

# College Education In Bangladesh

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**F**OR many centuries the civilized societies have looked to their institutions of higher learning for the training and grooming of the professionals and the government leaders. Growth and diversification of technology and the attendant complexity of the social structure are fast increasing and this is necessitating an increase in range and number of positions for which higher education, which includes college education, is essential.

Thus college and higher education in the modern world has to provide training in a larger number of disciplines to a greater number of pupils. As a society develops, the proportion of people needing college education increases. But college and higher education not only has to groom an adequate number of people to fill positions appropriate to modern conditions, it must also cater to the qualitative aspect of its outputs.

Higher education has a responsibility, which goes beyond upbringing of persons to engage in specialized or professional jobs; it must also assist its products to become educated in a general sense. This entails inculcating in them a proper habit of work, a continuing desire for knowledge, a sustained initiative, an independence of thought and action, an understanding of the problems of society, a desire to help solve such problems, and a sense of honesty and fairplay in dealing with others in the community.

Furthermore, an effective system of college and higher education not only serves society's present needs, it also helps in giving direction and impetus to the course of human progress and civilization. It is the agency primarily responsible for extending the frontiers of human knowledge, to examine, interpret, and improve the condition of man and nature.

**The Bangladesh Scenario.** Since independence, education at the higher levels in Bangladesh has expanded enormously. New colleges have been opened or affiliated and existing ones expanded without adequate facilities. This largely unplanned expansion has been at the expense of quality which has undergone disastrous deterioration. To ensure our future progress and to uphold the cause of national uplift it is imperative that this trend be reversed.

In college or higher education

there are three distinct stages of scholarly activity as represented by the undergraduate, the early post-graduate, and the advanced post-graduate levels. The first introduces the student to a field of specialization, the second—master of a portion of that field, and the third—inroads into advanced areas through independent study and research.

Theoretically college or higher education may be defined as the form of education that exists for the advanced training of pupils who have had at least twelve years of schooling, who have a proven capacity for intellectual pursuits, and who would eventually serve as professionals at various levels and spheres. The essence of college education is a community of scholarship in which the student is working for the first time in relative independence. It follows therefore that college education must be conceived of and administered as a separate stage of education distinct from primary and secondary stages.

The structure of secondary education in our country follows a 3+2+2 pattern. It was given this shape as per the Calcutta University Commission (Saddler's Commission) Report in 1917. According to this Commission the standard of education was dependent on the quality of secondary education. Consequently a 2-year intermediate course was introduced between the secondary and the university level. The main objective of this 2-year course was to prepare the students for higher education according to their merit. But by keeping this course open for everybody irrespective of merit, its inherent justification has been violated in our country and it has become a mere passport for higher education unrelated to national needs and unresponsive to socio-economic realities. As a consequence the standard of our college education has slumped, and there has been a massive increase in the number of unemployed.

In the national education commission headed by Mafizuddin Ahmed recommended in 1988 that the higher secondary or intermediate classes (XI and XII) should be gradually incorporated within the High Schools. At the same time, those

colleges which presently offer only H.S.C. level courses should also offer S.S.C. courses. Presently there are 365 Intermediate Colleges and all these can be converted into secondary cum higher secondary institutions.

In Bangladesh today 472 colleges impart education at degree level (1990). Amongst these 43 colleges offer under-graduate Honours course and 12 colleges offer Masters degree courses.

If the responsibility of H.S.C. level education is vested in the High Schools, the colleges can then concentrate fully on undergraduate and graduate levels. This concentrated effort would raise the standard of college education and also improve the standard of teaching in colleges.

**Bachelors and Masters level.** The traditional 2-year Degree pass courses of our colleges do not offer the opportunity for adequate learning of various disciplines. Although the student gets a certificate, this does not prove much of a help in his chosen profession. Considering this, our neighboring countries were prompted to adopt 3-year degree courses.

Even in our country undergraduate courses in Medicine take 5-years, and courses on engineering and agriculture take 4-years. There is no reason to believe that the courses on science, social science, commerce and arts are less important than medicine, engineering or agriculture.

The percentage of success at undergraduate Honours level in our country is almost 100%. As against this, only around 30% make their way through the Degree-Pass programme. Consequently a huge amount of national resource is wasted for educating the failure. This wastage could have been reduced if a proper method was devised for filtering the upward movement of students on the basis of merit and socio-economic necessity, and by revising the duration and content of college level courses.

The main reason why Degree-Pass students find it difficult to scrape through is because they are given insufficient time to grasp all three subjects. Even those who pass through face discriminatory treatment in higher education and jobs; this is due to the generally held view

that the standard of degree pass education is poor. Considering all these factors, the national education commission (1988) recommended a single pattern 3-year undergraduate course for science, arts, social science and commerce, instead of the existing dual pattern. This would consist of a 3 major subjects with the final examinations taken on a yearly (part by part) basis.

Currently there is a tendency to ignore or underrate the subsidiary subjects, and even students with very poor marks in these subjects sometimes top the undergraduate Honours list by virtue of their performance in Honours subject alone. This can not be justified, and the education commission has thus recommended that equal emphasis be placed on all subjects at undergraduate level: only those getting 70% or above in any subject could be given Honours in that particular subject.

The commission also recommended that in order to enable a student to enter a profession after the completion of undergraduate level, an applied subject should be incorporated in the 3rd year. It further recommended that the undergraduate degree should be accepted as a terminal one and after obtaining this degree the successful student would enter a profession as per his qualification, temperament and choice, subject to satisfactory job-related training.

As for the Post-graduate Masters Degree course it was recommended that instead of the existing 1-year duration which is too inadequate, its duration should be increased to 2-years (as is the case in M.B.A.) in line with most other countries of the world (duration of undergraduate plus post-graduate courses combined). In addition, specific qualitative criteria should be adhered to while allowing a student to enter Masters level course.

Needless and indiscriminate entry in large numbers as at present should be resisted and only scholars with high academic attainments or outstanding scholarly aptitudes should be encouraged to pursue the post-graduate course. We should make good use of our resources, reduce wastage in public sector education which is funded by taxpayers' money, and encourage quality education—not mere quantities or numbers.