

Accelerating Blended Education for Smart Bangladesh

EVENT SUMMARY

JUNE 2023



International Consultation on Accelerating Blended Education for Smart Bangladesh

16 May 2023 05:00 PM Grand Ball Room, Sheraton Dhaka

Organized by Ministry of Education in collaboration with World Economic Forum & Aspire to Innovate-a2i



Background

The international consultation workshop on Accelerating Blended Education for Smart Bangladesh was hosted by the [Ministry of Education of Bangladesh](#), the [World Economic Forum](#) and [a2i \(Aspire to Innovate\)](#). The workshop was the first meeting of the Education Accelerator in Bangladesh, part of the [Global Accelerators Network](#) supported by the World Economic Forum. It is a unique platform that bridges best-in class ideas and tangible implementation across countries and sectors, creating a network to share ideas, collaboration and practices. Through the accelerator, governments and businesses can trailblaze systemic change in their countries and leverage the Forum's global platform to find new partners, showcase impact, learn and share with others.

In line with the vision of Smart Bangladesh 2041, the Ministry of Education has taken innovative approaches in transforming the national curriculum, introducing blended teacher professional development at scale, incorporating multimedia content and experimenting with digitized methods of recording formative assessment. Within the National Taskforce for Blended Education and Skills, the Ministry of Education is responsible for overseeing and tracking detailed implementation plans, based on the National Blended Education and Skills Masterplan.

The Accelerator in Bangladesh was launched by Dipu Moni, Minister of Education, at the World Economic Forum [Annual Meeting 2022 in Davos](#) and, since then, has been coordinated by the Ministry of Education and a2i. The accelerator aims to integrate blended education into Bangladesh's mission towards higher-quality, inclusive and smart education, skills and human resource development. The accelerator works under the leadership of its Co-Chairs: Dr. Dipu Moni, Minister of Education; Zunaid Ahmed Palak, Minister of State for ICT of Bangladesh; Asif Saleh, Executive Director, BRAC; and Rubana Huq, Chairperson, Mohammadi Group and Vice-Chancellor, Asian University for Women.

Objective

The consultation was an opportunity for the first meeting of Co-Chairs to set the vision and direction of the accelerator and launch an active phase of the initiative. It also brought together relevant partners and stakeholders from government, business, education and civil society to share insights, establish partnerships and launch new collaborations.

The specific objectives of the workshop were to:

- Increase knowledge of key trends and forces shaping the education system around the world and in Bangladesh
- Raise awareness of the role of public-private partnerships in building education systems for the future economy and society
- Establish a community of purpose interested in partnering on accelerating blended education in Bangladesh

Event Summary



Opening Remarks

The consultation featured opening remarks by Suleman Khan, Secretary, Secondary and Higher Education Division (SHED) & Member Secretary, National Taskforce for Blended Education & Skills. He acknowledged the rapid challenges in bridging the gaps within the education system and the efforts made to address them. Despite resource limitations, he acknowledged how the multiple ministries, directorates, international organizations such as the World Economic Forum and a2i had come together as partners to contribute to achieve the vision of a Smart Bangladesh 2041.



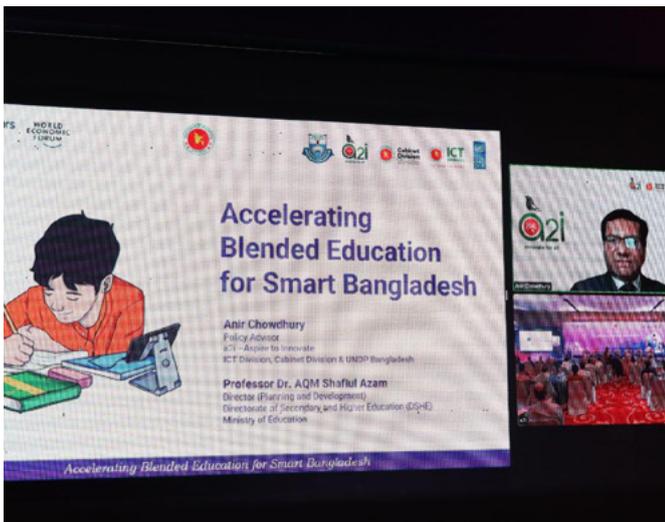
Keynote Presentation 1

Tanya Milberg, Lead, Education, Skills and Learning, World Economic Forum, was the first of two keynote speakers. The presentation identified current and future skills needs and gaps to be addressed around the world. It shed

light on the importance of boosting lifelong learning and access to skills-based opportunities as 49% of the global workforce has been found to be not employed in line with qualifications, according to the Putting Skills First white paper. Milberg emphasized how the accelerator acts as a national platform to encourage collaboration among stakeholders to boost economic output for future innovation.

Keynote Presentation 2

The second keynote speaker, Anir Chowdhury, Policy Adviser, a2i, introduced the Blended Education and Skills Framework, a review of the activities of the Education Ministry and relevant directorates under the accelerator and the inter-ministerial National Taskforce. The focus had been on the mission of the accelerator to connect, explore and scale-up innovations across Bangladesh. He encouraged all learners to bring out their “I am the solution” attitude to thrive in a Smart Bangladesh.



Panel Discussion

The presentations were followed by a panel discussion, Towards Smart Education for Smart Bangladesh: Role of Public-Private-People Partnerships in Accelerating the Implementation of Blended Education in Bangladesh. The panellists, who included representatives from various sectors, shared their insights and experiences and are listed below:

- **Md. Kamal Hossain**
Senior Secretary,
Technical and Madrasah Education Division
- **Suleman Khan**
Secretary, Secondary and Higher Education Division
- **Md. Shamsul Arefin**
Secretary, Information and Communication Technology
Division
- **Nasreen Afroz**
Executive Chairman (Secretary),
National Skills Development Authority
- **Farid Ahmed**
Secretary, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
- **Tanya Milberg**
Lead, Education, Skills and Learning,
World Economic Forum

The panel was moderated by Dr. AQM Shafiqul Azam, Director (Planning and Development), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education.

During this hour-long panel session, several points regarding the importance of introducing blended education in Bangladesh were discussed ranging from infrastructure development to accommodate learners and teachers in marginalized areas to resources for students to develop market-ready skills. Questions regarding digital divide, policies for a skilled labour force, blended education at primary, secondary and madrasah levels were raised. The panellists gave their shared commitment to leverage the existing organizational resources to advance blended education across all sectors for quality education and skills development in Bangladesh as they believe it would still allow for continuing learning in times of national or natural crises.



Remarks from the Guests and Co-Chairs



Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury MP
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

“ We need to change the mindset of the education ecosystem starting from the topmost institution to teachers. We need to be prepared to face the challenges of the changing economic and technological challenges and times.

Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury, Deputy Minister of Education, as Special Guest, gave an overview of how the government overcame challenges in achieving higher literacy rates, from 15% and limited technical education, and teacher training opportunities. He said the ministries had made progress by providing 32 million free books annually and ensuring teacher remuneration. The key goals are adapting to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and improving accessibility. He called for the need to recognize a flexible approach, specifically ranging from low-tech to no-tech solutions for the reskilling of learners and implementing new policies for transforming education at all levels.



Asif Saleh
Executive Director, BRAC

“ This is a great platform for the private sector to collaborate with the government in various capacities. We are really excited that we can bring not only BRAC's learnings here but other non-state actors in this process.

The accelerator Co-Chairs delivered their closing remarks starting with Asif Saleh, Executive Director of BRAC. He acknowledged the National Blended Education and Skills Masterplan and stressed the importance of cost-effectiveness in implementing blended learning. He emphasized the need to ensure equal access to education for all individuals and highlighted the potential for gaining valuable insights and knowledge from the process. Saleh also highlighted the inclusive approach of BRAC education, which aims to provide holistic education for all. He mentioned the shift in focus from basic education to quality education and expressed BRAC's support for future plans that align with the government's initiatives.



Dr. Rubana Huq
Chairperson, Mohammadi
Group & Vice-Chancellor, Asian
University for Women

“ The willingness of a country to collaborate with a platform like the World Economic Forum means a lot for us. I represent both my university as well as the private sector, I can only tell you that 4.1 million workers in the ready-made garment industry are not going to become coders overnight. We need to think how do we reskill them.

Dr. Rubana Huq, Vice-Chancellor of Asian University for Women, emphasized her willingness to collaborate in terms of reskilling and upskilling the 3.4 million working class. Through competitive collaboration, she hopes the accelerator is propelled to further heights and yields strategic insights with organizational commitments in the spirit of revolutionizing education.



Zunaid Ahmed Palak MP
State Minister, ICT Division

“ We must prepare our learners as smart learners, teachers as smart teachers, parents as smart parents and, as a whole, reform and improve our traditional education into smart education and learning ecosystem to fulfil the vision of the Prime Minister's Smart Bangladesh.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, State Minister of ICT Division identified in his speech three key areas to achieve the vision of Smart Bangladesh: equipping learners to become smart learners; empowering teachers as smart teachers; and educating parents as smart parents within the Bangladesh learning ecosystem. He said efforts are under way to develop content specifically tailored for secondary and higher education. Looking ahead, he said plans are under way to establish a Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in Bangladesh in 2023.



Dr. Dipu Moni MP
Minister, Ministry of Education

“It is high time that we work collectively towards transforming our education system. The Smart Education Accelerator is an opportunity for all of us to play a role in the much needed acceleration. It is here for us to connect, innovate and scale, to collectively make sense of our understanding of what it will take to accelerate blended education towards a smart Bangladesh by the year 2041.

Minister of Education Dr. Dipu Moni, as Chief Guest, spoke on the importance of collaboration among various ministries, national and international organizations. She emphasized the need to prepare learners for change and stressed the goal of achieving blended education by a specific timeline.

Furthermore, she focused on experiential learning, assessment for learning and the role of teachers as facilitators. Notably, she highlighted the participation of almost 1 million teachers in the recent curriculum online training through a national e-learning platform. The key to overcoming challenges lies in continuously analysing the current situation, sharing best practices and informing of the progress through the Smart Education Accelerator. She encouraged the learners to prepare for the future in such a way that they can face the upcoming challenges of a 4IR world. If the efforts of the Smart Education Accelerator are successful, it will not only transform education in Bangladesh but also Bangladesh itself and, by extension, the world.

To conclude the event, Dr. Dewan Muhammad Humayun Kabir, Project Director (Additional Secretary) of a2i, thanked the audience for their participation and shared his closing remarks.

If the efforts of the Smart Education Accelerator are successful, it will not only transform education in Bangladesh but also Bangladesh itself and, by extension, the world.

Key Takeaways

- Education in Bangladesh is undergoing a transformation
- Multiple pathways towards lifelong learning need to be established, whether it is for formal education, skills development and other informal ways of learning. Blended approaches, which incorporate combinations of high-tech, low-tech and no-tech based on context, can be instrumental in establishing multiple pathways
- The spirit of “I am the Solution” would be important for all our learners and citizens to inculcate within themselves to address the challenges ahead

- Learning systems are not only for learners but also for teachers and parents
- The importance of collaboration to achieve a blended education and address the digital divide for a Smart Bangladesh was emphasized throughout the event and no single actor will be able to do this alone
- The accelerator has been created so relevant actors can connect, innovate and scale-up appropriate solutions for a high-quality blended educational ecosystem.

Participation

About 150 participants from the following national and international arena participated in the session.

Ministries

Ministry of Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Ministry of Posts, Telecommunication and IT, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Labour and Employment

Departments/Directorates

Secondary And Higher Education Division, Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), Technical Education Board (BTEB), Directorate of Madrasah Education (DME), University Grants Commission (UGC), Bangladesh Public Service Commission, National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), National Academy for Education Management (NAEM), Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), Department of Textile, Center for Medical Education, Bangladesh Public Service Commission

Development Partners

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), USAID

Private Sector and Civil Society Organizations

BRAC, Plan International, British Council, Save the Children, Malala Fund, Samsung Bangladesh, Fair Group, BuildCon, The Tech Academy, Sesame Workshop, Friendship, CAMPE, EduHive, EdTech Hub, GEIST International, Room to Read, Institute of Informatics and Development (IID), Agami, CholPori, Teach for Bangladesh, Alokito Hridoy Foundation, Bangladesh Computer Council, StartUp Bangladesh, Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS)

Academia

University of Dhaka, Asian University for Women, National University, Bangladesh Open University, Noakhali Science and Technology University, Daffodil University, Government Teachers' Training College – Dhaka

Next Steps

The next steps noted here are based on both the event, as well as a private meeting that was held with the Smart Education Accelerator Co-Chairs and representatives from the World Economic Forum, Ministry of Education and the ICT Division. While the event primarily set the tone and rationale behind the accelerator, the private meeting laid out concrete next steps the accelerator can work on.

- Co-Chairs agreed that a three-month timeframe (June to August) would be sufficient for the accelerator to conduct a systems analysis on the state of blended education and Smart Education for Bangladesh. The systems analysis does not have to start from scratch – it can build on existing studies, such as the mapping done when drafting the National Blended Education Master Plan and other systems analysis studies.
- The Research and Development Subcommittee of the National Blended Education Master Plan can meet every month and support the accelerator in this systems analysis.
- The World Economic Forum and other relevant actors within the Smart Education Accelerator can review the draft National Blended Education Master Plan and offer input.
- Pilots relevant to blended education and Smart Education can be run in schools from each of the eight divisions and the findings of these pilots can be discussed.
- Several global partnerships and collaborations can be explored, related to the different elements of Smart Education.
- Models developed with the network of the accelerator in Bangladesh can also be shared for the purpose of reflecting on adoption and scaling.
- The local accelerator coordinator should play a role in following up on all of the above before the next convening of the Co-Chairs.

Conclusion

The consultation workshop was a milestone in the advancement of education to set in motion new collaborations and transform our education sector to a Smart Education for Bangladesh citizens. The organizers are grateful to the participants for making it a successful event. The further initiatives and progress under the accelerator will be updated throughout the year during the Research & Development Sub-Committee meetings of the National Taskforce.

Hyperlinks:

1. [Boosting education for a Smart Bangladesh and a Smart World | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/)
2. [International Consultation on “Accelerating Blended Education for Smart Bangladesh](#)
3. [Short video on transformational innovations in education by Government of Bangladesh](#)
4. [Keynote Presentation by World Economic Forum](#)
5. [Keynote Presentation by Ministry of Education and a2i](#)

