



education. One cannot learn electrical installation, welding, automotive maintenance, information technology or industrial production through textbooks alone. Practical learning requires qualified instructors, functioning equipment, sufficient consumable materials and continuous hands-on practice. Where these ingredients are absent, the qualification loses its value.

Perhaps, the most significant challenge facing vocational education is the shortage of qualified teachers. Unlike many academic subjects, vocational education demands instructors who possess both pedagogical competence and occupational expertise. Finding such professionals is not easy. Retaining them is hard, particularly when private industry offers considerably better salaries and career opportunities.

The result is predictable. Existing teachers become overstretched, institutions rely on temporary arrangements, practical classes become irregular, and students graduate without mastering essential competencies. Teacher

should, therefore, play a much larger role in curriculum development, competency standards, assessment and apprenticeship opportunities. Employers understand emerging skill demands better than educational bureaucracies do. Without this partnership, vocational institutions risk producing graduates for jobs that no longer exist.

Another neglected area is work-based learning. Internationally, effective vocational education is built on strong partnerships between educational institutions and employers. Apprenticeships, internships, workplace attachments and industry mentoring allow students to apply classroom learning in authentic work environments while enabling employers to assess future recruits. In Bangladesh, however, such partnerships remain sporadic and largely dependent on individual institutional initiatives rather than a coherent national framework. As a result, many students complete their courses with limited exposure to real workplaces, making the transition from education to employment unnecessary

valuable skills. Stop expanding. Start consolidating.

Bangladesh may have reached a point where consolidation is more important than further expansion. Rather than approving additional institutions, policymakers should first evaluate the performance of existing ones. Institutions that consistently fail to enrol students or provide quality education require serious review. Some may need restructuring, mergers or closure. Others may require targeted investments to become fully operational. Expansion without quality merely disperses scarce resources more thinly.

A national mapping exercise could identify where vocational programmes are genuinely needed, which sectors require additional training capacity and where institutions are already oversupplied. Evidence, not political considerations—should guide future approvals.

The world of work is changing rapidly. Automation, artificial intelligence, green technologies, digital services and advanced manufacturing are transforming labour markets across Asia. Bangla-

labour-market demand.

Bangladesh must work to elevate the social status of vocational education through better quality, stronger employment outcomes and clearer progression pathways into higher education and lifelong learning.

Quality teaching, competent instructors, modern equipment, industry partnerships, labour-market relevance, effective regulation and sustained investment matter far more than institutional expansion alone. The real measure of success is not the number of vocational institutions that exist on paper. It is whether graduates leave those institutions with skills that employers trust and industries need.

If Bangladesh wants to compete in an increasingly knowledge-based and technology-driven global economy, rescuing the quality of vocational education is no longer optional. It is an economic imperative.

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