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Education Policy of Bangladesh and It's Future: An Analysis

Merry Proma Biswas^{1*}

¹MA Thesis Student, English Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna,
Bangladesh.

Corresponding Author: *Merry Proma Biswas, merryproma1@gmail.com

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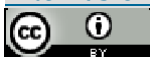
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ABSTRACT

This study examines Bangladesh's education policy and its prospects through the lens of Human Capital Theory. Education is essential for developing human resources, increasing productivity, and supporting sustainable national development. While previous research has focused on educational access, literacy, and policy implementation, limited attention has been given to the education system's preparedness for challenges such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, climate change, globalization, and changing labor-market demands. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes government policy documents, academic literature, and reports from national and international organizations. Findings reveal progress in educational access, literacy, and gender equity, but challenges remain in quality, teacher development, technological integration, curriculum relevance, and workforce preparedness. Future-oriented reforms are necessary.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most critical pillars of national development, social progress, and economic growth. Education in developing countries like Bangladesh is not only a human right, but it is also a strategic instrument to fight poverty, social injustice, and improve human capital (Islam, 2022). Bangladesh has made various efforts to make education more accessible, improve literacy, achieve gender parity, and build a skilled workforce for national development since gaining independence. Although progress has been made, there are still serious issues concerning the quality of education, curriculum relevance, teacher competencies, technological integration, and policy implementation in the education sector (Abedi, 2024). Moreover, globalization, the speed of technological development, artificial intelligence, climate change, and changing demands on the labour market have posed new challenges that demand a more adaptive and future-oriented education system. Therefore, the assessment of the effectiveness of existing educational policies is becoming more important (Government of Bangladesh, 2010).

The present study is an attempt to examine the historical evolution, status, and prospects of education policy in the context of Human Capital Theory in Bangladesh. The study adds to the body of knowledge by filling a gap in the literature, namely, considering the education policy of Bangladesh from a future-oriented perspective (Ali et al., 2023). This research differs from previous studies, which have largely examined the access and implementation barriers to education, by assessing the readiness of existing policies to address new challenges in the global world and the needs of the workforce. The study also contributes to the theoretical knowledge by applying the Human Capital Theory to evaluate the impact of educational policies on the improvement of knowledge, skills, productivity, and national competitiveness in the long term. The results will be useful to the policy makers, teachers, and researchers in building an education system that is more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable in Bangladesh (Rahaman et al., 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human Capital Theory regards education as an investment that increases the knowledge, skills, and productivity of individuals, which in turn leads to economic growth and national development (Egorov et al., 2022). According to this theory, educational expenditure should be regarded as an investment in human resources rather than a social cost. Education enhances individual productivity and benefits society, while investment in education and training raises human capabilities and workforce efficiency (Schultz, 1961). In South Asia,

educational reforms have increasingly been geared towards human capital development to meet the demands of globalization and economic modernization. The education policies in the region are geared towards producing a skilled workforce that will contribute to the nation's development and competitiveness (Lall, 2015). Education has increasingly emphasized employability, technological competencies, and workforce readiness to meet evolving labor market demands (Sood, 2012). The human capital theory has several principles that are reflected in the educational policies of Bangladesh. Universal education, technological literacy, vocational education, creativity, critical thinking, and skill development are key elements in the formation of human capital (Ministry of Education, 2010). Moreover, there is a growing need for strong language skills and communication competence to enhance Bangladesh's competitiveness in the international market, alongside curriculum reforms that equip students with the skills required for the labor market (Rahman et al., 2019). The need for digital transformation, AI, and future workforce skills has been increasingly recognised in recent scholarship in educational planning. Technology is enhancing educational access and learning outcomes when used appropriately (Shi, 2025). The OECD underscores the importance of digital literacy, adaptability, and lifelong learning as key competencies for the twenty-first century. Similarly, future job prospects will increasingly rely on technological skills, creativity, and ongoing training (World Economic Forum, 2025). The need for education systems that are inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented, capable of meeting the needs of children and young people in the face of inequality, climate change, and sustainable development targets (UNICEF, 2024).

Although there has been substantial progress in educational access and literacy, human capital development in Bangladesh remains constrained by a variety of issues, including weak linkages between education and employment, urban-rural gaps, curriculum limitations, and insufficient teacher training (UNESCO, 2021). Hence, the Human Capital Theory is a useful tool to analyse the education policy in Bangladesh and its prospects. Based on this theory, the present study examines the possibility of using educational policies to build up the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for sustainable national development in a globalised and technologised world.

RESEARCH GAP

While there are many studies on educational access, literacy, gender parity, and policy implementation in Bangladesh, few studies have investigated the education policy from a future perspective (World Bank, 2022). The literature tends to reflect current problems, not assess the readiness of education policies

for future problems like digital transformation, artificial intelligence, climate change, and evolving labour market needs. Moreover, there are very few studies on the aspect of Human Capital Theory and the effectiveness of education policy in developing skills and competencies for long-term economic growth and competitiveness in Bangladesh (Islam & Alam, 2023). So, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the historical development, current status, and prospects of education policy in Bangladesh from the perspective of Human Capital Theory, focusing on human capital development and preparedness of the future workforce.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study is a qualitative descriptive research design to analyse the history, situation, and future of education policy in Bangladesh. The research has relied on secondary data obtained from government policy documents, academic journals, books, and reports by various organizations like UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank. A document analysis technique is used to examine and analyse relevant literature and policy documents.

Population and Sample

This study is based on the population of all the available literature, policy documents, and reports related to education policy in Bangladesh. The sample consists of selected sources directly relevant to the research topic, including the National Education Policy 2010, UNESCO reports, World Bank publications, and peer-reviewed academic studies on educational reform, human capital development, and future education challenges in Bangladesh.

Data Analysis Tools

Thematic analysis is used for the analysis of the collected data. This will include the identification and analysis of themes and patterns in the chosen literature. The main topics are educational reform, quality of education, human capital development, technological development, globalization, and future policy issues. The findings are presented within the context of Human Capital Theory to assess the success and future course of education policy in Bangladesh. The sources were chosen based on their relevance, credibility, recency, and contribution to understanding the education policy and human capital development in Bangladesh.

Research Result

The study adopted a document analysis method by analyzing policy documents, government reports, and scholarly literature on education policy in Bangladesh. Thematic analysis revealed several important themes related to the development, progress, problems, and prospects of education policy in Bangladesh (Karim & Kabir, 2025).

Table 1
Summary of Research Findings

Theme	Key Findings
Historical Development	Education policy evolved from colonial and centralized systems to a national framework focused on inclusion and development.
Access and Equity	Enrollment rates, literacy levels, and gender parity have improved significantly.
Educational Quality	Learning outcomes, curriculum relevance, and critical thinking skills remain areas of concern.
Teacher Development	Shortages of qualified teachers and inadequate professional training affect educational effectiveness.
Digital Transformation	Technology integration has expanded, but disparities in digital access persist between urban and rural areas.
Skill Development	Curricula often fail to meet contemporary labor-market requirements and twenty-first-century skills demands.
Policy Implementation	Financial constraints, infrastructure limitations, and administrative challenges hinder policy effectiveness.
Future Challenges	Globalization, artificial intelligence, climate change, and workforce transformation require policy adaptation.

A HISTORY OF EDUCATION POLICY IN BANGLADESH: PHASES OF CHANGE

Bangladesh's education policy is intricately linked to its political, cultural, and developmental history. Education has traditionally been seen as a national vehicle for development, social equality, and mobility (Ahmed, 2024). Yet, reform has taken a varied historical trajectory marked by political, economic, and international factors.

Colonial and Pakistan Eras: Before Independence (Before 1971)

Before 1971, the area that is now Bangladesh was under British colonial domination, and then East Pakistan. In the colonial era, education policy was primarily introduced to meet colonial needs. The education system prioritised English language instruction and Western education to produce an educated class to help with the administration of the colony (Macedo, 2019). This system brought modern education, but also inequalities. Education was elitist, favouring urban over rural areas. Regional languages, cultures, and needs were neglected, making education irrelevant to society. In 1947, East Bengal became East Pakistan. But educational policy-making was still highly centralised in West Pakistan. Urdu became the national language, disregarding the Bengali language, leading to resentment among Bengalis. Education was thus associated with political and cultural struggles (Jabeen, 2023). So, before independence, education policy reflected the power of external forces. These inequalities and weaknesses in the education system posed significant problems for the fledgling nation of Bangladesh.

Education for Nation Building (Post 1971)

Bangladesh's independence in 1971 ushered in a new era of education. After the war, the nation was keen to rebuild its institutions. Education was seen as vital to rebuilding. The Quadrat-e-Khuda Education Commission (1972) was a milestone. It advocated a secular, democratic, and scientific education system based on the Bengali language and culture (Rob et al., 2020). It recommended free primary education, increased technical and vocational education, and the role of education in social change. This was a period of optimism and looking forward. Education was not viewed as a commodity but to create an independent, modern, and just society. But political turmoil, financial constraints, and bureaucratic ineptitude hindered the implementation of many of the recommendations. Nevertheless, this period laid the groundwork for future reforms and constituted the first effort to harmonise education policy with the aspirations and realities of Bangladesh as an independent state.

Political Reorientation and Reform (1979)

The reforms of 1979 marked a significant change in the educational system. By this point, there had been significant political shifts in Bangladesh, which affected policy (Roy et al., 2020). The National Education Advisory Committee implemented reforms that emphasised moral and religious education more than previous secular approaches. Curriculum changes reflected the state's ideology, and education served to promote a new national identity. Meanwhile, policymakers continued to tackle access and institutional building. But this period highlighted how political realities can shape education policy. Policy churns undermined policy stability and implementation (Menzies, 2026). This era reveals one of the problems with Bangladesh's education system: instability. It also highlights the need for non-partisan and sustainable educational policies.

Democratisation and Access (1991)

Parliamentary democracy was restored in 1991, marking the beginning of a new phase of education development. Bangladesh began to bring its policies in line with international objectives such as Education for All, focusing on enrolment, literacy, and gender equality (Dutta, 2025). At this time, the government launched initiatives to enhance school enrolment, especially for girls and the poor. This led to substantial improvements in primary education enrolment and earned Bangladesh recognition for its improvements in social inclusion (UNESCO, 2015). But the emphasis on access highlighted problems. Though more children were in school, many schools did not have qualified teachers, facilities, or modern teaching materials. The issue of quality became more acute, particularly in rural regions (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2015). The expansion of private education also reshaped the system, with new opportunities and challenges. Wealthy families could afford higher-quality education, while the poor were left with poorly resourced public education. This period showed that success in education cannot be gauged solely by numbers. Other factors such as quality, relevance, and equity are also important.

A New and Inclusive Framework (2010)

The National Education Policy 2010 is considered one of the most progressive reforms of the country's education system. It aimed to redress structural deficiencies and the challenges of the future. This policy advocated universal and compulsory education, curriculum reform, creativity, critical thinking, and technology. It also prioritised teacher training, equal opportunities, and improved education-national development connections (Government of Bangladesh, 2010). One of the key features of this policy was an awareness of globalisation and digitalisation. It noted the need for English language skills, digital skills, and vocational skills to enable students to meet the demands of the global economy. But, as with past reforms, there have been implementation issues. Poor infrastructure, lack of teacher readiness, and urban-rural divide remain a challenge to policy objectives (World Bank, 2022). Nonetheless, the 2010 policy is the best foundation for the future of education in Bangladesh.

Current State: Education in Bangladesh Today

Currently, the education system in Bangladesh is a combination of success, fragility, and change. The last few decades of policy reform have resulted in increased access to education, but the system is still plagued by issues of quality, equity, resilience, and sustainability (Karim & Kabir, 2025). Access to education has been a major success. Primary and secondary education rates have improved significantly, and there has been progress in gender parity. This is a result of sustained efforts in providing stipends, engaging communities, and implementing policy reforms to remove barriers for disadvantaged students (UNESCO, 2021). But access hasn't addressed concerns about quality. There are disparities in learning outcomes, and students are not proficient in literacy, numeracy, and analytical skills. The persistence of examination-focused and rote-based teaching and learning restricts creativity and critical thinking. This can lead to students advancing through the education system without acquiring the skills required for higher education and the workforce (World Bank, 2022). An area of concern is the employability gap. Students are increasingly looking for skills like communication, leadership, financial, and critical thinking skills, but many educational institutions still focus on academic routes. A study on young people's views in Bangladesh reveals students' keen interest in curriculum and quality of teaching to equip them with the skills needed for the world of work (British Council, 2024).

Preparation of teachers is also a major challenge. While policy documents prioritise teacher training, there is a lack of trained teachers and up-to-date teaching materials in many schools. This is especially the case in rural and marginalised areas. A further critical factor has been climate change. In 2024, extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods, and cyclones impacted the education of 35 million children in Bangladesh. In some areas, students lost eight weeks of learning time because of climate-related school closures (UNICEF, 2025). This suggests an increasing vulnerability of the education system and the

need for climate-proof infrastructure and learning approaches. Digital technologies are also key to modernisation. The pandemic highlighted the benefits and challenges of online education. Cities were quicker to embrace digital platforms, but rural students did not have access to the internet, devices, or digital supports. The digital divide is a critical issue for equity. On the policy front, funding issues remain a concern. While educational expenditure has grown, the proportion of national expenditure as a percentage of GDP is still low, which could be unsustainable in the long run. Effective and sufficient funding is critical for reforms to be implemented and have an impact (Lewin, 2023).

Overall, Bangladesh is at a crossroads in its education system. It has grown, but now it faces the challenges of a new world, with climate change, technology, the labour market, and society. The thematic analysis highlights the impressive strides Bangladesh has made in education access and inclusion. Despite these advances, however, problems in educational quality, teacher preparation, the integration of technology, and the preparedness of the workforce are still obstacles to the success of educational reform. The results suggest that human capital development, innovation, and educational resilience should be key areas of focus for future policy initiatives.

DISCUSSION

The results show that the education policy has undergone a tremendous transformation from the colonial era to the present, which is due to the shifting national priorities and development objectives (Imam, 2012). Education policy has been one of the most important factors in the social and economic development of Bangladesh. In the last few decades, there have been several educational reforms, which have led to higher enrolment rates, better literacy, and greater gender equality (Rahaman et al., 2024). These achievements are in keeping with the Government's drive to increase educational opportunities and are consistent with the aims of the National Education Policy 2010.

But the research shows that greater access does not necessarily lead to better education. There are still many students who have problems developing their critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical skills for today's society. This indicates that quantity is not enough to guarantee quality in education. Quality of education is a significant issue, especially in rural and disadvantaged communities where access to resources and qualified teachers is often restricted (Schwartz et al., 2019).

The results also emphasise the pivotal role of teacher development. While teacher training is highlighted in policy documents, there are still implementation issues to address for improving classroom effectiveness. According to Human Capital Theory, the more an individual invests in education, the more productive he or she will become, and the more productive he or she becomes, the more productive the nation will become (Becker, 1964).

Thus, low investment in teacher quality directly impacts human capital development and reduces educational outcomes.

The other significant discovery is the increasing impact of technological development on education. New learning opportunities, new ways to learn online have emerged, but there are significant disparities in access to digital resources (Guscott, 2026). Digital inclusion should therefore be a key concern of future educational policies to guarantee equal educational opportunities for all learners.

The study also illustrates a mismatch between educational attainment and expectations in the labor market. Employers are looking for graduates who have communication skills, technological skills, adaptability, and critical thinking skills. But there are still many schools using the old, test-based methods. Therefore, curriculum reform and skill-based learning have become a must for future development of education (Buddhadev, 2025).

In the view of Human Capital Theory, education should be a tool to create productive, innovative, and skilled citizens. The results indicate that improving educational quality, increasing the usage of technology, improving teacher training, and making the curriculum more relevant to the needs of a rapidly changing global economy are critical for the future success of Bangladesh's educational system (Karim & Kabir, 2025). These reforms will enable education to play a more effective role in sustainable national development and long-term economic growth.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the education policy in Bangladesh has changed significantly during the colonial era and the present, which corresponds to the political, social, and developmental priorities of the country. A range of reforms has achieved some success in extending access to education, enhancing literacy, and advancing gender equality. Despite these issues, around educational quality, teacher development, curriculum relevance, technology integration, and effective implementation of policies remain a challenge to achieve desired outcomes (Abedi, 2024). Education, according to Human Capital Theory, is still an important investment for the development of the nation and economic growth (Yang, 2020). The results suggest that the nation's educational system will need to be equipped with a skilled, flexible, and creative workforce to meet the challenges of a dynamic global context to ensure future educational success in Bangladesh. Thus, education policies need to change and pay more attention to quality, skills development, and educational resilience. Some recommendations are given below:

1. Increase teacher training and professional development efforts.
2. Update curricula to incorporate critical thinking, creativity, communication, and digital literacy.

3. Increase technological infrastructure and minimize the digital divide between urban and rural areas.
4. Invest more in education to enhance facilities, resources, and policy implementation.
5. Ensure vocational and skills education is integrated to ensure learning outcomes are relevant to the labour market.
6. Create education programs that are resilient to climate change and reduce the impact of environmental issues on education.
7. Encourage inclusive education policies, ensuring equitable access for disadvantaged and marginalized learners.

The recommendations put forward here can help shape a Bangladesh education system that is ready for the future and has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to sustainable national development and competitiveness.

ADVANCED RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

While Bangladesh has made substantial strides in access and literacy, there are still some issues with the quality of education, technology integration, teacher training, and readiness of the workforce. The effectiveness of the latest educational reforms in relation to the new challenges of the twenty-first century, including artificial intelligence, digital learning, climate change, and twenty-first-century skills, should be studied in the future. Future research using primary data collected from the policy makers, teachers, and students can give a better understanding of the practical implementation of education policies and their role in human capital development in Bangladesh.

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