

Perception of Secondary Level Teachers of Dhaka City towards the National Curriculum Framework 2021 of Bangladesh

Methela Akter¹ and Md. Adnan Nadv²

Abstract: *This study explores the perceptions of secondary-level teachers in Dhaka city regarding the National Curriculum Framework 2021 of Bangladesh. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing interviews as the primary data collection method. Data was gathered from 15 secondary school teachers across five schools. Upon analyzing the collected data, the researcher identified key themes and, through interpretation of these themes, derived significant findings from the study. The findings highlight both positive and negative perceptions regarding the curriculum framework. On the positive side, participants expressed the belief that the 2021 curriculum aimed to equip students with greater skills, as it aligns with international standards and incorporates elements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Teachers also appreciated the inclusion of modern pedagogical approaches aimed at enhancing student competency. However, the study also uncovered several challenges faced by teachers in implementing the curriculum. These challenges include an imbalance in the teacher-student ratio, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of sufficient teaching materials. The study suggests that these challenges can be addressed if key stakeholders, such as the government, policymakers, and educational administrators, collaborate effectively to provide the necessary resources and support for teachers. Overall, the study offers a comprehensive overview of teachers' perceptions, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of the National Curriculum Framework 2021. Although the implementation of the curriculum halted, this study will shed light on the effectiveness and lacking of the curriculum that can pave the way to move forward. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of addressing the identified challenges and ensuring that teachers are adequately supported to successfully deliver national curriculum.*

Keywords: *National Curriculum Framework 2021, Teachers' Perceptions, Secondary Education, Curriculum Implementation, Bangladesh Education System.*

1.1 Introduction

Curriculum serves as the foundational structure of an education system, guiding the teaching and learning processes, topics, and materials. According to Kulm and Li (2009), a curriculum is a structured plan that outlines the necessary teaching and learning activities to impart knowledge and skills. The curriculum serves as a framework that enables schools to provide effective education. As a culturally and systemically specific artifact, the curriculum also describes the educational activities and learning experiences across different education systems. Rahman et al. (2010) highlight that Bangladesh's education system has continuously adapted to meet the demands of socioeconomic

¹ Junior Teacher, Proyash Institute of Special Education

² Lecturer, Department of Education, Proyash Institute of Special Education and Research (PISER)

development, both current and future. While significant progress has been made in expanding secondary education-particularly in terms of increased participation, especially for girls, and a rise in the number of schools and teachers-challenges persist, notably in the declining quality of education, as evidenced by poor public exam results. The government of Bangladesh recognizes the critical need to improve education quality alongside efforts to ensure equitable access to secondary education.

Access, equity, and quality are interrelated, and addressing them requires an integrated, holistic approach. Despite challenges such as resource constraints, further investment is necessary to enhance the overall educational system. Identifying factors that can improve learning outcomes across diverse schools remains a priority for all stakeholders (Rahman et al., 2010).

1.2 Curriculum Framework 2021 by National Curriculum and Textbook Board, Bangladesh

The introduction of competency-based curricula has gained momentum globally, supported by research from both national and international sources. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2018) emphasizes that future global learners must develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential to address global challenges and adapt to an evolving environment. A competency-based curriculum, which prioritizes skills over traditional knowledge, ensures that learners are equipped to meet these challenges. The OECD report (2018) advocates for a transformative approach to competency, extending beyond conventional academic knowledge to include essential competencies needed for personal and societal well-being.

A study of 102 countries reveals a growing global trend towards competency-based education, with 36 countries incorporating skills-based competencies into their policy guidelines, and 76 explicitly stating such competencies within their curricula. Notably, 51 countries have integrated skill-based competencies into their curricula, highlighting the international shift toward competency-based education.

In Bangladesh, the curriculum was last revised in 2012, with the development process involving multiple stages aimed at creating curricula for pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher secondary education. A recent effort aims to create a comprehensive curriculum from pre-primary to Grade 12, focusing on imparting positive values and equipping students with the skills necessary to adapt to a competitive and ever-changing world.

1.3 Evidence-based Foundation

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) (2019) recommends implementing a competency-based curriculum at the secondary level to ensure consistency with the primary level. This includes integrating pre-vocational and vocational subjects, aligning the curriculum with global practices, and ensuring it addresses the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Vision 2041, and the objectives of the government's Election Manifesto (2018). Furthermore, curriculum reviews must

prioritize disciplines like science, sustainable development, and human rights, with a focus on experiential and activity-based learning.

1.4 Secondary Level Curriculum (Grades 6-10)

The revised secondary curriculum includes the following subjects:

- Language and Communication: Bangla
- Mathematics and Reasoning: English, Mathematics
- Life and Livelihood: Science, Digital Technology
- Social and Global Citizenship: History, Social Sciences
- Environment and Climate: Digital Technology, Well-being
- Science and Technology: Arts and Culture

1.5 Teaching and Learning Materials

To support the curriculum, textbooks and teaching guides will be provided to help teachers facilitate the development of students' skills, values, and attitudes. Local environments will serve as primary learning resources, encouraging experiential learning. Additional reference books, charts, and audiovisual materials will be available as needed, promoting a collaborative approach to learning that involves families, schools, and the broader social environment.

1.6 Learning Assessment

The success of the curriculum's objectives depends on the assessment strategies used to track student progress. Moving away from traditional exams, the competency-based approach emphasizes multidimensional assessment methods, including real-time assessment, peer evaluations, and the use of technology in assessments. The curriculum incorporates ongoing, process-based assessments that measure knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in an integrated manner, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of student competencies.

This study aims to understand secondary school teachers' perceptions of the Curriculum Framework 2021, identifying challenges and solutions in its implementation. By gathering teacher feedback, the study will assist schools in addressing curriculum-related issues and ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to apply the curriculum effectively. It will also provide valuable insights for policymakers and the government, highlighting areas for improvement and adjustment to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness. Ultimately, this research plays a critical role in shaping future curriculum developments, benefiting teachers, policymakers, and government stakeholders alike.

1.7 Objectives of the Study

- a. To identify the perception of the secondary level teacher about newly adapted curriculum
- b. To explore the challenges and solution of the newly adapted curriculum faced by the teachers

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in interpretive and critical frameworks common in social sciences, with the objective of exploring secondary school teachers' perspectives on the National Curriculum Framework 2021 of Bangladesh. This methodology is well-suited for capturing the complexity of teachers' interactions with the curriculum, providing nuanced insights that cannot be reduced to numerical data.

The study's population comprises secondary school teachers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as these educators are directly involved with the national curriculum's implementation. The sample includes teachers who teach at the secondary level and have experience with the curriculum, providing valuable insights into its practical effects. The sample size consisted of fifteen teachers from five different schools in Dhaka. The sample was determined by the principle of data saturation- data collection continued until no new themes emerged. Once the interviews reached this saturation point, it was concluded that the sample size was adequate to answer the research questions.

For this study the researcher used purposive and convenience sampling methods to select participants. Purposive sampling ensured that the participants had relevant experience with the curriculum, while convenience sampling facilitated the selection of teachers who were easily accessible given time constraints. This mixed sampling approach ensured that the sample was both qualified to provide insightful feedback and accessible for data collection.

Semi-structured interviews, consisting of open-ended questions, served as the primary data collection instrument. These questions were designed to capture both the positive and negative aspects of the curriculum, along with suggestions for improvements. The interview questions were reviewed and refined by experts in the field to ensure they aligned with the research objectives. In-depth personal interviews were selected due to their capacity to provide rich, context-specific information. The interviews, lasting between 20 and 30 minutes, were conducted face-to-face in convenient locations such as participants' schools. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed immediately to ensure accurate data capture.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify recurring patterns and themes, which were categorized and coded to facilitate a deeper understanding of the data. The transcription process was handled by the researcher and two assistants, with transcriptions being reviewed multiple times to ensure accuracy. This inductive approach allowed the data to inform the themes, rather than imposing preconceived notions or theories.

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, scope, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

3. Results

Analysis of the interview questionnaire shed light on various issues regarding the new curriculum framework. The issues can be divided into two categories: the positive aspects of the curriculum framework and the challenges and limitations in incorporating them. The positive aspects include real-life application, skill development, student-centered learning, and compatibility with international standards and demands. On the other hand, the challenges in implementing the new curriculum involve limited resources, lack of teacher training, and insufficient guardian awareness.

3.1 Positive Side of the Curriculum Framework

3.1.1 Real-Life Application

The current curriculum emphasizes practical learning, allowing students to acquire knowledge through observation and hands-on experience. By interacting with various professionals, students can explore different career paths and make informed decisions about their future professions. This approach ensures that students are able to apply what they've learned in real-life situations. Ultimately, the curriculum bridges the gap between academic learning and real-world application, preparing students for success in both their careers and personal lives. As noted by Participant 3,

“In this curriculum, students do not need to memorize their learning. They learn by applying knowledge, which proves to be more effective for them.”

3.1.2 Development of Skills

This curriculum offers a variety of learning approaches, including individual work, pair work, and group work, catering to diverse learning styles. Through these activities, students will develop essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. By engaging in varied tasks, students enhance their ability to understand complex concepts and think analytically. This multifaceted approach ensures that students learn in dynamic ways, fostering a well-rounded skill set. As Responder 1 stated,

“By using this curriculum, students can achieve communication skills, professional skills, leadership abilities, and acceptance of other perspectives.”

3.1.3 Student-Based Learning

This curriculum is centered on the student, with teachers acting as guides who direct students in understanding and solving problems without doing it for them. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, drawing on resources such as peers, parents, teachers, and the internet to solve problems, but they cannot copy tasks. This process allows students to learn from real-life experiences, which proves to be highly effective. Participant 10 emphasized,

“This curriculum allows students to learn independently and share their thoughts and creativity.”

3.1.4 International Standard Curriculum

This curriculum is widely adopted by many developed countries, which emphasize the importance of students applying their learning in practical life. When students experience learning in a real-world context, they are better equipped to use it in their professional and personal lives. This international alignment helps cultivate a global perspective among students, fostering international relations and collaboration. Participants 1, 2, and 11 echoed this point, with Participant 11 noting,

“Most developed countries use this type of curriculum because it focuses on identifying students' creativity and qualities.”

3.1.5 Suitability for All Types of Students

This curriculum supports students in multiple ways, including assessing their memorization abilities, creativity, co-curricular participation, class performance, communication skills, and understanding. By assessing students through various methods, teachers can identify each student's strengths and weaknesses and tailor their teaching accordingly. This flexibility makes it suitable for all students. As Participant 2 mentioned,

“The use of different types of assessment processes makes this curriculum suitable for all students.”

However, some teachers raised concerns, with Participant 5 stating,

“This curriculum is more suited to meritorious students and those with active parents.”

3.1.6 Compatibility with the Fourth Industrial Revolution

The curriculum is designed to prepare students for the opportunities and challenges presented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution by incorporating skills such as digital literacy, critical thinking, interdisciplinary learning, entrepreneurship, ethics, collaboration, and communication. These competencies equip students to succeed in a technology-driven, interconnected global economy. As Participant 11 noted,

“In the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we need more communication skills, technology-based learning, and active personalities-this curriculum ensures that.”

3.2 Limitations and Challenges in Incorporating the Curriculum Framework

3.2.1 Improper Ratio of Teachers to Students

In many schools, the teacher-student ratio can be as high as 1:60, which makes it difficult for teachers to effectively manage and support all students. This overcrowding hinders the successful implementation of the curriculum. All participants agreed on the need to reduce class sizes, with Participant 10 suggesting, “The teacher-student ratio in a class should be 1:20.”

3.2.2 Insufficient Class Duration

The nature of this curriculum, with its emphasis on pair work, group work, and other interactive activities, requires teachers to manage seating arrangements, collaborate with students, and facilitate learning. In classes that last 35 to 40 minutes, it is challenging for teachers to complete all required tasks. Therefore, extending class duration and reducing the number of classes could enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum. As Participant 11 stated,

“It is really tough to complete all class tasks in 35 to 40 minutes. If the class duration were increased, teachers could accomplish much more.”

3.2.3 Insufficient Teaching-Learning Materials

Certain subjects, such as science, mathematics, and digital technology, require specialized equipment for effective teaching. Many schools, however, lack the necessary resources, which can result in incomplete learning. As Participant 3 emphasized,

“There are many materials like books and science equipment needed to teach students. Without proper materials, students cannot acquire adequate knowledge.”

3.2.4 Modification Needs of Textbooks

While some textbooks in this curriculum are well-designed and creative, others do not adequately support student learning. In particular, textbooks for subjects such as mathematics, English, history, social science, and certain areas of science require modification to provide clearer explanations and up-to-date content. Participant 5 noted,

“There are many changes needed in the books, especially for mathematics, English, history, and social science, and more research is required.”

3.2.5 Modification Needs of Classrooms

The curriculum involves a variety of interactive activities, such as group work and presentations, which require classrooms to be more spacious and accessible. However, many classrooms are too small, hindering the free movement necessary for these activities. Additionally, teachers face challenges in maintaining communication and providing clear instructions. Therefore, modifications to classroom space are essential for the successful implementation of the curriculum. Participants 2, 10, and 11 shared similar concerns.

3.2.6 Teacher Training and Facilities

This curriculum is distinct from previous models, and many teachers are not yet fully equipped to implement it effectively. Teachers struggle to understand the new materials, tasks, and assessment processes, which can lead to difficulties in delivering quality instruction. Without proper training and support, teachers may feel demotivated and unable to meet the needs of their students. Over half of the participants agreed that teacher training is a crucial component for the successful execution of this curriculum. Responders 6, 7, 8, 10, 14, and 15 stressed,

“Teacher training and teacher facilities are the most important part of completing this curriculum.”

3.2.7 Assessment Process

The assessment process in this curriculum uses non-traditional indicators such as symbols (triangle, circle, and rectangle) to evaluate students' performance and behavior instead of numerical grades. While this approach reduces exam stress, it may also result in a lack of competition and clear progress tracking for students. Some teachers may also be biased in their assessments. Most participants acknowledged this limitation, with Participant 4 suggesting,

“We need to incorporate a 50% numerical grading system and 50% for other activities in the assessment process.”

3.2.8 Guardian Awareness

Due to the novelty of the curriculum, many parents do not fully understand its objectives or methods, which can result in a lack of support at home. Some parents feel that their children are not learning effectively, while others who understand the curriculum's value provide strong support. Schools must work to raise parental awareness by organizing seminars and meetings to educate parents about the curriculum. As all participants agreed, raising guardian awareness is crucial for the successful implementation of this curriculum.

4. Discussion

The study aimed to explore how secondary school teachers in Dhaka perceive the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2021 of Bangladesh, addressing two core objectives. The findings provide significant insights into the perceptions of teachers, confirming that the study's key questions have been thoroughly explored and answered.

The first objective of the study examined teachers' perceptions of the NCF 2021. The results revealed that teachers face significant challenges in implementing the curriculum, particularly due to the inadequate infrastructure needed to support teaching, learning, and assessment. This finding aligns with the work of Arpa (2024), who also observed that institutions struggle with a lack of resources, including financial support, materials, personnel, and time. Moreover, Arpa (2024) highlighted that many parents, unable to afford private tutoring, nonetheless rely on it to support their children's education, a situation reflected in this study as well.

Another key issue raised by the study pertains to the teachers' need for better training, especially regarding the textbooks and the assessment processes. Similar findings were reported by Arpa (2024), who also noted that teachers lack the necessary knowledge to effectively implement the curriculum, particularly in relation to equity and inclusivity. The study also highlighted concerns about class time duration, which were similarly raised by Arpa (2024). Teachers reported difficulty in covering the required content within the allocated time, which, as Arpa (2024) noted, is particularly challenging in science subjects for grades 6 and 7.

Despite these challenges, the study also revealed some positive perceptions about the NCF 2021. Teachers recognized that the curriculum aligns with international standards and supports the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This is consistent with the NCF 2021's foundation in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2010, as well as global educational trends such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Bangladesh's Vision 2041 (NCTB, 2021). Teachers appreciated the curriculum's emphasis on vision, mission, and core competencies, which reflect global best practices in education and contribute to the development of internationally competent individuals (An, 2014; APCEIU, 2021; Howard & Maxwell, 2023).

The second objective of the study focused on identifying the challenges faced by teachers and exploring potential solutions. The study suggests that enhancing teacher training and extending class durations, along with a more balanced teacher-student ratio, could address some of these challenges. These solutions offer valuable contributions to the literature, particularly as they focus on issues such as insufficient learning materials, the assessment process, and class time limitations—problems that are consistent with Arpa's (2024) findings. The study identifies several barriers to the successful implementation of the NCF 2021, including insufficient teacher professionalism, an inappropriate student-teacher ratio, and inadequate learning materials. These findings align with the challenges highlighted in Arpa's (2024) research, which focused specifically on the science curriculum but found similar issues across various subjects. The study's proposed solutions include improved teacher training, regular supervision of all curriculum-related sectors, revising textbooks to better meet student needs, ensuring appropriate teaching materials, modifying the evaluation system, extending class duration, and optimizing the teacher-student ratio.

These solutions are consistent with the views of Mezieobi (1993), who emphasizes that implementation involves carrying out a structured plan, and Ornstein and Hopkins (1998), who view implementation as an ongoing process of participation, feedback, and professional development. The current study's findings further support these theoretical frameworks, suggesting that a continuous and comprehensive approach to professional development, resource allocation, and curriculum management is essential for the effective implementation of NCF 2021.

In conclusion, the study highlights the need for a multifaceted approach to improve the implementation of the NCF 2021. This includes addressing challenges related to infrastructure, teacher training, resource allocation, and class duration. While the study confirms that many of the challenges identified in the literature are present in the current context, it also proposes practical solutions that can guide future efforts to enhance the curriculum's effectiveness. Ensuring the proper execution of these solutions will require sustained collaboration among educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to create an environment conducive to successful curriculum implementation.

5. Recommendations

To effectively implement the curriculum, it is essential to foster a positive perspective and provide self-paced orientation and ongoing training for secondary school teachers in

Bangladesh. Institutions must also have the necessary infrastructure to support activity-based and practical learning. Training sessions involving head teachers, education officers, and relevant stakeholders should be held to address pedagogy-related challenges. Enhancing teacher education curricula and incorporating blended learning approaches will help resolve these issues over time.

Additionally, focusing on teacher empowerment, income, and social value will motivate educators to perform at their best. Given that the current teacher education curricula are insufficient for preparing teachers for NCF 2021, reforms are needed. A robust curriculum management system should be established to ensure comprehensive oversight, with regular monitoring, feedback, and evaluation to overcome obstacles.

Furthermore, learning materials should be readily available, and both parents and students need to understand the curriculum. Workshops, seminars, and media campaigns can facilitate this. Collaboration among parents, educators, students, and stakeholders is crucial for the successful implementation of the NCF 2021.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into how secondary school teachers in Dhaka perceive the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2021 of Bangladesh. It highlights both the challenges and positive aspects of the curriculum, including issues with teacher training, infrastructure, class duration, and materials, as well as the recognition of its alignment with international standards and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The study emphasizes the need for targeted teacher professional development, improved resources, and structural changes to ensure the curriculum's effective implementation. By addressing these challenges and fostering collaboration among educators, parents, and stakeholders, the NCF 2021 can be successfully integrated into Bangladesh's education system, contributing to more inclusive and dynamic learning experiences.

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