerable, giving authorities no tool except eviction. Without formal status, there is no

accountability on either side.

The answer is not bulldozers; it is smarter governance that tackles root causes at every level.

A digital registration system is the necessary foundation. A register of licensed vendors organised by wards, trades, and tenures will distinguish legitimate vendors from those who have plotted to encroach. It would also strip informal brokers of their extortion leverage, replacing backroom arrangements with a straightforward relationship between vendors and city authorities.

Dedicated vending zones on underutilised government land must be established before enforcement is escalated. These spaces need basic infrastructure—hygiene facilities, clean water, and waste disposal—not grand architecture. Dhaka South City Corporation has already proposed eight night-market sites. That proposal deserves immediate funding and implementation, not another round of committee discussions. On April 30, 2026, the DSCC and DNCC jointly launched the "Dhaka City Hawker Management Policy 2026," issuing QR-coded digital ID cards to over 300 hawkers and relocating them to designated vending zones across the city.

Time-sharing models can resolve much of the conflict over public space. Keeping main footpaths clear during peak commute hours while permitting regulated vending from the evening onward is a workable compromise that several Asian cities already run without serious difficulty.

Ward-level management committees consisting of city corporation officials, law enforcement, and elected vendor representatives should oversee implementation with genuine decision-making authority, not advisory roles. People respect rules they helped create and resist rules which are imposed on them. Any relocation also needs to be complemented by

rehabilitation services that include temporary financial assistance as well as microcredit opportunities. Without such cushioning, relocation will merely move poverty elsewhere without solving the problem.

Scepticism towards these solutions is understandable. Bangladesh does not have Singapore-level institutional capacity, and licensing schemes can easily become new avenues for corruption.

But the answer lies in sequencing. Start with two or three pilot wards—

say, one each in Dhaka North and South. Introduce the full framework, monitor, and measure against published metrics. What works gets scaled. What fails gets corrected before it spreads.

The informal sector's contribution to Bangladesh's economy and to millions of lives is too substantial to address with force alone. Registration, zoning, and genuine support would make cities more walkable, reduce congestion, improve public health, and bring informal GDP into the

formal tax base.

The streets of Dhaka belong to all its people—the commuter who must dodge traffic to reach work and the hawker whose stall is the difference between feeding a family and leaving them hungry. These two needs are not in conflict. With honest political will, evidence-based planning, and real inclusion of the people most affected, the hawker problem can shift from an embarrassment into an example of practical, human-centred urban governance.

Government of the People's of Bangladesh
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Rapid Action Battalion-12
Hatikumrul, Salanga, Sirajganj
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Invitation For e-Tender

For financial year 2025-2026, e-Tender is Invited in the national e-GP system portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of.

SL	Tender ID No & Reference	Description of Goods	Last Selling Date & Time	Closing/Opening Date & Time
1.	Tender ID No: 1270415 Ref: RAB-12/REV/2025-2026/qtr-4 Date: 10/05/2026	Edible Oil (S/Oil)	24 May 2026 11.15	24 May 2026 14.01
2.	Tender ID No: 1272432 Ref: RAB-12/REV/2025-2026/qtr-4/Dal Date: 10/05/2026	High Quality Local Mashur Dal	24 May 2026 11.15	24 May 2026 14.01

This is an online tender, where only e-tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-tender, registration in the national e-GP system portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the national e-GP system portal have to be deposited in online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the national e-GP system portal and from e-GP helpdesk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Tenderer having clarity requirements are requested to contact at 01777711202 (Assistant Director, Adj. RAB-12).


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