

# EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: POLICIES, PREFERENCES AND PERFORMANCES OF EDUCATION SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

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**Abstract:** The positive impacts of education on development are recognised. There is also a gap between what education is expected to achieve and what have been achieved in very many developing countries. This paper gives an empirical account of education policies, preferences and performances of students in Bangladesh. It draws together observations and threads of a number of research works. The analysis directs our attention to the likelihood of graduated students remaining unemployed owing to differences between the number of graduates and jobs available for them. Further analysis suggests that education policies and social values influence the choice of education. Higher education has always been given priority by the national policy makers. Neither national policy makers nor students and their parents give a positive thought over job oriented vocational education. Education policies failed to provide with conditions necessary for enterprising activities among young students. Those also perpetuate the tendency of spending on unskilled human resources. As an outcome, inefficiency and waste of resources (both economic and human) is notably high owing to the limited capacity of the labour market to absorb the graduated students. These have created a phenomenon of educated unemployed. A significant part of the potential resources of the society are excluded from participation in socio-economic development. In concluding, this paper argues for going beyond higher education and fostering a reorientation of values and practices of technical and vocational education.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh; Education; Development; Social values; Vocational education

## INTRODUCTION

This article addresses an issue which increasingly confronts development research, policies and goals: the conditions detrimental to realisation of the full potential of education for affecting development. The issue overlaps disciplines such as sociology, political science, anthropology and economics. The theme of this paper draws mainly on sociology of development. The sociological notion of development puts emphasis on societal progress and human development. Education is regarded as the most effective means to achieve those objectives. Development includes economic growth. Economic growth can only proceed as planned if there are human resources with the required technical and managerial skill. Development implies widened possibilities to choose. Education creates those possibilities.

Experiences of the developed industrialised societies and the emerging economies are clear evidence of positive impacts of education on development. Education transmits knowledge and skills, and opens up opportunities for employment. For students, education also means higher income, improvement in their standard of living or moving upward in the social strata. They attain the capability of absorbing new information faster and make applications of knowledge and new information more effectively. In the wider social arena, educated young people are expected to affect productivity and growth besides contributing to the well being of a society and its people. Furthermore, education is expected to mediate cultural norms and democratic values. Education facilitates emancipation. Thus, education not is a means to achieve developmental goals but education is a goal in itself. The widespread belief today, driving mainly from the Welfare states, is that people are entitled to education.

As an outcome of multiple roles of education and convergence of interests, there has been increase of schools, colleges, and universities in developing countries. Not only enrolments in educational institutions swelled, but also number of young graduates. But, the number of graduates tells us little about the quality of education. Observation clearly shows a considerable gap between what education is expected to achieve and what have been achieved. In very many developing countries there is a growing concern about the massive unemployed young boys and girls. The most potential social resources are excluded from participation in socio-economic development.

This paper gives an empirical account of the experience of Bangladesh in education sector. Observation shows: 1. Differences between the number of graduated students and jobs available for them; and 2. A huge surplus of unskilled labour force, while there is acute shortage of skilled professionals.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, as observed, education policies are not conducive to labour market, and there are inbuilt disincentives to vocational education. The obvious question is: *What are the factors that influence education policies and choice of education*

This question is addressed in this article. It draws together historical analysis,<sup>2</sup> observations and threads of a number of research works to arrive at a somewhat integrated idea of likelihood of educated young people remaining unemployed. The section to come is a brief historical review of the education policies. The following section gives an account of the factors that leave impacts on students' choice of education in Bangladesh. Then, a short account of the performances both of the students and of the education sector including the status of vocational education in present Bangladesh. The concluding discussion includes arguments for fostering new values and systemic changes that would stimulate the interest of the students for vocational education. The purpose is, not undermining the importance of higher education but, unfolding some structural factors constraining the formulation and implementation of policies to promote vocational education and counteract students' choices.

#### **EDUCATION POLICIES**

Bangladesh emerged as a state 43 years ago, in 1971. Its education policies still bear some important legacies of old colonial education system. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a system of liberal English-language schools based on the British model was instituted in the region that now constitutes Bangladesh. The objective was civilizing mission, however, education programmes were designed to provide clerical and administrative support to the colonial administration. Those also, creating a new middle class with English life style, served the mercantile interest.

During its union with Pakistan (1947-1971) the dominant military-bureaucratic oligarchy, and the political elite, showed little interest in a people-oriented education policy. They regarded mass education, based upon scientific and secular principle, as threats to the very ideology of Pakistan. They used education policies as an ideal vehicle for the propagation of their political interests.

When Bangladesh became independent, in 1971, there was a general awareness of the need to restructure the education system to meet the needs of the new nation; implementing a scientific education policy based upon secular and democratic values. The full potentials of education for affecting development are not realised owing to politicization of education and education policies not satisfying the demand of the labour market.

#### ***The civilising mission***

What is Bangladesh today was East Bengal in colonial India. So, Bangladesh shares colonial legacies with India, especially West Bengal. It was in Bengal where the British East India Company started its activities. Calcutta was the first capital of the British Empire in India. A modern educational system was first initiated by the British in Bengal. They established Fort William College in Calcutta, in 1800 and then the University of Dacca, in 1913. The Fort William College aimed at training British administrators in Indian Language. The institution over time has fostered the development of Bengali language. Many historians consider the college to be starting point of the

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<sup>1</sup> Field study in Bangladesh, December 2010-January 2011. See also Rahman 2009; Rahman 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Historical analysis is necessary because the education system of present Bangladesh still bears legacies of the past colonial education policies. The choice of education is also not discrete event, but embedded in social relations over time, linking past and present as well as future.

Bengali renaissance. The University of Dacca was a gift to the Nawab of Dacca, a compensation of the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1905.<sup>3</sup>

With the British settling down in the seat of power, their requirements changed. Lord Bentick, announced his educational policy in 1835, most to cater to the growing needs of administration and commerce. Educational reforms started with a policy of assimilation of the Indians with British law and administration from 1786 to 1793. The intention to 'civilise' the natives was to recruit natives in the civil service to provide administrative support to the colonial administration. The evangelists, the Clapham Sect in particular, had also a 'civilising mission' through opening of Bengal to missionary enterprise. Simultaneously the merchants in London showed a keen interest in opening Bengal, eventually India, to trade.

The institutionalization of English model education was followed by land reforms. The Permanent Settlement Act of Bengal of 1793 in particular, conferred a freely alienable private property right. A Supreme Court was established in Calcutta and judges were appointed directly by the Empire in order to defend the rights and liberties of people against Indian institutions of law and rights. In 1829, two Supreme Court judges at Calcutta proposed the extension of an English form of property law to a part of Bengal. This required the establishment of a social class who would acquire the requisite means and taste for British way of life. Educational and administrative reforms were thought to be appropriate strategies. The natives were different from the British in language, manners, customs etc. Education was assumed to remove such differences. The natives were expected to develop English taste and assimilate themselves with the British. In this way, "the spread of knowledge would not forfeit its earthly reward; for 'where ever our principles and our language are introduced, our commerce will follow'".<sup>4</sup>

The English law members in India also argued for the importance of English education for the natives. Their aim was to arm the Bengali elite with English words and manners "to form a class who may be interpreters between the millions of whom we govern; a Class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, moral, and in intellect."<sup>5</sup> They successfully convinced Lord William Bentinck, the Governor of Bengal in 1828, that the East India Company's annual allocation of funds for education would better be spent on teaching Western learning to young Indians in the English Language. The intention was, "to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions of whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect".<sup>6</sup>

District judges in Bengal had put forward the proposal of administrative reform through education. Simultaneously, the British colonial administration initiated a kind of modernisation of the Indian bureaucratic machine. The British also found it more convenient to teach the natives English, than to learn the local language. A new education policy was set in motion to recruit bureaucratic personnel from the natives.

The impacts of English education seemed to have been a mixed blessing in relation to development in India, especially in Bengal. Both the civilising mission and the administrative purpose created new middle class, the Bhadrolok, (gentlemen) adopting the English life style thus served *the mercantile interest*. English became administrative language. The young generation in Bengal with some exception, embraced the English education.<sup>7</sup> The newly educated Bengalis found that bureaucratic jobs were the principal vehicle to upward mobility.<sup>8</sup> They were attracted to government administrative services that allowed status and privileges. On the other hand, English education served to intensify Indian perceptions of their native differences from those who ran the British

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<sup>3</sup> During the Indian freedom movement and after the partition of India it played the role of progressive and democratic movements. Its students and teachers played central role in the rise of Bengali nationalism and in independence of Bangladesh

<sup>4</sup> Grant quoted in Stokes E. 1989:34.

<sup>5</sup> Macaulay's minute, quoted in Wolpert 1982:215.

<sup>6</sup> Macaulay's minute quoted in Wolpert 1982:215.

<sup>7</sup> A group of Muslims thought English education was against Islam. Another group, Syed Ahmed being the leader, accepted English education. Ahmed argued for modernization of education.

<sup>8</sup> See Alavi H. 1989, Kochanek S. 1993, Maddison A. 1971.

administration. Eventually, this perception developed to national consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Calcutta in particular, became the centre of intellectual, academic and cultural activities, as well as political mobilization.

### ***Education policy as political propaganda.***

India became independent in 1947, but divided into two countries, India and Pakistan. Though geographically separated and culturally different, due to complex political reasons, East Bengal, (present Bangladesh) became a part of Pakistan.

The political ideology of Pakistan did not allow the growth of a modern secular education system. The Pakistani leaders, who were Muslims, proposed Urdu to be the state language and the teaching medium (in 1948). This was the first step toward Islamization education. The proposal was rejected by the academics and students in East Bengal. Urdu was promoted by the Turks and Mughals when they ruled India. It used a mix of Persian and Arabic scripts. The language was considered a vital element of the Islamic culture. Bengali and Hindu had Devnagari script and were associated with the Hindu religion. While Urdu developed among the Muslims in northern India, the Muslims and Hindus of Bengal primarily used Bengali. Bengali is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language that arose from the eastern Middle Indic language around 1000 BC. a new education policy (1962).

In 1962, the Pakistani government announced a new education policy, based upon the report of 1959 by Pakistan National Commission on Education. The student community and the Bengali intellectuals denounced it because it did not reflect their desire, a modern secular education. It was designed to fit the requirement of the Pakistani military-bureaucratic oligarchy and its emphasis was on Islamic values. The Pakistanis thought, since there was nothing in common between the people of East Bengal and of Western territory of Pakistan, the religious values would keep two territories together.

The interests of the generals played a decisive role in the national budget, so in the educational budget. The military budget was more than 50% of total revenue earnings of Pakistan. The share of educational budget was limited. The military-bureaucratic oligarchy knew that in the long run East Bengal would be seceded. East Bengal became a part of Pakistan against the wish of the student community and the intellectual elite in Bengal. The Pakistani administration did not want enlightened educated elite in Bengal. This was another reason why it did not give priority to the education sector in East Bengal.

### ***Politicization of education.***

Bangladesh emerged as independent nation on 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1971. The student community, the intellectual elite, and the political leaders in the newly emerged nation urged that education be expanded since the opportunity had been available only to a limited basis prior to its independence. They also demanded an education policy based upon the principles of secularism and universalism. The constitution of Bangladesh and the education policies as proposed in its first two education commissions (Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission report of 1974 and the Shamsul Huq Education Commission Report of 1997) guaranteed education policy to be secular and inclusive. The secular education in Bangladesh suffered setbacks.

Firstly, a good number of academics who were pioneers for the progressive and inclusive education policy were killed by the Pakistani occupation forces during the 9 months liberation war in 1971.

Second, the policy recommendations were not fully implemented. The first post-independent government did not have enough time to implement the policies as the President with his family members and core party leaders were assassinated by a group of army officers in 1975. There were two successive military regimes during 1975-1990. They amended the constitution in their effort to get support from Islamic states. They dropped the word secularism from the constitution. Later, the military regimes formed their own political parties and captured the state power in alliance with Islamist parties. In order to secure and maintain political power, they accepted some degree of Islamization of education.

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<sup>9</sup> Subhas Bose, a Bengali, was among the prominent Indian Civil Service, and the President of Indian Congress. He gave up both his positions in the administration and in the Congress and formed his Indian National Army with aim of freeing India through armed struggle.

Third, Islamization went in tandem with politicization of education. The growing ideological impact of Islamization of education went along with the weakening of meritocratic principles in education due to politics of patronage. All political parties have developed a proprietor attitude towards Bangladesh. Such an attitude is further reinforced by a process of politicisation of administration, business, judiciary and education. As a way of gaining support and the loyalty of students, the major political parties give the student leaders extra privileges. They work as mediating link between various government organizations and political leaders. They use their connections to bring a request to the leader, for top positions in the universities and for student admission.

### **CHOICE OF EDUCATION**

The choice of education is not a discrete event but embedded in social relations over time, linking past, present and future. Both colonial legacy and traditional social values (social obligations, purity, pride and prejudices) and status associated to various occupations left strong imprints on present class structure and on the choice of education.

Students and their parents look upon education as opening up opportunities for employment, higher income and improvement in their standard of living. In general, education is regarded as a major avenue to occupation and higher income. It takes on other values too. An educated person is respected by most people. To have higher education implies that one has acquired certain respectability.

The family takes the decision regarding education and career of the children. Parents regard giving a prestigious education to their offspring as their obligation. Education is tailored to suit what family members, usually parents, define higher education as a need of their children. Accordingly consumption of education within the family takes place directly through family's values and lifestyle. Children with higher education are evidence of pride of parents and kin. Such a consideration has strong impact on the decision regarding choice of education.

The family dignity, as obligation, flowing from the past consumption of schooling endowed parents with knowledge of the association between educational qualifications and future well-being- whether as material comfort, a sense of personal fulfilment, a prestigious job etc. In order to pursue all these goals, they juggle between prestigious schools and tutors.

The businessmen put relatively less weight on education, owing to their choice of investment in business and matrimonial relations as means both for economic security and upward mobility. They are less inclined to switch over to other professions. In an earlier survey I found some exceptions. A few businessmen had sent their offspring abroad for higher education which served a number of purposes.<sup>10</sup> First, their children achieved a foreign degree, which is a source of status and prestige. They got friends among English or American students. Later, when they took over the business of their parents they acquired a competitive advantage. Not only they got degree in Business management, they also mastered English language. Both these skills added extra to their competence, especially in international trade. And, finally, their academic degree and business success, in turn, helped them in establishing matrimonial relations with other families enjoying higher social status and honour.

Higher education is regarded as effective mechanism to establish matrimonial relationship. People in general put emphasis on similarity with each other when they establish matrimonial relationship. Economic differences and inequalities in wealth and status usually determine the cut-off points, and prevent matrimonial relationships between families. One born into a traditionally higher class family naturally starts off with an advantage in this process. One can move upward in the social strata by establishing matrimonial relations with a family with status, prestige and power. The process involves lot of efforts, for the newly rich in particular. They have to make extra investments in order to establish relations with a prestigious family. It happens that the bride's parents pay for higher education of the groom.

Apparently, investment in higher education pays, both materially and socially. Vocational education may be good for economic reason, but not for social purposes. In matrimonial relationship higher education is valued, vocational education is regarded as a constraint.

People generally feel that vocational education is necessary. Whenever I talked to someone, at a gathering or informal meeting, be they academics, professionals, or businessmen, all agree that vocational education and

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<sup>10</sup> Survey in Dhaka, 1998.

training be given priority in order to facilitate economic growth as well as to solve a lot of social problems. I also observed a strong distaste for vocational education among the students irrespective of their social background. As part of my field study I talked to students, at primary schools, at secondary schools, higher secondary schools.<sup>11</sup> I met students in classrooms and asked the question: What would they study after completion of secondary school? They talked about studying medicine, engineering, economics, law etc. No one mentioned carpentry, electrical and motor mechanism etc.

People value educational achievements and occupational success. Both for students and their parents, education means a higher standard of living which vocational education and training cannot provide. They are convinced that higher education leads to higher income and more prestigious jobs. The question is who seeks vocational education? The answer, came from a respondent, the Principal of Barisal Commercial Institute, is those who usually drops out of the higher educational institutions choose vocational education as the last option.

The choice regarding selection of schools can be seen as social mechanism of reproducing families who are able to mobilise a high level of economic and social capital. Education is a vehicle for social mobility. Higher education is preferred, not only as a vehicle for social mobility but also as a way of distinction. Sons and daughters, who perform well at school and get a higher degree, are the pride of parents and of kin. A reputed school is a source of such pride. Friendship develops amongst parents of children who attended similar schools. Such contacts help them in accumulating social capital. It means, the type of education one chooses adds more to her/his stock of social capital.

The previous section gave an account of education policies. Various education policies had other objectives than providing students with knowledge and skill. Among the students and their parents, there is a strong belief that educational certificates are the key to obtaining the best-paid and most secure jobs. Education is regarded as a means to achieve other goals. That education is also a goal in-itself, that education transmitting knowledge is way of emancipation, is hardly taken into consideration. Such a consideration has consequences for students' performances.

## **PERFORMANCES**

In 43 years since its inception as an independent country seven education policies have been formulated. None was implemented fully. The politicians have showed an inclination towards their own philosophy of education which they were not loath to foist upon the nation. Their policy objectives included expansion of enrolment. Those tended to feed into the overriding aim of achieving increased number of students. The number of students swelled. The educational institutions came to be overwhelmed by students. The pressure opened opportunities for private schools, colleges and universities. Presently, there are 72 private universities in Dhaka only. The quality of these institutions requires scrutiny..

### ***Institutional performances***

Education system, at all levels, is geared to imparting the knowledge necessary to passing exams, regardless of whether such knowledge is useful in practical life outside schools, colleges and universities. Most educational institutions perform classroom teaching that motivates students to prepare for examinations only and do not deliver practical knowledge and skills. As a result, there are more graduated young boys and girls who regard degrees or certificates as more valued, more than what they are useful for. Those add more to the high unemployment rate. Following a national daily, there has been a 28 per cent increase in the unemployment rate over three years between 2006 and 2009.<sup>12</sup> The present rate is 33%.<sup>13</sup>

The unemployment rate does not include those who are underemployed. The rate of underemployment is on rise. It was 17 percent in 2000 and 38 percent in 2003.<sup>14</sup> A major reason for underemployment is shortages of skilled man power. There are few people in the labour market with technical/vocational qualifications. The 2002-03 Labour Force Survey estimate shows that there were 53,000 men and 5,000 women with vocational qualifications. A contrasting picture is the number of graduates. For every single person in the labour force with a

<sup>11</sup> I have chosen schools, colleges and universities in different parts of Bangladesh, in rural areas, in urban areas.

<sup>12</sup> The Daily Star, 20.05.2010.

<sup>13</sup> The daily Star, 29.08.2014.

<sup>14</sup> Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, The World Bank, June 2006

technical/vocational qualification there were more than 104 others who have completed Secondary School Certificate or Higher Secondary Certificate and 34 others who had a university degree.<sup>15</sup> Employers are reluctant to hire unskilled labour force full time.

The biggest failure of the education system and policy appears to be the religious schools. The previous section gave an account of politicization of education that has plagued Bangladesh throughout the last four decades. As an outcome, fundamentalism has usurped educational spaces. Of late a new interest has been shown by the previous government (the four party alliance during 2001-2006 in which Jamaat I Islami is one partner) in madrassah education.<sup>16</sup> Driven by abysmal poverty and some attachment to religious values, poor parents in rural Bangladesh send their children to madrassas where they are provided with food and shelter along with radical Islamic thoughts and ideology but not with skill and knowledge required for the job market. While, government schools and vocational schools lack funds, per capita allocation for the madrasahs out of the public exchequer is quite high, though politicians acknowledge that the madrasahs are not only educationally anachronistic; they tend to roll back social progress. As female teachers are not welcome, students fail to grow a positive outlook towards gender issues. Topics relating to individual enlightenment and social progress are almost never discussed in classroom in madrassas.

Clearly, education in Bangladesh is far from being a means of transmitting knowledge and skills. Not only the education policy in Bangladesh fails to satisfy the demand of a modern education system, it also perpetuates the tendency of spending on unskilled human resources. There is little discussion on a rational education system that not only would provide the nation with skilled professionals but also save the nation from wastage of time, money, and human resources. There is too little investment in human capital. There is mismatch as regard educational objectives and means to attain those.

Let's take investment in human capital first. Public expenditures for education have always been low, and continue to remain low in Bangladesh. As a percentage of the gross domestic product, the level of expenditure for education in 1983 was approximately 1.3 percent, a figure that did not rise substantially throughout 1980s. On average, the share of education in the total development expenditure of the government between 1973 and 1983 was only 4.1 percent; in 1985 it was only 3.1 percent. There has been an increase in public expenditures for education during the 1990s still less than half of what other south Asian countries, Thailand, Malaysia etc, spend on education.<sup>17</sup>

The Third Five-Year Plan included efforts to improve quality of education by restructuring higher secondary and college education and introducing management controls and performance evaluations. The problem still remains. Secondary and higher education credentials have little currency in the labour market because they are regarded as purely academic programs.

Institutions offering higher education in the last decade increased many fold, however, the number of institutions that provide vocational education remained unchanged.<sup>18</sup> The present Education Minister expressed his concern: "The technical education especially polytechnic institutions, has been neglected. We want to improve the quality of technical education by putting our best efforts".<sup>19</sup>

### ***Students' performance***

As regards student performances, there are four major categories. The first category refers to the students with good merit records. For them, economic considerations are off course prime concerns. They value educational achievements and occupational success. Both are essential if they want to maintain a decent life style, to achieve status etc. As mentioned earlier, education is tailored to suit what family members, usually parents, define the educational need of their children. Therefore, consumption of education within

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<sup>15</sup> The Labour Force Survey 2003-04.

<sup>16</sup> Top leaders of Jamaat-i-Islami collaborated with the Pakistani occupation army during the Liberation War in 1971.

<sup>17</sup> World Development 2003. Bangladesh 2020; A long term perspective.

<sup>18</sup> Interview in Dhaka, 16.01.2011. The Ministry of Education; The Directorate of Technical Education; The Technical Education Board.

<sup>19</sup> Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, quoted in The Daily Star, 20.05.2010.

the family is a part of the family's values and lifestyle. This group of students are obliged to reciprocate through hard work at a college or at a university. It is also expected that children would repay their parents by supporting them when they become old. The academic performance of this category usually is good.

The second category refers to those for whom education was about obtaining a certificate in order to get a job, rather than learning to do a job. Since many students get admission, not because of their merit, but because recommended by some political leaders, they are obliged to reciprocating the favor they received from a student leader. They take part in demonstration, political meeting etc. They have little time to study and their academic performances are not satisfactory.

The third category refers to those who hold top positions in various student organizations and are active in student politics. They remain students year after year, since they are in the pay role of various political parties. The previous section gave an account of how the student leaders have created a position to manipulate the political system. Taking one step further, they do this through violent means. They also enjoy the protection by political leaders. Thus, they have entered into co-existence with the political elite. They are provided with free services and enter deals with the police who gave them protection.<sup>20</sup> University campuses are under their control. For any construction works at the university campus and the supply of equipment to the university, they must be given a share of the total amount. Since education is politicized, access to education, as well as job, depends on political connections, students are more interested in maintaining those connections than using their time in studying. Since a teachers' political connection is more important for a position at a university than his merit, the quality of teaching is questionable.

The students belong to the fourth category are those who take religious education. This group of students lack knowledge and skill that are required for the society as a whole. Yet they have strong interest in upgrading the status of their religious learning to use it to get a job. As mentioned earlier, that the madrassa students comes from poor families with some attachment to religious values. They learn how to read religious book. They don't get lesson neither on humanities, social sciences, nor in natural sciences. They are indoctrinated by radical Islamic thoughts and ideology, they fail to grow a positive outlook towards gender issues, democratic values, and enlightenment. They are not provided with skill and knowledge required for the job market.

Students belonging to the first category, in general, with good merit record, are employed. The picture is not that rosy for all. There are evidence of unemployment in this category. It is mainly due to conflicting interests between them and their employers, and political affiliation. The third category students, afterwards, become party activists. Some get elected as member of the parliament. A few may become ministers. Others, because of their political connections, turn out to be rich businessmen.<sup>21</sup> The students belonging to second and fourth category pose to be serious social problems. Both these groups obtain certificates. But, in the job market those certificates have no value. These young men came to be the root cause of many serious social problems: they became permanent burdens of their families; without job, they have lost trust in the society; they have lost trust in themselves; they are frustrated, many seek remedy in drug abuse; very many of them became victims of illicit businessmen engaged systematic human traffic. The potential resources are excluded from participation in social development. Without job, they become easy prey of the political and religious organisations.

#### **THE STATUS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH**

A number of vocational institutions were established in 1970s and those still exist; Polytechnic Institutes (offer pre-engineering education), Technical Institutes (offer short-term mechanical and electrical training), and Commercial Institutes (offer short-hand, computer training, secretarial and accounting schooling).

While universities and colleges are overwhelmed with students, the vocational educational institutes have problems in recruiting students. Hardly any institute uses the full capacity, not even 50%. A school having the capacity of accepting 400 students receives 200 applicants.<sup>22</sup> The schools are also ill equipped, equipments are

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<sup>20</sup> The Daily Star, a national daily.

<sup>21</sup> See Rahman 2010: Power Networks in the Makling of Rich in a Poor Country.

<sup>22</sup> Interview in Barisal. 14.01.2011. Fakhruzzaman, Principal, Barisal Commercial College.



old and not in use. These schools get a “step-motherly” treatment by the authority.<sup>23</sup> There is also lack of coordination between a school and other government organisations. The whole system of Technical Education is very complicated. It faces heavy bureaucratic tangles, and there is lack of coordination between the institutions involved. There are three institutions involved in technical and vocational education and training: The Ministry of Education approves the institutions providing technical education; The Directorate of Technical Education has the responsibility of organising the curriculum; and The Technical Education Board is responsible for conducting examinations and certifying the successful candidates. The bureaucracy within the institution is even more complicated. There are many layers in the hierarchy; people working in one level of the hierarchy do not know what is going on at the next level.<sup>24</sup>

In some Secondary Schools, in addition to academic subjects, students may take accounting, trade, computing, and subjects that provide them with technical skills as elective subjects. There are some Technical Schools offering specialized skill to perform job in offices, trading organizations and specific industries.<sup>25</sup>

Business houses, industrialists and traders also hold vocational education and training in minimum high regard. Private sector entrepreneurs are not involved in the management of vocational institutions. This is one reason why students taking vocational training are poorly trained. The involvement of private business houses may bring changes both in terms of financing purchase of training equipments, employing skilled teaching staff and producing skilled workforce essential for industrial competitiveness.<sup>26</sup>

There is a new awareness about vocational education. Job oriented education is now advocated as a response to the inability of labour markets to offer white-collar job to graduates. There is also a widespread perception that conventional education, at secondary and higher secondary levels, brings few benefits to the majority of students; that education should provide young students with skill and prepare them for work in sectors of the economy where demand for labour is higher, both at home and abroad. Employers feel that the education system in Bangladesh is continuing to produce graduates for old and marginal trades, which have no market demand, while newer trades with substantial needs for skilled labour have been left unmet. And, recently, there has been a new interest in vocational training within the private sector. A few businessmen established training centres providing young people with intensive mechanical and electrical education. The training is for 360 hours, in 3 to 6 months time, depending on full time or part time training. The private vocational training centres require affiliation of the Directorate of Technical Education and The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training. Prior to admission the trainees must pay a lump sum, the sum may vary, in some cases 100,000 BDT and in some cases 200,000 BDT. After completion a course a person may get a job in a country, in the Middle East and in South East Asia.<sup>27</sup>

A number NGOs have undertaken educating the adults. Centre for Mass Education and Science (CMES, started in 1991) is one of the pioneers in adolescent education. In addition to basic education, it offers vocational training, credit and provides leadership training through the Adolescent Group Program.

Despite all these efforts the country still lacks conditions necessary for enterprising activities among educated young people. Training capacity in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system has doubled to 145,000 since 1998. This is less than two percent of enrolments at the secondary level.<sup>28</sup> Thus, there exists a gap within labour market. Following the Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, “The main challenge for the skill development system is to overcome its inadequate orientation to the labour market. Formal providers of technical and vocational education and training do not have strong linkages with the private sector employers that

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<sup>23</sup> Interview in Barisal, and Galachipa, 14.01.2011 and 12.01.2011. Fakhruzzaman, Principal, Barisal Commercial Institute, Principal, Galachipa Textile Institute.

<sup>24</sup> Interviews in Dhaka; Bangladesh Technical Education Board. 16.01.2011.

<sup>25</sup> In my survey the examples are Barisal Commercial Institute Polytechnic Institute and Textile Institute in Barisal, Galachipa Textile Institute etc.

<sup>26</sup> Interview in Dhaka, Bangladesh Technical Education Board, and in Barisal, Principal, Barisal Commercial College.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews in Dhaka, Technical Education Board, 16.01.2011.

<sup>28</sup> Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, The World Bank, June 2006

drive the changing patterns of labour demand, nor do they have proper incentives to build those connections, which would ensure that skill development courses are relevant and useful to both graduates and employers".<sup>29</sup>

### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In development debate today there is an emphasis on social development. Social development requires providing people with education, job opportunities and other means by which they can realize their potential. Education is expected to provide people with job opportunities and other means by which they can realize their potential. The history of development since the Industrial Revolution, in Western Europe, to the present success stories of East Asian countries, suggests societies can achieve economic growth and social progress through education, technical, managerial and industrial skills. Societies which fail to provide people with education and job opportunities often have high rates of crimes and violence as people seek alternative means for satisfying their needs or improving their living conditions.

This article has undertaken a historical sociological analysis of education policy in Bangladesh. Sociological analysis in the sense, it examined the influences of social values and institutional arrangements on both education policies and on the choice of education. It combined historical data and present data to interpret and explain some structural factors constraining the implementation of modern education policies in Bangladesh as well as the ways in which social values influence the choice of education.

Since the establishment of the British Indian Educational service, that system had developed under British tutelage, with imported professional standards of English education that served to train administrators, clerks, and a few elite of native teachers and scholars. The British education facilitated a modernization of education and the emergence of an educated middle class in India, so in Bengal. During its 23 year union with Pakistan the modernization of process suffered severe setbacks owing to the Islamization process and interests of the military generals. The educational system in post-independent Bangladesh has undergone some changes and reforms, yet it fails to satisfy the demand of a modern education system. The education system in Bangladesh still remains highly conservative and not truly a democratic one. Education policies have created a phenomenon of educated unemployed. The labour market is characterized by a miss match relations; too many young men and women with higher degree the labour market cannot absorb, while there is acute shortage of skilled labour. Both education policy and preferences of students and their parents created differences between the demand for higher education and vocational education. The differences may be attributed to individual (subjective belief in benefits, success, costs etc.) and social perspective (opportunities, restrictions, social costs etc.). The differences are not only driven by individual ability, those also depend on social conditions and opportunity structures.<sup>30</sup> With increased number of graduates and changes in demand in the job market, young students are struggling for higher education. "In the dynamic and uncertain environment of technological change, more highly educated workers have a big advantage".<sup>31</sup>

A major point this paper underlines is that social progress can proceed as planned if there are sufficient people with required knowledge and skills. Education policies must ensure education transmits knowledge, social values, teach people to think, and provides people with skills so that they secure their livelihood as well as they can contribute to the social progress. It is the responsibility of the state to create opportunities and frame policies. The state, in Bangladesh, to put in the words of a social researcher in Bangladesh, was dwarfing its citizens to make them docile instruments, the very opposite of what education should do i.e. education should be light turned on the mind and heart, the realisation of what one is worth and making one capable of expressing opinion- thoughtfully. Education is the source of inspiration and makes people capable of thinking and be creative. Vocational education is both creative and self realising.

A relative abundance of labour force provides Bangladesh with a comparative advantage in production of labour intensive goods. Vocational education will make it easier both for skilled and semi-skilled workers to find a job or to start on their own using their skill. This would in practice require a drastic reform in education system. Higher education is necessary for social and human development. Vocational education and training to produce

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<sup>29</sup> Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, The World Bank, June 2006

<sup>30</sup> Rahman 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Bangladesh Development Series: Bangladesh 2010. A Long-run Perspective Study, World Bank 2003, p.37.

skilled labour force is essential for industrial competitiveness. The immediate requirement is fostering a reorientation of the philosophy and practices of the publicly run technical institutes so as to generate close cooperation between them and private entrepreneurs. Bangladesh needs support, and share experiences especially of the developed donor countries.

Vocational education will further reveal needs through participation in development programmes such as development support related to women's participation in economic life, including overseas employment. Possible markets for skilled Bangladeshi workers abroad also offer some justification for investing in the system.<sup>32</sup> There is an urgent need to increase the levels of in-service training. A well designed Vocational Education and Training system can help in addressing this shortcoming

Vocational education embraces wider career opportunities that include carpentry, electromechanical drafting, plumbing, culinary arts, interior design, dental assisting, health assisting, information technology, early childhood education to name a few. Knowledge, experience and the institutional capacity aid agencies, must be taken into consideration in decision regarding where to invest for the development, developing new values and utilisation of human resources.

Bangladesh needs an education system that can develop skilled and creative human resources. This would require a secular, dynamic and a creative system of education to develop the minds that will create knowledge, revitalize communities and value system. Higher education is necessary. In addition to guaranteeing young girls and boys their access to education, vocational training must be given attention. These are tasks of policy makers in Bangladesh. Given the necessity of creative human resources, the emphasis of this paper is on the objective of stimulating social development through mobilizing young educated boys and girls in Bangladesh. Skills, knowledge and innovation are the driving forces of economic growth and social development. The importance of the skill development policy can be linked to economic, employment and social policies so that national development may be enhanced in a coherent way. The relatively lower status of the vocational education can be compensated by a higher wage for those who take vocational education. The experiences of the Scandinavian countries may be stimulating. There, private sector representatives take part in the managing boards of technical and vocational institutions. This ensures the market orientation of vocational training. The schools also improve their performances in matching the supply need of skilled professionals with changing demand.

The importance of political connections, in getting access to higher education, and to the job market, must be replaced by merit and skill. The educational institutions must be free from political and religious influences. This would pave the paths to creative thinking and values and reconcile positive attitude towards life based on honesty, sincerity and shun the bad, drug abuse and criminal activities.

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