

Understanding what went wrong

Through this long academic journey, one question has continued to trouble me: what went wrong with Bangladesh's education system? From primary school to higher education, we see deep-rooted structural issues. The system needs a complete overhaul—not just reforms here and there, but a transformation starting from the foundation.

Bangladesh's education structure is fragmented. We have multiple boards—general, madrasa, and technical—each functioning with their own curriculum and objectives. Then there are the streams: Bangla medium, English version, and English medium. Having multiple streams is not the problem; countries like the US, Canada, and the UK have religious, private, and public schools coexisting. The problem is that, in those countries, students from different streams ultimately converge at a common point of higher learning. Their analytical abilities and cognitive skills align despite their varied beginnings.

In Bangladesh, however, we have failed to create that convergence. Students from madrasa, technical, and general backgrounds remain divided in aptitude, orientation, and even mindset. Worse still, society has built prejudices among these groups. A student from a madrasa background is viewed differently from one who attended an English medium school—and vice versa. This divide is not just educational; it is cultural and social.

The need for cultural harmony and internationalisation

At NSU, I have tried to address this by focusing on internationalisation. When students engage with peers from diverse countries and cultures, they become more tolerant, adaptable, and globally competent. This semester alone, we welcomed 17 new international students, adding to a body that already includes 52 students from 22 countries—ranging from the United States to Japan, Palestine, Somalia, and beyond.

My vision is to make NSU a campus where diversity and unity thrive together—a place where students can share differing opinions respectfully, where cultures blend harmoniously, and where learning goes beyond textbooks.

The crisis of control and the need for reform

The biggest problem in Bangladesh's education system is over-control. Governance mechanisms have become restrictive instead of facilitative. Teacher recruitment—especially in primary and government institutions—is often driven by political considerations rather than merit. As a result, the teaching profession has lost much of its dignity and quality.

If we want to rebuild our education system, we must begin by reforming teacher recruitment and training. We need to identify capable teachers, provide them with comprehensive training, and offer them salaries that reflect the importance of their role—perhaps even higher than many corporate positions. A dedicated, well-compensated teacher living in a rural area could transform hundreds of young lives.

The problem, however, is not only financial. It is attitudinal. The government's education budget largely goes

into infrastructure, not the quality of instruction. Building schools is easy; building good teachers is hard. True reform requires setting aside funds for technology, curriculum development, and above all, teacher training.

Beyond grades and golden GPAs

Another serious flaw in our system is our obsession with grades. We have transformed from the “land of golden fibre” to the “land of golden GPA.” The entire country celebrates exam results as if they define a person's worth. This has fostered an ego-driven, result-oriented society where learning has been replaced by competition.

In many advanced nations, students do not even receive grades until much later in their schooling. Learning there is continuous, project-based, and focused on critical thinking. A student's journey is personal—not a public spectacle. In contrast, our fixation on results alienates those who learn at a slower pace, creating unnecessary shame and anxiety. History has shown that slow learners can often become the most successful individuals later in life—if only they are given the right environment.

A 25-year roadmap for transformation

Bangladesh's education crisis cannot be fixed overnight. It requires a 25-year roadmap of structural reform. The government must first accept that education is the foundation of society—our social and ethical decay stems from its failure. We need to rebuild that foundation through teacher reform, curriculum redesign, and an inclusive cultural mindset.

The current model of exams, rigid UGC regulations, and outdated teaching methods must evolve. Universities should have greater autonomy to adopt global academic standards, focus on activity-based learning, and nurture analytical skills rather than rote memorisation.

Collaboration and global outlook

Finally, we must encourage global collaboration. Bangladesh's students need exposure to the world—not only through the West, but also through Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Knowledge is not confined to geography. Yet, given the country's economic limitations, not all our graduates will find opportunities at home. Therefore, international linkages and mobility are essential.

At NSU, we are proud of our 47,000 alumni spread across the world. Half of them live abroad, excelling in various fields. They are the true ambassadors of our institution and our country. Our alumni networks are active across the UK, USA, Australia, Europe, and beyond—supporting new graduates, offering scholarships, and connecting Bangladesh to the world.

If we truly wish to transform Bangladesh, we must first transform our education system. We must remove the cancerous cells of corruption, control, and complacency from within and rebuild an ecosystem where knowledge, integrity, and creativity can flourish. It will take courage, commitment, and time—but without this, no amount of infrastructure or industry can sustain a healthy, forward-looking nation.

