

Online child safety needs age assurance, not age policing

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Bangladesh's digital child protection policy still rests on a dangerously comforting illusion: that harmful online content can be managed by blocking websites. It is a politically convenient approach, because it allows the state to appear decisive without confronting the actual architecture of digital harm. It is also a technically weak approach. Bangladesh has already relied on mass blocking, including the blocking of 1,279 pornographic websites in 2019, but a blocked URL does not protect anyone. Children do not experience internet only through a list of prohibited websites. It happens through phones, feeds, games, livestreams, messaging apps, search results, advertising systems, influencer content, and increasingly, AI interfaces. A policy designed for static websites is badly mismatched with a digital environment built around algorithmic exposure.

In Bangladesh, internet access is overwhelmingly mobile and deeply embedded in everyday life. BTRC data showed that as of January 2026, Bangladesh had some 12.90 crore internet subscribers, with mobile connections accounting for the vast majority. That scale makes the relevant question unavoidable: not whether children are online, but whether Bangladesh has any credible system for deciding which digital spaces they should be allowed to enter, at what age, and under what safeguards. At present, the answer is largely no.

The United Kingdom's Online Safety Act requires strong age checks for services allowing pornography, and Ofcom has made clear that simply ticking a box to claim adulthood is no longer enough. Australia has gone further, requiring age-restricted social media platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent Australians under 16 from creating or keeping accounts, backed by penalties that

can reach 49.5 million Australian dollars. Indonesia, in March 2026, moved to restrict under-16 users from high-risk platforms including TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X. The European Union is also developing a privacy-preserving age verification approach, including a tool that allows users to prove they are over 18 without disclosing other personal information. These jurisdictions differ sharply in law and politics, but they are converging on one principle: age

design age-appropriate access into their systems before harm occurs. Criminal law can punish an offender, but it cannot by itself stop a 12-year-old from entering an adult content site, joining an unsafe stranger chat, being nudged into gambling, or receiving self-harm content through recommendation systems.

The Cyber Security Ordinance 2025, later ratified as Cyber Security Act 2026, has changed the legal landscape by replacing the Cyber Security Act 2023. Public reporting

appeal mechanisms, data minimisation rules, and penalties for negligent design. Without those elements, Bangladesh is not regulating children's digital access. It is merely reacting to the worst outcomes of unregulated access.

There is, however, a legitimate danger in rushing toward age verification without safeguards. Bangladesh's history of digital regulation gives citizens every reason to fear that a child safety policy could become another surveillance instrument. Age

to facial age estimation to trusted third-party tokens that confirm only whether a user is above or below a legal threshold. The best systems do not reveal identity when identity is unnecessary. The question should not be, "Who is this user?" It should be, "Is this user old enough for this service?" The OECD has warned that age assurance laws are spreading quickly while implementation remains complex, especially because online services operate across borders and because many services used by children still have serious gaps in their age-related practices. Bangladesh should learn from this complexity, not use it as an excuse for inaction.

The mental health and safety risks are not speculative. The US Surgeon General has stated that current evidence cannot conclude social media is sufficiently safe for children and adolescents, and has called for stronger age-appropriate health and safety standards, better privacy protections, and policies that reduce exposure to harm. Bangladesh should not wait for a domestic tragedy to accept a global evidence base that is already strong enough to demand regulatory action.

A credible Bangladeshi approach would begin by abandoning the fantasy that blocking websites equals protecting children. It would place legal duties on high-risk services, require privacy-preserving age checks for adult content and gambling, demand stronger protections in social media and gaming environments, and prohibit platforms from using children's data to optimise addictive engagement. It would also require transparency from platforms about underage users, content exposure, complaint handling, and algorithmic safeguards. Most importantly, it would subject both companies and regulators to independent oversight.

Bangladesh can either remain trapped in a censorship-based model that is easy to announce and easy to bypass, or it can build a rights-respecting age assurance regime that protects children without turning every citizen into a monitored subject. The first option is familiar, ineffective, and politically lazy. The second is difficult, technical, and institutionally demanding—but necessary. Child online safety will not come from blocking yesterday's websites. It will come from governing today's platforms with seriousness, restraint, and accountability.



FILE VISUAL: MAHIYA TABASSUM

can no longer remain a fiction written into a sign-up form.

Bangladesh is not behind merely because it lacks a specific age assurance law. It is behind because its regulatory instinct remains reactive, moralistic, and enforcement-heavy. The state blocks after panic, prosecutes after harm, and announces crackdowns after public outrage. What it does not do is require platforms, app stores, payment systems, gaming environments, and AI services to

on its approval noted provisions relating to online gambling, sexual harassment of women and children in cyberspace, and the recognition of internet access as a civic right. Those are important developments, but they do not amount to a coherent age assurance framework. They still treat child safety mainly as a matter of offences and punishment. A serious framework would instead define platform duties, minimum age thresholds, verification standards, independent audits,

assurance cannot mean forcing every user to surrender national identity data to every platform, nor can it mean building a central database of what citizens read, watch, play, or discuss. A child protection system that destroys privacy would be another policy failure dressed up as reform.

This is why Bangladesh needs age assurance, not crude age policing. Age assurance can include a spectrum of methods, from document-based verification

Good teaching still matters, but it's no longer enough



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Student satisfaction is still one of the most widely used indicators of education quality, shaping expectations for what effective teaching must deliver. There's a long-held belief in this regard about three core attributes of good education: that if teachers are knowledgeable, teach well, and connect meaningfully with students, satisfaction will follow. That belief is not wrong. But today, it is no longer enough.

From over two decades of research on student satisfaction, evidence suggests that there is a decoupling underway in the education landscape: the relationship between the three core attributes and student satisfaction has weakened substantially, not because these attributes have lost their intrinsic value, but because the locus of value creation in higher education has fundamentally shifted from an instructor-centred model to a broader, more complex ecosystem-based model.

In Bangladesh, for example, the classroom is no longer the sole centre of learning. Students today are shaped by a widening and expanding ecosystem that extends far beyond the teacher. Private coaching still plays a significant role, especially in Bangladesh's dispersed colleges under the National University system, in translating classroom material into exam success, often becoming the space where students feel they truly "learn." YouTube lectures, Facebook groups, Massive Open Online Courses (Coursera, edX, Udemer, Khan Academy), and informal peer networks have also become integral to how students understand and pursue their coursework. AI (ChatGPT, Claude, Google, etc.) has entered public and private universities to "assist" students in thinking and writing creatively, but also often to shortcut the process!

At the same time, institutional systems—registration processes, advising structures, career counselling, mental health support,

cocurricular and extracurricular activities, campus facilities—also shape students' daily experience in ways that influence how they ultimately evaluate their education.

This broader context plays out differently across public and private universities, but the underlying pattern is similar. In many public universities, large class sizes and limited resources mean that even highly capable teachers must work within constraints that push students towards external support systems that often become essential complements to formal instruction. In private universities, where smaller class sizes and more structured teaching environments are common,

more. Their judgments are shaped not only by what happens in the classroom, but also by whether their degree feels relevant to the job market, whether institutional systems are efficient and supportive, and whether the overall experience justifies the investment they are making in their education.

One unique dimension of Bangladeshi education is the entrenched coaching culture. When students come to rely on external coaching to perform well in a course, the perceived value of classroom teaching inevitably changes. A teacher may be competent, even excellent, but if the "real learning" is seen to occur outside the classroom, the link between in-class teaching and satisfaction weakens. This creates a quiet paradox in the system: students may respect their teachers, yet feel dissatisfied with their educational experience.

We must therefore be clear about what is changing and what is not. Good teaching remains indispensable. Without it, the system would quickly collapse. But it is no

longer sufficient on its own. A strong and well-crafted lecture cannot compensate for administrative inefficiencies, outdated curricula, weak links to the job market, or a system that does not adequately support students as they navigate their academic journey. Students today are not only evaluating their teachers; they are evaluating their entire educational experience.

This shift calls for a rethinking of the teacher's role. The teacher is no longer the sole source of knowledge, but they are also not marginal. Instead, the teacher can serve as a central node within a wider network of learning, one that includes technology, peers, emerging institutions, and external

influences. The challenge is not to resist this change, but to engage with it by integrating new forms of learning into teaching, to connect course content more explicitly to real-world applications, and to recognise that learning now unfolds across multiple, overlapping spaces.

At the same time, the burden of student satisfaction can no longer rest solely on the shoulders of teachers. Universities—both public and private—must take responsibility for the full ecosystem in which learning takes place. Academic quality must be

matched by administrative efficiency, relevant curricula, meaningful career pathways, and robust student support systems. Improving teaching is necessary, but improving the academic ecosystem has become equally critical. Bad political influence (in teacher selection, promotion, and administrative positions) is also an indirect but potent disruptor of student satisfaction.

The emerging truth is important for academia: good teaching, often emphasised and driven by external intervention (Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project, Higher Education Acceleration and Transformation, Institutional Quality Assurance Cell and other agency programmes), has not become less important—but it has become less sufficient. Recognising this is important as it is an invitation to rethink how we design and deliver education in Bangladesh.

In the end, the goal is not simply to teach better, but to ensure that students learn more effectively and are better prepared for the world beyond the classroom.

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students increasingly evaluate their experience through a different lens that values service quality, administrative responsiveness, and, crucially, career outcomes. In both settings, the teacher remains important, but no longer the singularly decisive factor.

When we observe students over time, a clear pattern emerges. Earlier, core teaching practices used to strongly predict satisfaction. Over time, that relationship has become weaker. Today, even strong teaching will not reliably guarantee satisfaction. This does not mean that teachers are doing less, although some in fact are skimping on diligence; it means that students are expecting and experiencing

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e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of works as follows.

| Tender ID NO. | Package Name | Online Tender Notice Publication Date & Time | Online Tender Closing Date & Time | Method |
|---------------|--|--|-----------------------------------|--------|
| 1271226 | Construction of Boundary wall Bhairab highway thana under Highway Police, Sylhet Region, Sylhet | 10-May-2026 10:00 | 20-May-2026 11:15 | OTM |
| 1271216 | Repair and Renovation of the Sathgao highway thana barrack under Highway Police, Sylhet Region, Sylhet | 10-May-2026 10:00 | 20-May-2026 11:40 | OTM |
| 1270825 | Repair and Renovation of the Sherpur highway thana barrack under Highway Police, Sylhet Region, Sylhet | 10-May-2026 10:00 | 20-May-2026 14:30:00 | OTM |

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