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## Education policy and 21st Century skills

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The world has undergone fundamental shifts in recent decades -- widespread advances in technology and communications, booming economic developments and increased competition, increased dependency between and among nations, and the escalation of global challenges from financial meltdowns to global warming.

All of these shifts have made the world more complex and connected, which demand from our young generation new type of skills to survive and thrive in the future. The breeding ground of these skills is education institutions where education curriculum is the root.

In formulating education curriculum for the 21st century the concerned authority of school, college, and university in Bangladesh should pay due consideration to the skills which today's students require when they enter into the job market. The curriculum should be considered as the source of required skills.

For appropriate skills building a 21st century education includes knowledge of traditional core subjects such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. In addition, it emphasises contemporary themes such as global awareness, cross-cultural competence, financial/economic trend, health, and environmental literacy. The education curriculum should emphasise the use of theory and practice equally in learning process for skills development.

What are those skills which our young generation should possess for entering into the 21st century job market once they complete education? The most important skills which our young generation should possess in future to survive and thrive are learning and innovation skills -- creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration.

Moreover, in a digital era digital literacy skills are indispensable, such as information literacy, media literacy, and ICT literacy. Furthermore, career and life skills are becoming more essential than ever before. Career and life skills contain flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility.

In order to equip our young generation with required skills for the 21st century job market, we need a unified education policy immediately. Unfortunately, what we have seen since independence is that no government could formulate and implement a unified education policy yet. The current government has adopted an education policy which may bring a radical change to our old fashioned education system if implemented properly.

The skills we needed for success in 20th century are different from the skills we need for success in the 21st century. In the 21st century we have entered into a complex era of dependency where global economic swings affect everyone's job and incomes. Moreover, the world is becoming smaller and connected by technology and transportation. We are becoming next door neighbour to others, though not in reality but virtually -- through internet, e-mail, cell phone, SMS, Twitter, Facebook, Skype to name a few

The success of 21st century education fundamentally depends upon how effectively these communication tools are used. We do not need to let our kids become addicted to internet or e-mail, but to teach them how to use these tools for knowledge building and creativity.

In the learning process 20th century education mainly used series of lectures followed by exams. However, in addition to lectures and exams, 21st century education needs activity writing, argumentation, demonstrations, study conversation, learning simulation and games, process writing, cooperative learning, assignments, field-work, problem based learning (PBL), research project/thesis, group project, seminar etc.

In order to prepare our kids for dealing with real world problems in the 21st century, educational institutions in Bangladesh should emphasise creativity and innovation alongside honesty, accountability, leadership, self-efficacy, empathy, gender equality, and fairness from the very beginning of the school year.

The role of teachers capable of building 21st century skilled workforce has been changing very fast, from just a teacher who would give some lectures and take an exam for evaluation in the end, to a facilitator, a careful mentor, a kind friend, a communicator between school and the parents, and a role model for the students.

A change is rapidly taking place in educational institutions around the globe, which is partnership between educational institutions and stakeholders such as parents and organisations/companies. At the primary and secondary levels of education schools should cooperate with parents concerning the progress of the students. On the other hand, in higher educational institutions, there should be more and more cooperation with companies where the students will ultimately work. The example of Japan and South Korea, where companies and universities jointly develop education curriculum and research projects, may be considered here.

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