

## Missing the Mark on Education

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Students in Bangladesh are often sold a common narrative by educators, parents, and family members. They become overwhelmed as everyone tries to provoke them into achieving the highest marks possible on every exam of every subject. However, do high test scores correlate to producing successful leaders within the country? I argue that while grades are important, we are completely missing the bigger picture in the current Bangladeshi education system. As someone who has had exposure to both education in Bangladesh and abroad, I can attest to what differentiates successful learning in diverse settings.

As a student who attended primary school in Bangladesh, there are a few sentiments that I still recall feeling today. I was required to wear the same uniform as everyone else and thus, I looked unoriginal in appearance. I was always being told what rules to follow, while indirectly being expected to be a high achieving conformist. Today, I recognize that long term complicity under these influences rob students of their individuality, suppress character development and ultimately, obstruct their possibility for achieving greatness.

While more and more students are reaching the so called "academic success" by attaining GPA5s, the current education system is lacking the ability to give youngsters a solid foundation to emerge as leaders in both the community and the country. In order to increase development in Bangladesh, we must redefine success to mean something greater than achieving a certain exam score, landing a high salary job, or acquiring specific possessions. In my opinion, we are not aiming high enough nor are we inspiring our youth to be active change makers in society. We must energize students by instilling within them a firm belief that they are gifted, irreplaceable, and capable of creating change in a country that remains stagnant in many fields. It is our duty to encourage children to dream bigger than just being a doctor, engineer, or lawyer. Defining success by those terms have failed to produce immense progress in a country flourishing with those professionals.

The current Bangladeshi education system should be redesigned to produce future leaders for the country. We

must supplement the curriculum with modifications that encourage students to each find and nourish their own personal strengths and skills. Education should help students find their voice and passions, not suppress or erase their distinctiveness to fit society's artificial image of success. Fostering a sense of identity within the youth beyond just being a student is critical to dramatically change the landscape of Bangladesh's future.

**These are the modifications that I strongly advocate for:**

### 1) Empower students by allowing them to become active participants in their own education.

- Giving students a voice on campus and in their own learning will encourage them to take a genuine interest in advancing their studies.
- Students should be allowed to provide anonymous teacher evaluations during the middle and end of the school year. It will allow school officials to understand what changes are needed to facilitate better learning.
- Permit students to provide feedback when it comes to designing the curriculum. These suggestions will indicate to school administrators what is working well and not working for students.
- Hold yearly class student government elections to teach leadership, teamwork, and responsibility while giving students the platform to advocate for change.
- Encourage group projects in the classroom early on to foster exchange of ideas and collective innovation between students.

### 2) Reduce "coaching center" mentality from the learning culture

- Bangladesh needs to distance itself from the practice of making coaching the principal source of learning. Instead, coaching should be optional for students who are mainly struggling and in need of an extra boost.
- Only operate government certified coaching centers where they have government trained teachers. This will help eradicate unqualified tutors who are taking advantage of our weak education system.
- Teachers must teach core content in the actual classroom setting during school hours. Most of the learning should be done in the classroom, supplemented by daily homework assignments to reinforce topics taught in class.
- Reducing time spent in coaching centers will allow students to explore other hobbies and extracurricular activities.

### 3) Redesign learning curriculum to balance both the arts and sciences.

- Endorse a curriculum that emphasizes application of knowledge over memorization and regurgitation in all subject areas. Creativity and innovation should be valued over reiteration. For example, instead of forcing students to memorize poems, require them to write their own poetry.
- In the school setting, stop promoting a rigid controlled version of arts focused on following rules and achieving perfection. Students should experiment with new techniques and free form art to construct abstract creations. This will encourage thinking outside the box.
- Incorporate rare subjects like social anthropology and creative writing to challenge students to think differently and expand their thought process.
- Require students to complete 25 hours of community service, 25 hours of creative work, and 25 hours of physical activity (sports, dance, gym) every year to advance into the next grade.
- Establish a point system for service hours, which will encourage students to get involved in the community and stay engaged in caring about others. This will show students how they can each contribute to improving society and instill in them a sense of personal responsibility to others.

### 4) All public schools should be required to provide students with opportunities to regularly engage in afterschool programs and student organizations.

- Reducing the practice of relying heavily on coaching centers will vacate student's schedule, where time can be dedicated to pursuing extracurricular activities.
- Involvement in various clubs and school organizations will teach young minds professional skills, time management, but most importantly allow them to investigate depths of their personality.
- This will be a healthy way for students to socialize in school and find others with common interests.
- Extracurricular activities will give students opportunity to expand their horizons and explore new interests and experiences that are not traditionally found in the classroom.
- Afterschool programs such as debate club, photography club, math club can help supplement learning in a way that is enjoyable for students. It will also allow students to learn from each other.

### 5) Public school teachers should be required to attend a quarterly training program.

- These programs will teach educators standardized guidelines and new methods on how to effectively communicate and instruct in the classroom.
- This training program will provide quarterly updates on major knowledge gaps and advancements in subject areas.

- Educators will be taught how to better incorporate modern technology into their teaching curriculum.
- Teachers will be trained to be mindful of varying learning styles amongst children. They will be encouraged to design a study curriculum focusing on combining visual, auditory, and tactile learning styles to give every unique student an equal opportunity to acquire knowledge.
- This program can be run by professionals from international countries who are leaders in the field of education.

### 6) Colleges and universities should modify their admission criteria to be more inclusive of a wide variety of talents and skills. Institutions should look for more well-rounded students, who succeed in the classroom but also display qualities of leadership and service in the community.

- Higher education should stop relying heavily on judging the merit of students by a standardized test score. Standardized test scores do not accurately reflect a young developing person's potential. They mainly highlight who is a good test taker, while excluding creative merit and independent thinking.
- Unique skills should be openly welcomed and given proper nurturing in all academic settings, whether primary school or university.
- If institutions of learning demand more well-rounded individuals, students will naturally be interested in engaging in character building activities to boost their resume.

Schools have an obligation to nourish young minds and assist them in forming admirable qualities. From early on, students must be inspired and trained to be active participants in their education and community, which will ultimately cause them to grow into socially conscious citizens. Empowering the youth to explore their talents while fostering a sense of duty to others, will ultimately be Bangladesh's greatest ticket to an enlightenment based revolutionary progress.

The youth of Bangladesh have a bright future for they possess a lethal combination of talent and dedication. As a young nation who is less than half a century old, the potential for Bangladesh to produce home grown success stories is infinite. As Bangladeshis, our ability to be open minded and receptive to changes is what will propel the country to become a leader in learning. Currently, Bangladesh may be missing full marks in the field of education, but it is not too late to change our direction and readjust our educational objectives to rise above the expectations. As the famous adage goes, "Leaders are not born, they are created"; similarly, our education system has a moral responsibility to provide our children with the proper vessel to grow into the leaders of tomorrow. ■

