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Skill Development Initiatives towards Youth Development in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Bangladesh currently enjoys an average age of 27 years among its people, meaning that almost two-third of the population refers to young people. Each year, around 2.2 million new entrants join the workforce, but only about 1.2 million could find absorption in government and non-government employment opportunities. One of the greatest challenges that this particular concern is underemployment, in which skills learned from the training do not meet what employers demand. This leaves much yielding contributions of young people to economic productivity under-exploited. Some pieces of evidence demonstrate that vocational and technical training programmes do not always fit the market requirements, showing thus that there are gaps when it comes to employability. Taking these into consideration, the study intends to critically analyze the government-led efforts in skill development for the youths in order to identify the challenges. Relying primarily on secondary sources and a qualitative review, the study proposes practical measures for strengthening existing policies and programmes. The findings are expected to provide useful insights for both policymakers and academic discourse on youth development in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Skill development, Development initiatives, Youth Development, Employment, and Bangladesh.

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Introduction

Bangladesh is experiencing a demographic dividend, that refers to the economic advantage which arises when a country has a larger proportion of its population in the working-age group compared to dependents such as children and elderly. A striking feature of this demographic shift is the rapidly increasing number of young people, who make up a significant portion of the total population (ILO, 2018). This youth bulge creates a dual scenario, on the one hand, it presents immense opportunities for economic growth by supplying a productive labor force that can drive industrialization, innovation, and entrepreneurship. On the other hand, it also poses serious challenges, particularly in generating sufficient employment opportunities to absorb this expanding workforce. Without effective employment creation, the country risks facing problems of youth unemployment, underemployment, and social unrest (ADB, 2023).

The country's labour force continues to grow at the rate of approximately 3 percent per annum, that exceeds the growth in the overall population. It has been estimated that, of all the youths in the age brackets of 15 to 29, approximately 33% constitute the entire workforce in the country (BBS, 2022). About two million young entrants join the workforce every year. However, around 85% of employment is still concentrated in the informal sector

(BBS, 2024), and more than half of Bangladeshi migrants are classified as semi-skilled or low-skilled, resulting in lower earnings (BMET, 2017).

Recognizing both the opportunities and challenges, Bangladesh has adopted a range of initiatives over the years to maximize the benefits of its young population. These efforts aim not only at ensuring job creation within the domestic economy but also at preparing Bangladeshi youth for international labor markets, where skilled manpower is in high demand. Among these initiatives, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has gained particular attention. This approach acknowledges that the global economy increasingly requires workers with specialized technical skills, practical competencies, and adaptability to technological advancements (UNESCO, 2020).

The skill development programmes in Bangladesh are therefore designed to align with both national development priorities and global labor market needs. On the national level, skilled manpower is essential for supporting sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction, and the rapidly growing information and communication technology (ICT) industry. Internationally, Bangladeshi workers constitute a major segment of the expatriate labor force, particularly in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries. Enhancing their technical skills not only increases their employability abroad but also raises their potential to earn higher wages, thereby boosting remittance inflows to Bangladesh’s economy (UNICEF, 2022; ADB, 2023).

In addition, the government has collaborated with development partners, private sector institutions, and international organizations to modernize curricula, expand training facilities, and promote public-private partnerships in skill development. Policies have been formulated to encourage entrepreneurship among young people, so they

are not only job-seekers but also job-creators. Furthermore, emphasis has been placed on improving the quality and recognition of vocational qualifications, ensuring that Bangladeshi youth can compete in both domestic and international job markets (World Bank, 2022). In essence, the demographic dividend presents a time-bound opportunity for Bangladesh. If properly managed through effective education, skill training, and job creation strategies, it can transform the country’s youth bulge into a powerful engine of economic growth. Conversely, if the challenges of unemployment and skill mismatch are not addressed, this demographic advantage may turn into a demographic burden (World Bank, 2022). These realities bring to light the dire need for a change in policy and improvement in education quality, expansion in training access, and creating more inclusive opportunities for Bangladesh's youth to transit into the world of work. In these contexts the question arises, whether the existing national skill development policies and initiatives are leading towards youth development in Bangladesh. Is there any challenge in implementing the policies and programs?

Aim and Method of Study

In this backdrop the aim of this study is to critically analyze the existing skill development initiatives towards youth in Bangladesh. This study specifically tries to explore the challenges of the existing initiatives toward youth development in Bangladesh so that some policy inputs for the improvement of the issue can be put forwarded.

A qualitative research method was applied to attain the objectives of the study. For collecting data a list of government records, research papers, published and unpublished articles were collected. They were extensively reviewed, analyzed and synthesized for the purpose of the study accordingly. A content analysis technique was applied to analyze the data.

Theoretical Basis of the Study

A range of theoretical perspectives is associated with youth development. The present study is primarily informed by human capital theory, which traces its roots to the writings of Adam Smith in the 18th century, where he underscored the value of education and skills in economic progress (Becker, 1964). The concept was later refined in the 1960s by Theodore Schultz, who argued that investment in education and training constitutes a critical driver of economic growth (Schultz, 1961). Around the same period, Gary Becker (1964) further developed the theory by formalizing the idea that individuals and firms make rational decisions regarding investments in education, training, and health, viewing these as strategies to enhance productivity and earning capacity (Becker, 1964). Such investments, in turn, are understood to yield higher productivity, improved wages, and overall economic advancement.

In parallel, sustainable development theory positions youth as vital agents of transformative change due to their creativity, energy, and heightened awareness of the long-term implications of environmental and social challenges (United Nations, 2015). Within this framework, young people are recognized as essential actors in promoting equity, advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and influencing progress through participation in policy making, grassroots initiatives, and global dialogue. Consequently, youth development is regarded as a matter of critical importance for nations across the globe.

Building upon these theoretical foundations, this study seeks to critically evaluate existing policy initiatives on skill development and assess their impact on youth development, who are increasingly acknowledged as pivotal change agents in national development of any nation.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Youth development initiatives have a long history in Bangladesh, that suggests substantial academic and policy-oriented literature should be available on the issue. Indeed, several studies have been conducted; however, most remain case-specific and are often pseudo-academic in nature. Much of the work has focused on presenting the overall situation of youth in Bangladesh, including their socio-economic challenges, while others have explored issues of skills development and youth entrepreneurship (Hossain, 2009; Roy & Bhattacharjee, 2013; Bhattacharya et al., 2017).

Despite these contributions, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to systematically examining the effectiveness of government-led skill development initiatives, particularly from the lens of youth development.

Only a few studies have investigated the impacts of government led skill development initiatives. Some of which are:

Mujahid (2015) mentioned that educated unemployment is increasing massively in Bangladesh. As far as youth development index is concerned, Bangladesh performed the lowest among the commonwealth countries.

Rahman et al. (2017) demonstrated improvements of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the youths as a trainee. They emphasized the necessity of incorporating practical fieldwork into training modules of the youths and conducting regular evaluations to maximize effectiveness.

Murshid et al. (2019) observes that there is a growing concern in the country that if large numbers of educated, young people are bypassed by the development process and fail to obtain employment, this might lead to widespread social unrest and encourage extremism.

Mujahid et al. (2023) mentioned that the world is witnessing a dramatic change in the composition of the population. Industrialized nations are struggling with an

"ageing population", while in most developing countries like Bangladesh, the proportion of young people is increasing. In Bangladesh, the youth constitute one-third of the total population and despite the government's efforts, the youth in Bangladesh are falling behind compared to other neighboring countries.

Some scholars have discussed the relationship between government skill development programs and youth development. For instance: Hossain (2009) identified that Bangladeshi youth face high unemployment due to a lack of technical and vocational skills, insufficient practical training, and socio-cultural barriers, especially for women. These challenges prevail despite the NSDA Act 2018 and the NSDAP 2022–2027, both of which aim to improve coordination, industry linkage, and employability. Khan (2025) and Rahman & Hossain (2023) also mentioned about similar challenges due to vocational and technical skills of the Bangladeshi youths both male and female. MJF (2023) and SANEM (2022) explored that the Youth Development Policy 2017 promotes vocational and life skills training but faces disparity in implementation and alignment with the needs of the labor market. As a result, integrated, inclusive, and demand-driven programs are important to empower the youths of Bangladesh.

Research Gap

Taken together, the existing literature highlights a critical gap that there is a lack of studies specifically on the analysis of the skill development initiatives on the development of youths in Bangladesh. To date, no comprehensive study was found that has systematically analyzed the government skill development programs from a positive youth development perspective. This gap marks the need for a theoretically informed analysis.

The present study seeks to critically evaluate the existing government skill development initiatives in

Bangladesh in order to explore the challenges and propose some inputs for the further development on the issue of skill development towards youth development.

Key Concept Defined

Skill

The word "skill" was formally recognized in Bangladesh through the National Skill Development Authority (NSDA) act 2018 which is defined as the knowledge, techniques, and abilities acquired through training that equip people to perform and provide services that meet domestic and international standards. Skills are the capabilities and expertise that are needed to perform specific functions in the workplace, including both technical competencies and soft skills such as communication and teamwork (ILO, 2020).

Skills include the knowledge, attributes, and competencies that enable individuals to perform tasks and contribute to economic and social development (World Bank, 2021). Skills can vary contextually, spanning from geographical, environmental, gender-related, to culturally defined groups. For instance, tribal communities may have different livelihood-based skills than those in urban settings.

More simply, it can be reffered to the practical ability to apply knowledge effectively in working tasks, using cognitive, technical, or inter-personal skills (Government of Bangladesh, 2018).

Skill Development

Skill development refers to the process of identifying, improving, and applying abilities, both technical and soft, that enable individuals to perform tasks effectively, adapt to changing environments, and contribute productively to the personal, organizational, and national growth (ILO, 2020).

Skill development is the improvement of a person's ability to do work that increases his/her productivity and employability, covering both cognitive and technical skills (World Bank, 2021).

However, it can be understood by various indicators, such as:

- The extent of understanding and application of acquired knowledge,
- Ability or difficulty in performing tasks,
- Consistency and accuracy in the performance, and
- Limiting time in completing a task.

In sum, we can say that skill development is such a process that enhance one's knowledge, competencies, and attitudes through education, training, and lifelong learning in order to improve productivity, employability, and adaptability to the labor market changes.

Skill Development Initiatives in Bangladesh: Policies, Plans, and Authority

Bangladesh has undertaken several long-term strategies and policy frameworks focusing on skills development of its growing workforce. These initiatives also seek to enhance employability and productivity while aligning the labour force to domestic and global market needs. The key skill development initiatives such as policies, plans, and authority are discussed below one by one:

National Skills Development Policy 2011

The National Skill Development Policy (NSDP) provides guidelines to help people with employable skills by increasing their access to skills training. Having the vision to build a demand-driven skilled workforce for the socioeconomic development of Bangladesh it highlighted a few principles which are:

a) Shared responsibility among government, private sector, and civil society actors,
b) Improved alignment between labour market needs and training supply, and
c) Ensure equal opportunity for women, rural populations, disadvantaged youth, and persons with disabilities.

The policy promises to provide a clear way forward for skills development in Bangladesh, ensuring a focus on demand-driven, flexible and responsive training provision, nationally recognized qualifications, competency-based training and assessment, industry and private sector involvement, flexible institutional management, promotion of workplace learning, and recognition of prior learning. The policy identifies total five areas for the skill training which are to be synchronized to effect optimum training for the workers (National Skill Development System in Bangladesh, 2015):



Figure 1: Areas for Skill Development

Source: NSDS, 2015

Although the National Skill Development Policy (NSDP) 2011 is a landmark step toward improving technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Bangladesh, a number of criticisms have appeared. Scholars note that implementation is hampered due to weak coordination among ministries and agencies and the absence of an effective monitoring and evaluation framework (ILO, 2021; World Bank, 2019). The policy is also criticized for being supply-driven rather than demand-led, producing a mismatch between training outcomes and labour-market needs (Kabir, 2024; World Bank, 2019). Moreover, quality assurance systems and the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) are not fully institutionalized, leading to uneven training quality (ILO, 2021). Researchers have also highlighted low instructor capacity, inadequate private-sector participation, and inefficient funding that limited the impact of the policy (Shonchoy, Raihan & Hassan, 2017). Finally, the strong emphasis on overseas employment skills by the NSDP is said to overlook the need for diverse, locally relevant skill development (Kabir, 2024).

The Perspective Plan 2021-2041 (PP 2041)

The Perspective Plan for 2021-2041 identified skills development as vital to national development. It also stresses the importance of extending access to 12 years of compulsory education while raising the other hand to its technical capacities in the work force. The plan emphasizes the strengthening of TVET institutes with rural technologies and training systems to industry needs and rapid economic and technological changes. It recognizes NSDP as flexible enough for future adjustments to meet changing labour market requirements.

The general pattern of training that the young people of Bangladesh undertake may be summarized as Follows (National Skill Development Action Plan 2022-27):

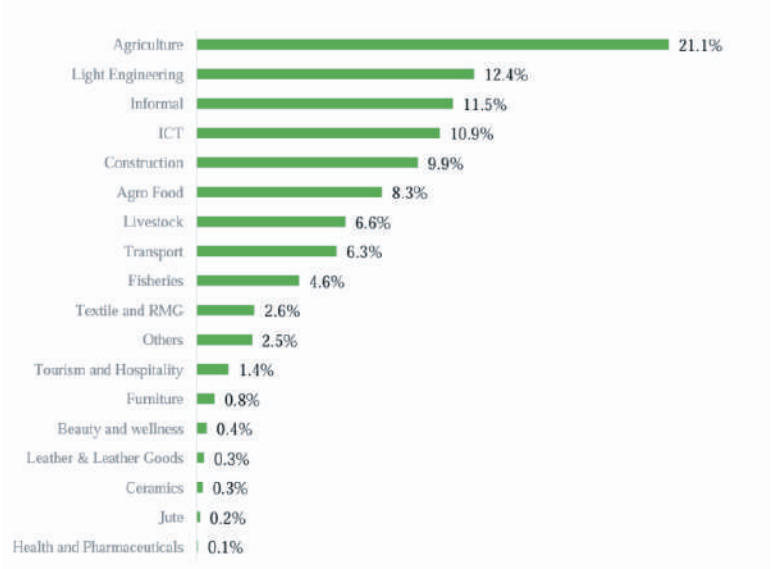

Figure 2: Pattern of Training

Source: NSDAP, 2022-2027

However, The Perspective Plan 2021–2041 (PP 2041) has drawn different criticisms from economists and policy analysts. Many indicate that the growth and investment targets of the plan are over ambitious, especially since many goals from the earlier plan (2010–2021) remained unmet due to structural weaknesses (The Business Standard, 2022). Critics further note that achieving developed-country status by 2041 may be unrealistic without major advances in human capital and education, as Bangladesh still faces a shortage of highly skilled workers (NDC E-Journal, 2023). Scholars have also warned of weak governance, poor accountability, and growing inequality, which could prevent the plan's goal of inclusive development from being realized. Finally, researchers highlight that informal employment and low skill levels among youth continue to threaten the structural transformation envisioned in PP 2041 (Policy Insights,

2023). Altogether, these critiques indicate that while the plan is ambitious, its success depends on realistic forecasting, stronger governance, and greater investment in human capital.

The 8th Five Year Plan (2021-2025)

The 8th Five Year Plan emphasizes market demand-driven skill development within the country. It says that the academic streams will not absorb all the children (who are over one-third of the population currently) and it will not be able to provide every necessary skill that will be demanded in the future. According to the plan, Bangladesh has a youthful working-age population (between the age of 15 and 29) of 41.25 million. The unemployment rate, among the country's young people, stands at 10.7 percent, accounting for 79.6 percent of total unemployment (8th five-year plan). Furthermore, almost 30 percent of the youth aged population were totally NEET (not in employment, education, or training) in 2017. Currently, around 13 million Bangladeshis work overseas, with most of them being unskilled or semi-skilled. A more skilled pool of migrant workers from Bangladesh would readily translate into more remittance for the country. The present scenario endorses setting up a national authority for skills development.

However, the 8th Five Year Plan (2021–2025) of Bangladesh has faced many criticisms regarding the development of youth skills. Critics argue that the plan is built on outdated labour-market data that makes its skill targets less realistic and weakens effective implementation (The Daily Star, 2021a). There is also a persistent mismatch between the skills taught in training institutes and those demanded by employers, as industries are rarely involved in curriculum design (Planning Commission, 2022). Moreover, the quality of training remains poor due to a

shortage of qualified trainers, limited resources, and social stigma against technical education (GED, 2022). Budget allocation for youth training and education is also insufficient and not fully aligned with the plan's ambitious goals (The Daily Star, 2021b). Furthermore, many disadvantaged youths, especially women and rural populations, still face barriers in accessing formal training opportunities (Department of Youth Development, 2025). Researchers also note that the implementation and monitoring systems of the plan are weak, leading to a gap between training initiatives and actual employment outcomes (The Daily Star, 2021c). Overall, while the 8th Five Year Plan outlines an inclusive vision for youth empowerment, it struggles with old data, limited financing, weak coordination, and poor institutional capacity that reduce its effectiveness in achieving real skill transformation (The Business Standard, 2022).

National Skills Development Action Plan (2022-27)

In the light of policy guidelines, the National Action Plan (2022-27) has been prepared. The Action Plan provides an operational framework for implementation of NSDA policies, outlining activities for each year, naming ministries and agencies responsible, and ultimately deciding sectoral priority for training. The Action Plan is compatible with Vision 2041, the 8th Five-Year Plan, the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally. Its purpose involves translating the commitments made strategically into practical training programs that aim at providing youth with skills for employability and entrepreneurship.

The targets for skill development up to 2027 are appended below (National Skill Development Action Plan 2022-2027):

Training Type	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	Total Targets 2022-23 to 2026-27
Fresh Skills Training	992,723	910,757	1,094,177	1,050,148	891,065	**4,938,870**
Re-Skilling Training	170,539	186,784	199,235	211,682	180,685	**948,925**
Upskilling Training	108,762	116,765	128,439	139,893	150,626	**644,485**
Apprenticeship Training	146,205	203,382	222,453	246,496	265,249	**1,083,785**
RPL	29,700	58,006	73,969	83,850	97,858	**343,383**
Entrepreneurship Training	121230	150315	165574	168150	48287	**653,556**
Total	**1,569,159**	**1,626,009**	**1,883,847**	**1,900,219**	**1,633,770**	**8,613,004**

Figure 3: Skill Development Targets

Source: NSDAP, 2022-2027

However, the National Skills Development Action Plan (NSDAP) 2022–2027 has been met with several criticisms from the researchers and the policy experts. For example, Rahman and Hossain (2023) indicates that while the plan aims to strengthen the skills ecosystem of Bangladesh, its implementation has been slow due to weak coordination among ministries and training authorities. The lack of efficient and sustainable funding and insufficient engagement with the private sector have further limited the effectiveness of the plan.

The World Bank (2023) mentions that the plan also fails to create a strong link between training programs and actual labour market demand, leading to skill mismatch and underemployment among trained youth. The Asian Development Bank (2022) highlights that many training initiatives still rely on outdated curricula and insufficient technology integration. Moreover, the International Labour Organization (2023) mentions that gender and rural inclusion goals remain under prioritized, reducing equitable access to opportunities. Another major concern is the absence of a robust monitoring and data management system that weakens transparency and accountability. Overall, while the NSDAP 2022–2027 represents a forward-looking policy, critics emphasize that without institutional

reform, industry participation, and improved resource mobilization, the ambition of the plan to create a globally competitive workforce may remain largely unrealized.

National Skills Development Authority 2018

The Government of Bangladesh was pleased to publish the National Skills Development Authority Act 2018 to deal with the challenges regarding skill development. The establishment of the NSDA under the 2018 Act and the 2020 Rules marked a departure in the approach of Bangladesh to workforce training. The authority coordinates public and private training providers, sets standards, and ensures optimal and efficient utilization of resources. Besides regulation, the Authority acts as a knowledge hub in researching labour market demand, technology transformation and future skill requirement. Long-term plans of NSDA focus on streaming fragmented training systems into a cohesive skills ecosystem that responds to national and global needs. To align skill development strategies across public and private sectors as well as enhance coordination of all stakeholders in education and training in Bangladesh, NSDA proposed a National Skill Development Policy in 2020, which became active in 2022.

However, despite its objectives, the Act faces many criticisms. Scholars argue that it suffers from poor coordination among multiple training providers, which fragments the skills ecosystem and reduces effectiveness (SPPFM, 2022). Its emphasis on competency-based training and industry linkages has been limited by weak implementation mechanisms, resulting in a mismatch between training outcomes and labor market needs (Khan, 2025). Additionally, while the National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) 2020 under the Act promotes demand-driven training, institutional capacity and funding constraints hinder progress (SPPFM, 2022). The Act's

provisions for inclusive skills development for women, rural, and disadvantaged groups lack clear implementation strategies, restricting equitable access. Overall, while the Act provides a strong legal framework, its success depends on improved coordination, resource mobilization, monitoring, and strategies for inclusion (Khan, 2025; SPPFM, 2022).

Youth Skill Development and Bangladesh Youth Development Policy 2017

The Ministry of Youth and Sports of Bangladesh considers youth aged 18-35 as a formidable demographic that constitutes almost one-third of the present population (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2017). This demographic advantage, also referred to as the demographic dividend, can be fully capitalized upon only when the youth are groomed with the necessary skills, education, and opportunities to actively engage in the national development process. Thus, the policy gives a large share of focus to skill development towards achieving youth empowerment and socio-economic development. The policy envisages nurturing such youth who are morally sound, forward-looking, and capable of making contributions toward the prosperity and global competitiveness of Bangladesh. To this extent, empowering the youth is considered a mission of ensuring their potential along with skill development in every aspect of life. In this respect, skill development is viewed in two ways: a tool for an individual's self-reliance and a catalyst for national growth.

Several objectives mentioned in the policy are directly related to empowering the youth through skill enhancement. Those are:

a) Transforming youth into productive human resources through quality education and vocational training.

b) Providing opportunities for employment and professions in accordance with individual abilities and aspirations.
c) Supporting entrepreneurship and innovative enterprises, thus promoting self-employment and relieving the traditional job market of undue pressure.
d) Raising the level of participation among youth in decision-making and leadership, which indirectly strengthens critical thinking and problem-solving abilities; and
e) Ensuring inclusive skill development programs targeting disadvantaged groups such as unemployed youth, school dropouts, rural youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, women, and youth with special needs.

Priority Areas of Youth Skill Development

All these policy priority areas demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of skill development. These areas include:

Education, Training, Employment: This entails the expansion of the formal, non-formal and technical education systems, giving emphasis to ICT training and digital literacy. Entrepreneurship development programs are placed high in priority to enable youth to move from job seekers to job creators.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A heavy emphasis on climate-resilient environmentally friendly agriculture and sustainable industrialization skills so as to cater to the global development agenda.

Equitable Development*:* Special interventions will ensure inclusion of marginalized groups of youth in skill development initiatives to ensure that opportunities reach the vulnerable and reduce inequality in access.

Globalization and Knowledge Exchange: The policy fosters youth exchange programs, cooperation with international volunteer organizations, and the use of digital platforms for the exchange of skills, experiences, and innovative practices.

Research, Monitoring, and Policy Implementation: Being evidence-based in planning is the track of the policy that stands out. It is recommended that a youth census be conducted, and a Youth Development Index be developed for monitoring skill needs as they evolve among the youth. In addition, it looks at the future of research and publication in youth fields, generating knowledge for strategizing in the future. It also envisages the establishment of a digitalized youth archive for monitoring information on youth development. The National Youth Development Policy (2017) thus sees skill development as a crucial avenue for the empowerment of youth and the development of the nation. This sets a solid framework for linking education, training, employment, and entrepreneurship-of-their-skill-development-system to the larger goal of sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Despite the Bangladesh Youth Development Policy 2017 aims at empowering the youths through skill development, several challenges prevail. The Department of Youth Development (DYD) has trained over 67 million youths since 1981, but still many remain underemployed or unemployed due to a mismatch between training outcomes and labor market demands. Additionally, the emphasis of the policy on vocational education often overlooks the need for life skills education, which is crucial for holistic youth development (MJF, 2023). Furthermore, the issues of institutional capacity and resource constraints hinder the

effective implementation of the policy, limiting its impact on the empowerment of youths (Razzaque et al., 2025). These factors contribute to the high rate of youth unemployment that stands at 14.8%, nearly three times the national average (SANEM, 2022).

Skill Development and Sustainable Development Goals: Exploring the Links

Skill development is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, skill development Initiatives should focus on skills development aim to bridge socioeconomic divides, foster innovation, and create more resilient work forces, emphasizing vocational training, lifelong learning, and collaboration between governments, businesses, and educational institutions to promote inclusive growth and sustainability. Skill development policies of Bangladesh are fit within national priorities as well as the United Nations (United Nations, 2015). Such alignment guarantees that workforce training feeds into inclusive and sustainable development targets globally.

The alignment mainly focused on the following SDGs:

SDG 4 (Quality Education): Focus on universal access to education and lifelong learning. Within this framework, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is seen as a means of improving employability by providing equitable access to skills and knowledge.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Calls for reform geared towards removal of barriers restricting women from participating in economic activities. In its skill sense, it talks about creating safe and supportive environments for women in training programmes and in enhancing their access to emerging job sectors.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Stresses on creation of productive jobs paying equal pay for youth, persons with disabilities and marginalized groups, promote reducing youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) and promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. Moreover, it also covers SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Nonetheless, in integrating these SDGs into national frameworks, Bangladesh guarantees an inclusive, gender-responsive skills development policy towards sustainable economic growth. This entails in practice designing programmes for disadvantaged groups which enhance economic empowerment of women and create pathways to decent work for them both at home and abroad. The initiatives focusing on the underprivileged groups are diagrammatically presented below (National Skill Development System in Bangladesh, 2015):

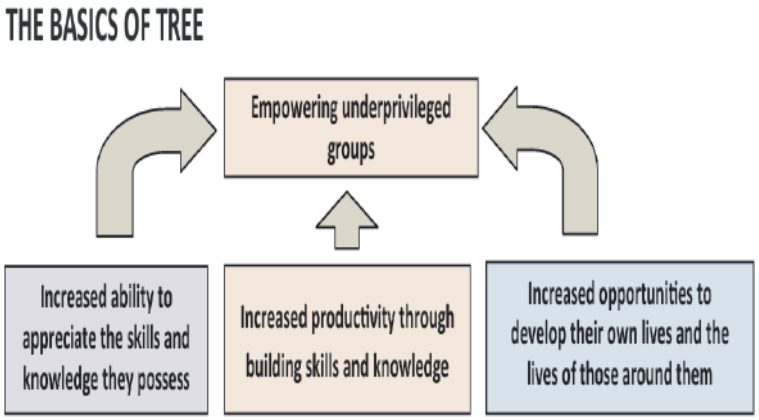

Figure 4: Empowering Underprivileged Group
Source: NSDS, 2015

However, Bangladesh still faces many challenges in linking her skill development initiatives with the SDGs. One major issue is the mismatch between the skills taught

in training programmes and the actual needs of the job market, which weakens progress toward SDG 4 and SDG 8 (The Daily Star, 2023). A large portion of the workforce is in the informal sector, where workers' skills often remain uncertified and unrecognized, limiting their contribution to SDG 10 (Skill Bangladesh, 2023). Weak institutional coordination and limited governance capacity also hinder effective policy alignment and implementation (Hasan, 2023). Moreover, the absence of reliable data and monitoring systems makes it difficult to track skill outcomes and measure SDG progress (UNDP, 2023). Insufficient financing and competing national priorities further slow advancement (The Business Standard, 2024). Inequitable access to training opportunities for women, rural youth, and marginalized groups also remains a concern (Shun Culture, 2024). Finally, rapid technological changes and the growing need for digital and green skills challenge Bangladesh's ability to align its training systems with SDG 9 and SDG 13 (Policy Insights Online, 2023).

Implementation of Skill Development Policy Initiatives: Identifying the Challenges

An effective skill development policy should provide special provisions for implementation. Bangladesh still lags in various areas: development of relevant skills for labor market absorption, quality and accessibility of vocational education, and skill development of underprivileged groups. In Bangladesh around 2.2 million new entrants join the workforce, but only about 1.2 million could find suitable employment opportunities.

The policy and strategies could not be effectively implemented yet to reap its fruits through absorbing youths in suitable job market:

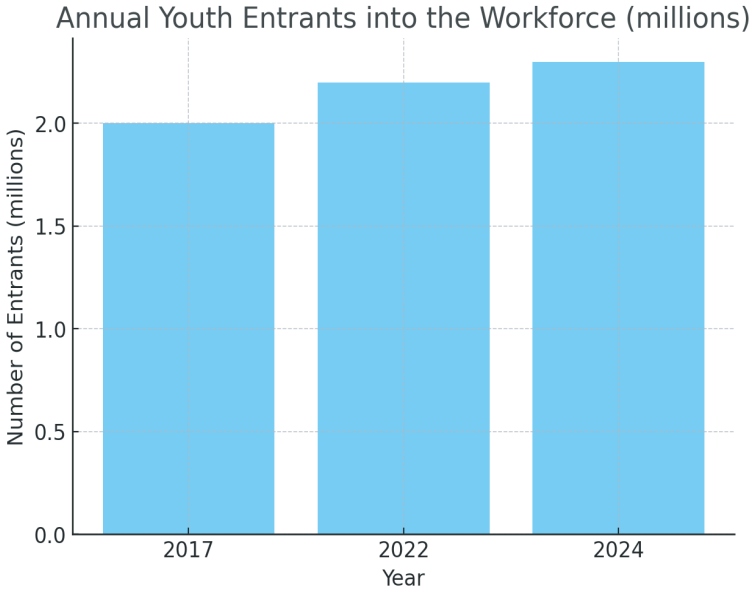

Figure 5: Annual Youth Entrants in Work force

Source: NSDAP, 2022-2027

This means that though skill development training and entrepreneurship are recognized by policy but are dragged back by strict barriers like access to finance, poor institutional capability, and a frail linkage with the industry-academia interface resulting in unskilled workforce entrants. These are important challenges that need to be addressed if the goals of the policy turn into reality for young people. Bangladesh has, thus far, enacted numbers of policies as well as strategy documents to achieve the potential of this large youth population and meet the requirements of the labor market (National Skill Development Action Plan 2022-2027):

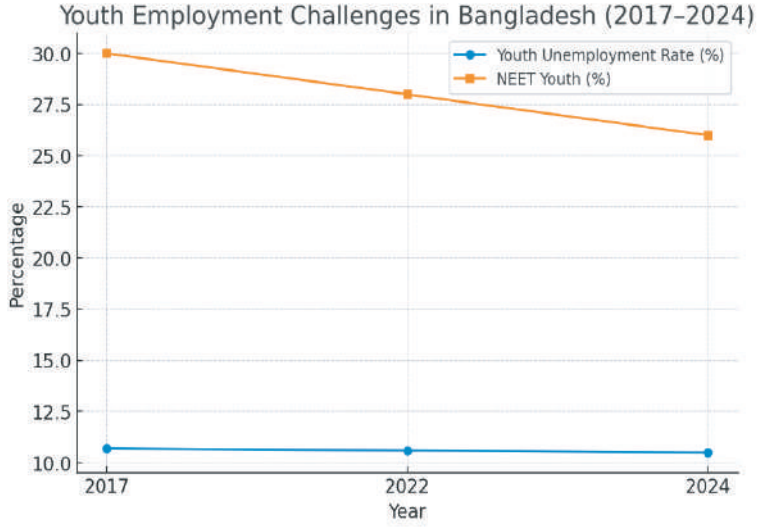

Figure 6: Youth Employment Rate

Source: NSDAP, 2022-2027

The government's initiatives are quite focused having broad-based and action plans, but their implementation is constrained by structural, institutional, and socio-economic issues undermining their effectiveness. Based on the above-mentioned discussion and analysis on the current government initiatives, especially policies, plans, and programmes the major challenges of skill development are summarized below:

Coordination and Institutional Overlaps

One of the most critical challenges is the absence of coordination and fragmented governance system. Different ministries, agencies, training institutions and donors run overlapping programmes with poor coordination, so national policy goals are hard to translate into unified

action at scale. The Youth Development Policy is primarily under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, while the Skill Development Policy is predominately with the NSDA under the Prime Minister's Office. In practice, the responsibilities are, in most cases, fragmented across various ministries like Education, Expatriates' Welfare, Industry, and Labour. This creates overlap-a duplication of work without any consistent strategies or monitoring gaps that makes using resources inefficient and delivers programs slowly.

Weak Linkage Between Training and Labor Market Needs

Skills development policy focuses that training is to be based on the demand of the labor market. But, lack of reliable, up-to-date labour-market data makes it hard to plan what skills to teach, where to invest, and which sectors to target. Moreover, supply-driven, often not demand-driven, training programs have developed obsolete curricula and limited technical trades. The links between industry and training providers are very weak and there are very few opportunities of internships/attachments (World Bank, 2018). Employers frequently report that graduates of technical and vocational programs lack practical skills, problem-solving abilities, and industry-relevant competencies. Youth, classified as educated, remain unemployed and eventually join informal job market while industries lack skilled labor:

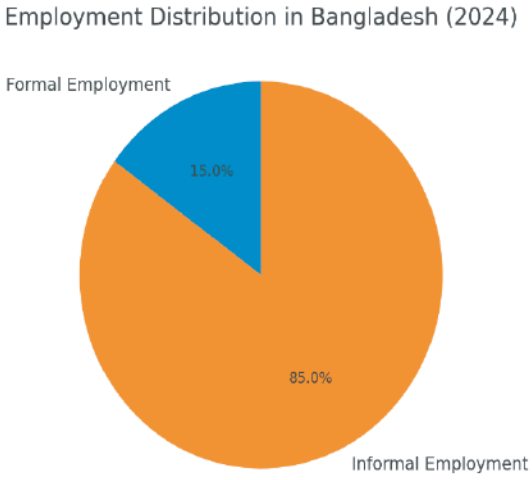

Figure 7: Formal and Informal Employment
Source: NSDAP, 2022-2027

Limited Access and Inequalities

The policies promote inclusion by focusing on marginalized groups, namely women, rural youth, migrants, ethnic minorities, school dropouts, and youth with special needs. But access to skills development programs specially for women and disadvantaged groups has inequalities and unevenness. Such as, social norms, mobility limits, safety concerns, and non-flexible training schedules reduce women's and marginalized groups' participation. Training facilities are mostly concentrated in urban areas while almost all rural youth are left with no services at all (SANEM, 2022).

Quality Assurance and Standardization Challenges

The NSDP envisages a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and standardized certification of skills such that both national and transnational recognition would be guaranteed. But, weak enforcement, however, undermines this. Shortage of qualified trainers and teacher

development. Many TVET/training centres lack experienced instructors and modern teaching methods, which lowers training effectiveness. Many private training providers do not get accredited or closely monitored, and this leads to differences in training quality. Hence, mostly certificates go untrusted by employers, which deprives them of the employability of graduates (SANEM, 2022).

Financing and Resource Constraints

Most initiatives for skill development of youth are highly dependent on government and donor finances; they are, however, spelled without sustainable financing mechanisms. Public funding and sustainable financing mechanisms are very limited; project-based donor funds create short-term gains but not long-term systems. As a result most of the public technical and vocational education and training institutions suffer from shortages of equipment in modernization, capable trainers, and infrastructures (Asian Development Bank, 2014). Moreover, the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that might be critical partners providing workplace-based training are offered no incentives or financing for skill development.

Weak Private Sector Engagement

Though policies emphasize the role of private sectors in training and employment generation, participation is very limited. New technologies and automation focus on new skills and employers look for these types of higher-level technical and generic skills, but training systems still produce many graduates with the wrong mix of skills for modern jobs. This gap reduces youth employability (World Bank, 2018). Few industry leaders are consulted in curriculum design or policy planning. Lack of strong industry-academia partnerships merely sustains the disconnect between training programs and workplace requirements. Employers are skeptical of offering

apprenticeship or internship opportunities because they view training graduates as lacking the requisite employable skills.

Migration and Global Labor Market Pitfalls

A significant number of young Bangladeshi migrate, especially for employment in the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia. However, most of them, at best, are semi-skilled and mostly low-skilled along the low-earning potential and man vulnerability to exploitation (National Skill Development System in Bangladesh, 2015):

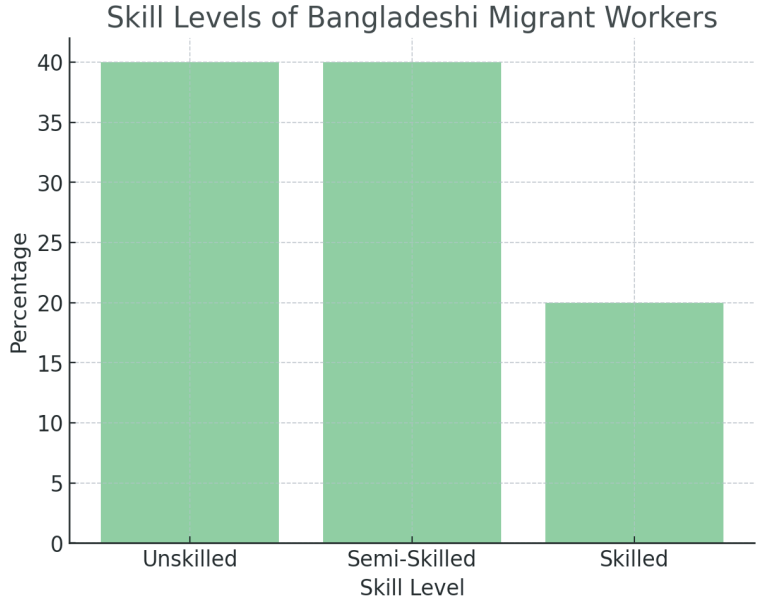

Figure 8: Formal and Informal Employment
Source: NSDAP, 2022-2027

The NSDP documents promoted international certification with skills recognition at the global level, but implementation has been pathetic. Therefore, these not only minimize remittance inflow but also deny Bangladesh a competitive edge in the battle with the global market demand for skilled labor.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Research Gaps

Both policies underline the importance of evidence-based planning through youth censuses, skill audits, and a Youth Development Index. Unfortunately, systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are frail. Such data, training outcome data, labor market absorption data, and long-term impact data are more often but fragmented or unavailable. Without strong feedback loops, it is difficult to refine training programs, scale successful models, or discontinue ineffective ones, so policies cannot be reliably improved from evidence (Lee, 2020).

Cultural and Social Barriers

It is not only structural; here culture presents a considerable barrier in terms of perception about vocational training. Even now, most families and youth would consider a general education or migration overseas rather than buying into vocational pathways, regarding TVET as a "second class" option. Changing these perceptions is not easy; it will require continuous advocacy, awareness campaigns, and showcasing the economic value of skill-based employment (SANEM, 2022).

Political and Policy Continuity Issues

Political change tends to cause disruption in continuity of policy application, weakening long-term impact. Policy frameworks set guidelines at five-year intervals; political or priority changes or a donor-driven initiative usually result in short-lived and fragmented programs. To have an in-sustained political commitment and institutional stability is vital in realizing the impact (SANEM, 2022).

Ways Forward to Overcome the Challenges

The challenges in youth skill development in Bangladesh have mostly remain unchanged. Therefore, this paper tries to provide some remedial measures based on the discussion mentioned above (Khan, 2025; SPPFM, 2022; Rahman & Hossain, 2023; SANEM, 2022; MJF, 2023; Razzaque et al., 2025; and World Bank, 2023) and the researchers own analysis in the following way:

a) Align Training with Market and Industry Needs

Update and Modernize TVET

We need to revise the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs regularly according to present and future demands in the labor market, especially in high-growth sectors such as ICT, manufacturing, and services.

Collaboration Industry-Institution

We need to create a partnership between industry and academic institutions so they can co-develop curriculum which will provide graduates with relevant, employable skills.

b) Expand Access and Inclusivity

Bridging Digital Divide

All investment in infrastructure should ensure that all homes can gain equitable access to online learning and blended learning, especially in the remote areas where most households lack internet access.

Targeted Outreach

Government should scale up skill development programmes targeted at marginalized, poor groups-women; rural; and ethnic minority youth with financial assistance and specialized interventions.

c) Strengthening Capacity of Institutions and Trainers

Faculty Development

Government needs to invest in training and upgrading teachers and trainers to address the serious shortage of qualified teachers in the TVET sector.

Build Research and Training Institutes

We should establish and reinforce research centers aimed at labor market trends and skills forecasting that directs policy and program design.

d) Promote Demand-Driven and Flexible Training Models

- ***Training Tied to Employment:*** The implementation strategy to ensure training schemes associated with employment, such as job-offer-based training and apprenticeships.

- ***Lifelong Learning and Modular Approaches:*** Initiatives to focus on motivating learners and create provision of continuous upskilling and reskilling courses, micro-credentials, and flexible learning pathways.

e) Take More Engaging the Participation of the Private Sector

- ***Private-Led Training:*** The private sector to be encouraged to spearhead the course of skills development where the government to be a regulator and assurer of quality.

- ***Stimulate Firms' Investments:*** Firms to be encouraged to invest in national talents through in-house training, internships, and mentorship programs.

f) Build a Regional Skills Ecosystem

- ***A Coordinated Effort:*** Government to develop and promote a coordinated "skill ecosystem" at the regional and national levels, which involves public institutions, private firms, NGOs, and skills councils, to respond to local needs and opportunities.

- ***Value Chain Integration:*** Government to connect skills development efforts with job placement to career advancement through the value chain from training provision.

g) Monitor, Evaluate and Hold More Accountable

- ***National Qualifications Framework:*** Strengthen the unified national qualifications framework to transparent recognition and portability of skills.

- ***Robust M&E Systems:*** Implement comprehensive monitoring and evaluation to track progress, ensure quality, and inform continuous improvement.

h) Foster Ownership and Lifelong Learning

- ***Empower Individuals:*** Have youth and graduates take responsibility of their own professional development by using self-learning, internships, and in-depth engagement with industry.

- ***Cultivating Soft Skills:*** Communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy to be incorporated into all training programs to increase adaptability and employability.

Concluding Remarks

Bangladesh undertook several short and long-term initiatives to develop skills in its potential workforce with the aim of meeting the national and international labor market demands. These initiatives of National Skills Development for Youth provide a strong framework to deal with the problems of youth empowerment and employment in Bangladesh. Perspective Plan 2021-2041 makes an emphasis on skills development as a core pillar of growth. This is made with a specific focus on compulsory education and modernization of TVET and adaptation toward competency training considering excruciatingly fast technological changes. Similarly, in the 8th Five-Year Plan (2020-2025), there is a call for urgency over skills development that has relevance to demand, noting the big youth population of the country, the high unemployment levels, and the dominance of low-skilled migrant workers. It is expected that a better-qualified workforce would also improve productivity domestically and increase employment opportunities abroad.

To counter the systemic limitations, NSDA was created in 2018, as part of the effort to streamline all fragmented skills training initiatives, and to establish national standards as well as being a knowledge hub. The NSDA introduced the National Skills Development Policy 2022, which emphasizes the notion of shared responsibility among government, private sector, civil society, along with competency-based training and recognition of prior learning, inclusiveness towards women, the rural population, and disadvantaged youth. To reiterate this, the National Action Plan on Skills Development maps out

activities/sectoral priorities and mirrors others like Vision 2041, Delta Plan 2100, and the SDGs.

The Skills Agenda of Bangladesh is directly tied up with the SDGs 2030. The initiatives that will be directly touching relating to SDG 4 are opening their doors for universal access to education and lifelong learning, while SDG 5 ensures that there are more substantive opportunities for women in training and employment, with SDG 8 establishing decent work and entrepreneurship, whilst bringing down the numbers of youth from being NEET. And this integration ensures that national policies will not just aim for economic growth but also for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable growth in the future.

Even though there are very good frameworks in place, Bangladesh continues to face significant challenges in implementing its skill-development policies. The major hurdles include poor coordination among the ministries and agencies, overlapping roles and responsibilities, and inefficient allocation of resources that produces a major hurdle in the effective execution of policy. Most of the training activities are still supply-driven, outdated, and ill-aligned with industry needs, resulting in a gap between the required competencies of graduates and the demands of the labor market. Inequalities are also apparent in access to training-rural locations receive much less than urban areas, and women, disadvantaged youth, and people with disabilities face cultural, social, and infrastructural barriers. The mechanisms for quality assurance are not strong. Several private training providers have no accreditation, leading to very poor recognition of the skills certifications domestically and internationally. In addition, public TVET institutions have limited financing and resources.

Furthermore, private sector involvement in the areas of curriculum design, apprenticeships, and workplace training is also not extensive.

The other dimensions of the matters are migration and demand for the global labor market, where most Bangladeshi migrant workers are low-skilled and become vulnerable since their qualifications are not internationally certified or recognized. Monitoring, evaluation, and research systems are at a low level; therefore, it is very hard to analyze training efficiency and to adjust the policies. Cultural attitudes also play their part when people consider vocational training as inferior compared to the general education or overseas migration opportunities. Political and policy instability often tends to undermine progress on long-term issues because change in leadership and change in priorities set by donor agencies result in fragmented initiatives.

Bangladesh can, however, overcome these hurdles in youth skill development through modernization and reengineering of training programs in line with labor market demands, especially considering high-growth emerging markets such as ICT, manufacturing, and services. Expanding the awareness of industry-academia collaboration is essential to ensure that the learning outcomes are employer relevant and appropriate. Broader inclusiveness must also mean closing the digital gap, widening access to training for rural and marginalized communities, and supplying financial and tailored supports for women and disadvantaged youth. The changes proposed will require bettering institutional capacity through staff professional development, investing in trainer upskills, and

establishing research and training institutes to forecast future labor market conditions. Together, these measures may create a demand-driven, inclusive, and future-ready skills ecosystem.

However, their successful implementation will be impeded by weak coordination, skills mismatch, inequitable access, poor quality assurance, financing limitations, inadequate private sector engagement, and weak monitoring mechanisms. Genetic barriers, if not dealt with effectively, will leave Bangladesh with lost chances to maximize its demographic dividend and meet domestic and international skills needs. Institutional capacity strengthens the promotion of fit access for inclusion. We hope that the study findings will create new knowledge on the issue of skill development of the youths in Bangladesh that will contribute to the academia. Moreover, the policymakers and others concerned will get important insights for the further development of skill development initiatives towards youth development in Bangladesh.

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