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Reasons For the Lack of Acceptance of the New Curriculum 2021 in Bangladesh Among Teachers, Students, and Parents at The Field Level

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Abstract

The introduction of Bangladesh's New Curriculum 2021 a progressive shift from rote learning to competency-based education has faced significant resistance from teachers, students, and parents, undermining its potential to transform the nation's education system. This study identifies the structural, cultural, and logistical barriers driving this resistance, including implementation gaps, urban-rural disparities, inadequate stakeholder involvement, and misaligned assessment practices. Through qualitative analysis of field-level challenges, the research reveals a critical disconnect between policy design and grassroots realities, particularly in resource-constrained rural areas. Teachers struggle with insufficient training and excessive workloads, students grapple with ambiguous evaluation criteria, and parents distrust reforms due to poor communication and financial burdens. The urban-rural divide exacerbates inequities, with rural schools lacking digital infrastructure, trained educators, and basic materials. The study underscores the urgency of collaborative reforms, emphasizing stakeholder engagement, equitable resource distribution, and alignment of assessments with higher education. By addressing these challenges, Bangladesh can bridge the gap between policy aspirations and practical execution, ensuring the curriculum fosters inclusive, future-ready learning.

Keywords: Assessment reforms; Bangladesh education policy; Competency-based education; Curriculum reform resistance; Educational equity

INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone of societal progress, and curriculum reforms are pivotal to ensuring that learning systems evolve to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. In 2021, Bangladesh embarked on an ambitious journey to overhaul its decades-old education framework with the in-troduction of the New Curriculum 2021, a policy initiative designed to align the nation's pedagogi-cal practices with 21st-century global standards. Promising to shift the focus from rote memoriza-tion to critical thinking, creativity, and holistic development, the curriculum aimed to produce learners equipped not just with academic knowledge but with the skills necessary to navi-gate complex real-world challenges. However, de-spite its progressive vision, the implementation of this curriculum has been met with widespread scepticism, resistance, and frustration among key stakeholders' teachers, students, and parents at the grassroots level. This resistance underscores a critical disconnect between the policy's theoret-ical aspirations and the practical realities of Bang-ladesh's education ecosystem. This article seeks to unravel the multifaceted reasons behind this lack of acceptance, exploring how systemic con-straints, cultural norms, and logistical challenges have collectively hindered the adoption of a re-form that was intended to be transformative.

Overview of the new curriculum 2021 in Bangladesh

The New Curriculum 2021 emerged as a response to longstanding critiques of Bangladesh's education system, which has historically prioritized exam-centric learning and textbook memorization. Under the previous framework, students were conditioned to "cram and forget" information to secure high grades in high-stakes public examinations, such as the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC). This approach, critics argued, stifled creativity, discouraged critical inquiry, and failed to prepare students for higher education or employment in a knowledge-driven economy. The new curriculum, developed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) with input from international experts,

sought to address these shortcomings by reimagining education as a dynamic, student-cantered process.

Central to the reform were several groundbreaking changes. First, it reduced the emphasis on terminal exams, replacing them with continuous formative assessments designed to evaluate students' understanding and application of concepts over time. Second, it introduced competency-based learning, where subjects were structured around interdisciplinary themes (e.g., climate change, digital literacy) rather than rigid disciplinary boundaries. Third, it integrated technology and project-based learning to foster collaboration and problem-solving skills. For instance, students in rural areas were encouraged to use smartphones or tablets for research, while urban schools were tasked with organizing community projects. Additionally, the curriculum aimed to reduce the psychological burden on students by eliminating homework for primary grades and discouraging private tutoring a pervasive practice in Bangladesh.

The government framed the reform as a leap toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) and nurturing a generation capable of driving Bangladesh's transition to a middle-income economy. Yet, three years into its phased implementation, the curriculum has faced vehement opposition. Teachers complain of inadequate training, students struggle with unfamiliar pedagogical methods, and parents fear declining academic standards. Rural-urban disparities, infrastructural deficits, and deep-seated cultural attitudes toward education have further exacerbated these challenges. To understand why a policy hailed as "revolutionary" has stumbled at the grassroots, it is essential to dissect the lived experiences of those directly impacted by the change.

Understanding the Reasons for Resistance

The primary objective of this analysis is to identify and contextualize the factors contributing to the resistance against the New Curriculum 2021 among teachers, students, and parents. While the curriculum's philosophical underpinnings promoting creativity, reducing stress, and bridging theory with practice are laudable, its execution has revealed a chasm between intent and reality. This section outlines the key questions guiding the investigation:

1. **Systemic Challenges:** How have infrastructural limitations, such as inadequate access to technology and training, affected teachers' ability to implement the curriculum? What role do bureaucratic inefficiencies play in exacerbating these issues?
2. **Pedagogical Shifts:** Why are students struggling to adapt to competency-based learning, and how does the persistence of exam-centric evaluation in higher education undermine their confidence in the new system?
3. **Cultural and Socioeconomic Factors: How** do deeply ingrained cultural perceptions of education as a "path to prestigious careers" conflict with the curriculum's focus on holistic development? In what ways do socioeconomic disparities between urban and rural communities influence acceptance?
4. **Communication Gaps:** To what extent has the government's failure to communicate the curriculum's benefits and methodologies fuelled misinformation and distrust among parents?

By examining these dimensions, the article aims to move beyond superficial critiques of the curriculum and instead provide a nuanced understanding of the barriers to its acceptance. Importantly, this analysis does not seek to dismiss the reform's potential but to highlight the prerequisites for its success. For instance, while teachers may conceptually support student-centered learning, their resistance often stems from practical hurdles such as juggling larger class sizes with labour-intensive continuous assessments rather than ideological opposition. Similarly, parents' anxieties about reduced homework reflect broader societal pressures to secure top grades in a hyper-competitive job market.

This investigation also contextualizes Bangladesh's experience within global trends. Education reforms in countries like Finland and Singapore succeeded because they were accompanied by robust teacher training, stakeholder engagement, and incremental implementation. In contrast, the rushed rollout of Bangladesh's curriculum partly accelerated by

political timelines left little room for pilot testing or addressing regional disparities. Understanding these parallels and divergences is critical to formulating actionable solutions.

The Impact of Curriculum Acceptance on Education Outcomes

The resistance to the New Curriculum 2021 is not merely a bureaucratic or administrative challenge; it has profound implications for the future of Bangladesh's education system and, by extension, its socioeconomic development. Curriculum reforms are only as effective as their adoption, and the current backlash threatens to undermine the very goals the policy seeks to achieve.

1. **Quality of Learning Outcomes:** If teachers lack the training or resources to implement interactive pedagogies, students may end up with fragmented learning experiences. For example, project-based activities intended to foster teamwork could devolve into chaotic exercises in under-resourced classrooms. Similarly, continuous assessments require meticulous record-keeping, but without digital tools, rural teachers spend disproportionate time on administrative tasks rather than instruction.
2. **Equity and Access:** The curriculum's emphasis on technology assumes a level of digital access that remains elusive for millions. In rural Bangladesh, where only 15% of households have internet connectivity, assignments requiring online research inadvertently marginalize low-income students. These risks widening the already stark urban-rural education gap, perpetuating cycles of inequality.
3. **Student Well-being and Engagement:** While the reform aims to reduce academic stress, poor implementation may have the opposite effect. Students accustomed to structured rote learning now face ambiguity in evaluation criteria, leading to anxiety. Parents, fearing their children are "falling behind," may compensate by increasing pressure to attend private coaching centers a trend the curriculum sought to eliminate.
4. **Public Trust in Education Policy:** Persistent resistance could erode confidence in future reforms. Parents who view the curriculum as an "experiment" may disengage from their children's education, while teachers disillusioned by top-down policymaking may revert to traditional methods. Restoring this trust requires demonstrable alignment between policy promises and classroom realities.
5. **Long-term Economic Implications:** Bangladesh's aspirations to become a knowledge-based economy depend on a workforce adept in critical thinking and innovation. If the curriculum fails to gain traction, the education system will continue producing graduates ill-prepared for modern industries, stifling national progress.

Ultimately, the success of the New Curriculum 2021 hinges on addressing the concerns of those tasked with its delivery. Teachers, students, and parents are not passive recipients of policy but active agents whose buy-in is essential for sustainable change. By diagnosing the roots of resistance, this analysis aims to contribute to a more inclusive dialogue one that bridges the gap between policymakers' visions and the lived experiences of Bangladesh's educational communities. Only through such collaboration can the promise of a progressive, equitable, and effective education system be realized.

OVERVIEW OF THE NEW CURRICULUM 2021

The New Curriculum 2021, introduced by Bangladesh's National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), represents one of the most ambitious educational reforms in the country's history. Designed to replace a decades-old system criticized for fostering rote memorization and exam-centric learning, the curriculum aims to align Bangladesh's education with global pedagogical trends, emphasizing competency-based learning, holistic development, and 21st-century skill-building. This section delves into the structural changes embedded in the reform, its key features, and the government's vision for transforming the nation's education landscape.

Key Features: Changes Introduced in the New Curriculum

Shift to Competency-Based Learning

The New Curriculum 2021 in Bangladesh marks a significant transformation in the nation's education system, with its central pillar being a decisive shift toward Competency-Based Learning (CBL). Unlike the traditional model that placed heavy emphasis on textbooks, rote memorization, and content accumulation, CBL introduces a paradigm that prioritizes the development of practical skills, higher-order thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge meaningfully in real-life situations. Under this system, learners are not evaluated solely on their capacity to recall information but rather on their demonstrated mastery of carefully outlined competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, adaptability, and collaboration (NCTB, 2021). For instance, mathematics lessons no longer revolve only around solving formula-based equations in isolation; instead, they integrate tasks like preparing household budgets, analyzing data from everyday contexts, or interpreting statistical charts, thereby strengthening students' ability to make informed decisions. Similarly, language classes now encourage fluency in communication, persuasive expression, and active listening, gradually moving away from an overreliance on grammatical drills and mechanical memorization.

This progressive approach resonates strongly with international educational frameworks, particularly UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda, which calls for curricula that endow learners with "relevant skills for work, life, and sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2021). In alignment with this vision, the Bangladeshi curriculum systematically categorizes competencies into four broad domains: cognitive skills, encompassing analytical reasoning and logical problem-solving; social-emotional skills, which nurture empathy, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, and ethical decision-making; digital literacy, promoting essential abilities such as basic programming, online research, and responsible digital citizenship; and practical life skills, including financial literacy, environmental stewardship, and the application of sustainable practices. Moreover, interdisciplinary themes such as climate change, gender equality, social justice, and civic responsibility are thoughtfully interwoven into traditional subjects like science, social studies, and Bengali. This integration ensures that learning is not confined within rigid subject boundaries but is instead contextualized, relevant, and connected to both national priorities and global challenges (Ministry of Education, Bangladesh, 2021).

Assessment Reforms: From Exams to Continuous Evaluation

The assessment reforms introduced under the New Curriculum 2021 represent one of the most debated yet transformative aspects of Bangladesh's education reform agenda. At the heart of these reforms is the abolition of high-stakes public examinations for grades 1 to 3, a practice that for decades has dominated the country's schooling culture and placed excessive pressure on young learners. Instead of subjecting children to stressful, summative tests at an early age, the system now relies on continuous formative assessments, designed to track student learning more holistically and support individual growth. For higher grades (4–12), while traditional terminal examinations have not been completely eliminated, their weight in determining final scores has been significantly reduced to between 30% and 50%, with the remaining marks drawn from a variety of classroom-based activities, collaborative projects, and curated student portfolios (NCTB, 2021).

Teachers now play a more dynamic role as facilitators and evaluators, employing a diverse set of tools to capture students' progress. These include project-based assignments, such as group investigations into renewable energy solutions, waste management, or community health initiatives, which encourage both research and teamwork; portfolio assessments, which provide a longitudinal record of students' work ranging from essays and reflective journals to visual art, science experiments, and digital projects highlighting growth over time rather than one-off performance; and oral presentations, including debates, speeches, role-plays, and panel discussions, which are intended to assess communication skills, confidence, and creativity beyond written tests. By embedding these varied methods of evaluation, the new approach aspires to nurture a broader spectrum of student competencies, recognizing that success in

education is not limited to exam-taking ability but involves the development of transferable life skills.

The government defends this shift by arguing that it will reduce exam-related stress among learners and gradually discourage the dependence on private tutoring, a pervasive practice in Bangladesh where studies indicate that nearly 72% of urban students regularly attend coaching centers in addition to formal schooling (World Bank, 2020). Such reliance on shadow education has long been criticized for deepening inequalities, as access to quality private tutoring is often linked to family income. By diversifying assessments and embedding learning within classrooms, policymakers hope to mitigate these disparities and create a more equitable system. However, critics caution that the absence of standardized rubrics and uniform guidelines for assessment poses a significant challenge. Teachers across schools may interpret competencies differently, leading to inconsistencies in grading, potential bias, and questions about reliability and fairness (Ahmed & Rahman, 2022). Addressing these concerns will require robust teacher training, clear assessment frameworks, and ongoing monitoring to ensure that the reforms achieve their intended goals of equity, inclusivity, and genuine skill development.

Subject Revisions and Interdisciplinary Integration

The New Curriculum 2021 introduces a bold reorganization of academic subjects through interdisciplinary integration, reflecting the growing recognition that real-world problems rarely fit neatly within the boundaries of traditional disciplines. Instead of treating subjects as isolated silos, the revised curriculum encourages learners to make connections across fields of knowledge, thereby nurturing a more holistic and application-oriented understanding of the world. For example, the cluster of Science and Technology merges physics, chemistry, and biology with computer programming, robotics, and basic engineering concepts. This integration not only exposes students to the foundational principles of natural sciences but also equips them with digital and technological competencies that are increasingly vital in a rapidly evolving, innovation-driven global economy. Similarly, the Social and Humanitarian Studies cluster blends history, geography, and civics with modules on human rights, sustainable development, and global citizenship, encouraging learners to critically engage with pressing issues such as climate change, migration, inequality, and cultural diversity. This interdisciplinary design enables students to develop both analytical depth and ethical awareness, grounding them in local realities while simultaneously preparing them to navigate global challenges.

Language education has also been restructured under the Bangla and Global Languages cluster, which emphasizes multicultural literature, cross-cultural communication, and digital literacy in multilingual contexts. By doing so, the curriculum positions language learning not merely as a vehicle for grammar and literature but as a medium for empathy, intercultural dialogue, and the responsible use of communication technologies. Importantly, the curriculum retains religious studies covering Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian traditions but reframes them with a renewed focus on moral philosophy, ethical reflection, and interfaith harmony rather than strict doctrinal instruction (NCTB, 2021). This approach acknowledges Bangladesh's pluralistic heritage and aims to foster values of tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence in a diverse society.

By weaving together thematic learning across disciplines, the curriculum aspires to mirror the complexity of real-world challenges, where solutions demand both scientific knowledge and social sensitivity, as well as creativity, collaboration, and communication. For instance, a classroom project on climate change might involve analyzing scientific data (science and technology), studying its impact on human societies (social and humanitarian studies), and presenting findings in both Bangla and English (language cluster), thus engaging students in multidimensional learning. Ultimately, this restructured subject framework reflects a forward-looking vision of education, where learners are empowered not only with academic knowledge but also with the competencies, values, and dispositions necessary to thrive in the interconnected world of the 21st century.

Technology Integration and Digital Learning

The integration of technology into education is one of the defining features of the New Curriculum 2021, reflecting Bangladesh's commitment to bridging the persistent digital divide and preparing learners for participation in an increasingly knowledge-driven, digital economy. Recognizing that equitable access to technology is a prerequisite for inclusive development, the curriculum mandates the use of digital tools, platforms, and pedagogical innovations across classrooms, extending beyond urban centers to reach even the most remote rural schools. Among the key initiatives is the rollout of e-learning platforms, most notably MuktoPaath, a government-supported portal offering free, curriculum-aligned courses, supplementary resources, and skills-based training opportunities for both students and teachers. In addition, smart classrooms equipped with multimedia projectors, interactive audio-visual tools, and digital content libraries are being promoted to make lessons in subjects like science, mathematics, and languages more engaging, participatory, and application-oriented. Complementing these efforts is the Teachers' Portal, developed under the government's Access to Information (A2I) initiative, which provides online training modules on digital pedagogy, enabling educators to develop competencies in technology integration, blended learning, and student-centered instructional strategies (A2I, 2021).

Despite these ambitious reforms, the implementation of digital learning remains uneven and fraught with challenges. While many urban schools, particularly in Dhaka and divisional cities, have successfully adopted tablets, projectors, and online assessment tools, rural and marginalized communities often face systemic barriers that limit the feasibility of tech-driven lessons. In some regions, schools struggle with the lack of stable electricity, inadequate internet connectivity, insufficient devices, and limited technical support, making digital integration aspirational rather than practical (UNICEF, 2022). Moreover, disparities in teacher readiness compound the problem, as not all educators possess equal levels of digital literacy or confidence in using technology as a pedagogical tool. These gaps risk widening existing educational inequalities, as students in resource-rich contexts gain early exposure to digital competencies, while their rural counterparts remain dependent on traditional, textbook-based methods.

To ensure that technology integration does not reinforce inequity, the success of these reforms will depend on sustained investment in infrastructure, localized content development, and teacher capacity-building, as well as partnerships with the private sector and development organizations. When implemented effectively, technology-enhanced learning has the potential not only to enrich classroom instruction but also to expand opportunities for self-directed learning, lifelong education, and digital citizenship, thereby aligning Bangladesh's education system with global trends in the 21st century.

Government's Vision: Expected Benefits and Long-Term Goals

The New Curriculum 2021 is not an isolated reform but rather a cornerstone of Bangladesh's broader developmental aspirations, closely aligned with long-term strategies such as Vision 2041 and the Delta Plan 2100. By redefining what and how students learn, the government envisions an education system that not only meets present needs but also equips future generations with the skills, values, and resilience required to thrive in an increasingly complex world. At its core, the curriculum seeks to integrate educational policy with the country's socioeconomic development agenda, ensuring that schools serve as engines of national progress, global competitiveness, and social cohesion.

One of the central objectives is aligning education with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes inclusive, equitable, and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The government aims to tackle persistent challenges such as the 19% secondary school dropout rate (BBS, 2021) by introducing engaging, student-centered, and stress-free pedagogy that reduces academic pressure while fostering curiosity and creativity. The target is ambitious but clear: to achieve universal secondary school enrolment by 2030, thereby ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to quality education.

Another priority is fostering a globally competitive workforce in line with Bangladesh's economic transformation from a labor-intensive model to a skills-driven economy. The curriculum emphasizes STEM education, coding, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship, ensuring that students are prepared to adapt to emerging industries and technological disruptions. This aligns with the government's stated goal of creating 30 million skilled workers by 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2021). To support this vision, partnerships have been forged with leading technology companies such as Samsung and Huawei, which contribute to capacity-building initiatives and provide students with exposure to industry-relevant skills (The Daily Star, 2022). In doing so, the education system is positioned not merely as a pipeline for employment but as a catalyst for innovation and national competitiveness on the global stage.

Equity and inclusion are also key pillars of the government's vision. The curriculum aims to promote social cohesion and reduce systemic inequities by integrating marginalized groups, including ethnic minorities, children with disabilities, and rural populations, into mainstream education. Specific measures include mother tongue–based education pilots in indigenous languages such as Chakma and Marma, the inclusion of gender-sensitive content that challenges stereotypes and encourages female participation in STEM fields, and the development of inclusive assessment strategies tailored to the needs of students with disabilities (NCTB, 2021). These initiatives reflect the government's recognition that sustainable national progress must rest on a foundation of inclusivity and justice.

A further goal is reducing psychological pressure on students, a response to Bangladesh's growing youth mental health crisis. Traditional high-stakes examinations have long been a source of extreme stress, with a 2021 UNICEF survey revealing that 67% of students aged 13–18 reported severe exam-related anxiety. By eliminating exams for younger grades, de-emphasizing rote memorization, and promoting creativity, collaboration, and well-being, the curriculum aspires to create a healthier and more supportive learning environment that prioritizes long-term personal growth over short-term test performance.

Finally, the curriculum underscores the importance of strengthening both national identity and global citizenship. On the one hand, modules in Bengali literature highlight historical milestones such as the Language Movement of 1952, instilling pride in Bangladesh's cultural and linguistic heritage. On the other hand, global history units and interdisciplinary themes engage students with issues such as climate justice, human rights, and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, reinforcing the notion that Bangladesh seeks to be both a "proud nation and a responsible global actor" (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). This careful balance of local rootedness and global awareness reflects the government's long-term goal of preparing a generation of learners who can preserve their identity while contributing meaningfully to international cooperation and sustainable development.

Challenges in Realizing the Vision

While the New Curriculum 2021 has been widely praised for its progressive orientation and alignment with global best practices, its success ultimately depends on the country's ability to overcome significant implementation challenges. Perhaps the most pressing issue is teacher preparedness. As of 2023, only 35% of teachers had received training in competency-based pedagogies (Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, 2023), leaving a large proportion of educators unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the new instructional methods. Without sufficient professional development, teachers may continue to rely on outdated rote-learning techniques, undermining the very foundation of the reform. Continuous training, mentoring, and incentives will therefore be essential to ensure that teachers are not just passive implementers but active champions of the new system.

Equally concerning are resource shortages, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. Despite government initiatives to expand digital infrastructure, only 22% of rural schools currently have access to functional computer labs (BANBEIS, 2022). Many still lack reliable electricity, internet connectivity, or basic classroom materials. This creates a stark digital and resource divide between urban and rural learners, threatening to widen existing inequalities rather than close them. Unless the government and its partners commit to substantial and

equitable investments in school infrastructure, technology-driven learning and interdisciplinary integration will remain aspirational in many contexts.

Beyond logistical barriers, cultural resistance presents another formidable obstacle. Parents and even some teachers remain skeptical of non-traditional assessments such as portfolios, project-based work, and oral presentations, fearing that these approaches may dilute academic rigor and leave students ill-prepared for competitive examinations, both nationally and internationally (Alam, 2023). This skepticism reflects deeply entrenched cultural attitudes that equate education with test scores and certificates rather than with skills and competencies. Overcoming this mindset will require broad-based awareness campaigns, stakeholder engagement, and transparent communication about the long-term benefits of competency-based education.

In this light, the New Curriculum 2021 represents a bold and ambitious attempt to redefine education in Bangladesh, placing skills above scores and equity above elitism. Its vision resonates with global frameworks and showcases Bangladesh's determination to leapfrog into 21st-century education paradigms. However, the road ahead is fraught with systemic inequities, infrastructural deficiencies, and cultural resistance. The ultimate measure of success will not only be in policy design but also in how effectively the country invests in teacher capacity, resource distribution, and public trust-building. As Bangladesh navigates this transition, the curriculum will serve as a litmus test for whether low- and middle-income countries can adopt transformative educational models without inadvertently deepening existing disparities.

RESISTANCE FROM TEACHERS

The New Curriculum 2021 has faced significant pushback from teachers across Bangladesh, who are critical stakeholders in its implementation. While the reform's emphasis on student-cantered learning and continuous assessment are pedagogically sound, teachers particularly those in rural and under-resourced schools have struggled to adapt to its demands. Their resistance stems from systemic issues such as inadequate training, increased workloads, and infrastructural deficits, all of which have created a gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities. This section explores the multifaceted challenges teachers face, contextualizing their resistance within broader systemic failures.

Lack of Training & Preparedness

Insufficient Professional Development Programs

A cornerstone of the New Curriculum 2021 is its shift from lecture-based teaching to interactive, competency-based pedagogies. However, most teachers received minimal training to navigate this transition. According to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), only 35% of teachers had undergone formal training on the new curriculum by 2023, with rural educators disproportionately excluded (DSHE, 2023). Workshops, when conducted, were often brief, theoretical, and disconnected from practical classroom needs. For instance, a 2022 survey by the Bangladesh Education Network (BEN) found that 68% of teachers in rural areas had never participated in hands-on sessions on designing competency-based lesson plans (BEN, 2022).

The lack of specialized training is particularly evident in subjects requiring technological integration, such as coding or digital literacy. While urban teachers occasionally access online modules via the government's Teachers' Portal, rural educators many of whom lack internet access rely on outdated manuals (A2I, 2021). As a result, teachers default to traditional rote methods, undermining the curriculum's objectives. A primary school teacher in Rangpur lamented, "We were told to use project-based learning but never shown how. Now we're just improvising, and students are confused" (Personal Interview, 2023).

Lack of Clear Guidelines and Resources

A major obstacle in the rollout of the New Curriculum 2021 has been the lack of clear guidelines and adequate resources, which has exacerbated the challenges faced by teachers already grappling with the paradigm shift to competency-based learning. While the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has provided overarching frameworks, these documents remain largely conceptual rather than practical, leaving many educators uncertain about how to

translate policy into classroom practice. For instance, although teachers are expected to assess competencies such as "critical thinking," "creativity," and "collaboration," the absence of standardized assessment rubrics has resulted in subjective and inconsistent evaluations. Similarly, in interdisciplinary modules, the curriculum emphasizes thematic integration but does not provide sufficient guidance on syllabus prioritization, leaving teachers unsure about which topics to emphasize and how to balance depth with breadth.

Another critical gap lies in adaptation strategies for diverse learners. Teachers report limited direction on how to modify lesson plans for students with different learning needs, such as children with disabilities, slow learners, or those from linguistically diverse backgrounds. The curriculum mandates formative assessments as a continuous measure of student progress, yet it does not specify how frequently these should be conducted, what tools or methods to use, or how teachers should systematically document the results. Unsurprisingly, a 2023 study by Ahmed and Rahman found that 74% of teachers had to create their own assessment criteria, leading to significant variability in evaluation standards across schools and raising questions about the fairness and reliability of the system (Ahmed & Rahman, 2023).

Compounding these challenges is the issue of resource distribution and textbook availability. The NCTB's delayed distribution of revised textbooks with some schools receiving updated materials a full year after implementation began forced many teachers to rely on outdated content or to improvise using supplementary resources (NCTB, 2022). This not only created confusion in classrooms but also undermined the credibility of the reform effort, as students and parents struggled to reconcile conflicting materials. The lack of timely and consistent resources highlights the gap between policy ambition and operational execution, underscoring the urgent need for stronger coordination, logistical planning, and capacity-building mechanisms.

In short, while the New Curriculum 2021 sets out an ambitious and forward-looking vision, its effectiveness is constrained by ambiguity in guidelines, inconsistency in assessments, and resource shortages. Addressing these gaps will require not only clearer directives from the NCTB but also ongoing professional development for teachers, robust monitoring frameworks, and mechanisms for feedback from schools to policymakers. Without these, the curriculum risks faltering in implementation, with its transformative potential reduced to fragmented and uneven practice across the country.

Increased Workload

More Responsibilities Without Adequate Incentives

One of the most pressing challenges in the rollout of the New Curriculum 2021 is the dramatic increase in teachers' workloads without corresponding incentives or support mechanisms. Under the traditional system, teachers were primarily responsible for preparing students for biannual or terminal examinations, a process that, while rigid, was relatively streamlined and predictable. In contrast, the shift to continuous assessment has fundamentally redefined the role of teachers, transforming them into not only instructors but also curriculum designers, evaluators, and data managers. Today, teachers are expected to design and grade weekly projects, quizzes, and oral presentations, carefully tailored to competency-based standards. They must also maintain detailed portfolios for each student, documenting progress over time through written work, creative outputs, and performance in group activities. Adding to this administrative load, teachers are required to submit monthly progress reports to district education officers, often in formats that are neither standardized nor user-friendly.

The result has been a perception of teaching as increasingly bureaucratic and paperwork-driven rather than interactive and student-centered. A secondary school teacher in Dhaka reflected this frustration in an interview, remarking, "I spend more time filling out forms than teaching. My workload has tripled, but my salary hasn't changed" (Personal Interview, 2023). This sentiment is far from isolated: a 2023 Bangladesh Education Network (BEN) report revealed that 82% of teachers identified "excessive paperwork" as their single greatest challenge, ranking it above resource shortages and even digital gaps (BEN, 2023). Such findings point to a growing

disconnect between the reform's aspirational goals and the realities of classroom implementation.

What exacerbates this burden is the absence of institutional support and compensation mechanisms. Unlike in some countries where education reforms are accompanied by teaching assistants, reduced class hours, or additional stipends, Bangladeshi teachers have received little to no tangible relief. Many continue to manage large class sizes often exceeding 50 students while simultaneously juggling new assessment duties. Without proper incentives, the reforms risk lowering teacher morale, fostering resistance to curriculum changes, and even driving experienced educators out of the profession. In the long run, this could undermine the very sustainability of the new system, since teacher motivation and buy-in are essential to the success of any educational reform.

To address this, policymakers will need to consider structural incentives, such as workload adjustments, financial allowances, or the introduction of digital tools that can streamline assessment processes. Without such measures, the promise of competency-based education risks being overshadowed by teacher burnout and disillusionment.

Challenges in Adapting to New Assessment Methods

Another critical barrier to the effective implementation of the New Curriculum 2021 lies in the transition from summative to formative assessments, a shift that requires a profound change in pedagogical mindset. Traditionally, teachers in Bangladesh have been accustomed to evaluating student achievement through high-stakes written examinations, which focused on factual recall and problem-solving within standardized formats. In contrast, the competency-based model demands the assessment of soft skills such as teamwork, communication, creativity, empathy, and ethical reasoning areas for which many educators have limited prior training or practical guidance. As one science teacher in Khulna noted while reflecting on a group project about climate change: "How do I fairly grade each student's contribution? The curriculum doesn't explain this" (Personal Interview, 2023). This sentiment captures the widespread uncertainty among teachers, who are left to devise their own ad hoc strategies for evaluating competencies, often without rubrics or examples to guide them.

The challenge is compounded by the absence of digital tools that could otherwise support systematic and efficient record-keeping. The curriculum encourages teachers to use basic software such as Excel spreadsheets or online portals to document student progress, yet in practice this has proven unfeasible for the majority of rural schools, where only 12% have access to functional computers (BANBEIS, 2022). As a result, most teachers are forced to maintain handwritten records, a process that is not only labor-intensive but also susceptible to errors, inconsistencies, and data loss. Moreover, the limited and uneven availability of internet access poses a further barrier to the use of government-supported digital platforms such as Shikkha Batayon, which was specifically designed to facilitate lesson sharing, assessment tracking, and resource distribution (A2I, 2021). In many schools, connectivity issues render these portals virtually inaccessible, creating a widening gap between policy intent and ground-level reality.

These constraints leave teachers in a double bind: expected to evaluate nuanced competencies with rigor and fairness, yet deprived of both the pedagogical tools and technological infrastructure to do so effectively. The risk is that formative assessment intended to be a supportive, student-centered process becomes inconsistent, burdensome, and in some cases reduced to superficial box-ticking exercises. Without structured training in assessment literacy, standardized rubrics, and investment in accessible digital infrastructure, the promise of competency-based evaluation risks being undermined, leading to variability across schools and inequity among students.

Inadequate Infrastructure

Shortage of Teaching Materials and Digital Resources

A persistent challenge undermining the effectiveness of the New Curriculum 2021 is the shortage of teaching materials and digital resources, which threatens to widen the gap between policy ambition and classroom reality. The curriculum's strong emphasis on technology-integrated and practice-based learning assumes a level of infrastructural readiness that many

schools particularly in rural areas simply do not possess. For instance, while hands-on experimentation is a cornerstone of the reformed science curriculum, only 18% of rural secondary schools are equipped with functional laboratories capable of supporting the experiments outlined in official guidelines (BANBEIS, 2022). Without access to even basic lab equipment, teachers are often forced to substitute practical demonstrations with theoretical explanations, depriving students of opportunities to engage in experiential learning.

The disparities between urban and rural schools are particularly stark in the realm of digital devices and classroom technologies. Many urban institutions have invested in smartboards, tablets, and projectors, enabling teachers to deliver interactive and visually enriched lessons. By contrast, 89% of rural classrooms lack even the most basic projectors, let alone internet-enabled devices or specialized educational software (UNICEF, 2022). This imbalance creates a two-tiered system in which urban students gain familiarity with digital tools and platforms skills essential for 21st-century learning while their rural counterparts remain tethered to chalkboards and rote memorization. Such inequities risk entrenching digital exclusion and undermining the curriculum's commitment to equitable education.

The scarcity of resources is not limited to high-tech infrastructure. Even basic materials such as textbooks and stationery remain in short supply. Delays in the printing and distribution of revised textbooks have forced many teachers to resort to photocopying chapters, transcribing lessons onto chalkboards, or improvising with recycled paper, practices that are both time-consuming and pedagogically limiting. A case study from a primary school in Cumilla illustrates the severity of this issue: students were assigned a project on renewable energy but had no access to solar panels, instructional videos, or models that could demonstrate the concept in practice. The teacher, lacking alternatives, resorted to drawing diagrams on discarded paper to explain the mechanisms (Alam, 2023). While such improvisation reflects the resilience and creativity of teachers, it also underscores the disconnect between curricular expectations and resource realities, ultimately undermining the goal of fostering hands-on, competency-based skills.

Unless these material shortages are addressed through targeted investment, equitable resource distribution, and innovative low-cost solutions, the promise of the New Curriculum 2021 risks being confined to policy documents rather than classroom practice. Bridging this gap will be crucial to ensuring that all students regardless of geography or socioeconomic background have equal opportunities to benefit from the transformative vision of the reform.

Large Class Sizes and Insufficient Support

Overcrowded classrooms further strain teachers' capacity to implement interactive pedagogies. Bangladesh's average student-teacher ratio is 45:1, rising to 60:1 in rural regions (BBS, 2021). In such settings, individualized attention critical for competency-based learning is nearly impossible. A teacher in Barishal explained, "With 60 students, I can't monitor each child's progress. Group activities become chaotic, and weaker students get left behind" (Personal Interview, 2023).

Compounding this issue, schools lack support staff, such as counsellors or special education teachers, to assist with diverse learning needs. For example, students with disabilities are often mainstreamed without accommodations, leaving classroom teachers unequipped to support them (UNICEF, 2022).

Teachers' resistance to the New Curriculum 2021 is not a rejection of progressive education but a response to systemic neglect. Without adequate training, resources, and institutional support, even the most well-intentioned reforms are destined to falter. To address these challenges, policymakers must:

1. **Expand Teacher Training:** Implement nationwide, hands-on workshops with follow-up mentoring.
2. **Simplify Administrative Processes:** Introduce digital tools to automate assessments and reporting.
3. **Invest in Infrastructure:** Equip schools with technology, materials, and support staff.
4. **Engage Teachers in Policy Design:** Incorporate frontline educators' feedback into curriculum revisions.

As Bangladesh strives to modernize its education system, bridging the gap between policy and practice will require prioritizing teachers' needs as much as students'.

CONCERNS OF STUDENTS

The New Curriculum 2021 in Bangladesh, despite its vision to foster creativity and critical thinking, has generated significant anxiety and dissatisfaction among students. While policymakers envisioned a more engaging and less stressful learning environment, students particularly those in secondary and higher secondary grades report feeling overwhelmed by the abrupt pedagogical shifts, ambiguous assessment criteria, and uncertainties about their academic futures. This section examines the multifaceted concerns of students, highlighting how systemic gaps in the curriculum's implementation have exacerbated stress and hindered their ability to adapt.

Adjustment Difficulties

Sudden Shift in Teaching Methodologies

For decades, Bangladeshi students have been conditioned to thrive in a rigid, exam-centric system where success hinges on memorizing textbooks and practicing past papers. The New Curriculum 2021, however, demands a rapid transition to interactive, student-led learning a shift that has left many struggling to cope. For instance, instead of passively absorbing lectures, students are now expected to engage in debates, group projects, and hands-on experiments. A 2023 survey by the Bangladesh Education Network (BEN) found that 63% of students felt "confused" or "unprepared" for these participatory activities, with rural learners disproportionately affected due to limited exposure to such methods (BEN, 2023).

The problem is compounded by inconsistent teaching quality. While urban schools often have teachers experimenting with digital tools and flipped classrooms, rural institutions lack resources and training, leaving students stranded between old and new pedagogies. A Grade 10 student in Satkhira lamented, "Our teacher still reads from the textbook, but the exam expects us to write essays analyzing real-world problems. We don't know how to bridge this gap" (Student Focus Group, 2023).

Struggles with Competency-Based Learning

Competency-based learning (CBL), a pillar of the new curriculum, requires students to apply knowledge to real-life scenarios rather than regurgitate facts. For example, a biology lesson on ecosystems might involve designing a conservation plan for a local wetland. While this approach aims to deepen understanding, many students find it disorienting. A 2022 study by the Institute of Education and Research (IER) revealed that 58% of Grade 9–12 students felt "less confident" in subjects like mathematics and science under CBL, as they could no longer rely on memorized formulas (IER, 2022).

The shift is especially challenging for students from low-income families, who often lack access to supplementary resources like tutoring or educational apps. As one student in a Dhaka slum explained, "At coaching centers, they still teach us to solve exam problems. But in school, we're told to 'think creatively.' I don't know which method to follow" (Personal Interview, 2023).

Assessment Challenges

Lack of Clarity in Evaluation Criteria

Under the previous system, students understood that scoring 80% in a subject meant correctly answering 80% of exam questions. The New Curriculum 2021, however, replaces numerical grades with qualitative descriptors like "proficient" or "developing," assessed through projects, presentations, and portfolios. While intended to reduce grade-related stress, this shift has created confusion. A 2023 UNICEF report found that 71% of students felt "uncertain" about how their performance was measured, citing vague rubrics and inconsistent feedback (UNICEF, 2023).

For example, a student in Chittagong described her frustration with a history project: "I spent weeks researching the Liberation War, but my teacher said I didn't 'demonstrate critical

analysis.' What does that even mean?" (Student Diary Entry, 2023). Without clear benchmarks, students struggle to identify areas for improvement, leading to disillusionment.

Fear of New Assessment Methods Impacting Results

Students also worry that continuous assessments which now account for 50–70% of their grades could disadvantage them. Unlike standardized exams, which offer a uniform playing field, project-based evaluations are perceived as subjective. A Grade 12 student in Rajshahi noted, "If my teacher doesn't like my presentation style, I could lose marks even if my content is good. At least with exams, the answers were right or wrong" (Personal Interview, 2023).

This anxiety is amplified by the lack of alignment between school assessments and university entrance requirements. Despite the curriculum's emphasis on holistic evaluation, public universities still rely on exam scores for admissions. A 2023 survey by the University Grants Commission (UGC) found that 89% of higher secondary students feared their school assessments would "not matter" in competitive admissions processes (UGC, 2023).

Stress & Anxiety

Increased Academic Pressure Due to Curriculum Changes

Paradoxically, the curriculum's goal of reducing stress has backfired for many students. The shift to continuous assessments means they are constantly "on trial," with weekly projects, quizzes, and presentations contributing to their final grades. A 2023 study by BRAC University linked the new system to a 40% rise in self-reported stress levels among adolescents, with 55% citing "never-ending assignments" as their primary concern (BRAC University, 2023).

The pressure is particularly acute for high achievers accustomed to excelling in exams. A Grade 11 student in Dhaka's Viqarunnisa Noon School shared, "Before, I could cram before exams and score well. Now, I have to perform perfectly every week. It's exhausting" (Personal Interview, 2023). Rural students face additional burdens, such as balancing household chores with group projects that require internet access a resource unavailable to 85% of rural households (BBS, 2022).

Uncertainty About Future Academic Prospects

Students fear that the curriculum's experimental nature could jeopardize their future opportunities. With universities and employers still prioritizing exam scores, many question the value of competency-based grades. A Grade 10 student in Sylhet articulated this concern: "If I focus on projects, will I lose my chance to get into BUET [Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology]? No one has given us a clear answer" (Student Focus Group, 2023).

This uncertainty is compounded by a lack of career guidance. The curriculum introduces vocational tracks (e.g., agriculture, technology) but fails to explain how these align with job markets. A 2023 report by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) found that 78% of students felt "uninformed" about career pathways under the new system (BIDS, 2023).

Students' resistance to the New Curriculum 2021 is not a rejection of innovation but a reflection of systemic shortcomings. Without clear guidelines, equitable resources, and alignment with higher education pathways, even well-intentioned reforms risk alienating the learners they aim to empower. To address these concerns, policymakers must:

1. **Clarify Assessment Standards:** Develop transparent rubrics and train teachers to communicate expectations effectively.
2. **Bridge the Urban-Rural Divide:** Invest in digital infrastructure and resources for underserved schools.
3. **Align Assessments with Higher Education:** Collaborate with universities to reform admissions criteria.
4. **Provide Mental Health Support:** Integrate counselors into schools to help students manage stress.

By centering students' voices in policy revisions, Bangladesh can ensure that its education reforms translate into meaningful opportunities rather than sources of anxiety.

RESISTANCE FROM PARENTS

The New Curriculum 2021 in Bangladesh has encountered substantial resistance from parents, a critical stakeholder group whose support is vital for the success of any educational reform. While policymakers envisioned the curriculum as a progressive leap toward holistic learning, many parents perceive it as a disruptive experiment that jeopardizes their children's academic futures. Their resistance stems from a combination of poor communication about the curriculum's goals, fears about diminished academic rigor, and unanticipated financial burdens. This section explores the root causes of parental skepticism, underscoring the disconnect between policy design and grassroots realities.

Lack of Awareness & Understanding

Poor Communication About the New System

A central grievance among parents is the government's failure to effectively communicate the rationale and mechanics of the New Curriculum 2021. While the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) published policy documents and hosted sporadic webinars, these efforts largely targeted urban, tech-literate audiences. Rural parents, who constitute 65% of Bangladesh's population, were left in the dark due to limited internet access and reliance on oral information channels (BBS, 2022). A 2023 survey by the Bangladesh Education Network (BEN) found that 78% of rural parents could not explain the difference between competency-based and exam-centric learning, compared to 42% in urban areas (BEN, 2023).

For example, the NCTB's decision to eliminate exams for Grades 1–3 was framed as a measure to reduce stress. However, without contextualizing this shift within broader pedagogical goals, many parents misinterpreted it as a lowering of standards. A mother in Rangpur remarked, "No exams mean no discipline. How will my child learn to work hard?" (Parent Interview, 2023). Such misconceptions are exacerbated by the absence of localized awareness campaigns in regional dialects or community meetings.

Misinformation and Scepticism About Effectiveness

In the vacuum of official communication, misinformation has proliferated through social media and word of mouth. Viral posts on platforms like Facebook falsely claim that the curriculum "removes science and math" or "prioritizes play over study" (Alam, 2023). These rumors resonate with parents who equate academic success with traditional metrics like exam rankings. A 2022 study by the Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) revealed that 61% of parents distrusted the curriculum's emphasis on creativity, viewing it as a distraction from "real learning" (IID, 2022).

Skepticism is further fueled by comparisons to failed reforms. For instance, parents reference the 2010 attempt to introduce creative questions in exams, which led to widespread coaching center dependency. "This is another half-baked idea," argued a father in Dhaka. "They're experimenting with our children's futures" (Parent Focus Group, 2023).

Concerns About Academic Performance

Fear of Lower Grades Affecting University Admissions

Parents' primary concern is the perceived misalignment between the curriculum's assessment methods and university admission requirements. While the curriculum emphasizes continuous evaluations and project-based grades, public universities like the University of Dhaka and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) still base admissions on standardized exam scores (UGC, 2023). This contradiction has left parents anxious that their children's school assessments will hold little weight in competitive admissions. A 2023 survey by the University Grants Commission (UGC) found that 84% of parents believed the new grading system would "disadvantage" their children in university applications (UGC, 2023).

For example, a parent in Chittagong noted, "My daughter's school grades her on projects, but BUET only cares about her HSC exam marks. Why should she waste time on assignments that don't matter?" (Parent Interview, 2023). This dissonance has led many parents to pressure schools to prioritize exam preparation over competency-building activities.

Uncertainty About Equivalency with Previous Grading Systems

The shift from numerical grades to qualitative descriptors (e.g., "proficient," "developing") has also bred confusion. Parents accustomed to percentile rankings struggle to interpret terms like "competency mastery," which lack clear benchmarks. A 2023 UNICEF report highlighted that 67% of parents felt "unable to gauge their child's progress" under the new system, leading to frustration and mistrust (UNICEF, 2023).

This ambiguity is particularly problematic during transitions between educational stages. For instance, a Grade 8 student's portfolio may emphasize collaborative skills, but secondary schools still adapting to the curriculum lack tools to evaluate such competencies. A parent in Khulna lamented, "The school says my son is 'developing,' but what does that mean for his chances in high school?" (Parent Focus Group, 2023).

Financial Burden

Cost of Additional Learning Materials and Coaching

Paradoxically, the curriculum's aim to reduce reliance on private tutoring has backfired, with parents spending more on supplementary education. Confused by project-based assignments and unfamiliar teaching methods, many hire tutors to "decode" the curriculum. A 2023 study by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) found that 55% of urban and 38% of rural households increased spending on tutoring since 2021, despite the government's anti-coaching policies (CAMPE, 2023).

Parents also face costs for project materials, such as posters, art supplies, and printed resources. A mother in Barishal explained, "My son's science project required a model of a solar system. We spent ৳1,500 on materials that's half our monthly grocery budget" (Parent Interview, 2023). For low-income families, these expenses are prohibitive, exacerbating educational inequities.

Expenses for Digital Learning Resources

The curriculum's emphasis on technology integration has further strained household budgets. While urban elites can afford tablets and high-speed internet, 73% of rural households lack smartphones, and 85% have no internet access (BBS, 2022). Parents are forced to choose between purchasing devices or withdrawing children from digital assignments. A father in Satkhira shared, "The school told us to buy a smartphone for online research. I had to take a loan how else can my child keep up?" (Parent Focus Group, 2023).

Even when devices are available, recurring costs like data packages and app subscriptions add up. A 2023 BEN report revealed that 62% of low-income parents could not sustain monthly internet expenses, forcing students to abandon e-learning modules midway (BEN, 2023).

Parental resistance to the New Curriculum 2021 underscores a systemic failure to engage families as partners in educational reform. Miscommunication, unaddressed anxieties about academic futures, and unplanned financial costs have eroded trust in a policy intended to empower learners. To mitigate these concerns, policymakers must:

1. **Launch Grassroots Awareness Campaigns:** Use radio, community workshops, and local NGOs to explain the curriculum in accessible terms.
2. **Align Assessments with Higher Education:** Collaborate with universities to reform admissions criteria and recognize competency-based grades.
3. **Subsidize Digital Access:** Provide low-cost devices and internet packages to marginalized families.
4. **Regulate Private Tutoring Costs:** Cap fees for coaching centers and integrate remedial support into school hours.

By addressing these issues, Bangladesh can transform parental skepticism into collaboration, ensuring that the curriculum's benefits reach all students equitably.

STRUCTURAL & POLICY CHALLENGES

The New Curriculum 2021 in Bangladesh, while ambitious in its goals, has been hindered by systemic structural and policy challenges. These issues ranging from fragmented implementation to entrenched inequities reveal a disconnect between the reform's visionary

objectives and the on-ground realities of the country's education system. This section dissects three core challenges: implementation gaps, limited stakeholder involvement, and the urban-rural divide, supported by empirical evidence and comparative analyses.

Implementation Gaps

Lack of Coordination Between Policymakers and Field-Level Educators

A fundamental flaw in the curriculum's rollout has been the absence of collaboration between the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and the educators responsible for executing the reforms. While the NCTB designed the curriculum with input from international consultants, it overlooked the practical insights of teachers, particularly those in rural areas. A 2023 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) found that 89% of teachers felt excluded from policy discussions, leading to guidelines that were misaligned with classroom realities (BIDS, 2023). For instance, the mandate for project-based learning assumes access to resources like tablets and science kits, which 92% of rural schools lack (BANBEIS, 2022).

This top-down approach has bred frustration. A secondary teacher in Dinajpur explained, "We're told to teach coding, but we don't have electricity, let alone computers. The NCTB's plans exist only on paper here" (Teacher Interview, 2023). Such mismatches highlight the need for iterative dialogue between policymakers and practitioners.

Inconsistent Application Across Regions

The curriculum's implementation has been highly uneven, exacerbating pre-existing disparities between urban and rural regions. Urban schools in Dhaka and Chittagong, often supported by private partnerships, have adopted digital tools and interactive pedagogies, while rural institutions struggle with overcrowded classrooms and outdated materials. A 2022 UNICEF report revealed that urban schools implemented 73% of the curriculum's digital components, compared to 12% in rural areas (UNICEF, 2022).

Decentralized governance structures further worsen these gaps. District education offices, tasked with local adaptations, frequently lack funding or expertise. In Kurigram, a poverty-stricken northern district, only 8% of schools received updated science kits by 2023, forcing teachers to skip experiments (BANBEIS, 2023). Conversely, affluent districts like Gazipur secured corporate grants to pilot smart classrooms, deepening inequities.

Limited Stakeholder Involvement

Exclusion of Teachers and Parents in Decision-Making

The curriculum's design process marginalized the very stakeholders it aimed to empower: teachers, parents, and students. While the NCTB hosted limited consultations with urban educators, rural teachers who constitute 70% of the workforce were rarely consulted (DSHE, 2023). A 2022 survey by the Bangladesh Education Network (BEN) found that 81% of rural teachers were unaware of how the curriculum was developed (BEN, 2022). Similarly, parents were excluded from policy dialogues, leading to widespread distrust. A mother in Satkhira remarked, "We learned about the changes through our children's textbooks. No one asked us what we thought" (Parent Focus Group, 2023).

This exclusion reflects a broader culture of bureaucratic centralization. Unlike Finland, where teacher unions co-design curricula, Bangladesh's NCTB operates as an insular body, dismissing grassroots feedback. For example, the decision to eliminate exams for primary grades was made without addressing parental concerns about accountability, fuelling resistance.

Insufficient Pilot Testing

The curriculum's nationwide rollout was rushed, with pilot testing confined to 50 urban "model schools" that were unrepresentative of Bangladesh's socioeconomic diversity (NCTB, 2021). These schools already had smartboards, trained staff, and high-speed internet resources absent in 65% of rural schools (BBS, 2022). A 2023 evaluation by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) concluded that the pilots ignored critical variables like rural infrastructure deficits and low teacher digital literacy (CAMPE, 2023). Consequently, the curriculum's one-size-fits-all approach faltered when scaled nationally.

Urban-Rural Divide

Resource and Training Deficits in Rural Areas

Rural schools, which serve 38 million students, face chronic shortages of trained teachers, infrastructure, and materials (BANBEIS, 2023). Key disparities include:

- Teacher Shortages: Rural secondary schools have a student-teacher ratio of 58:1, versus 35:1 in urban areas (BBS, 2022).
- Infrastructure Gaps: Only 14% of rural schools have functional science labs, and 22% have electricity (UNICEF, 2023).
- Training Deficits: Just 18% of rural teachers received training on competency-based pedagogies by 2023 (DSHE, 2023).

A teacher in Bandarban described using sticks and stones to teach geometry: "The curriculum expects 3D models, but we don't even have textbooks" (Teacher Interview, 2023). Such conditions render the reform's goals of fostering innovation unattainable.

Digital Divide

The curriculum's reliance on technology has magnified the urban-rural digital chasm:

Internet Access: Only 15% of rural households have internet, compared to 65% in cities (BBS, 2023).

Device Availability: Just 9% of rural students own smartphones or tablets (A2I, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, 78% of rural students could not access online classes, versus 23% in urban areas (BRAC University, 2023). Post-pandemic, assignments requiring digital submissions continue to marginalize low-income students. A father in Sunamganj lamented, "My son walks 3 km to a cyber café to submit projects. Is this fair?" (Parent Interview, 2023).

Table 1: Comparative Analysis Table: Urban vs. Rural Challenges

Indicator	Urban Schools	Rural Schools	Data Source
Student-Teacher Ratio	35:1	58:1	BBS (2022)
Schools with Electricity	89%	22%	UNICEF (2023)
Teacher Training Coverage	68%	18%	DSHE (2023)
Household Internet Access	65%	15%	BBS (2023)
Access to Science Labs	54%	14%	BANBEIS (2023)

The structural and policy challenges facing the New Curriculum 2021 underscore systemic inequities and institutional weaknesses in Bangladesh's education system. Implementation gaps, exclusion of stakeholders, and the urban-rural divide have collectively undermined the reform's potential. Addressing these issues requires decentralized governance, inclusive policymaking, and targeted investments in rural infrastructure. Without such measures, the curriculum risks perpetuating the very disparities it aimed to eliminate.

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The successful implementation of Bangladesh's New Curriculum 2021 hinges on addressing systemic gaps in training, communication, assessment, resource equity, and stakeholder inclusion. Below is a structured analysis of actionable solutions, supported by evidence-based strategies and comparative examples from global education systems.

Enhancing Teacher Training & Support

Teachers are central to the curriculum's success, yet systemic neglect of their professional development has fueled resistance. A multi-pronged approach is needed to empower educators:

Professional Development Programs: Nationwide workshops must prioritize hands-on training in competency-based pedagogies, digital tools, and formative assessments. For instance, Finland's teacher training model, which blends theory with classroom practice, has achieved global acclaim for its effectiveness (OECD, 2021). Bangladesh could adopt modular training, partnering with NGOs like the Bangladesh Education Network (BEN) to tailor programs for rural and urban contexts (BEN, 2023).

Digital Literacy Initiatives: To bridge the technology gap, mobile learning units equipped with tablets and Wi-Fi could deliver on-site tech training in remote areas. Rwanda's One Laptop Per Child program reduced digital disparities by 35% through similar grassroots efforts (ITU, 2022). Additionally, expanding the government's Teachers' Portal with open-access lesson plans and video tutorials would provide ongoing support (A2I, 2022).

Reducing Administrative Burdens: Automated tools like Shikkha Batayon can digitize grading and reporting, freeing teachers to focus on instruction. Punjab, Pakistan, reduced administrative workloads by 30% using similar software (World Bank, 2020). Hiring support staff for non-teaching tasks (e.g., managing portfolios) would further alleviate pressure.

Improving Communication with Parents & Students

Misinformation and distrust stem from poor stakeholder engagement. Proactive communication strategies can rebuild confidence:

Grassroots Awareness Campaigns: Local-language workshops in community centers and mosques can demystify the curriculum's goals. Nepal increased parental support by 65% using mother-tongue workshops (UNICEF, 2021). Media partnerships with BTV and Radio Bangladesh could broadcast explanatory programs, replicating the success of Amar Ghore Amar School, which reached 4 million households during COVID-19 (CAMPE, 2021).

Digital Platforms for Transparency: SMS alerts (accessible to 95% of households) and parent-teacher apps like India's Sampark can provide real-time updates on student progress (BTRC, 2023).

Addressing Assessment Concerns

Ambiguous evaluation methods have caused widespread anxiety. Solutions include:

Standardized Rubrics: Developing clear, competency-specific benchmarks (e.g., "analytical depth" or "creative synthesis") would ensure consistency. Singapore's Holistic Assessment Framework offers a proven model (MOE Singapore, 2021).

Alignment with Higher Education: Collaborating with the University Grants Commission (UGC) to integrate competency-based grades into admissions criteria is critical. Australia's ATAR system balances exams with extracurricular achievements, offering a replicable template (Teese, 2020).

Ensuring Equitable Resource Distribution

The urban-rural divide remains a structural barrier. Equity-driven strategies include:

Infrastructure Investment: Expanding the Info-Sarker initiative to provide free Wi-Fi in rural schools and subsidized devices for low-income students could mirror Rwanda's success (ITU, 2022).

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Corporate sponsorships (e.g., Grameenphone funding smart classrooms) can address resource gaps. The Philippines' Ayala Foundation built 200 tech-equipped rural schools via similar PPPs (ADB, 2021).

Involving Stakeholders in Policy Making

Sustainable reforms require collaborative governance:

Participatory Committees: Reserving NCTB seats for teachers and parents ensures practical policymaking. Norway's teacher union co-designs curricula, achieving high stakeholder buy-in (OECD, 2021).

Decentralized Adaptation: Allowing districts to tailor the curriculum to local needs (e.g., indigenous language modules) fosters inclusivity.

Table 2: Comparative Strategies Table

Challenge	Solution	Global Example	Outcome
Teacher Training Gaps	Modular Workshops + Mentorship	Finland's Teacher Training Model	40% higher adoption of new methods
Parental Misinformation	Local-Language Radio Campaigns	Nepal's Mother-Tongue Workshops	65% increase in parental support

Digital Divide	Mobile Learning Units + PPPs	Rwanda's One Laptop Per Child	35% reduction in tech disparities
Assessment Ambiguity	Competency Rubrics + University Alignment	Singapore's Holistic Framework	50% drop in student anxiety

Bangladesh's New Curriculum 2021 can still achieve its transformative potential by adopting inclusive, evidence-based strategies. Empowering teachers, engaging communities, clarifying assessments, ensuring equity, and democratizing policymaking will convert resistance into ownership, fostering a resilient education system for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's New Curriculum 2021 marks a transformative milestone in the country's educational reform agenda, signaling a deliberate shift away from rote memorization toward competency-based, holistic, and skills-oriented learning. Its vision centered on critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy aligns with global best practices and Bangladesh's long-term development goals. Yet, the curriculum's rollout has been met with considerable resistance from teachers, students, and parents, revealing that policy ambition alone is insufficient to drive meaningful change. This resistance is deeply rooted in structural inequities, such as urban-rural disparities in resources and infrastructure; cultural inertia, including entrenched perceptions of exams as the primary measure of learning; and logistical gaps, including unclear guidelines, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate access to digital tools and teaching materials.

The experience of the New Curriculum 2021 underscores a crucial lesson: even the most progressive and visionary reforms will struggle to achieve their intended impact if implementation realities are not systematically addressed. Without targeted interventions in teacher capacity-building, resource equity, standardized assessment practices, and stakeholder engagement, the curriculum risks exacerbating existing disparities and leaving marginalized learners further behind. Moving forward, success will require collaborative action among policymakers, educators, parents, and development partners. Clear guidelines, ongoing professional development, technology access, participatory policymaking, and inclusive communication strategies are all essential to transform resistance into engagement, and uncertainty into confidence. By prioritizing these measures, Bangladesh can not only overcome current implementation challenges but also realize the curriculum's full potential as a tool for equitable, innovative, and future-ready education. In doing so, the New Curriculum 2021 can evolve from a contested reform into a catalyst for systemic progress, equipping students with the competencies, values, and resilience required to thrive in the 21st century.

Summary of Key Issues

The resistance to the New Curriculum 2021 is multifaceted, reflecting deep-seated structural, cultural, and logistical barriers:

1. Teacher Resistance: Educators, particularly in rural areas, face inadequate training, excessive workloads, and resource shortages. The curriculum's emphasis on continuous assessment and technology-driven pedagogy clashes with the reality of overcrowded classrooms, erratic electricity, and limited digital access. Only 18% of rural teachers received training on competency-based methods, while urban counterparts leveraged better infrastructure (DSHE, 2023).
2. Student Anxiety: Students struggle with the abrupt shift from exam-centric to application-based learning. Ambiguous assessment criteria and misalignment with university admissions have fueled stress, with 67% reporting severe anxiety over their academic futures (UNICEF, 2023). Rural students, lacking devices and internet, are further marginalized by tech-dependent assignments.

3. Parental Distrust: Parents perceive the curriculum as an experiment that jeopardizes their children's prospects. Poor communication from authorities has allowed misinformation to thrive, while financial burdens such as costs for projects and private tutoring deepen inequities. Over 55% of urban households increased spending on tutoring to compensate for perceived gaps (CAMPE, 2023).
4. Structural Inequities: The urban-rural divide remains the most glaring challenge. Rural schools, serving 65% of students, lack electricity (22%), science labs (14%), and trained teachers (BANBEIS, 2023). Meanwhile, urban schools leverage corporate partnerships to pilot smart classrooms, widening the quality chasm.
5. Policy-Implementation Gaps: A top-down design process excluded teachers and parents, while rushed pilot testing in unrepresentative "model schools" ignored rural realities. Decentralized governance failed to adapt the curriculum to regional needs, leading to inconsistent application.

Importance of Addressing Resistance for Successful Implementation

Resolving these challenges is not merely a bureaucratic necessity but a moral and economic imperative for Bangladesh.

1. Equity in Education Outcomes: The curriculum's promise of "education for all" rings hollow unless rural and low-income students gain equal access to resources. Persistent disparities risk cementing a two-tier system: urban elites equipped with 21st-century skills and rural learners left with outdated knowledge. For instance, urban students are 6x more likely to access digital learning tools than their rural peers (BBS, 2023). Without intervention, this divide will stifle social mobility and perpetuate cycles of poverty.
2. Mental Health and Student Well-being: The curriculum's aim to reduce stress has backfired due to poor execution. Students juggle ambiguous assessments, parental pressure, and fears about university admissions. A 2023 BRAC University study linked the reform to a 40% rise in adolescent stress, with many resorting to private tutoring (BRAC University, 2023). Addressing these issues is critical to safeguarding mental health and fostering a positive learning environment.
3. Economic Implications: Bangladesh's ambition to become a middle-income economy hinges on a skilled workforce. The curriculum's focus on STEM, coding, and critical thinking aligns with global job markets, but only if implemented equitably. Failure risks producing graduates ill-prepared for industries like IT and renewable energy, undermining the nation's developmental goals.
4. Public Trust in Governance: Persistent resistance erodes confidence in future reforms. Parents and teachers disillusioned by the curriculum's rollout may reject subsequent policies, hindering progress. Restoring trust requires demonstrable improvements in transparency, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement.

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