

Much left to be desired in the new school curriculum



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The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) must be commended for undertaking the long-awaited and long-needed revision of the curriculum, albeit experimentally, of Classes 6 and 7. It has also prepared useful teaching guides and are providing training to teachers. Revision of the primary school curriculum has kicked off as well and, as expected, there has been a flurry of criticism against it. However, a constructive view should be taken here, based on the overall objectives the changes are expected to meet.

First of all, it was refreshing to see that the new Bangla curriculum was designed to address the need for Bangla as the language of communication as well as the medium of learning. The content of the textbooks are organised to meet the dual purposes. Eight language-related competencies have been identified, and the materials in different chapters are presented in a coherent manner. The pedagogical approach to meet the four requirements of experiential learning is explained in the teaching guide.



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Textbook errors belie bigger concerns



The authors of English textbooks deserve credit for using Bangla in key instructions to students, and liberally using Bangla in the teaching guide. However, the previous English textbooks for Classes 6 and 7 were pretty good for communicative English. The authors would have done a better job by upgrading the old textbooks, instead of going for radically different textbooks. In the process, the authors made the new textbooks too difficult for students coming out of Class 5. This will defeat the purpose of the new curriculum; the NCTB should have taken lessons from past failures with radical changes in textbooks. Implementing the new English curriculum in a modified manner should be considered now, and a thorough review should be undertaken immediately.

The approach taken to design the curricula for other subjects is generally sound, and the content is well-conceived and well-prepared. A good foundation has been laid for all subjects, and improvements can occur with time.



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As for the teaching guides, they are designed by experts and are of high quality. However, for all the teaching guides, too much material has been given, as if the teachers are completely unaware as to how to teach. We have the following suggestions based primarily on Bangla and English teaching guides, but they are applicable for all subjects.

The guide very aptly describes the organisation of the textbook along with an explanation of competencies. However, the instructional guideline to the teachers can be more lucid and shorter. Simply put, the guideline should explain how to conduct a class, how to create an active learning environment, and how to assess that everyone is participating in the learning process. A simple and easy-to-follow rubric may be provided for the assessment of individual students.

As for how individual classes should be conducted, the guide should showcase only a few selected lessons to demonstrate how that could be done effectively. Burdening the teachers with a load of materials about how to cover each and every lesson is counterproductive; it kills creativity on the part of the teachers, as well as the desire to experiment and excel. The teaching guide should encourage teachers to innovate ways to continually improve the teaching-learning process based on the realities on the ground.

It would also be a good idea to compose two separate messages in the textbooks for students and teachers. The messages should cover the concepts and objectives of the curriculum design. The essentials of teaching and learning, and the expectations from teachers and students, should be briefly stated in the messages. The transparency will benefit both students and teachers. In addition, there should be sample questions and answers in the textbooks with an adequate number of additional questions that the students should address to develop competence, creativity, and imagination.

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‘New year, new curriculum’ cannot transform our school education



The single most important factor for success in implementing the new curriculum successfully is to secure the teachers' ownership of the curriculum. This is best done by trusting the teachers' ability and by providing training that focuses on the essentials and provides only selective input in the details. Our experience of working with rural high schools in different parts of Bangladesh between 2010 and 2022 show that teachers have the capability to impart quality education if they are trusted, if their innate desire to help students is stoked, and if they are given a simple learning-centred pedagogy that can be implemented readily and easily. In our experience, we found that demonstrating the pedagogy in a real-life classroom setting, along with participatory discussions with teachers, is the best way forward.

Quality education must cover both academic and life competencies of students. In the course of our research, we have engaged the community and the school by applying the concept of *Shikkhar Shamajik Dayitto* (Social Responsibility for Education - SSD). The programme builds a consensus that quality education for children serves the interests of everyone in the community. While the primary responsibility for quality education is borne by the school (students, teachers, and management committee members), the school alone cannot do it and needs support – material and

non-material – from parents, guardians, community members, community leaders, and community public representatives. The SSD approach motivates the community to provide the needed assistance. This creates ownership of the programme by the community and results in an expectation and demand for continued quality in the community, making sustained quality a natural outcome.

We believe that a national awareness campaign on *Shikkhar Shamajik Dayitto* will be of great assistance in achieving the desired results from the new curriculum. This can offset, at least partially, the implementation issues that hinder the outcome of the government's macro-level policies.

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