

# Quality early-year education

by Rayhan Ahmed Tapadar  18 October, 2025, 00:00

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BANGLADESH has made commendable progress in primary, secondary and higher education over the past few decades. However, when it comes to the quality of education, serious concerns remain. The decentralisation of education has not proceeded as expected. Madrassah education continues to operate separately from the mainstream system. Although there has been some progress in skills development, it remains insufficient. Another significant problem is the lack of meaningful interaction between science and technical education and industry.

The National Education Policy of Bangladesh states: 'To make education creative, application-oriented and productive for the economic and social progress of the country; to develop students as personalities with a scientific outlook and to help them develop leadership qualities.' Unfortunately, this vision appears to remain largely on paper. Education is one of the key indicators of the Human Development Index, but it is not just access to education that matters — the quality of education is now paramount. This is why quality education has been enshrined in the Sustainable Development

Goals, with Goal 4 focusing on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities.

The National Education Policy 2010 outlines as one of its objectives: 'To ensure quality higher education in all fields and to encourage students to do research and to create a suitable environment for research necessary for the country along with research in basic knowledge and science.' Yet, in practice, little progress has been made. While Bangladesh has achieved impressive gains in enrolment at different levels of education, persistent questions remain about the quality of primary education. If the educational journey begins on a weak footing, it is extremely difficult to bridge that gap in higher education or professional life.

Primary school is where children first acquire knowledge, yet there remains a wide disparity in quality between rural and urban areas. Many children attend school, but inadequate teacher quality, outdated teaching methods and ineffective curricula limit their intellectual development. As a result, the foundation of primary education remains weak, and this weakness becomes evident even at university level. Students' basic knowledge is noticeably poorer than before; many struggle with core concepts in science, mathematics and even Bengali and English. The root cause lies in the absence of a strong foundation in primary education. Consequently, students spend time compensating for earlier deficiencies rather than learning new concepts. This undermines the quality of higher education and, in the long run, reduces their competitiveness in the job market.

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The weak salary structure and inadequate training of teachers in Bangladesh further exacerbate the problem. Teachers are the main driving force behind a nation's development, yet primary school teachers in Bangladesh still lack adequate social status and financial security. When teachers are

preoccupied with making ends meet, they cannot devote their full attention to their students' intellectual growth. Moreover, many lack proper pedagogical training, preventing them from adopting modern teaching methods.

International comparisons highlight Bangladesh's shortcomings. India, through its National Education Policy 2020, has placed great emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy at the primary stage, and regularly organises training workshops for teachers. In China, primary school teachers enjoy high social status, with average monthly salaries equivalent to 70,000–80,000 Bangladeshi taka. The teaching profession is highly respected, attracting talented individuals. Sri Lanka's education system is among the most advanced in South Asia, ensuring good salaries and regular training for teachers, even in rural areas.

In European countries, teachers are held in particularly high regard. In Finland, for example, a master's degree is required to teach at primary level. Across the Nordic region, entry into the profession is highly competitive, and teachers are considered respected professionals. In countries where teachers' pay and status are high, educational outcomes tend to be stronger and more sustainable.

In contrast, Bangladesh's recruitment of primary teachers is often plagued by irregularities, weaknesses and political influence. Regular training is rare, and where it exists, its quality is often questionable. Experts argue that if salaries and professional status are improved, and regular high-quality training introduced — as in developed countries — the quality of education would rise significantly. At present, primary school salaries are not attractive, which discourages talented individuals from joining or remaining in the profession.

If, however, teacher salaries were competitive and linked to a clear career progression path, teaching could become a first-choice profession for talented young people. Higher salaries are not merely a financial incentive — they also foster dignity, self-esteem and long-term professional commitment. Salary increases should be linked to accountability and continuous professional development, such as completing regular training, participating in peer observation, and accepting postings in rural or remote areas in return for allowances or promotion opportunities.

Effective training modules should cover areas such as literacy, numeracy, child psychology, inclusive education, continuous assessment, library culture, hands-on science and mathematics activities, and digital learning methods. At the same time, systemic issues such as large class sizes, lack of educational materials, and an excessive focus on rote, test-based learning act as barriers. Reducing class sizes to 30–35, appointing assistant teachers, establishing libraries in every school, organising

weekly reading festivals, and supplying affordable science and mathematics kits are crucial steps. Strengthening primary education requires more than constructing buildings; it demands investment in learning infrastructure — libraries, laboratories, teaching materials, a peaceful environment and, above all, trained teachers.

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The importance of primary education extends beyond individual benefit; it has profound social and economic implications. A child who receives a strong foundation in mathematics, science, language and moral education is more likely to excel later, become a skilled worker, and contribute to national productivity, employment creation and poverty reduction. Developed countries regard investment in education not as an expense but as a long-term investment — a perspective Bangladesh must adopt.

In essence, primary education forms the bedrock of national development. If we fail to strengthen this foundation today, future generations will continue to stumble. Elevating the status of teachers, improving their qualifications, ensuring proper training and modernising curricula are essential steps towards building this foundation. As Bangladesh advances on its development journey, investing in quality education has never been more crucial. Today's primary students are tomorrow's doctors, engineers, scientists, administrators and political leaders; if their foundation is weak, so too will be the nation's future.

It is time to learn from the experiences of developed countries and bring primary education to the forefront of national priorities. Students are the future of the nation, and without an effective education system, that future cannot be secured. Bangladesh must move away from the obsession with GPA scores and overburdened syllabuses. Education should not be a matter of coercion, as is too often the case. Students currently have little opportunity to make their own choices. Even those who achieve good results often do not understand how their education relates to societal or national development.

A flawed education system has created uncertainty in the job market, pushing some students towards despair and, in extreme cases, suicide. As the saying goes, 'If we do not wake up, how will the morning come?' A comprehensive, unified education framework is urgently needed to replace the fragmented systems currently in place. This is particularly true for madrasa education, which requires substantial reform. The benefits may not be immediate, but if action is taken today, the landscape could transform within 20 to 25 years. The students of today are the torch bearers of tomorrow, and it is through them that Bangladesh can move forward.

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