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SADIA AFRIN
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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF BANGLADESH AND FINLAND

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

_____
Dr. Lawrence Baines, Chair

_____ _____
Dr. Michele A. Eodice

_____
Dr. Crag Hill

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To my beloved Late Father-in-Law and my parents

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Abstract

This thesis compares the educational system of Bangladesh, a democratic South Asian country, with the educational system of Finland, a Scandinavian country that scores high in international comparisons on tests, such as PISA (Program for International Student Achievement). Areas for comparison include multilingualism, high stakes testing, teacher autonomy and motivation, urban/rural populations, special education, and teacher professionalism. The extent to which "the Finnish way" can help and direct improvements for the Bangladesh educational system is the major focus of the discussion. Drawing from Finnish education, the most attractive resolutions can be setting intervention for children with learning difficulties within the school system; empowering children's native language; de-emphasizings testing; providing equal access to and resources for education in rural areas; increasing teachers' autonomy, improving teachers' working conditions; and ensuring teachers' professional development.

Chapter One

Introduction

Many countries across the world cultivate bilingual/multilingual education extensively or intensively due to political and economic benefits. Reasons are many, but they mostly fall under the complexity of a wide variety of multilingualism, political integration of minorities, promotion of languages of the elite, and creation of a multilingual work force. Countries with colonial history or with issues of immigration/diaspora stand in the front line of bilingual/multilingual education. Bangladesh, a South Asian country, embodies the first reason- a colonial tie- and its bilingual educational system fluctuates between Bangla (the native language) and English (the language of privilege). On the other hand, the Scandinavian countries: Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Sweden, represent the second characteristic mentioned above- immigration. They practice a bilingual/multilingual educational system to act upon the political demand of unifying their multilingual populations. Though Scandinavian countries, especially Finland, possess vastly different educational systems from Bangladesh, there might be lessons that could help improve the current bilingual educational system of Bangladesh.

This research will attempt a comparative study between the educational systems of Bangladesh and Scandinavian countries, specifically of Finland with a focus on bilingual/multilingual education. The research also intends to identify, explore, and analyze best practices of trilingual education of Finland to suggest effective reforms and interventions for the Bangladesh educational system. Finland has succeeded to ensure a goal-oriented trilingual educational system promoting equity, social justice, language

plurality, and inclusion. Drawing from Finland, what can be useful for Bangladesh educational system, taking into consideration her dynamic characteristics and issues?

On the world economic and political map, Bangladesh is considered a third world country- four years away from celebrating 50 years of independence after 224 long years of colonial experience. However, her journey after independence consists of multidimensional problems and crisis raised by natural, social, political, and economic turmoil (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). Structurally, the country relies upon agriculture and the majority of the population resides in rural areas deprived of modern amenities and government services. On the contrary, urban residents have access to 21st century advancements though poverty remains as an obstacle to overall progress. Access to quality education is highly correlated with poverty though Bangladesh constitutionally commits to "ensure literacy of all the citizens" (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010, p. 115).

The present form of both public and private education in Bangladesh demonstrates a connection with her colonial legacy with the British **(**Ali, 1986 as cited in Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010**)**. English, taught as the second language from the primary school, insinuates a co-existence of another language beside Bangla for economic advancement in and outside of the land. In fact, Bangladesh, being under British rule for 200 years and Pakistan for another 24 years, has a disturbed history of colonialism. Bangla, the mother tongue of Bangladesh, was not recognized as the national language till 1971. Ironically, the bilingual educational system established after the independence prioritizes Bangla and exercises English, which still continues today producing mixed concerns among scholars about its effectiveness. Often, the

universality of the bilingual education at the setting of Bangladesh is called into question, but substantial changes have not taken place. The standards of education to facilitate acquiring domain specific knowledge versus bilingual education to grow competency in both Bangla and English while imparting field specific knowledge—stands as a long debate. Some critics observe a deliberate downfall in the overall quality of skills and knowledge of students across the country over the years (Shahed, 2014). Moreover**,** to investigate what extent of competence or what definition of a 'bilingual' in Bangladesh is desired by her people, a study (Shahed, 2014) details several categories of bilingual performance as follows:

1. One who can speak and write English fluently as much as s/he can speak and write fluent Bangla,
2. One who can speak English fluently but has limited writing skills; however on the other hand s/he can write Bangla very well,
3. One who cannot speak fluent English, but can write it appropriately--and can also write Bangla well,
4. One who cannot express oneself properly in verbal or written English, but has very well developed receptive skills in English; she/he can understand everything in English when she/he reads or hears, and she/he can write and speak good Bangla,
5. One who cannot write either good proper Bangla or English, but has the spoken communicative skills in both languages which she/he uses in her/his daily life (e.g. in his job) perfectly,

6. One who has a very solid command of English--be it writing or speaking--but can only speak, and not write, Bangla well. (Shahed, 2014)

There exist plenty of residents in Bangladesh who fit into several categories given above. However, what is the most effective category to focus on in the context of Bangladesh still waits for further exploration and development for a competitive future. Claiming from a pragmatic overview, Shahed (2014) provides a realistic image of a bilingual norm for Bangladesh: "the bilingual is a fully competent speaker-hearer; she/he has developed competencies in the two languages to the extent required by his or her needs and those of the environment" (p.4). Advocating for the fact that requirement and usage of two different languages depend on different purposes in life, the author emphasizes accepting unequal proficiency as a common phenomenon.

Historically, Bangladesh, ever since her independence, thrived to establish Bangla and replace English from the core system of education and government **(**Das, Robina, Shrestha, Rahman, & Khan, 2014**).** However, the replacement appeared as unfavorable to the ambition of joining the competition in global work force and so, Bangladesh with regularity, experiments and revisits educational policies regarding English language teaching. Two significant educational policies shaped today's bilingual educational system in Bangladesh: imposing English as a compulsory subject from 1st grade till 12th grade in 1986 and directing English learning more towards communicative purposes in 1990 (Das et al., 2014). Overall, the public education from grade 1 till secondary level attempts to produce a generation well equipped to use both languages. In a way, "The mainstream happens to be a vernacular based secular educational system carried over from the colonial past" (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, &

Rahman, 2010, p.115)**.** Nevertheless, the success of the bilingual educational system has not reached a satisfaction to enable students after high school to perform in English interchangeably with Bangla. In other words, focusing on communicative purposes, especially over four areas, reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English, has failed to create a population fluent enough in English to use it as a communication tool on the global market (Rahman, 2015).

Immigration exists as a common issue in places where diversity of linguistic groups becomes a priority to ensure collaboration and function within a nation state. Europe is one great example of immigration issues with evolving priority list where immigrants not only enter practically a new geographical area, but a new social and environmental space (Council of Europe, 2007 as cited in Galantini, 2014). Moreover, due to the influx of immigrants, various languages and cultures blend into dominant cultures. Languages do not dwell in pockets of geographical-political locations anymore and thus, intensify the power of "well-planned linguistic and cultural enrichment strategies" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund & Sjoholm, 2013, p. 2). The Scandinavian/Nordic countries in this field act prominently regarding multilingualism and multilingual education: "Though the trends are similar in all countries, language and integration policies, language learning practices and research on multilingualism and multilingual education have come to differ in focus to some extent in Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.2).

In comparison to other continents and their living languages, Europe falls behind with less than 300 languages where the range of languages is as high as 1,060-2,300 in other parts of the world **(**Ethnologue, 2013 as cited in Bjorklund, Bjorklund & Sjoholm,

2013**)**. Hence, in many nations and states, political benefits determine languages to be prioritized within a geographical space. In other words, "a large number of other languages is spoken in most countries in addition to those officially recognized" **(**Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p. 2). Within the European language map, the Nordic countries have built a reputation for responding to the demands of multilinguals and their multiculturalism. For an example, Finland recognizes three official languages. However, Nordic countries adopt bilingual/multilingual education congruent with their internal complexity revolving around the ratio of immigrant population: "The percentage of the immigrant population in the Nordic countries varies from approximately 7 % in Finland to around 20 % in Sweden" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p. 4).

The Scandinavian countries developed different language policies and measures to introduce and maintain language programs. Recently, they have started to acknowledge their growing and ever changing unique version of multilingualism. Such realization led them also to believe, "literacy education should be sensitive to the individuals' needs and experiences in all Nordic countries" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.3).

Though the Scandinavian languages, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish, do not form a lingua franca, they all possess so much in common that to an extent, outsiders may consider them as dialects of one language. To be specific, Swedish language shares common pronunciation of words with the Norwegian language though they differ in terms of vocabulary. In contrast, Danish language appears to be almost identical based on vocabulary, but it is radically different in pronunciation from the Norwegian

language (Asklöv, 2016). However, mixing Scandinavian languages with English has been a strategic course of action as the region thrives to practice a lingua franca for internal and external function. On the whole, 80% of the Nordic population speaks one of the three of Scandinavian language as their L1 (Bjorklund, Bjorklund & Sjoholm, 2013**)**. Nevertheless, the Scandinavian countries maintain a unique form of linguistic protocol: "In all four countries there are linguistic frameworks that also include languages other than the dominant language spoken in each country" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund & Sjoholm, 2013, p.7).

Simultaneously, the four Scandinavian countries practice a mandatory language education during their compulsory school years where English dominates the foreign language choices. Like Bangladesh, English is introduced to learners in all Nordic countries between grade 1 and grade 3 (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013). Specifically, Sweden, just like Bangladesh, launches the teaching of English in the first grade. Introducing a language other than the home language at an early stage of life is a foundational component of bilingual/multilingual education of Bangladesh and Scandinavian countries.

Observing the effects of exposure to English in my early stage of life, I also intend to understand the effectiveness of this process in terms of best practices in bilingual/multilingual education through my research. Whether or not I was empowered by learning English parallel to my native language during my childhood became an underlying question. Above all, specific practices of Bangladesh complicate and problematize teaching and learning and they are compared with practices of Finland in this paper. The research also includes a detailed discussion of Finnish educational

practices, which may provide ways to reconsider and reinforce better educational goals for future generations in Bangladesh.

Chapter Two

Methodology

The data and information presented in the research are derived from various online data bases, the library database, the internet, print materials, conversation with family and friends, informal interviews, and from discussion with my advisor. The literature review condensed information on the educational system of Bangladesh and compared it to practices in Scandinavian countries with a particular focus on Finland to fit the research intent.

While making extensive search for information available online on Bangladesh, I encountered difficulty in finding peer-reviewed journals. Specifically, articles exploring the existing educational practices of Bangladesh and their cultural, social, economic, and political consequences are difficult to find in online databases. Most of the international research and studies conducted on Bangladesh focus on poverty and literacy in rural areas. These initiatives are often led by NGO and supported donations. The public/Bangla medium educational system and its relationship to poverty are usually not mentioned. Most importantly, it was rare to find analysis of the bilingual education in terms of instruction and their purposes, teachers' delivery style and competency, teachers' value and professional development, topics and contents of subject areas, effectiveness of the grammar based language teaching and testing, application based activities, and overall knowledge development.

As Bangladesh is still not digitally well equipped to provide access to valuable local research and studies from abroad, I had to draw from personal experiences as well. I was born and raised in Bangladesh and studied in the public educational system till my

Master's degree graduation. Simultaneously, I interviewed relatives studying and teaching in different grade levels at school and public universities. I collected data starting from students in 7th grade to students in a university. Interviews were informal but purposeful. Questions were incremental and it sometimes took multiple phone conversations to compile answers for my questions.

My friends and family members, who are teachers and parents in Bangla and English medium schools, also contributed their direct observations and information. Interviews were conducted over phone through several questions asked during and before the final interview. The questions revolved around:

1) In what ways both English and Bangla are taught in classes at schools?
2) What are the topics of grade specific study materials?
3) What is the mark distribution in Bangla and English exams for grammar, literature, writing, and reading areas?
4) How are the students prepared by their teachers for exams? What is the quality of teaching while teaching in a class and in a private tutoring session?
5) How much effective are the instructions to comprehend as well as the practice of homework, which are given in and outside of the classroom?
6) What is the current condition of charging money in private tuition in Bangladesh?
7) What are the average, entry level, and/or 'A' grade salary scales (different payment grades are common in government jobs based on designations and

departments) for teachers, doctors, lawyers, and engineers in both public and private sector in Bangladesh?

8) What is the duration of schools and higher secondary schools?

While searching for articles online, studies conducted in last 15 years were the main targets. Instead of looking at old practices of both countries' educational systems, more recent ones were preferred. All the figures and tables, except one, were constructed from data provided by collected articles.

Chapter Three

Literature Review: Bangladesh

The public education of Bangladesh employs Bangla as the main medium of instruction and English as the second language in the curriculum. Learning English is highly encouraged for communicative purposes and higher studies. Since her independence, Bangladesh established Bengali or *Bangla* as the national language, extending it also as the official language. With over 60 language varieties spoken in Bangladesh, the linguistic diversity is impressive. Among those 60 varieties, 13 belong to ethnic minorities in the southwestern regions (Islam, 2011a). Indeed, the southwestern and northwestern dialects, such as Sylheti, Chittagonian, and Chakma differ markedly, and so speakers from those regions may not be understood by speakers from other areas (IML Research & Information Team, 2013). The dialects are accompanied by distinct accents that challenge any listener outside the indigenous communities. In other words, accents carry a great deal of identity with the dialects. Thus, the distinctions of Bangla dialects are multifarious and often surprising.

Standard Colloquial Bengali or Standard Bangla is the popular written and spoken Bangla style, which incorporates a great deal of colloquial idioms and shortened verb forms. The old version of Standard Bangla was more of a written than spoken language with a higher sophistication, which eventually lost popularity with the evolution of the language. The current Standard Bangla form was first introduced for formal practice in 1914 and gradually gained popularity through the pen of famous scholars (IML Research & Information Team, 2013).

However, English, being the second language, receives much attention throughout all stages of the Bangladesh educational system; especially in private and public universities, English is highly encouraged and practiced as the medium of instruction ("The Bangladeshi education system," 2012). Though the current educational system includes English as a compulsory subject, English did not hold the same status in the primary curriculum during the British (1757–1947) or Pakistani rule (1947 – 1971) **(**Hamid & Honan, 2012). Before 1971, English was employed as a bridge between West Pakistan and East Pakistan (i.e. Bangladesh).

After 1971, Bangladesh faced a challenge of evolving from a multilingual country to a country with a monolingual identity. Indeed, 98% of the population is Bangla speaker. With growth in the infrastructure of Bangladesh, several educational commissions have recommended English to be introduced in primary education. However, their suggestions differed on the question of which grade would be suitable for introducing English; more or less 3rd and 6th grade were central to this debate. In 1992, putting an end to the debate, a major educational reform reinforced the role of English by making it a compulsory subject from grade 1 as a pragmatic response to expectations of external funding resources (Hamid, 2010a as cited in Hamid & Honan, 2012).

In Bangladesh, primary school education, from grade 1 to grade 5, is compulsory and free of cost. A long discussion continues over extending the mandatory school period till grade 8. Each school year starts at January and ends in December. Similarly, in public universities, the duration of an academic year is 12 months, from January to December. In contrast, the private universities had adopted the western form

of academic calendar dividing their calendar into Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters. Academic system in Bangladesh can be identified with three separate stages – primary (I-V), secondary (VI-XII), and higher education (Bachelor/Master's degree) (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). While the age limit for admission to primary school is 6, the age range for junior secondary, secondary, and higher secondary education are 11-13, 14-15, and 16-17 respectively. Moreover, while primary education includes 5 years, secondary education includes 7 years divided into three cycles: junior secondary (3 years: grades VI-VIII), secondary (2 years: grades IX and X), and higher secondary education (2 years: grades XI and XII) (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010; "The Bangladeshi education system," 2012). Below is the figure representing the overall Bangladesh educational system in a brief and graphic manner:

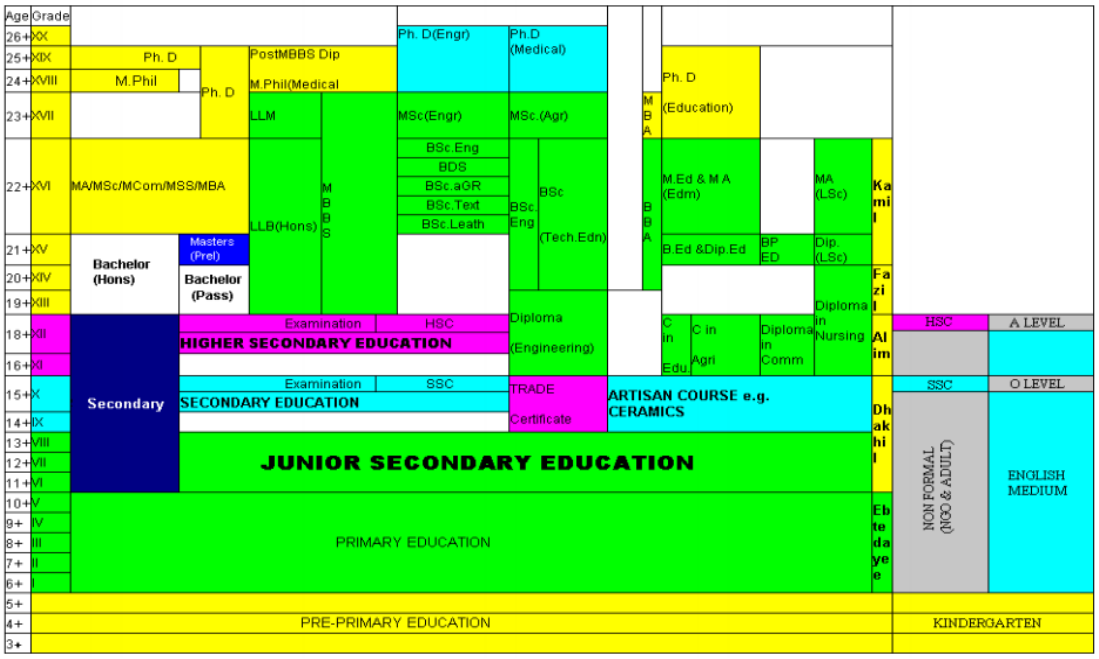


Table 1: The educational system of Bangladesh in a nutshell. (Based on Prodhan, 2016, p.14)

For school education from grade 1-12, there are three streams of education active in Bangladesh: (1) general stream/public education, (2) English medium education, and (3) Madrasah based education, an educational curriculum designed mostly for the study of Quran. To be more specific, primary education in the public sector is available through two main streams or arrangements: general and Madrasah; secondary education is available through three major streams: general, Madrasah, and technical/ vocational; and higher education is available through 3 streams: general (provides majors in both core and applied science, arts, business and social science), Madrasah, and technology education (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). Separate institutions administer and provide higher education in agriculture, engineering, medical, textile, leather technology, and ICT (Information and Communication Technology) under technology education. Most of the separate institutions have branches in several districts, but they usually do not function to offer two fields of study. For an example, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) does not provide educational programs on Textile engineering (BUET, n.d.). In other words, higher education in Bangladesh is compartmentalized in general, vocational, technology, and medical fields; also it consumes more or less 5-6 years to deliver Bachelors/Master's degrees.

As crowded public universities make it difficult for all students to seek admission, private universities benefit from this situation. In fact, private institutions function in all the three stages of education in Bangladesh. To meet the demands of the population, the private schools and colleges cater to a significant number of students. After investigating about whether or not bilingual education persists in all educational

streams, it can be concluded that Bangla, English, and Mathematics stand as the common subjects in the primary education of all three major streams (Prodhan, 2016). The percentage of schools under the three main streams of Bangladesh education is given below:

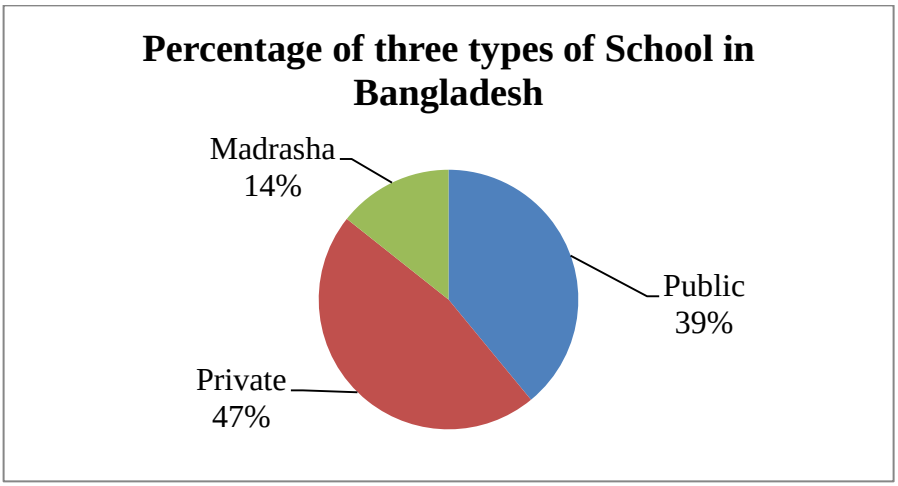


Figure 1: Percentage of three types of schools in Bangladesh. (Based on Prodhan, 2016, p.15)

The public school system from 1st grade to 12th functions through a bilingual educational system where the national curriculum takes English language and English literature as subjects to learn. However, the private schools, starting from primary to higher secondary education, follow the UK-based school curriculum. After independence, all English medium schools were terminated in the process of 'Bengalising,' which emphasized "Bengali in all spheres" (Banu & Sussex, 2001, p.1). The process mostly affected four crucial and formal areas of the state: (1) administration, (2) education, (3) law and (4) media. However, the demand of the elite forced the establishment of English medium schools in the private sector, which have flourished in a dramatic way over the last few decades in Bangladesh, creating a

"parallel English medium educational system" (Banu & Sussex, 2001, p. 131). The English medium school system does not only instruct in English, but also fully submits to the UK based British educational system. Here Bangla is taught just as a subject in the curriculum, and many students lack fluent and complex reading or writing skills in Bangla. On average, students of English medium schools possess the 5th grade level performance in Bangla reading and writing after high school graduation and less knowledge about national history in comparison to Greek, Roman, and other foreign histories (Imam, 2005). In other words, "the syllabi of these schools create students who are generally apathetic towards their own country and culture due to lack of proper courses in Bangladesh history and culture and the minimal importance they get" (Prodhan, 2016, p. 15).

In Bangladesh, the 'O' level and 'A' level students have to follow books prescribed by and produced in UK for all subjects except Bangla and religion based study. The O and A level examinees take their final tests in a designated place named the British Council, located in the capital, Dhaka and then their exam papers are sent in sealed envelopes to UK for evaluation. The questions set in UK thus remain distant from the Bangladeshi cultural context. The English medium school students, after passing A level, have the opportunity to study in any institution in Bangladesh though many choose to study abroad (Imam, 2005). The public/private universities administer admission tests of their own preference choosing from either MCQ (Multiple Choice Questions), or short/broad questions requiring written, open-ended answers. It can be a combination of both in many institutions and the choice of English or Bangla as the language of the test, however, depends on location and instructional agenda. The

question papers are in Bangla in most of the subject areas in public universities, but there are English translated question papers available for graduates from English medium schools. Earlier, studying under a different/foreign curriculum had created difficulty for students while taking public universities' admission tests. Recently, the public universities became more accommodating for English medium students and now provide separate sets of questions that align with the English medium syllabus (I. Zahan, personal communication, March 14, 2017).

As private schools charge three times more than public schools (Prodhan, 2016), in response to the demands of the middle class society, less expensive and improvised English curriculum-based schools were established. They follow the same route of UK based curriculum from 8th grad, but prior to that level, they adjust study materials by following different international publishers who produce text books for different grades in separate versions according to cultural zone, such as Asia, Africa, etc. Examples or any discussion in the content of those textbooks draw from the culture familiar to specific zones in the world to provide students with a familiar concept. Also, book publishers in both India and Bangladesh tend to use English as the medium of instruction for commercial purpose.

During the 90's, the national education board of Bangladesh took an extensive step by introducing the English version of the national curriculum, which follows the same Bangla medium syllabus and study materials translated in English. "So far about fifty two English version schools have been established in Dhaka, several towns and five outside the country which are run by Bangladeshi missions" (Billah, 2011, para 1). This initiative was taken to create stronger students in English through the national

curriculum and mainly public school education: “English Version schools generally follow the same structure as their Bangla Version counterparts but, as the name implies, students in the English Version gain a stronger foundation in English” (Prodhan, 2016, p.15).

Well reputed Bangla medium schools in urban areas quickly adopted the English version education of the Bangla curriculum, which became popular within the middle class. They just provide the translated form of the Bangla curriculum and books, where English is the medium of instruction (Imam, 2005). However, a lack of proper planning for the English version; lack of teacher’s training or their lack in sufficient English background; lack of resources to facilitate students to develop strong footing in English; faulty translation in study materials; more traditional home-work based and less class based teaching method; and many more logistic failures restrain the success rate of English version school system (Billah, 2011).

Beside the public and private educational streams, the Madrasah based education is highly focused on Islamic studies, which has variation in curriculum. Different types of Madrasa system function with their individual curriculums, which are either disconnected from the general education or similar to it (Abdalla, Raisuddin, & Hussein, 2004). In spite of being ignored and facing slow reforms, most of the Madrasah curriculums now attempt to incorporate three languages to study: Bangla, Arabic, and English. On the whole, this stream of education emphasizes heavily on learning the Quran. Further, Madrasah educational system, in its three major stages (Primary, Secondary and Postsecondary), has similar core courses as the general

educational stream; however, it has special emphasis on religious studies (Prodhan, 2016).

To retrieve the power of Bangla after independence, the educational policies of Bangladesh once attempted banning English in the public institutions, which had complicated tertiary education in Bangladesh. The higher studies functioned using English (delivery of lecture in English) where books, journals, and other study materials were mostly available in English (Banu & Sussex, 2001). So, the transition to Bangla was not possible immediately. Eventually, tertiary institutions adopted a blended interaction, using both Bangla and English to address the huge number of students who are mostly incapable to interact in English proficiently. However, legislation passed in 1992 permitted English to be used in the tertiary level as the medium of instruction (Banu & Sussex, 2001). Also the Private Universities Act of 1992 permitted private universities to re-establish English. Though the language related policies of education didn't require it explicitly, private universities quickly made the move towards English as their language of preference and power.

To examine the bilingual education of Bangladesh, understanding the existing Communicative English Teaching (CLT) approach, implemented in the textbooks by the National Education Board for the public school curriculum, is essential. The CLT approach aims at developing communicative competence in a foreign or second language with an emphasis on developing "procedures for teaching of the four skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richard & Rodgers, 1986:66 as cited in Islam, 2011b, p.2). Though different scholars interpret this 'competence' in different ways, Hymes (1979:19) provides a suitable implication of

competence in context of Bangladesh suggesting that it "contains both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to four factors: 'possibility, feasibility, appropriateness, and accepted usage'" (Islam, 2011b, p.2). The basic assumption behind CLT, however, generates the idea that learners will feel connected and encounter meaningful learning experience by expressing their thoughts and opinions on a regular basis in English. In other words, under the CLT approach, teachers will facilitate a learning interaction that aims to provide a motivation of utilizing the target language purposefully.

In order to receive an inclusive understanding of the CLT approach embedded in bilingual education of Bangladesh, this paper will draw information from the curriculum of grades VII, IX-X, and XI-XII. A short overview of the textbooks used in teaching English as well as assessment criteria will be drawn from the website of National Education Board of Bangladesh. Throughout the public school system, teaching English incorporates two subjects in English: English first paper (mainly focuses on narrative content) and English second paper (mainly focuses on grammar and composition). The text book approved by National Education Board in all grades for English 1st paper is titled *English for Today*. The curriculum for XI-XII grades and the topics of the chapters in *English for Today* revolve around the following theme:

> Adolescence, travels and tourism, human achievements in science and technology, myths and literature, traffic education, human rights, peace and conflict, people or institutions that made history, jobs and careers, diaspora, manners and etiquettes, human relationships, environment, cultures around,

dreams, music and painting, future challenges, path to higher education, global English, natural disasters, adulteration of food. (HSC syllabus, 2013, p.5)

Under such themes, some topics introduced in the text book are: Statue of Liberty, Things we enjoy, Environment, Natural Disaster: Earth Quack, Flood, Drought, Essentiality of Education, Different Cultures, Internet+Mobile for entertainment, Social awareness: sound pollution +water pollution+ more (S. Akhtar, personal communication, December 20, 2016) The table below shows the test items and mark distribution to provide an idea of question pattern to evaluate the contents of XI-XII grade, provided in the *English for Today*:

Skills	**Total Marks**	**Test Items**	**Notes**
Listening	10	MCQ	Test items must be developed by question setters on their own.
		Gap filling	
		Matching	
speaking	10	describing/narrating	five to ten sentences used coherently with acceptable English acceptable English with understandable pronunciation
		answering questions 5X1=5 based on everyday familiar topics/events/situations such as family, school, home city/village, books, games and sports, movie/TV show, recent events and incidents etc.	
Reading	40 (for the time being 60, until	**For text materials:**	
		MCQ (guessing meaning from context)	5
		Comprehension questions (open ended questions	10

	listening and speaking tests are introduced)	relating to analysis, synthesis, evaluation)	
		Cloze test with clues	5
		Cloze test without clues	10
		Flow chart	10
		Rearranging	10
		Summarizing	10
Writing	40	Writing paragraph answering questions	7
		Completing a story	7
		Writing informal letters/emails	8
		Analyzing maps/graphs/charts	10
		Appreciating short stories/poems (identifying genre, theme, subject matter, and interpreting the content)	8

Table 2: Test items of English paper one and mark distribution. XI and XII grades, Bangladesh. (Based on HSC syllabus, 2013, p.6)

The English 2nd Paper of higher secondary grades comprises grammar and writing composition, such as essay, letter/application, paragraph, dialogue, and newspaper report writing. Topics of grammar curriculum are general: Voice, Narration, Prepositions, Idioms and phrases, Parts of Speech, Degree, Verbs, Tense, Synonyms, Clauses, Phrases, Articles, Punctuation, Modifiers, Pronouns, and Translation. The total marks distribution of the assessment and question patterns for English 2nd paper in higher secondary are given below in the following table:

Test items for Paper Two and distributions of marks

Total marks 100

Grammar 60

Composition 40

Grammar test items

- gap filling activities without clues (for articles)
- gap filling activities without clues (for propositions)

- gap filling with clues (special uses: was born, have to/ has to, would rather, had better, let

alone, what if, as if, as soon as, what's ….like, what does….look like, introductory 'there' or

'it')

- completing sentences (use of conditionals, phrase, and clause)
- use of verbs (right form of verbs and subject verb agreement as per context)
- changing sentences (change of voice, sentence types, degrees)
- narrative style (direct to indirect and vice versa)
- completing sentences (Sentences will have a context and related to one another. It can be a

dialogue, interview or a narration of something.)

- use of modifiers
- use of sentence connectors
- use of synonym and antonym
- punctuation

Note: Question setters will use all items from the above list and make questions of 5 marks for each

question item. Test items must have contexts. Sentences which are isolated and out of context

cannot be given as questions. Question setters will prepare the test items. No questions will be set

from the textbook or/and any help books.

Composition test items

Marks

- formal letter/emails 08
- report writing (for newspapers) 08
- paragraphs (based on one of the paragraph types: listing, narration, comparison and contrast, cause and effect) 10
- free writing: descriptive, narrative, persuasive/argumentative, imaginative and creative writing of 200-250 words based on personal experience, everyday problems, familiar topics, recent events and incidents etc. 14

Table 3: Test items for English paper two and distribution of marks. XI and XII grades, Bangladesh. (Based on HSC syllabus, 2013, p. 9-10)

The English curriculum for IX-X grades is similar to the higher secondary grades. Few topics of *English for Today* for their English 1st paper are: Bangladesh population, Women education, Traffic Jam, Famous people: Nelson Mandela, Pritilota Sen, etc. Similarly, marks distribution in English 1st paper assessment incudes 60 marks on questions based on textbook passages, and 40 marks on writing letter, paragraphs, and dialogue. The English 2nd paper assessment frames questions on grammar and writing letters, essays, paragraphs, and resumes.

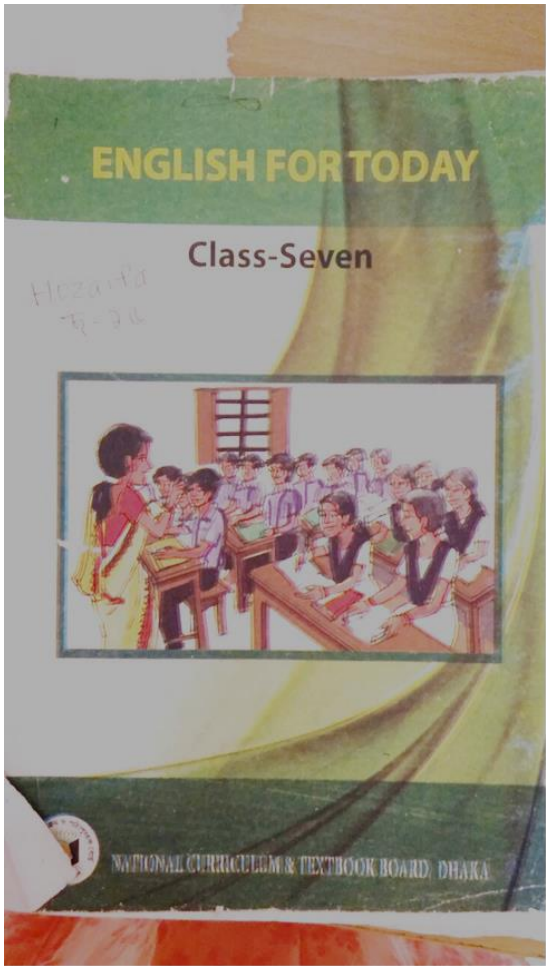
The English assessment in grade VII differs from the previous grades as the questions in English 1st paper are both framed from seen and unseen passages. These questions framed on unseen passages of textbook directly target the content of chapters

of *English for Today*, which then require memorization of the whole book. To elaborately understand the difference between questions over the seen and unseen passages in English 1st paper of grade VII, the following description is helpful:

Reading passage distribution: 60 marks

- Questions over unseen passages come from any place of the book, which require memorization of the entire book. Question patterns include: information transfer (Column matching), true/false, fill in the blanks (with and without) clue, and rearranging sentence in a paragraph to sequence.
- Seen passages are copied directly from the textbook and question pattern include: MCQ, short question, summary writing.

Below is the figure 2, which presents the *English for Today* of grade VII, collected from my cousin studying in a private Bangla medium school. The 'cover page' and 'table of content' are set on the first image. The second image compiles two pages of one chapter of the book. The chapter demonstrates how content and follow up questions are set in the English book under the auspices of CLT practice of the education board. The follow up questions given under the content in the second image are direct text based questions.



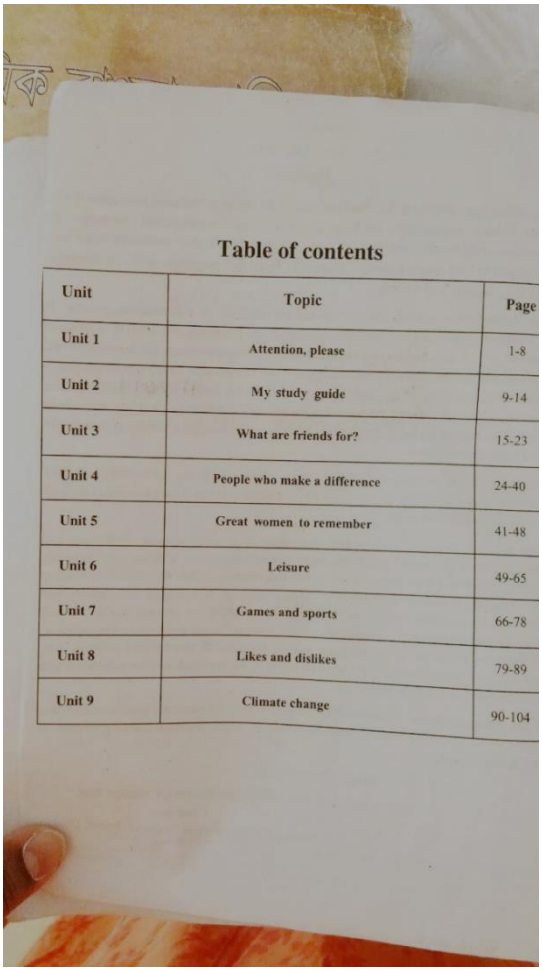
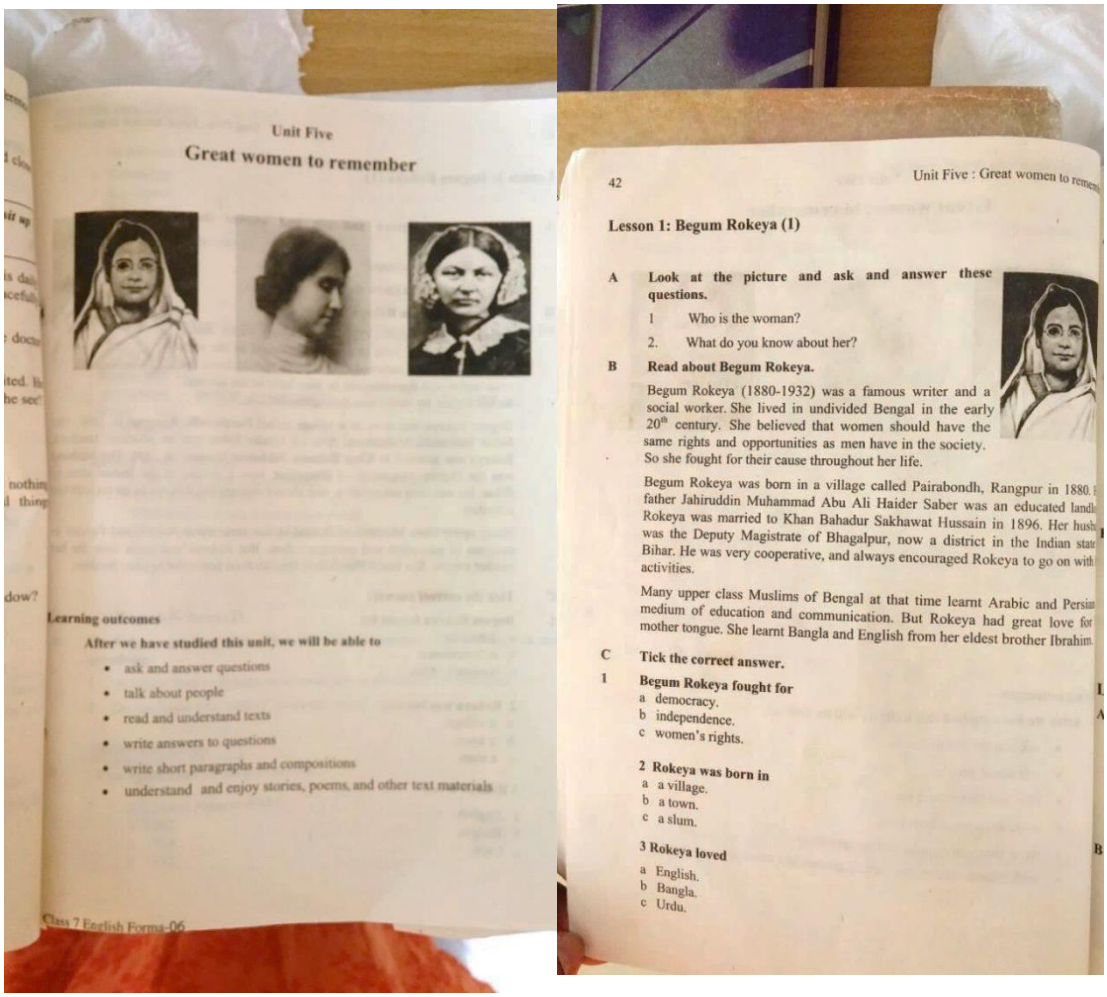


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Unit	Topic	Page
Unit 1	Attention, please	1-8
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Unit 8	Likes and dislikes	79-89
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Unit Five

Great women to remember

Learning outcomes

After we have studied this unit, we will be able to

- ask and answer questions
- talk about people
- read and understand texts
- write answers to questions
- write short paragraphs and compositions
- understand and enjoy stories, poems, and other text materials

Class 7 English Forma-06

42 Unit Five : Great women to remem

Lesson 1: Begum Rokeya (1)

A Look at the picture and ask and answer these questions.

1 Who is the woman?

2. What do you know about her?

B Read about Begum Rokeya.

Begum Rokeya (1880-1932) was a famous writer and a social worker. She lived in undivided Bengal in the early 20th century. She believed that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men have in the society. So she fought for their cause throughout her life.

Begum Rokeya was born in a village called Pairabondh, Rangpur in 1880. f father Jahiruddin Muhammad Abu Ali Haider Saber was an educated landl Rokeya was married to Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hussain in 1896. Her husb was the Deputy Magistrate of Bhagalpur, now a district in the Indian stat Bihar. He was very cooperative, and always encouraged Rokeya to go on with activities.

Many upper class Muslims of Bengal at that time learnt Arabic and Persia medium of education and communication. But Rokeya had great love for mother tongue. She learnt Bangla and English from her eldest brother Ibrahim.

C Tick the correct answer.

1 Begum Rokeya fought for
a democracy.
b independence.
c women's rights.

2 Rokeya was born in
a a village.
b a town.
c a slum.

3 Rokeya loved
a English.
b Bangla.
c Urdu.

Figure 2: Book image of 7th Grade *English for Today* (Collected from S.Salauddin, personal communication, November 16, 2016)

The English 1st paper assessment also includes writing composition for 40 marks: Dialogue, paragraph (topics are given in syllabus), letter, story (where opening sentences of any fable are given or from any scene/situation to complete the story). In grade VII for English 2nd paper, a book from the Education Board is provided, which is composed with both English grammar and writing composition. In English 2nd paper assessment, the total marks is 50 where 30 marks are allocated for grammar and 20

marks on writing letter or email and an essay (N. Rahman, personal communication, December 30, 2016).

Bangla, as a subject is also taught in the similar pattern as English is taught, divided into 1st paper and 2nd paper. The Bangla 1st paper in grade VII contains two books provided by the Education Board. One book is titled *Shoptoborna*, which is composed with informative essays, poems, literature pieces written by all Bengoli writers of the past and present. The other book is *Annondopath*, which features several short stories of Bengoli writers. For the Bangla 2nd paper in grade VII, the Education Board provides a grammar book titled *Bangla Becoron o Nirmiti* that includes all topics of Bangla grammar and chapters on writing compositions, such as letter/application, paragraph, essay, and summary on given passages or portion of poems (N. Rahman, personal communication, December 22, 2016). Apart from learning Bangla as a language and with its literature, all other subjects in science, arts, and business majors are taught in Bangla in public institutions.

The above descriptions of English curriculum in different grades reflect on the CLT approach attempted by the Bangladesh Education Board and brings forth the question about how much the CLT approach is practically implemented to reach expected outcomes. The CLT innovation, as a joint effort of the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh, replaced old textbooks and emphasized on teachers training. However, it is concluded by several studies that CLT failed to encourage and build a new learning environment because textbooks and overall classroom instructions use a grammar-translation orientation, not the CLT approach (Islam, 2011). The variables in identifying the factors of such failure

are many, but the three major ones are: low socio-economic status of the local area of schools; lack of government funding for training teachers and administrative staffs; and inadequacy of educational facilities (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010).

Chapter Three

Literature Review: Finland

The free of charge educational system of the Nordic countries are shaped by their model of being a welfare state, which thrives to restore "individual autonomy and universal provision of basic human rights" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.7). The exercise of tuition free education aims at equal opportunities for children and youth irrespective of their backgrounds (Bjorklund, Bjorklund & Sjoholm, 2013). As the issues of immigrants influence multilingualism and educational policies, the demographic situations of Nordic countries are vital to navigate, which shaped many government decisions taken in the past few decades. During the 1950s, among the Nordic countries, Sweden first had opened its boundaries to immigrants. By the 70s, Denmark and Norway opened their borders and received a large number of immigrants. Finland, however, still remains as the one with low number of immigrants compared to other Scandinavian Countries.

Acting upon the unique situation of linguistic distribution in the Nordic societies, the school curriculums incorporated mother tongue instruction for immigrants of different languages accordingly; such arrangements emerged in 1976 in Denmark and in 1987 in Finland. Nevertheless, this complex educational facility meets various challenges and different Nordic countries initiate instructions in mother tongue at a different time-table along with the schedules of school. The exact number of languages spoken in Nordic countries can be tough to calculate, but in a gross estimation, there are about 140-150 different languages functional among the population of each country. This range of numbers depends on the definitions of language and dialect. Also, which

language will have more attention by the educational system depends on different considerations in the Nordic countries:

> The relatively wide representation of different languages in each country per se does not guarantee any visible role in the education system. Only the largest populations of students with minority language backgrounds may have a right to receive official mother tongue instruction (included as a part of a regular school day) or semi-official mother tongue instruction (included as extra-curricular activity after the school day). (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p. 9)

A common pattern in multilingual practices observed in all Nordic countries represents the influence of English as a prominent rising language. The framework of language education interwoven in the compulsory nine years of school education of Nordic countries (except Norway has 10 years) can be visible in the following chart:

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Foreign language education in comprehensive school(in general)	English (grade 3)+another language (grade 7)	English (grade 3 or 4)+another language (grade 7 or 3)+1 optional language (grade 8)	English (grade 1 or 3)+another language (grade 7)	English (grade 1)+another language (grade 6)

Table 4: Introduction of English as a foreign language in school systems of Scandinavian countries. (Based on Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.7)

The chart above clearly enlists different stages of Nordic school systems to introduce English. During the compulsory education period, students are exposed to learn English as a foreign language parallel to another national language or before it. In Finland, a common tendency of Finnish-speaking students is to prefer English to learn as a foreign language, which precedes their curriculum of learning the other national language; a statistic from 2009 shows that 90.2 % of the Finnish students took English as their first foreign language (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013). According to the comparative chart above, students are exposed to English in Finland usually by grade 3 in the Finnish- medium schools, and by grade 4 in the Swedish-medium schools. However, an exception exists in the Swedish-medium schools in Finland where English is an optional language in later grades and Finnish language precedes English by appearing in the lower grades (Björklund, 2011 as cited in Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013).

Overall, the Nordic countries thrive to form an effective language education to function as a foundation of growth and communication among different linguistic groups within their national boundaries:

> In Sweden, a lot of research has been done to develop a working system for teaching Swedish as a second language that includes all levels of education. In Denmark, research emphasis has been to study the roles of the children's home languages within the school system to ensure the development of the mother tongue of the immigrant children. In Finland, quite a lot of work has been done in developing multilingual school programmes where several languages are used in subject teaching, but not with the emphasis on minority language students,

> rather on majority language children. In Norway, strong emphasis has been put on developing the national curricula for the schools and on developing internet-based self-study programmes for teaching Norwegian to immigrants. (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.10)

Another common feature of language education of Nordic countries appears to be the teaching of National Minority Language (NML) as mother tongue and the national language/s as a second language (Danish/Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish as L2) in order to put an emphasis on national languages, so that they are considered as the key aspect to progress smoothly in their educational systems. Moreover, in order to promote second language learning within the subject-based learning, an effort is visible to posit language learning carefully within content areas (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013).

On the whole, when a country attempts to evaluate their educational success, students of multicultural and multilingual backgrounds require crucial attention. In the case of Nordic countries, the PISA's reading assessment results from 2009 provided a comparative data on performance of students with diverse backgrounds and native speakers: "Generally speaking, students with immigrant background are claimed to achieve lower scores in the cognitive domain than native Nordic speakers, whereas first-generation immigrant students obtain a lower score than second-generation students in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.8). Highlighting the impact of an "efficient language learning path" over academic and personal enrichment, recent educational research field widely advocates for creating opportunities for language multiplicity of immigrants parallel to

strengthening and ensuring growth in their home languages; especially, for higher education, learning foreign languages is encouraged (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.11). As such implications of educational research are comparatively new, the language learning programs of minority groups within Nordic countries are less reflective on empirical outcomes and each country has developed and evolved more or less through their different strategies employed by educational policies and settings (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013). However, similar to traditional language teaching, which is characterized by monolingual perspectives and a narrow focus on different cultures, Nordic school curricula fail to attend the issues of individual multilingualism and view minority language students through the lens of NML.

In spite of exhibiting common trends in educational policies and their implementation, the 2009 PISA test indicates differences between the performances of reading assessments of the students of Finland and other Nordic countries: "Finland differs most from the other countries since only 8 % of the Finnish students are identified as weak readers, while 17 % of the Swedish and Icelandic student population are weak readers (PISA 2009)" (Bjorklund, Bjorklund, & Sjoholm, 2013, p.8).

Educational System of Finland.

Finland has received significant attention across the world over the past decades for its consistent and remarkable performance in PISA. To explore Finnish approach in promoting effective learning environment with two official languages (Finnish and Swedish), it is useful to examine the general structure of the educational system. The Finnish educational system overall comprises three key elements: (1) autonomy of

educators and emphasis on teachers' training; (2) free and strong financial aid for different levels of education; and (3) balance of power between policy makers and school officials to implement national curriculum.

To ensure equity in student learning experience, Finland invests in education by making all levels of schooling, starting from pre-primary to higher education free (Finnish education in a nutshell, 2013). The compulsory 9 years of basic education in Finnish schools is foundational. Learning materials, such as textbooks are provided in preprimary and basic education. The general syllabus for all students of basic education is given below that lists the common subjects, divided into compulsory and optional categories, which depend on grades and allow individual student to create their own study program:

- mother tongue and literature (Finnish or Swedish)
- the other national language (Swedish or Finnish)
- foreign languages
- environmental studies
- health education
- religion or ethics
- history
- social studies
- mathematics
- physics
- chemistry
- biology

- geography
- physical education
- music
- visual arts
- craft
- home economics. (“Teaching and learning in single structure education”, 2015)

Apart from the flexibility offered in subject choices, supporting all pupils with daily meals and free transportation from any distance provides extensive care to ensure a convenient learning environment for all. Different kinds of financial aids, grants, and arrangements remain definite within the Finnish educational system. Even during the study program in upper secondary, vocational, and higher studies, opportunities to receive full time funding are obtainable. Below is the figure 3 representing the Finnish

educational system in a brief and graphic way:

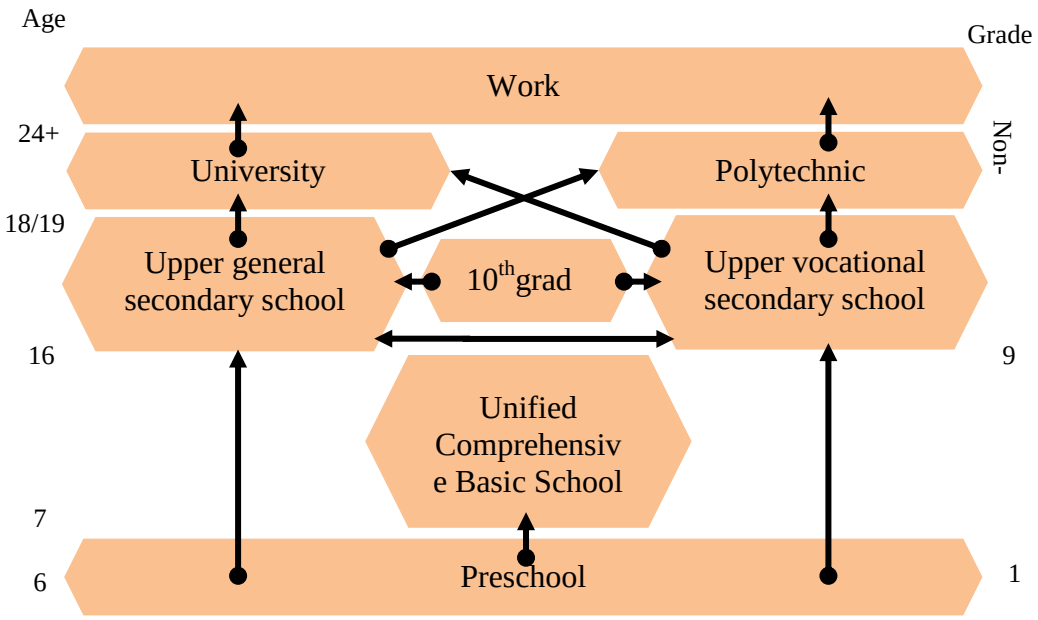


Figure 3: Finnish educational system in a nutshell in 2011 (Based on Sahlberg, 2011, p.40)

In terms of the two official languages of Finland (Swedish and Finnish), which are split in different areas across the country as spoken by different groups of people, separate institutions exist for each of the language speaking groups to choose their preferred spaces to receive education. Going further to facilitate more language preference/choices of students, Finnish education developed "educational institutions where all or at least some instruction is provided in a foreign language, most commonly in English" ("Finnish education in a nutshell," 2013, p.8). As co-existence of different language groups is a significant trait of Finnish population, the local authorities, who are responsible as the mediators to implement the national curricular, customize and entail educational programs as well as determine languages necessary for instruction.

For example, “Local authorities are also required to organize education in the Sami language in the Sami speaking areas of Lapland” (“Finnish education in a nutshell,” 2013, p 8).

Roma along with other minority groups receive similar attention and educational opportunities; even people using sign language. Moreover, opportunity to apply for special funds exists for providers of education in order to design and deliver instruction in the official national languages as well as in the mother languages of second language speakers, such as Roma, or Sami. To support and prepare immigrants, specifically for basic and upper secondary education, educators have the liberty to initiate instructions through necessary programs.

The local authorities play a significant role in education and exert power to determine various courses of action essential for their local demographic situation: “Most institutions providing basic and upper secondary level education are maintained by local authorities or joint municipal boards” (“Finnish education in a nutshell,” 2013, p. 10). In addition, the state and the local authority hold a mutual obligation and duty to make several decisions and distribute funding. A significant period of school education in Finland, known as basic education provided over 9 years, however, remains undivided as it is not compartmentalized with primary and lower secondary educational structure. One instructor acts as a class teacher teaching most of the subjects in the first six years, but in the last three years, the subject specific instructors take the responsibility. The school committee or administration also works closely with local authorities. The table below details the areas for decision-making under the Central and Local authorities in education:

Central steering	Local decisions
o Educational priorities o Minimum time allocation o National core curricula o Size of state subsides	o Educational priorities o Local curricula o Allocation of subsidies o Class size o Recruitment o Teacher "evaluation" o Quality assurance

Table 5: Two-tire National educational system of Finland. (Based on Finnish National Board of Education, n.d., slide 9)

In terms of testing and evaluation, Finland's educational system allows both self-evaluation and national evaluation to function as separate entities. Schools and education providers avail self-evaluation, whereas national evaluation is conducted consistently, on a yearly basis and via tests either in literature and mother language, or in mathematics. The Ministry of Education contains the evaluation plan for other subject areas, including arts and crafts as well as cross cultural themes ("Finnish education in a nutshell," 2013).

However, higher educational institutions function differently: "Finnish universities are independent corporations under public law or foundations under private law" ("Finnish education in a nutshell," 2013, p.11). The universities collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Culture for planning and laying out "operational and qualitative targets" along with ensuring necessary resources for three years as a unit. Nevertheless, higher education allows more internal autonomy and freedom of choices

in every sphere of their infrastructure starting from administration, admission, and degree programs. Polytechnics and universities enjoy extensive autonomy.

Besides empowering the higher education with abundance of financial aid and flexibility in administrative decisions based on situation and choices, Finland also has excelled in providing adult education. Their profile of such ventures goes back all the way to 1889 when the first high school was established for adults and since then, the adult education has grown over time with more acceptance and participation ("Finnish education in a nutshell," 2013). To provide opportunities to study parallel to work in all levels of education, various arrangements are made for adults to engage into degree programs and training. Such efforts and vision paved the path for a long term effect and resolution for inclusivity of different age and skills that can expand the boundary of a strong work force. The philosophy behind this initiative is well reflected in the objective of Finnish adult education:

> The main objectives of adult education policy are ensuring the availability and competence of the labour force, providing educational opportunities for the entire adult population and strengthening social cohesion and equity. The objectives should support efforts to extend working life, raise the employment rate, improve productivity, implement the conditions for lifelong learning and enhance multiculturalism. ("Finnish education in a nutshell," 2013, p. 9)

Overall, Finnish approaches address education as a far more autonomous sector than many countries; especially, many countries perceive education as a tool to execute and sustain political and economic agendas. Such an attitude of Finland towards education seems to discourage any interference or reform, considering what is best for

children. For two decades, Finnish reforms have encouraged freedom for educators in pedagogical practices as well. Later, significant stratification in public administration empowered schools with extensive self -autonomy and self-regulation in crucial decision making process, such as in setting budgets, curriculum, governing body, place specific educational programs, and language as the medium of instruction (Sahlberg, 2007).

Studies further claim that Finnish school practices do not conform to modern educational concepts, such as student-centered learning. Rather they exhibit more conventional traits with fewer implementations of the "new constructivist pedagogy" (Norris *et al.*, 1996, p. 85 as cited in Sahlberg, 2007, p. 165). Though the teaching practices of Finland are profiled as not open to reform and devoid of advanced technologies, the stability and goals achieved by the Finnish educational system are noteworthy. In other words, aligning less with the flow of changes and demands of modernity, Finland generates a 'pause' for educators and policy-makers to rethink how to negotiate the function of education:

> Perhaps this pedagogical conservatism together with a fear-free atmosphere has created conditions for teaching and environments for learning that have promoted creativity and risk-taking that are necessary elements of learning in the knowledge society….New practices are often mandated by issuing laws and regulations that coerce schools and teachers to change their behaviors. The Finnish approach to improving learning and achievement of all students, by contrast, is based on a long term vision and a set of basic values that have been accepted by Finnish society. (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 165-166)

Another crucial understanding of the Finnish educational system is the limited interest and provision of testing to influence learning outcomes. Across the world, educational systems convert much attention into measuring learning and developing high-stakes testing to circulate 'learning' as a 'product.' In reverse, Finland took a critical stand against such testing: "The main reason is that the education research community focused on policy-making has remained unconvinced that high-stakes testing policies actually increase student learning: if student learning remains positively unaffected, the validity of such high-stakes tests must be questioned" (Sahlberg, 2007, p.166).

Such an attitude toward testing evolves from a careful consultation with what student growth actually means. This differs with traditional concept of student achievement. The latter is heavily depended on measurable parts of human productivity; especially focused on domains of knowledge, skill, and aptitude visible in preferred areas like mathematics, reading writing, and science. In Finnish education, student achievement does not rest only on a demonstration of subject specific knowledge measurable by structured tools; rather their philosophy extends the boundary of performances of the students as social beings. In short, "this means that successful Finnish students need to demonstrate not only sufficient knowledge and skills in a broad range of academic and aesthetic subjects, but also certain developed features of personality and moral behavior" (Sahlberg, 2007, p.164).

The debate over defining student achievement triggers a lot of issues related to evaluating national performances of countries on a macro level and in measuring an individual's performance on micro level. Testing system is designed to provide scores

that indicate possession or attaining of knowledge in certain domains, which are on the plate for the contest. Such arrangement raises questions about how scores can be correlated with learning. Private tutoring outside of school can become a major part of student achievement in countries where testing has high-stakes. Bangladesh and South Asian countries, as well as Japan and Korea, have societies where private tutoring is inseparable from the school days. This social norm of perceiving student scores on test results as the ultimate indicator of merit and knowledge is a by-product of educational policies that fail to recognize the difference between performance and learning. Conditioned response to perform in a certain way does not necessarily constitute learning. In the figure 5 below, a concise idea of testing system of Finnish matriculation exam is provided:



- Minimum 4 tests
- Mother tongue +3 of the following
    - 2nd national language
    - Foreign language
    - Mathematics

- General studies (one subject in sciences and humanities)

- One or more optional tests possible
- Biannual

Figure 4: Finnish Matriculation Exam. (Based on Finnish National Board of Education, n.d., slide 39)

From the above characteristics of Finnish matriculation exam, we can see that the short and simple approach taken toward student assessment does not cultivate an exhibition of test scores and learning. It also balances the importance of language learning and other subject matters.

Similarly, assessments designed with certain criteria to locate special skills with instrumental evidence function through standardized tests and so, international student assessments may treat learning as something accurately measurable. Finland's testing system and philosophy emerge as an example to challenge such an artificial concept of testing. School education remains the sole resource for learning and the educators in the classroom liberate learning from testing tools by holding the power to teach as they see fit. In other words, there is "no external high-stakes testing [in Finland] prior to Matriculation Examination nor private tutoring, [and] many argue that only the teachers who have taught the students know what they were expected to learn and, hence, to achieve" (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 163). The trust in teachers within the Finnish educational system allowed people of the country to recognize the value of learning and knowledge over competition and performance. The Finnish educational system does not treat education as a merchandize that needs to be continually upgraded. The country invests in local sustainability, stability, compatibility, and growth.

Though Finland has remained in the top ranks in international comparisons of achievement for a number of years, their duration or length of annual school hours is less than many countries. Annual school hours in Finland are only 600 hours whereas on average, 1,100 hours are required in the U.S. school system (Baines, 2007). Finland's educational system focuses more on effectiveness of lessons than the belief that 'more time invested in teaching brings forth more learning.' The central government decides the maximum length of a school day as well as the minimum number of lessons per week; the Basic Education Act and Decree in Finland looks into such regulations ("The education system of Finland," 2008). Finnish schools operate through five days a week with two holidays, Saturday and Sunday, if no adjustment is necessary by the school authority. In other words, educational institutions may utilize any Saturday to cover lessons interfered by any extended holiday, or government holidays, which fall into working day schedules. Subjects are taught through a number of lessons, which vary depending on the subject matter and grade level. The weekly number of lessons can range between 19 and 30.

The first two grades at schools in Finland receive on average 19 weekly lessons through instructions; the average/minimum for the third and fourth grades is 23 lessons; and the average for the fifth and sixth grades is 24 lessons. In grades 7–9, instruction and educational guidance cover minimum 30 weekly lessons ("The education system of Finland," 2008). In addition, remedial teaching is available. To be specific, in the first two grades, one school day may consist of no more than five lessons; in the other grades, the maximum number is seven lessons per day.

Grades of Basic 9 years School	Minimum number of 45 minutes lessons per week
1 – 2	19
3 – 4	23
5 – 6	24
7 – 9	30

Table 6: Based on "The education system of Finland,"2008, p. 47-48)

To understand what is considered as a lesson or unit in Finnish schools is necessary at this stage: "A lesson is defined as 60 minutes of which instruction must account for at least 45 minutes" ("The education system of Finland," 2008, p. 47). As the teaching time at classrooms consists of separate periods based on delivery of instruction and class activities, a lesson can also vary up to 90 minutes. However, it is again necessary to mention that together the municipalities and the schools consult and conclude upon lesson hours in weekly and daily timetables. Below is a table on the overall Finnish school education showcasing the time allocation for sample subjects in a weekly basis through the number of lessons imparted:

Forms	1-2	3-6	7-9	Total
Mother tongue and literature	14	18	10	42
Mathematics	6	15	11	32
A language (1st foreign language)	-	9	7	16
B language (2nd foreign language)	-	2	4	6
Forms	1-6		7-9	Total
Environment and science	14		17	31
History and civics	5		7	12
Arts, crafts and sports				62
Total annual no of lessons x38	Total minimum			222

Table 7: National minimum time allocation, 2016-sample subjects with annual weekly lessons). (Based on Finnish National Board of Education, n.d. slide 32)

Similar to Bangladesh, Finland uses learning materials published by commercial publishers and local publishers: "The Finnish National Board of Education produces materials with a small circulation and for minority groups" ("Teaching and Learning in Single Structure Education," 2015). However, as Finland commits to flexibility and customization, schools and teachers can choose learning material and textbooks based on their implementation of the national core curriculum. Moreover, education providers collect the learning materials for students as they are free for pupils in basic education. A national website remains open for the education providers to find resources and information ("Teaching and Learning in Single Structure Education," 2015).

Special education in Finland refers to an extensive and variety of support to students throughout the 9 years of compulsory education. The Special Educational Needs (SEN) aims to provide and support students with equal access to resources in order to enable them to progress in schools based on their individual abilities and with a promise of classroom environment with peers (Sehlberg, 2011). In fact, it is common

for students in their basic school years to receive additional support: "Since those students who are in part time special education normally vary from one year to another, up to half of those students who complete their compulsory education at the age of 16 have been in special education at some point in their schooling" (Sehlberg, 2011, p.47).

The SEN actually functions through two parallel channels of support: part time support and permanent support. The part time support focuses on the needs of regular classroom students and meets their needs in small groups, which are taken care of by a special education teacher; usually, SEN teachers work with students over less difficult learning issues. Students in part time support have the flexibility to form their own learning plan aligned with their goals and interests. So, their basic education can be completed through a general or improvised curriculum. Assessments take place over students' chosen curriculum and thus, do not put them into any risk of competing with mainstream students (Sehlberg, 2011). The allocation and delivery of part time support, which are discharged by a team made with different members, vary in schools, but remain consistent over the common agenda of attending student needs and evaluating given support:

> Many schools have a student welfare group comprising the principal, the full or part time school psychologist, the school nurse and the special education teacher; it may also contain the class teacher, social worker and a student advisor. The group may meet weekly or monthly and it integrates information about students and the school from different sources. It includes a focus on students who receive part time special needs services, monitoring their progress in relation to their individual education plan. (Perry & Wilson, 2015, p.3)

The other category of support, the permanent special education, operates either through a separate class in the school, or in a separate institution. Selection of students for such support takes place after a thorough and multifaceted process, involving "medical, psychological, and social welfare professionals" as well as family members (Sehlberg, 2011, p.47).

Finnish schools become aware of special educational needs of children through the early identification process, which takes place before children start school. Such process is built upon a "network of child health clinics providing regular assessments of the social, physical and mental development of babies and pre-school children. Multi-disciplinary teams comprising a nurse, doctor, speech therapist and psychologist make evaluations with the aim of identifying development risks" (Perry & Wilson, 2015, p.3). Before primary school, an inclusive opportunity occurs to share information about the child between the parents and teachers of the pre-school and primary school; this sharing includes strategic information that incorporate portfolio and reports on the child's specific skills, such as social, speech, and motor skills. Apart from SEN, high value posed on teachers, abundance of autonomy and trust entitled in their works, and availability of a variety of options in individual educational planning are some significant attributes of Finnish educational system.

Finnish education is deeply connected to language. Swedish speakers are the largest minority language group and they are well supported with the existing parallel school systems for the Finnish and Swedish language groups. Generally, the language for instruction in a school stands for the major language speaking group in a municipality; moreover, it is not uncommon for any minority group to practice their

right to “establish public schools in its own language” (Kilpi, 2010, p11).Those areas, which are identified as bilingual municipalities, arrange schools in both languages. Further, Swedish speakers enjoy more educational places and options than Finnish speakers do in upper secondary and tertiary level (Saarela & Finn¨as, 2003 as cited in Kilpi, 2010, p12).

Simultaneously, Finland has schools that use a language other than Swedish or Finnish as their medium of instruction and some schools, including private schools, use English as the primary language:

> In the largest towns there are also schools that teach in French, German, Russian, Estonian and Chinese. Except for the international schools, most schools that teach in a foreign language do so in immersion- or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) programs, and the amount that is taught in the foreign language ranges from a few hours a week to almost all lessons. (Kilpi, 2010, p. 12)

For immigrant students, the right to learn in their mother tongue has been established in Finland, which is arranged through the collaboration of the municipalities depending on the number (4 is the minimum number to consider) of students and availability of a teacher in their language. This also leads to providing special preparatory classes for a significant amount of time (at least half a year) to the immigrant children eligible for school. Often such support is provided through a year-long program, which mainly focuses on developing Finnish language skills in order to promote or integrate the immigrant children in the regular classroom setting. The integration process for immigrant children in mainstream classes starts with subject

areas where language skills are less stretched out, such as physical education and arts. However, the immigrant students are required to learn Finnish and Swedish "as a second language either in separate classes or alongside the mother tongue curriculum" (Kilpi, 2010, p.14). In a way, Finland proposes a greater significance and attention on the mother tongues of different language groups in their education. The plurality of languages in the Finnish educational system perhaps prevents one single language to dominate.

Chapter Four

Discussion

Educational systems of countries across the world differ not only because of their political, economic, and historical differences, but also because of dynamic traits and developments across time and regions. At the wake of changing demographic parameters as well as priorities of lands and leaders of countries, educational systems evolve over time. However, while educational systems cannot be separated from the infrastructure of a governing entity, consistent empowering of the educational system has benefits. Thus, Bangladesh as a postcolonial country may appear to be a product of hegemony and cultural struggle, but creating a social and educational alliance to reinforce her identity and economy seems more necessary now than ever.

According to *Worldometre.com*, the land area of Finland is 303,511 Km2 (117,186 sq. miles) with a population of 5,537,208 whereas Bangladesh stands on 130,172 Km2 (50,260 sq. miles) with a population of 164,372,767. The statistics show that there is a huge gap between the two countries' geographical capacity and population. Of course policies of one country may not be fully replicable in the other. Finland is culturally and ethnically rather homogenous in terms of ethnic diversities. Although the demographic context is ever changing in Finland and it witnessed a drastic growth of foreign-born citizens in the early 2000s, the issues of integrating and accommodating different ethnic and language groups seem more manageable than in many countries, such as the U.S.A. Finland already functions as a trilingual society where though Finnish, Swedish, and Sami (apparently) hold the status of official languages, other language minorities may request to have an education in their mother

language (Sahlberg, 2011). Bangladesh is considered homogenous in ethnicity too, but the language variations within its boundary, especially the quirky dialectics of the Southern districts and tribes, seem to call for a more integrative educational system.

As the size of a country also becomes an essential element to implement educational policies and create a model for others, many can argue that Finland as a country cannot provide a replicable educational model due to its population and size. Many states of North America hold a population near or similar to the population of Finland (Sahlberg, 2011):

> When the size factor in educational reforms is considered, it is necessary to note that in many federal nations, states, provinces, or regions are to a large extent autonomous in terms of educational management and running of their schools. This is the case in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Germany, for example. …If these jurisdictions have freedom to set their own educational policies and conduct reforms as they think best, then experiences from an educational system of the size of Finland should be particularly interesting and relevant to them. (Sahlberg, 2011, p.8-9)

Also, critics note that in many international academic achievement measures, such as Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the areas tested do not give a 'holistic' view of students. Such doubts emerge because they claim these tests "focus on areas too narrow to capture the whole spectrum of school education, and thus ignore social skills, moral development, creativity, or digital literacy as important outcomes of public education for all" (Sahlberg, 2011, p.9). Further criticism towards Finland's success on PISA includes the claim toward Finland to be favored by such

testing due to its educational culture and its alignment with the international testing system. Critics may also say that Finland possesses the advantage of a comparatively small population and social homogeneity. Nevertheless, many large and diverse countries do not attempt to develop highly complex educational policies, setting, and reforms (Sahlberg, 2011). To an extent, it will be too aggressive for the critics to equate the success of Finland's educational system with those crucial issues only and disregard the other driving forces embedded in the philosophy, life style, and social practices of Finnish government and people. The construction of a "functional, sustainable, and just country with an equitable public education system" opens a lot of windows to look through (Sahlberg, 2011, p.10). The overarching aspect of Finnish educational success is their central belief in the power of "doing things on their own" way (Sahlberg, 2011, p.10).

The Bangladesh educational system tends to focus on 'one right way' for all to 'learn and benefit.' The demographic variables, such as dialects and socioeconomic status as well as geographical criteria of a location, determine potential earning sources of people across Bangladesh. The current government announced ambitious educational goals with a theoretical running track to proceed since 2010. Below are the goals determined by a commission of current Bangladesh government:

- to develop a curricula and textbooks imbued with the national spirit with a view to cultivate the humanistic values. A congenial and joyful environment need to be created in the schools to promote healthy physical and mental development of the children;
- to initiate a uniform and mandatory syllabus for some basic subjects to

be taught in diverse types of schools delivering primary education;

- to help the students inculcate moral and spiritual values like idea of justice, sense of duty, discipline and etiquettes, non-communalism, human rights, accommodative attitudes toward corporate living, curiosity, friendliness and perseverance, and to encourage them to acquire scientific, cultural and human values and to shun superstitions;
- to ignite in them the spirit of our national liberation movement and encourage them with patriotism to dedicate themselves to nation-building;
- to make them motivated and capable of pursuing higher education through ensuring the qualitatively adequate marginal skills at respective levels of studies; To achieve this, adequate number of quality teachers will be appointed. Besides, the development of physical infrastructure, favorable social ambience, competent pedagogy, warm teachers students relationship and the respectable status of women have to be ensured.
- to take effective steps to ensure the acquisition of essential knowledge, subject-based knowledge, life skills, attitudes, values and the sense of social awareness to meet their basic learning needs that will enable them to move ahead to the next level of education. (Prodhan, 2016, p.13)

The over-arching goals of education in Bangladesh are clearly mapped out above. However, availability and assurances of resources and necessary changes customized according to ‘needs’ require more attention. In Bangladesh, lack of commitment to language plurality or at least negligence in the accommodation of

plurality is still visible. English is mandatory, but the actual quality of instruction needs to be scrutinized. The quality of life of teachers is also ignored and student support systems within educational institutions remain more theoretical than real. Moreover, constitutionally education is expected to be uniform across the country, but the 13 types of primary educational curriculum and standards existing in the private, public, and Madrasah school systems, generate a wide range of inequality and differences in student learning outcomes. In other words, different levels of knowledge and skills emerge from the following 13 types of primary school systems that run parallel to each other in Bangladesh:

> Government Primary Schools (GPS), Registered Non-Government Primary Schools (RNGPS), HSAPS- High School Attached Primary Schools Experimental Schools Primary Teachers' Training Institute Primary School, Community Schools, Non-Registered Non-Governmental Primary Schools, Kindergarten, NGO Schools, Primary sections of Secondary Schools, Ebtedayee Madrasahs, Primary sections of other Madrasahs, English Medium and English Versions (BANBEIS, 2010, (UNICEF 2008). (Prodhan, 2016, p. 14)

In rural areas, opposed to urban areas, the differences in learning outcomes is the most frustrating due to disparity in every aspect of facilitation and service at educational institutions. As a consequence, students coming from rural areas usually remain less competent in subject specific knowledge areas, application based tasks, language skills, and in skills to draw from various resources. Less competent teachers are also appointed in rural areas. Also, urban schools tend to put more stress on English language skills than rural schools. Standards are voluntarily reduced for weaker students

(Prodhan, 2016). The evolution of Bangladesh as a nation could have been empowered by a well-framed and customized educational system exploring both past and future political, geographical, and social agenda. Finland can become a case study here to learn from its evolution across time as Bangladesh and Finland share few similar histories.

After the post WWII, Finland's educational system was imbalanced and focused more on rural areas and agriculture. During the 60's, the expansion of urban life began and today two thirds of Finland's population reside in urban areas (OECD, 2010). The interconnectedness between the Finnish educational system and its economy can be followed by a short outline of Finnish educational goals:

- enhanced equal opportunity for education by way of transition from a northern agricultural nation to an industrialized society (1945-1970)
- creating a public comprehensive school system by way of Nordic welfare society with a growing service sector and increasing levels of technology and technological innovation (1965-1990)
- improving the quality of basic education and expanding higher education in keeping with Finland's new identity as a high tech knowledge-based economy (1985-present). (Sahlberg, 2010a as cited in Sahlberg, 2011, p. 15)

During the 50's, around 338 grammar school at that time offered middle (5 years) and high (3 years) school education in Finland, which were not available for all across the country (Sahlberg, 2011). After legislation signed in 70's, private schools were encouraged to transform into schools under municipal authority (Kilpi, 2010).

Earlier, schools were funded and run privately while few schools were run by the state and municipals. However, by assuring partial or certain amount of state funding, the Finnish government took control over previous grammar schools. The strategic step to bring private schools to cooperate with the state not only brought coherence to the system, but also brought increased educational opportunities.

Bangladesh was and is an agricultural country and the urbanization of the country has been slow and sporadic. Each district of Bangladesh has an individual education board, but they all work closely to form a cohesive national curriculum. For an example, the secondary and upper secondary high school final tests across the country are conducted separately in districts with separate sets of questions crafted by their individual education board, but they all follow the same national syllabus and textbooks.

As a matter of fact, Bangladesh poses different kinds of challenges than Finland. Poverty is a consistent and prominent factor that impacts education and equality throughout the country. Especially, children born in poverty are often found to earn from their very young age instead of going to school. Though child labor is prohibited in many countries and denounced, the number of child laborer in Bangladesh is huge and growing: "One out of every six children is a working child numbering 7.42 million children across the country. However, there is no evidence based comprehensive study on child poverty and deprivation" (Barkat, Poddar, Mahiyuddin, Halim, Karim, Khan, & Abdullah-Al-Hussain, 2009, "Executive Summary"). Finland, on the other hand, has only 3.4% children living under the definition of poverty according to UNICEF

(Sahlberg, 2011). Again, in Bangladesh, the teacher-student ratio is very high, 40:1 while in Finland, it is 14:1 (Prodhan, 2016). The figure below well explains this issue:

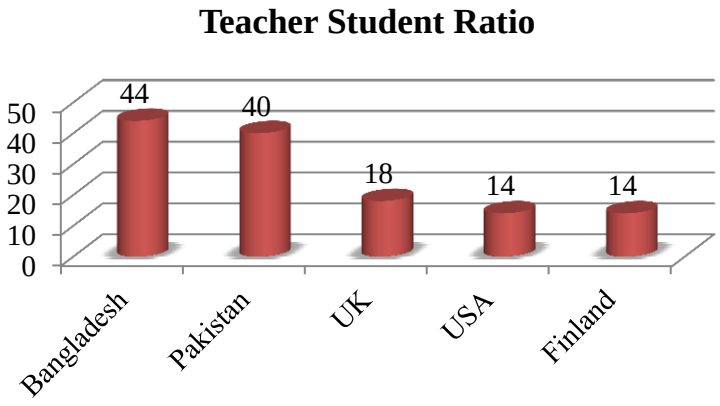


Figure 5: Ratio of teachers and students in several countries. (Based on the data provided in Prodhan, 2016, p.18)

Student-teacher ratio is one of the key determiners of a quality education. In my secondary and higher secondary school, each major: science, arts, and commerce had two sections and each section had on average 130 students in a classroom. This situation is worse in rural schools than urban schools due to the refusal and disinterest of teachers to move into country sides.

In order to negotiate between the current educational systems functioning in Bangladesh and Finland, identifying prospective reforms of Finnish educational system that can benefit Bangladesh educational system is necessary. Although Finnish educational success depends on several crucial factors, "systematic attention to social justice and early intervention to help those with special needs, and close interplay between education and other sectors" had been the mantra to achieve their current successful status (Sahlberg, 2011, p.69). Value of teachers and decent salaries for

teachers parallel to other professions also contributed into the rise of Finnish educational system.

Schools are more than just buildings in Finland. There schools act as a shelter, a provider, a safe place away from home. Finnish schools "provide a daily hot meal for every student. They provide health and dental services. They offer guidance and psychological counselling and access to a broader array of mental health and other services for students and families in need" (OECD, 2010, p.122). Finland, thus, combines social justice and education in one platform to dismiss any disparity in the educational environment.

Bangladesh, to address the high rate of child poverty and their malnutrition, adapted the "Food for Education" program at primary schools since 1993, which provides food grains to poor families in exchange of their children to attend schools instead of work. However, the entitlement of poor families became a political controversy in local areas. Corruption and poor administration disrupt the whole intent of the program by failing to ensure food quality, fair selection of poor families, proper distribution, accessible service centers, and appropriate educational resources (Ahmed & Ninno, n.d.) The disparity remains acute in schools and Food for Education program. This program in fact has done not much to transform poor areas or to even increase enrollments in schools for learning purpose. The gap between urban and rural schools seems intractable: "While rural schools should not look like urban schools, they must offer the same opportunities as urban schools for children to advance through the school system to higher levels" (Moulton, 2001, p.29). So, equal opportunities, resources, and learning outcomes still remain out of reach for rural students in Bangladesh.

On the contrary, teachers specializing in Special Education Needs (SEN) aid about 30% of students in Finnish schools where "8% of these students are educated in full-time special education with the remaining 22% receiving part-time special education" (Perry & Wilson, 2015, p.2). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, early identification of children needing extra help is considered a priority by Finnish schools. They believe that if any kind of special needs is detected in a timely manner, most of the students' needs can be then met in the mainstream classroom instead of putting children in a separate setting or institution. Among the 8% full time support receiving students, half of them attend the regular schools where 'special teachers' work side by side with the class teacher to promote 'inclusion' (OECD, 2010). The role of these special teachers are not anyway less significant than any other teachers: "their job is to work closely with the class teachers to identify students in need of extra help and to work individually or in small groups with these students to provide the extra help and support they need to keep up with their classmates" (OECD, 2010, p.122). Within the process of identifying special need children, the class teachers do not carry the sole responsibility to refer a child to a special education teacher. The "pupils' multi-professional care group," whose members are the principal, the class teacher, the special education teacher, the school nurse, the school psychologist, a social worker and often the parents of the child make decisions together (OECD, 2010, p.122). SEN is provided in "mainstream classes, a group-setting in a separate room or in a special school" (Perry & Wilson, 2015, p.15), which in return empowers the school system.

The success of SEN system owes a lot to its 'part-time' special education that should invite the most attention of Bangladesh and other countries. This kind of

assistance takes place in an incremental manner while students remain in their regular classroom: “Typically, students participate for one or two hours weekly for a period of between four and ten weeks” (Perry & Wilson, 2015, p.15). The aim is to anticipate need rather than wait until students demonstrate weak performance. For segregated SEN support, especially for students with visual, audio, physical, or any other different ability, six special basic schools have been established under the state. Moreover, these institutions work as nation-wide resource centers for developmental support “providing expertise to other schools, and also offer temporary education and rehabilitation to pupils from other schools” (Perry &Wilson, 2015, p.15).

In contrast to SEN, extra educational support in Bangladesh is totally off in schools; rather it is unsystematic, privately financed, and discriminatory. Whether it is public or private or half government funded, no Bangladeshi school provides assistance outside of class except few private English medium schools, arranging ‘remedial classes’ (Hamid, Sussex, & Khan, 2009). The teachers are thus less interested to deliver proper instruction in the class and more persistent on bringing the children for private tuition to them. In other words, an unhealthy practice takes over power in schools where students are targeted or threatened through unethical grading by teachers to force them to take private tuitions under the subject-teachers. Moreover, coaching centers and private tutors teach in batches (large groups) without any restriction over the number of students. The work ethics and sense of responsibility necessary in teaching profession has declined over time and now it stands as an unconquerable business enterprise. In a way, economic status of the family becomes the driving force of a student’s fate, not their hard-work or merit. Poor students cannot get any kind of

necessary assistance in and outside of school apparently and fail to compete with affluent students.

Private tutoring is very much in practice starting from the entry level to higher secondary level in schools and all the way to many colleges and universities, such as National University of Bangladesh. My first cousin is a student of English Literature in the National University of Bangladesh who does not attend much of his regular university classes, but he is bound to go to private tuitions provided by the same professors/lecturers of his institution. The unfortunate part is that the private tuition practice is open, unchallenged, and ignored by all except the sufferers, the poor group.

The amount of money charged in these tuitions vary depending on subjects (e.g. science or arts), residential area (for elite, middle class, or poor), geo-economic status of a location (city or village), region (capital or other districts), center of tuition (student's home, or teacher's place), medium of language used in tuition (English or Bangla), and reputation of the teacher in providing a narrowed down 'suggestion' list for exams in all levels (Hamid, Sussex, & Khan, 2009). I studied in the capital and in a well-reputed, private Bangla medium school. The math teacher graded me to fail on the pretext that I didn't know how to explain steps in 'details' in comparison to the highly competitive practices of Dhaka city schools. I was told that I needed to pay for private tutoring from him, so that I could pass.

In contrast, Finnish educational system attends Special Educational Needs and builds self-evaluative skills among students from the very first grade. Students are encouraged to determine their own activities to explore any content, but through collaborative teamwork on a variety of projects, which are mostly non-traditional,

multifarious, or interdisciplinary in nature (OECD, 2010). Similarly, students in the upper secondary can study in their own customized, individual programs.

Despite the risk of monopoly or absolute manipulation of power, mainstream class teachers, need autonomy as teachers under a valued social context and a self-reflective condition. Finland's one powerful resort in achieving success is their educators who are well supported, nurtured, and rewarded for their work. Specifically:

> Regular class teachers (grades 1-6) and subject teachers (7-9) exercise an enormous degree of professional discretion and independence. While there is a national core curriculum in Finland, over the past 20 years it has become much less detailed and prescriptive. It functions more as a framework, leaving education providers and teachers latitude to decide what they will teach and how. Teachers select their own textbooks and other instructional materials, for example. (OECD, 2010, p.123)

As mentioned in the literature review, Finnish educational system does not mandate standardized and rigorous tests. Instead, tests are used to measure the general effectiveness of the Finnish educational system. Evaluation of student progress relies on teachers: "Teachers are expected to assess their own students on an ongoing basis, using the assessment guidelines in the national core curriculum and textbooks" (OECD, 2010, p.123).

With autonomy comes trust. The high social position of teachers in the Finnish society acknowledges teachers' hard working mindset and fuels their energy: "Social cohesion and trust are difficult factors to isolate and quantify, but they clearly are part of the explanation for why teaching has become such an attractive profession for

talented young people in Finland, at least on a par with medicine and law" (OECD, 2010, p.124). During the hiring season, even for primary school teacher position, at least ten applicants apply for one open job slot. In other words, due to the financial, social, and professional satisfaction offered in Finland, teaching became a top career choice. While hiring, the selection process is competitive and challenging. Below is a table of salaries of different levels of teachers and other most popular professionals:

Profession	Salary €
Teachers (on average)	3,900
Health center doctors	6,300
Lawyers	4,500
Kindergarten teachers	2,600
Class teacher, primary education	3,500
Subject teacher, lower secondary	3,900
Subject teacher, general upper secondary	4,500
Principal, lower secondary education	5,500
Principal, general upper secondary	5,800

Table 8: Average salaries paid in different professions in Finland, Statistic Finland. (Based on Finnish National Board of Education, n.d., slide 58)

In the table, the salary scales of the other two professions compared to teaching profession is indicative that the gap is not unconvincing for people to choose the teaching career. In many cases, according to various ranks, the payments are satisfactory and not offensive to their designation and value of work. Hence, the satisfaction in teaching career is high in Finland and the figure below demonstrates the fact:

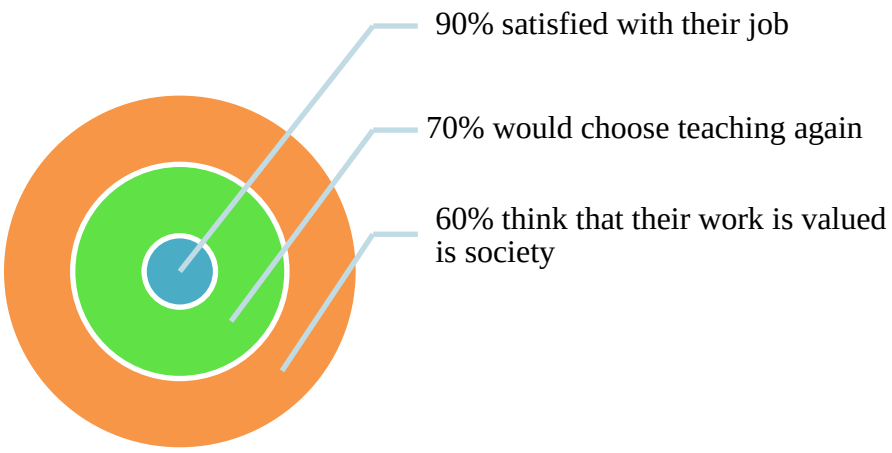


Figure 6: Percentage of teaching job satisfaction in Finland, OECD Tails 2013. (Based on Finnish National Board of Education, n.d., slide 56)

The condition of the teaching profession in Bangladesh is different and unsatisfactory in terms of social, professional, and economical worth of teaching as a profession; at least not until private universities and schools established a reasonable salary scale. The teaching profession was and is still to an extent unpopular in Bangladesh. It was perceived as the career for people who couldn't survive in STEM field or couldn't afford any highly paid corporate jobs with competitive skills. Teacher's salary was never enough to live a life with relief. In this context, private tutoring became a major source of income for teachers. Once (around three decades ago) teachers were highly respectable in Bangladesh (as if they were next to parents) despite their poor socio-economic status, but over time, as education has become a commodity, teachers have become service-providers bought by money. With exceptions, teachers are often considered as mindless persons who 'teach to the test' while they sell tutoring services. Thus, little sense of trust and cohesiveness exists between teachers and the general public.

In recent days, the entry level salary of a lecturer, a faculty without PhD in a well reputed private university is between monthly $250 (20,000 taka) to $312 (25,000 taka) while in a public institution, it is between monthly $225 (18,000 taka) to $250 (20,000 taka) (T. Tehreen, personal communication, February 17, 2017). Here taka is the currency of Bangladesh. According to Bangladesh government's 8th National pay scale gazette for its civil employees, senior university professors now receive monthly $825 (66,000 taka) as total salary, double of 7th Pay scale salary $412 (33,000 taka) ("8th Pay Scale"). Festival bonus, house rent, and increment are also provided, adding them with the basic scale. An engineer's entry level salary in private companies starts on average $437 (35,000 taka) to $625 (50,000 taka) per month. Due to the new pay scale implemented in 2015, at present the government salary range for doctors and engineers is satisfactory than before and competes well with private jobs now. A gross salary at the entry level for doctors and engineers since then is around monthly $463 (37, 000 taka), including house rent and other incentives. In spite of the current government's significant increase in pay scale for all government employees, the disparity among salaries of teaching profession and other professions still exists in a variable manner in both private and public sector, depending on location, entitlement, and reputation of the institution. Nevertheless, the payments vary mostly in all jobs in private sector depending on location (especially, outside of the capital) and reputation of the company.

However, the fate of government primary and secondary school teachers has not changed much. Salaries of primary and secondary government school teachers also vary on their possession of pre- and in-service training and a lot of variables play role in the

quality and quantity of those school trainings, which are often inconsistent and low quality. Although both government and non-government school teachers are supposed to receive somewhat trainings, specifically the subject teachers through national and local agencies, it is common to observe that in the training sessions, "Chalk and talk teaching methods predominate and practical skills are not emphasized" (Haq & Islam, 2005, p. 6). On the other hand, NGO run schools and private schools have their own regulations and training facilities according to their needs, purposes, and completion with others in the field.

The Head teachers are paid the highest scale and the assistant teachers receive different range of salaries based on their status in pay scale grades at primary school administration. Within the Head and assistant teacher positions, top/maximum scale and bottom/minimum scales are subscribed depending on their job promotion, experience, duration, and performance. Below is a table of salaries set for various designations of teachers in primary and secondary government schools of Bangladesh, according to the year 2005 (all currency is in taka and $1=78 taka):

	PRIMARY (monthly)		SECONDARY (monthly)	
	Bottom scale	Top scale	Bottom scale	Top scale
BASIC PAY	$	$	$	$
Trained teacher	37.5	74	63.7	129.5
Non-trained	35	60.8	Na	Na
Trained head teacher	38.7	79.8	137.5	220.6
TOTAL PAY				
Trained teacher	60.6	113.5	98.6	194
Non-trained	53.4	94.5	Na	na
Trained head teacher	70	150		

Table 7: Total monthly incomes of teachers at government run primary and secondary schools, 2005 (Based on Haq & Islam, 2005, p.11)

The above table showcases how poor payments were made to school teachers. In 2014, only $11.25 increase in monthly salary was promised by the government for the Headmasters and assistant teachers ("Primary teachers," 2014). However, with the 2015 pay scale, the primary school headmaster's basic salary has been elevated from monthly $74 (Tk 5,900) to $275 (Tk 22,026) and as for the basic pay scale of assistant teachers, it is now increased from $69 to $210 (S. Banu, personal communication, January 20, 2017). Accordingly, the secondary Headmasters monthly basic salary is now $362.5 and assistant teacher salary is $270.

The salary scale indeed implicate that though currently the primary and secondary school teachers' salary scale has drawn significant attention, the government school teachers could barely live hand to mouth with such amount of money in the past. Thus, the conditions and motivations for teachers still need equal monitoring and care parallel to student learning environment. Just a decade ago, the increment based on annual salary of primary school teachers was less than $1 and the entry level paycheck was just slightly more than a government driver's salary. The private schools' payments as usual vary on reputation, local socio-economic status, regional location, and academic degrees as well as experience of teachers. I joined one of the first grade English medium schools in 2008, located in the capital, with an entry level salary of only $160 (taka 13000) per month, possessing MA degree in English Literature and Language. The same school now offers their teachers on average $238 to $262 per month ("Scholastica salaries in Bangladesh", 2017). My mother-in-law, who retired in 2014 as a Head mistress from a primary school located in a rural area outside of the capital, received monthly $150 (taka12,000) during the end of her career though she

invested 25 years in that school. Again my mother, as a Vice-principal in a new private school, started with monthly $100 (Tk 8,000) salary 15 years ago and now receives monthly $250 (taka 20,000) only.

So, disparity between government and private schools is still acute, and in many average and low grade private schools, there is no fixed regulation to follow for offering salary to teachers. As a result of low salary and incentives, the quality of service from teachers as well as their motivation to pursue a teaching career in Bangladesh become a concern: "Studies suggest that low pay is a key factor behind teacher absenteeism, informal fees, and brain drain, which in turn is a cause for poor child outcomes especially in rural areas" ("Protecting salaries of frontline teachers,"2010, p.1). So, a careful and thoughtful plan for improving working conditions and providing professional development opportunities to teachers of Bangladesh is necessary. A figure below indicates the position of Bangladesh among many countries across the world based on their annual income:

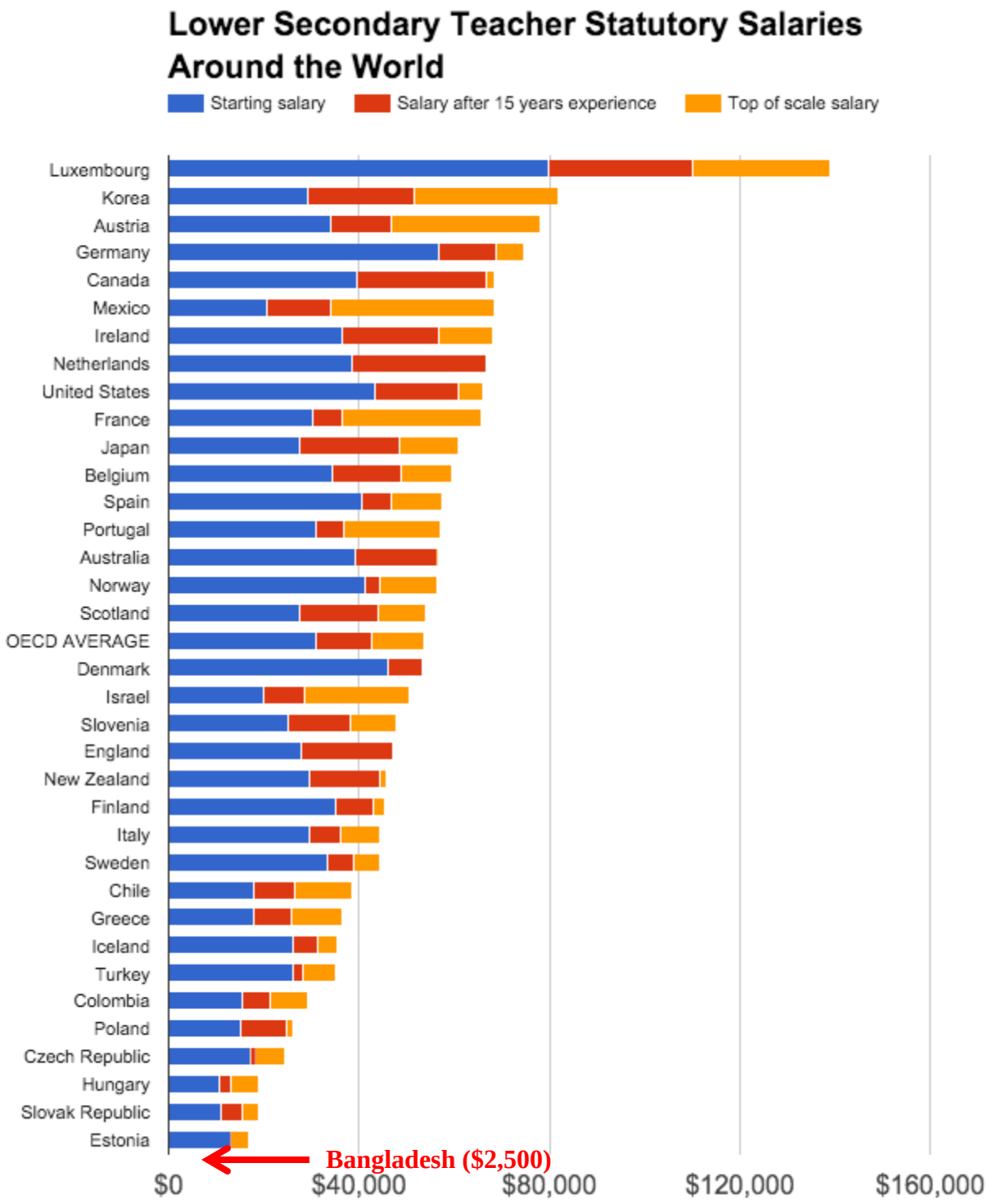


Figure 7: Teacher's average annual income in Bangladesh compared to many countries in the world. (Based on Ostapchuk, 2017)

The emphasis on creating a language plurality is also one area where Bangladesh can investigate to explore why and how the plurality of language is one of the prominent features of the Finnish educational system. It is necessary to renegotiate the current language policies of Bangladesh to push for minimizing disparity in language skills of students across the country. In Bangladesh, the rural areas and various districts speak dialects that cause students in basic education to struggle learning both the Standard Bangla and English at a time. Inside the national core curriculum, there is no support for their linguistic diversity and needs. However in Finland, if any student is identified as not fluent in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in any of the school's official languages of instruction (Finnish, Swedish, and Sami), they are enrolled under the 'second language curriculum'(Kilpi, 2010, p.12). This curriculum offers them separate or extra language learning opportunities until students are fluent in the expected level to join the mainstream classes. Few students end up segregated for language learning classes in Finland, as most students possess the language skills to follow the first language curriculum. Sometimes unavailability of language teachers interferes with this practice in Finnish schools, but most of the time, schools are ready to offer a second language curriculum (Kilpi, 2010). Perhaps, students who speak quirky dialects, especially the tribal students of Bangladesh would be helped if trained teachers teach in an in-house, language proficiency development system at schools.

The Bangladesh school system can offer second language curriculum in public and semi-public schools to help struggling students in Standard Bangla, or English. Specifically, in the tribal areas and southern districts, such an initiative may help to

empower different groups of citizens who suffer for less accommodation of linguistic diversity in educational system. Undoubtedly, English as a foreign language needs extra assistance for all groups of students. Below is the table listing a concise course distribution in the upper secondary level of Finnish Education to showcase how language courses are prioritized:

Subject	Compulsory courses	Specialization courses
Mother tongue and literature	6	3
A-language	6	2
B-language	5	2
Other languages		8+8
Mathematics	6-10	2-3
Environment and science	5	16
Humanities and social sciences	11	14
Arts, crafts and sports	4-6	7

Table 9: Distribution of courses in Upper secondary level, 2016-Sample subjects (Based on Finnish National Board of Education, n.d., slide 38).

This table indicates how much emphasis is built on language courses and plurality in Finland by a combination of compulsory courses and specialized courses among all other subjects. However, mother language remains at the highest position with its number of courses in Finland, which also can compose a potential solution for Bangla to retain and regain its essence, practice, growth, and heritage in Bangladesh.

Without empowering or developing mother tongue, any other linguistic skill development somehow will not facilitate optimum growth expected from students of any grade level in Bangladesh. Treating both Bangla and English equally and merely as a grammar based learning content detaches the learners from the very charm, mechanism, and cognitive development offered by language plurality.

In Bangladesh, English is the only foreign language offered and mandated throughout the pre-tertiary and tertiary level; special language courses are only offered

by linguistic departments of universities. This condition limits the scope for other foreign languages if students are willing to pursue them. Moreover, the concept of learning language contains an ‘element of force’ as French, German, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, etc. are learned by individuals only when someone is forced to learn it for overseas jobs or higher study opportunities (S. Salauddin, personal communication, November 5, 2016). In order to break through the power dynamic of English as an imperial language and to encourage students with the concept of intrinsic benefits of language plurality, it is a must to put more efforts, resources, and inclusion of specialized language courses for both mother tongue and foreign languages in the educational system of Bangladesh.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

In a time of global transactions between countries for various products and support, struggling countries have a great opportunity to draw from other's success in education. Bangladesh can also attempt to grow from her minimum resources. The current educational system of Bangladesh believes that reforms in English curriculum and upgrades in content will be enough to accelerate student learning outcome. However, without tending to the quality of teaching profession, the expectation of improvement is ludicrous.

Recently, Bangladesh is facing a shift in urban areas by a rapid growth and an increasingly competitive mindset of private universities and schools. To compete, they hire highly qualified teachers and try to retain them with reasonable salaries and working conditions. In the capital Dhaka, teaching at the tertiary level is becoming more and more popular as business corporations are expanding their investments in the area. Lecturers and professors earn good salaries at tertiary private institutions and they work with the pleasure of having better flexibility and autonomy in those well-reputed universities. However, pay scale and teacher autonomy differ between A grade (top in rank), B grade (average in rank), and C grade (low quality) universities. Lecturers and professors of renowned public universities also join private universities as guest lecturers in a manner of sharing resources.

Though English as a language is much nurtured in private institutions, unifying English curriculum and providing skilled teachers with the scope of proper professional training throughout different streams (public, private, and Madrasah) of educational

system in Bangladesh is necessary. To build from the current wave of improvement in the working conditions for teachers, the government and private investors need to merge and stimulate various regulations, benefits, and ethics in order to prioritize the value of teaching profession in the society of Bangladesh. Funding in education has to focus on building safe learning environments and inclusivity for the changing population of Bangladesh. Bangla as the mother tongue also requires powerful representation in the intellectual world and in pop-culture. In fact, poverty, lack of government funding, and social institutions along with people's fixed mindset are detrimental to change. In a way, Finland fostered improvement through a social transformation, which is the key to embracing plurality without prioritizing one language over another.

I also believe that educational reforms should be far sighted and attend to the power of the 'place based education,' which encourages listening to the 'place' people inhabit as a key determinant in leading education to make it congruent with various aspects of that place and people. Here 'place' is not understood as a small unit, but rather it constitutes a broader geographical, political, and social platform, which includes the culture, history, characteristic of people, and struggles related to human experience of that place (Gruenewald, 2003). It is also a tool for resistance to past colonial practices and revival of ownership of the land and its culture:

> This pedagogy seeks the twin objectives of decolonization and "reinhabitation" through synthesizing critical and place-based approaches. A critical pedagogy of place challenges all educators to reflect on the relationship between the kind of

education they pursue and the kind of places we inhabit and leave behind for future generations. (Gruenewald, 2003, p.3)

Finland has its own challenges ignited by increasing demographic changes and other uncertainties. Despite, "Fairness, honesty, and social justice are deeply rooted in Finnish way of life… The intense individuality of Finns blended with low hierarchy and traditional willingness to work with others has opened pathways to endless creative potential" (Sahlberg, 2011, p.10). Many have recognized "*The Finnish Way" to Optimize Student Learning* as a thought provoking resource to plan teaching styles, which can enable students to achieve their goals and garner their potential. An educator from Southern California, U.S. and a winner of Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching, wrote on *OECD insight* that she had appropriated and applied the Finnish way of teaching in her Biology class with a blended group of learners and experienced positive outcome. Her story is interesting:

> Last year I used these Finnish methods to teach conceptual biology to second language learners, those with significant learning challenges, and many who have struggled or have been unsuccessful in traditional American high schools. (Some of these classes were as large as thirty-eight students.) This year I'm using a blended Finnish/American approach to teach college preparatory biology to high achieving students and low achieving students. The learning results of both groups have been remarkably positive. (English, 2014, n.p.)

Through a survey, the educator concluded that her use of Finnish/American method of teaching appeared to be "intellectually stimulating" to 94% of her students opposed to their experience with previous science courses (English, 2014). Feedback

from her students expressing satisfaction over bridging the gap between high and low achieving students was significant. Specifically, students shared their relief to break through teacher-centered teaching approach, or Paul Freire's 'banking system' by receiving the opportunity to learn beyond the textbook. Such intervention of this teacher from California reaffirms the claim of Andy Hargreaves: "One of the ways that teachers improve is by learning from other teachers. Schools improve when they learn from other schools. Isolation is the enemy of all improvements" (Sahlberg, 2011, p. xx). Thus, similar to Bangladesh, many nations need to borrow from each other to improve their educational systems.

Being both a student and a parent in the U.S., I observe that the U.S. educational system is driven by similar mindset and infrastructure compared to Bangladesh though it is considered as a first world country and a super power. The value of teaching profession in the American society does not exhibit any high promise to attract competent graduates from institutions and motivations for teachers existing in the current system are typically low as of Bangladesh. The teachers of my daughter's elementary school regret their obligations to teacher to the test during teacher-parents meeting, which brings me to think: how far have I come to ensure a healthy educational environment for my child outside of my third world country? There is no scope to empower my daughter's mother tongue and she is grown under the immersion process of the dominant culture.

However, the elementary school teachers of my daughter seem to be highly passionate, hard-working, and dedicated to their job driven by their personal commitments to improve lives and contribute into society. The teaching materials and

rang of tasks delivered and conducted by teachers of my child's school conforms to the fact that their potential as educators is put on a leash. Thus, "over the past quarter century, the standards and performance of American teachers and schools have steadily declined in relation international benchmark" (Sahlberg, 2011, p. xv). Scopes for professional development through financial and administrative support are bare minimum whereas the working hours and job responsibility are lengthy and heavy for teachers. My classmates, who are practicing teachers in various grades and levels of education, complain about this fact often. Therefore, the U.S. educational system, like many other Anglo-American cultures and societies, still reflects "unhealthy obsession with all that is bigger, harder, tougher, faster, and stronger" (Sahlberg, 2011, p. xvi). It is ironic to see that being one of the greatest advocates for freedom, the U.S. government couldn't free its educational system as they "dictate what and how students should learn and what schools should teach" (Zhao, 2009, p.40 as cited in Sahlberg, 2011, p. xvi).

The tertiary level education in the U.S. is no less different than Bangladesh. Reforms and policies seem to be undertaken as a provisional treatment or response to issues that bring political approval from the mass. Ignorance toward the expense of higher studies; interdependence of educational quality and socioeconomic status of parents and school areas; structured and monolingual attitude towards education; less negotiation in educational policies and facilities for growing immigrant population; and patronization of high-stakes testing are the key features of the American educational system, which altogether echoes the same issues of Bangladesh. Hence, nations across

the globe need to grow drawing from each other not only economically, but also socially while cultivating a strong educational system.

Ultimately, time and place drive the forces for change and growth. In the 21st century, both Bangladesh and Finland have to be always in a pursuit of improvement in their educational systems to meet emerging challenges. Learning from each other can be useful for administrators, educators, policymakers, teacher trainers, parents, and students as well as for the overall countries across the world.

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