

# Six elements accelerating education for a Smart Bangladesh, and Smart World



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## Smart Bangladesh takes the country's education system to the next level

Covid-19 rattled our  
age-old mindset and  
pushed us towards  
unprecedented  
opportunities to  
achieve quality  
education

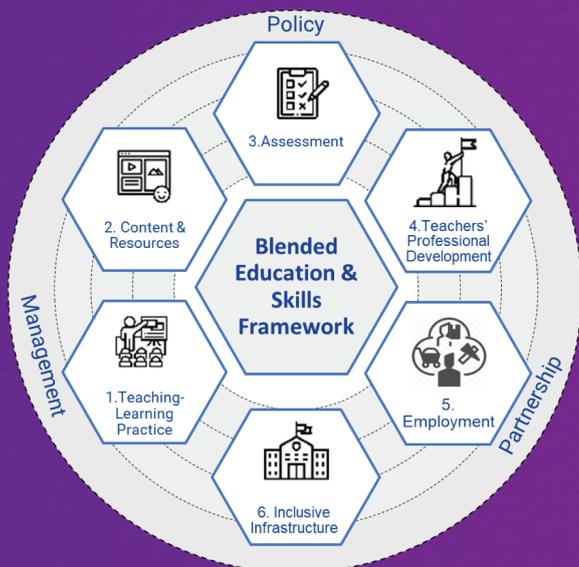
A six-element  
blended education  
framework is integral  
to realise these  
opportunities

Multiple actors need  
to meaningfully and  
continuously  
collaborate, guided by  
an empowered  
convening entity,  
informed by global  
best practices

When schools in Bangladesh closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Ismat, a secondary school teacher from rural Ashuganj, knew that with each passing day, her students were falling behind more and more. Instead of waiting for solutions to be handed down by her administration, she decided to “be the solution”. She experimented with ways of teaching using social media live, video conferencing and even visiting students’ homes on occasion—driven by a deep understanding of the digital context of their lives.

This story of Ismat was not unique in Bangladesh; many self-driven teachers innovated solutions to continue education virtually during the pandemic. Schools were closed but thousands of teachers ensured that education was not. How did teachers find the courage to pioneer such innovation? Partially through their decade-long experience of constructing and sharing digital content through a teacher-for-teacher social media platform.

During this time, various other educational innovations were also being launched by government and non-government actors through television, radio, phone and the internet.



## Blended Education for All (BEFA) Framework by Bangladesh Government

From the ashes of the pandemic seemed to emerge the foundation for an education ecosystem with future-ready features. This led to the World Economic Forum piece 5 questions to ask now to shape blended learning of the future. This piece, in turn, inspired the formation of an interministerial National Blended Education Taskforce in Bangladesh, led by the Minister of Education, with ten other ministries spanning across education, health, skills development, ICT, telecommunications and even planning and finance and various non-state educational actors.

This comprehensive formation was a first in the country's history to solve the problems of education: make it market-ready, future-ready, and aspiration-ready. It was to leverage cutting edge technologies and methods and do it together, involving whole-of-government and whole-of-society.

This empowered committee generated plans for an inclusive blended education ecosystem, which combined high-, low-, and no-tech resources to enable all learners to have greater control over where they learn, when they learn, and how they learn.

## Six elements of education for a Smart Bangladesh

How could education be comprehensively planned with such diverse entities?

A simple sense-making framework had to be used: its result is the 10-year Blended Education Master Plan, costing at about \$20 billion.

The plan is guided by the following six elements:

### 1. Teaching Learning Practices: Learning how to learn

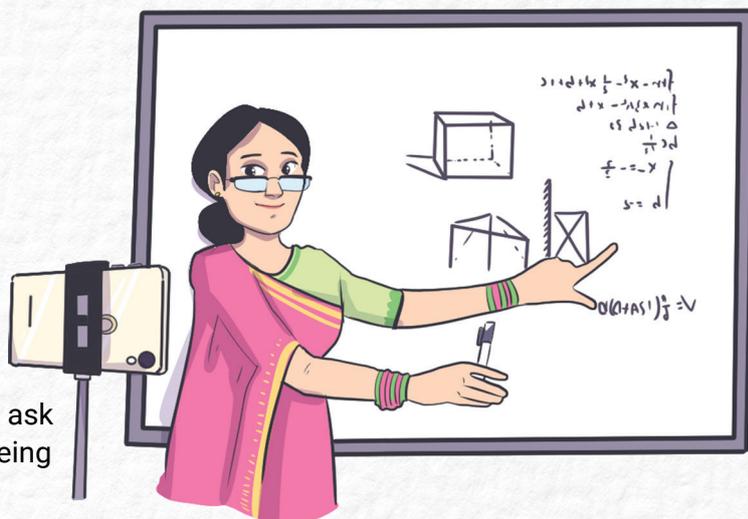
Internet search engines means that the days of memorising facts are long gone.

If our learners are to thrive in an increasingly complex and ambiguous tomorrow, they must learn how to learn, ask questions and solve problems. There are six figure jobs being offered now simply to give ChatGPT better prompts.

Problem-solving cannot be taught through mere lectures.

The ongoing national curriculum reform in Bangladesh focuses on experiential learning and problem-based learning (PBL) approaches in classrooms. Early signs show promise, demonstrating that suburban students are doing better than their urban counterparts because the latter are methodically trained by schools and private tutors to memorize and regurgitate.

However, acceptability of these new approaches by teachers and families varies, given the radical departure from the conventional teaching-learning methods.



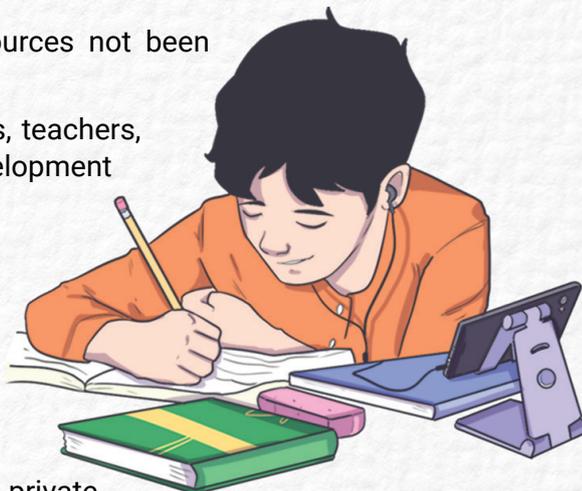
## 2. Educational Content and Resources: Ensuring inclusion and personalisation

Ismat's story would not be possible had digital content and resources not been developed to continue education virtually during the pandemic.

This took unprecedented collaboration between government entities, teachers, digital content creators, startups, EdTech companies, and development partners.

As teaching-learning practices are to change, so must all content and resources—teacher guides, workbooks, school-based resources and learning content. Various public and private institutions are already putting up massive budgets to produce digital content: for instance, the approved budget of various digital content development initiatives of the ICT Ministry is around \$800 million until 2027.

What is needed is careful coordination across all the public and private stakeholders producing digital content so that both duplication and gaps may be avoided.



## 3. Assessment: Measuring the real-time of and for learning

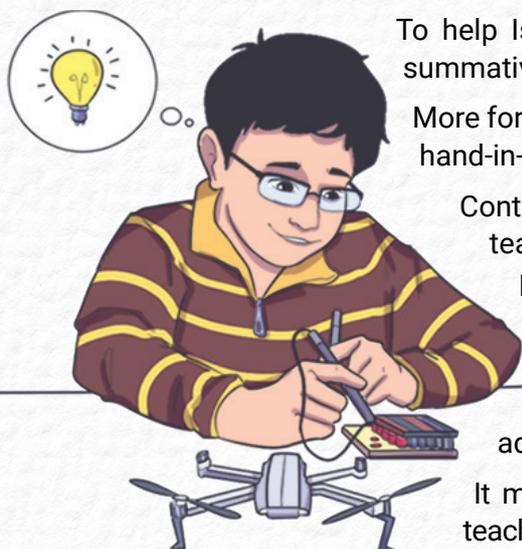
To help Ismat's students learn, traditional assessments of learning—mostly of the summative nature—are not sufficient.

More formative and continuous assessment for learning must be the way, which goes hand-in-hand with both experiential learning and the emphasis on learning to learn.

Continuous assessment tools are being piloted in Bangladesh, empowering teachers to use a smartphone app to track student assessment and learning. AI plays a major role in this transformation.

This has enabled teachers to generate personalised reports for learners, reduce learner "wait" time for feedback, lower teacher time spent on grading and strengthen data-driven decision making systems for administrators.

It must be understood that formative assessment is a major paradigm shift for teachers, administrators and even parents. It must be nurtured carefully for adoption.



## 4. Teacher Professional Development: Transforming 'sages on the stage' to 'guides on the side'

Ismat knew how to execute during the pandemic. Imagine how much bigger her impact could have been had she been trained the right way—to be facilitators and not mere lecturers.

Dependence on face-to-face teacher professional development (TPD) is costly and resource-intensive, leading to wastage in time and money and causing disruption in already teacher-starved schools. Bangladesh's move towards blended TPD for its 1 million teacher workforce is showing great promise, enabling teachers to have more time in classroom and supportive materials.

This transition to blended TPD is heavily facilitated by nearly 2,500 tech-savvy teacher ambassadors. These are "super-teachers" acting as change-agents within teacher communities.

Ismat, for example, was encouraged by teacher ambassadors over the years and she is becoming a teacher ambassador herself. This very promising transformation of the teachers' role from sages to guides requires mental rewiring and a cultural disruption, which must go through consistent behavioural nudges by the teacher educators and educational administration.



## 5. Employment: Learning to earn

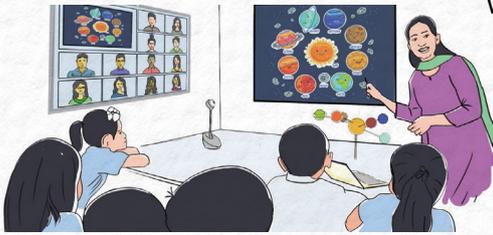
The mismatch between supply and demand is an iconic issue for graduates from education systems in developing countries. It is often facetiously said that education creates more unemployment than it creates employment, at least in the tertiary sector. It is because the archaic content and style of education fail to supply graduates with appropriate knowledge and skills demanded by the market, domestic and foreign alike.

To address this, the government of Bangladesh developed a one-stop collective intelligence platform. This enables matchmaking among employers, job seekers, and skills training providers. The platform also empowers policy makers to orchestrate the right coordination in a timely manner to ensure evidence-informed decisions. The collective intelligence platform requires continuous and trusted collaboration among the 20+ ministries, 40+ industry associations and thousands of training providers for meaningful data analysis and informed decision making.



## 6. Inclusive Infrastructure: Leaving no one behind

Without thinking about devices, digital platforms, electricity, data hosting and connectivity, access to blended education cannot be realized. To raise the bar for what we mean by access, infrastructure has to be inclusive and meaningful, ensuring an appropriate device, high-speed broadband connectivity at affordable cost. Curiously, with all the public and private expenditure in digital infrastructure, we are still very far from affordable universal broadband access for educational institutions, teachers and students. In Bangladesh, the cost for infrastructure is estimated to be about USD 8 billion. Global public-private partnerships are necessary to make this happen. Without it, the richness of the digital content, the maturity of TPD and the market-readiness of assessment do not reach the learners ultimately. Working together—public and private sectors, local and global partners—we need to innovate disruptive business models to create public infrastructure for blended education for all.



## Smart Bangladesh for a Smart World

At the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting 2022 in Davos, we announced Bangladesh's participation in WEF's Accelerators Network, fostering public-private-people partnerships to continuously mature the country's blended education ecosystem along the six elements.

In line with Vision 2041 for Smart Bangladesh recently unveiled by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the resulting Smart Education Accelerator intends to:

- **Connect** with local and global best practices: This will be done through establishing a community of purpose, consisting of a diverse range of actors (public-private-people). Physical and virtual spaces will be curated to facilitate connection and trust among the relevant actors. In the spirit of connection, the accelerator will play a part in clarifying purposes, convening the right people, cultivating trust, coordinating trust and collaborating generously.
- **Innovate** to solve the country's educational challenges: This will involve providing resources and support for rapid prototyping, research, and development of inclusive blended education solutions. The types of innovation will be technological, pedagogical, and financial.
- **Scale up** the most impactful innovations, based on the evidence, to transform the comprehensive education ecosystem. The appropriate scaling strategy will need to be explored, whether it is through seeking government adoption, distributing through existing platforms, spreading the idea open-source, etc.

We are confident that the model will inform similar transformative processes in other countries, both developing and developed, resulting in a smarter world where all its learners are equipped to "be the solutions" for the challenges of today and tomorrow. This is our commitment from "Bangladesh to the world."

