

Youth of Bangladesh: Ready for Demographic Dividend

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ABSTRACT

At present one-third of Bangladesh's population is under the age of thirty. Additionally, Bangladesh's working-age population (15–59%) is currently bigger than the non-working-age population (>15 and 60+), which has the potential to propel economic growth with a focus on our youth. Although there is a lot of interest in Bangladeshi adolescents, there is relatively little thorough information available about their situation. This research was conducted to offer insightful information about our youngsters. The youth's self-identities and life goals were first observed, together with their level of education and skill readiness, and then their engagement in earning activities. Then, a survey was conducted to determine how free they felt to choose. Their political stance was then examined. From the analysis, it can be said that Bangladeshi youth are still mostly untapped and are not at all prepared to take advantage of the prospects presented by the twenty-first century. This is especially true for young women and those from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: Demographic Dividend; Vision 2041; Goals of Life; Preparedness for Future; 4IR.

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is going through the process of demographic dividends. The country's working-age population has grown since 2007. By the year 2041, this window of opportunity is predicted to be closed. The country's economic growth will be significantly boosted if this period is effectively exploited. However, the country's economic growth will be obstructed if adequate policies, large investments in youth, and important procedures to mold them as competent human resources are not established. Today's youths are the main target group for the future development of any country. Young people need help on their path toward adulthood and self-reliance. Understanding those young people's aspirations, fears and choices will allow society to better support them and help them reach their full potential.

In reality, the working-age population is good for the economic growth of a country. However, the efficacy of social, economic, and political institutions as well as the policies implemented will determine whether a country can get benefit from the demographic dividend or not. When South Korea, Thailand, and Ireland were going through the process of demographic dividend, they invested extensively in education as well as declared incentives for foreign direct investment and tried to attract the attention of foreign companies.

Many countries, however, are having a difficult time utilizing the demographic dividend. Commonwealth of Nations has established Youth Development Index (YDI) to measure the youth development of a country. In YDI, there are eighteen variables under five areas: employment and opportunities, education, health and wellbeing, political involvement, and civic participation. Because they have a big young population, most of the countries that scored poorly on the YDI 2020 are also unable to take advantage of their demographic dividend. Bangladesh, which has a substantial proportion of a young population, is also one of the worst-performing countries on the YDI index. According to the YDI 2020 rankings, Bangladesh's score is bottom-third among South-Asian nations and ranked 126th among 181 countries (Bhuiyan 2021). Many of the lowest achievers are also in financial distress.

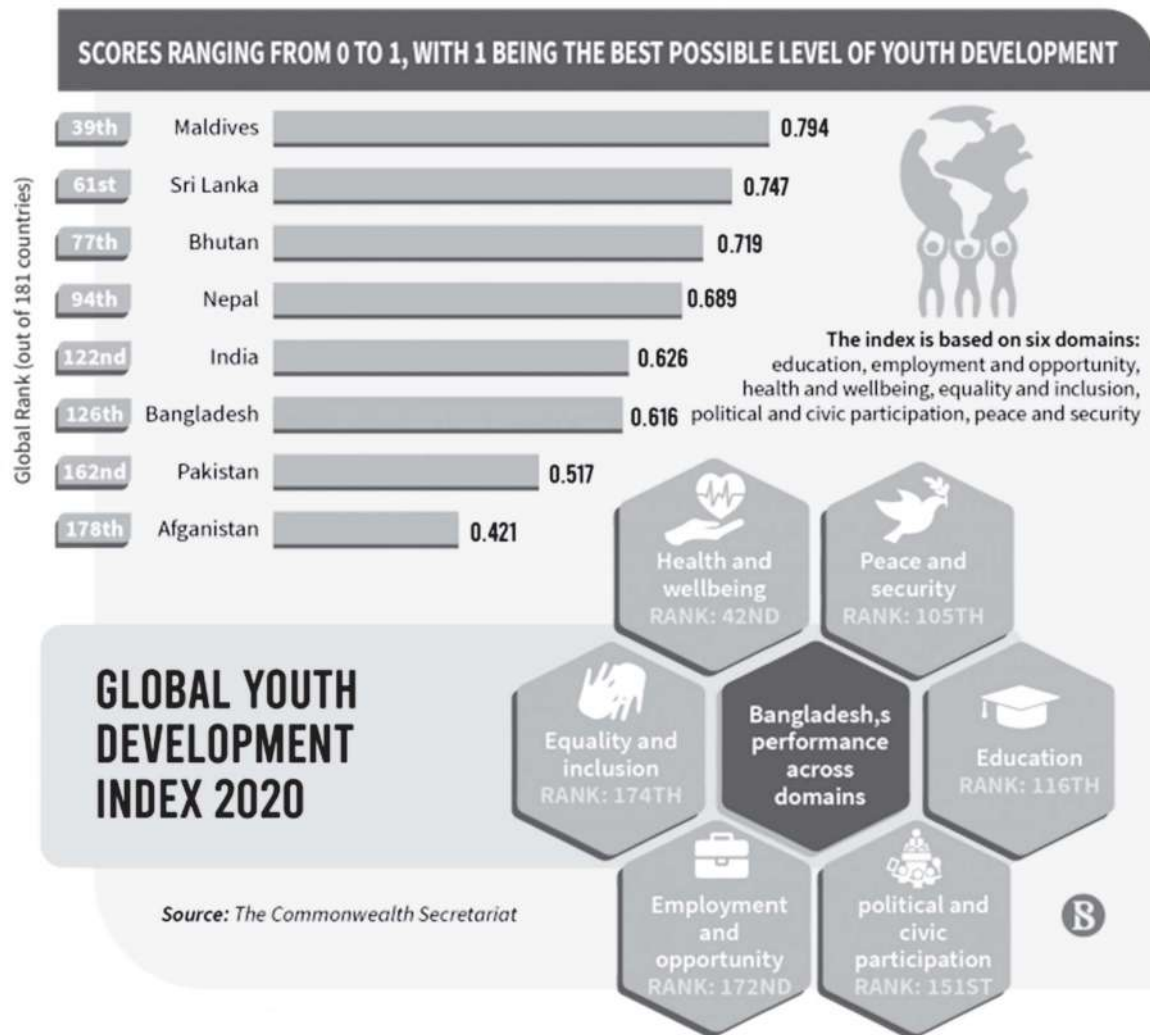


Figure 1: *Global Youth Development Index 2020 (Commonwealth Secretariat 2021)*

The Bangladesh government has a strong desire to help the country's young people succeed. For the Bangladesh Youth Policy 2017, the Bangladesh government aims to ensure that all of the country's young people have the opportunity to develop into a moral, humanitarian, and forward-looking generation capable of enhancing the country's wealth and glory. Therefore, social research on youth development is a crying need for Bangladesh nowadays.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many Asian and Latin American countries have enjoyed rapid economic growth in recent decades, and scholars, economists, as well as demographers have attributed this to demographic shifts that have aided the economic growth of the country. The "demographic dividend," or the

demographic contribution to rapid economic growth, is particularly misrepresented by leaders and policymakers in developing countries, who are excited about the dividend's possibilities because of their huge youth populations.

Bloom & Finlay (2009) studied the correlation between demographic dividends and economic development in Asia. With a special focus on East Asia, a review of the impact of the demographic shift in contributing to cross-country variances in economic development from 1990 to 2005 was made by Bloom & Finlay (2009) and they emphasized youth development and preparing them for the challenges coming ahead.

In the mid-1990s, researchers and economists focused on understanding the "East Asian Miracle," or the spectacular economic performances of newly industrializing countries in the Asia Pacific. Expansion of trade openness, high savings rates, a strong and early commitment to primary and secondary education, and effective macroeconomic policy have all been identified as key drivers of rapid economic growth in East Asia (Kim & Lau 1994).

The term "miracle" was coined to describe the portion of economic development that couldn't be explained by these variables alone (Bloom & Finlay 2009). If Asian countries seek to sustain their current economic growth rates, the fall in the working-age percentage will bring significant hurdles in the future. As the demographic transition pushes these countries into a new period of increased old-age population shares, the inventiveness and flexibility of governments, organizations, and individuals throughout Asia will be relied upon once more (Gaag & Beer 2015).

Christens & Dolan (2011) investigated community and interweaving development of youths and social changes through youth organizing. Young people are now being included as leaders in attempts to improve quality of life by community organizing groups that have developed coalitions for local change over the previous few decades. Psychological empowerment, leadership development, and sociopolitical growth are all promoted as part of the effort. The relationship between youth development, community involvement, and social change is examined in light of the emerging field of juvenile organizing and some other efforts to engage the young in civil society (Christens & Dolan 2011).

Khatun and Saadat (2020) published a paper on youth employment. It starts by putting capacity building into the context of economic ideas and it also looks at statistics on employment to GDP ratio, jobs created, rate of unemployment, Doing Business indicators, and other indexes to examine the verifiable research on youth employment in Bangladesh (Khatun & Saadat 2020).

“ASIAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION REPORT 2019-2020” says that the Asia-Pacific area is seeing a fast demographic transition, with some countries rapidly ageing and many of the region's economies will become increasingly reliant on an older population as a result of the ongoing demographic transition, offering a challenge to both advanced and developing countries in terms of maintaining potential growth. Hence it is high time the government took the necessary steps to grow up our young generation in such a way that when the demographic dividend will be finished, then these youths of today will not be a burden to the nation.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, the research and analysis were conducted by following both qualitative and quantitative analysis methods. A questionnaire survey draft was prepared for collecting data. Data samples were randomly collected from different areas of Bangladesh. Some data were collected through oral interviews from school, college, and university students, some were collected from both job seekers and job holders as well as local uneducated/less educated youths. The survey was conducted on both male and female teenagers, youths from rural and urban areas, and young people from poor, middle-income, and rich families, respectively. Data from reliable sources like BBS, BRAC, UNFPA, ILO, etc. also got prioritized.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The study was conducted to analyze whether or not the youths of Bangladesh are ready for accepting the challenges that the country will be faced to fulfill its dream of “Vision 2041” and combat the upcoming challenges at the end of the demographic dividend. Hence, a survey was conducted to observe the aim of the youths as well as their goals in life, visionary thinking, career planning, entrepreneurship, lifestyle etc.

The last survey report on the labor force of Bangladesh was published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) during the 2016-17 fiscal year.

According to that report, aged between 15 to 29 years old were defined as youth age. However, ages between 18 to 35 years have been used as youth age by the National Youth Policy of Bangladesh, 2017. Hence in this paper age of youth ranged from 15 to 35 years is chosen.

Youths' Aspirations and Concerns

Goals in life are the desired conditions that people try to either achieve and maintain or avoid (Nair 2003). Self-identities affect life objectives and a variety of socioeconomic elements including age, gender, personality, experience, society, and environment (Nair 2003).

To survey the life goals of the youths, they were asked to tell what they considered to be the most crucial goal among all the others matters in their life. This was an open-ended question. Most of them answered to get a government job or go abroad for higher studies. Around 9% of youths said that they have not yet set up their life goals. Youths from the poorest family have to maintain family pressure for survival. Again, youths from rich family bestow with many alternative opportunities for the future. Hence these two groups have inverse-U-shaped life goals among others and failed to select the real goal of their life.

Table 1: Life Goals of the Youth

Education Level/Life Goals	No Formal Education		Below SSC		SSC-HSC		Above HSC	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Ensuring children's future success	31%	45%	17%	57%	4%	23%	9%	21%
Accumulation of assets	34%	28%	24%	11%	8%	3%	5%	0%
Government job	1%	2%	12%	6%	33%	31%	42%	57%
Higher education	6%	1%	13%	11%	33%	30%	20%	9%

Youth's Ambition and Self-identification

When the youths were asked how did they most likely to identify themselves, most of them chose nationality and religion as representing their self-identification. 47% chose nationality, 20% selected religion and 10% supported educational qualification and 14% chose occupation (Figure 2).

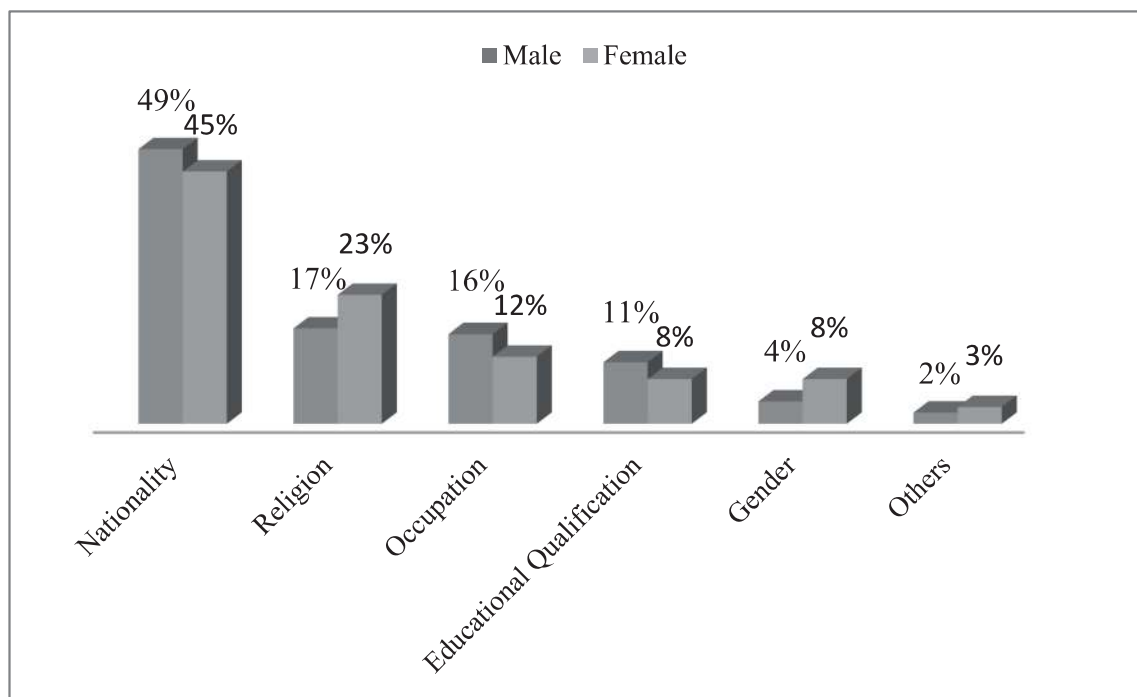


Figure 2: Self-identity of youth (by gender)

When youth's self-identities according to their socioeconomic level were examined, it was found that ultra-poor teenagers like most to identify their nationality as their major identity—nearly twice as likely as their wealthiest counterparts. However, wealthy adolescents exhibit a more varied pattern of desired self-identities.

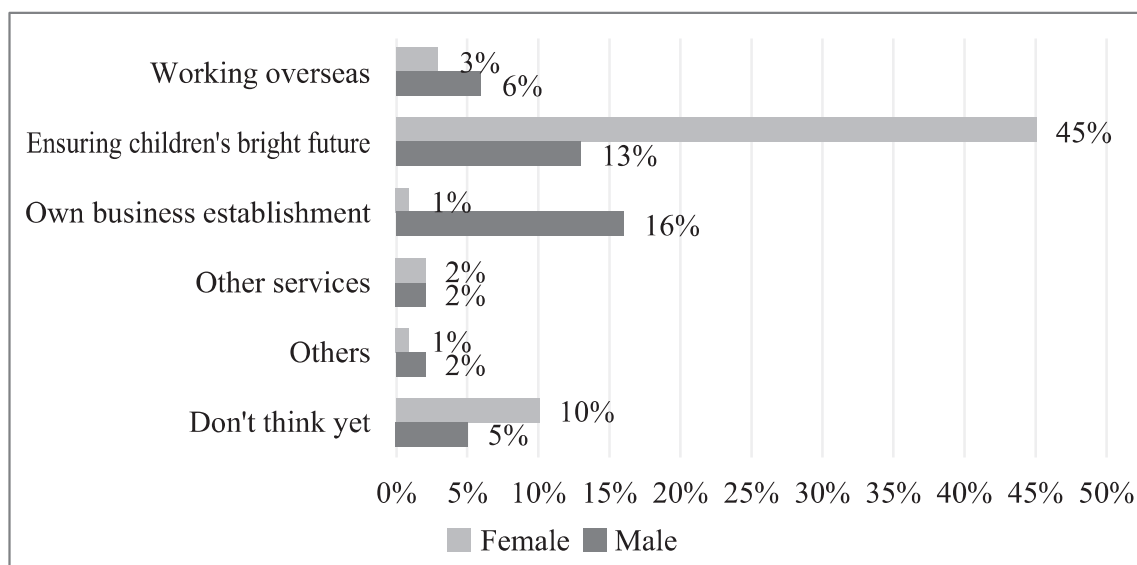


Figure 3: Youth's goal in life

In terms of their aspirations in life and worries about the future, young men and women exhibit a pronounced difference (Figure 3). The main

objective of young women is to give their children a happy future. Male youths mentioned running a business, earning a higher degree, amassing assets, and receiving a government job the most frequently.

Similarly, most of the little or non-educated young male participants coming from poor or middle-class families said that their main concern is unemployment, while young women are most worried about their children's safety. Only 11% of young males prioritize children's welfare, compared to 34% of young women. Therefore, it makes sense that children's bright future and asset accumulation are top priorities for less educated and poorer adolescents.

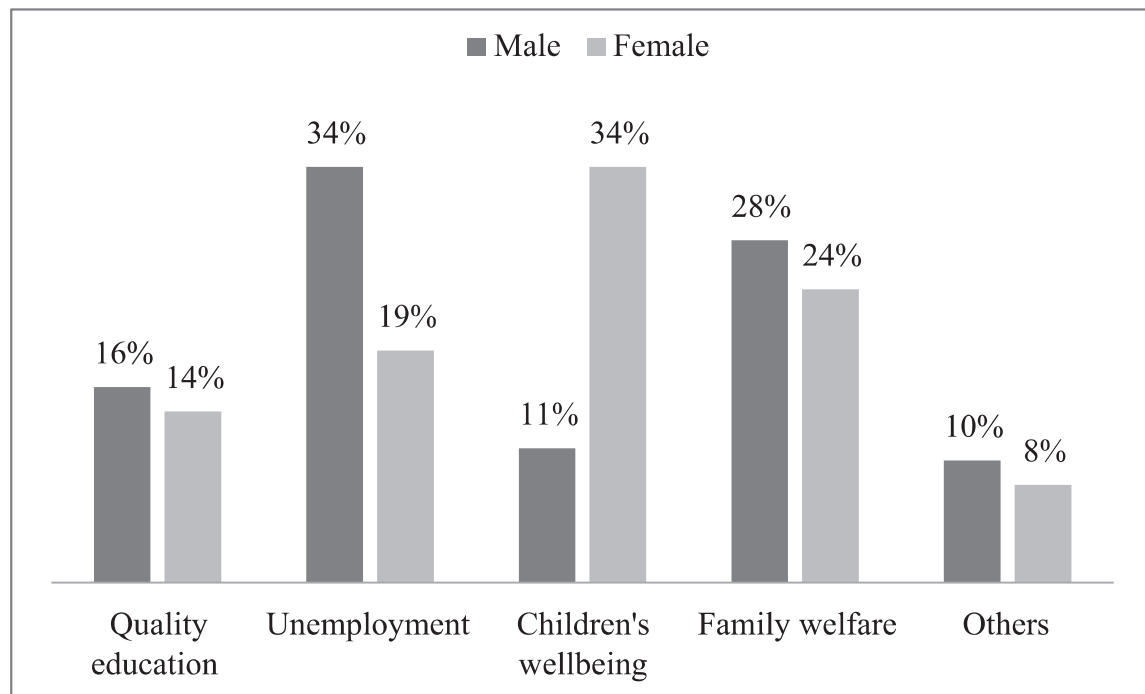


Figure 4: *Youth's daily concerns*

On the other side, better-educated and wealthier teenagers prioritize life aspirations including higher education, government employment, and business ownership. A potential poverty trap may be indicated by this pattern. Young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who lack education or have inadequate education are likely to be overburdened by daily obligations and uncertain of their capacity to achieve lofty objectives like higher education and a well-paying job, which may prevent them from investing in their skill development. Banerjee and Duflo demonstrated in the same study how much less money is spent on education by those who are less well off (Banerjee & Duflo 2007).

Perspective on Vocational Education

Vocational education for young people has become an effective method for developing a skilled labor pool for these industries as the country transitions from a predominantly agrarian to a manufacturing and service economy. In Bangladesh, however, there is a general lack of interest in vocational education because it is frequently thought to be just for the underprivileged or students with weak academic records. From the questionnaire survey, it is found that over a quarter of respondents thought that only those with little education should pursue vocational training.

However, it was found from the survey that a far smaller percentage of young people, less than 10% on average, agreed with the notion that vocational training is shameful. However, this belief is more pervasive among some groups, such as the richest socioeconomic categories (25%) and young people (34%) without any formal schooling.

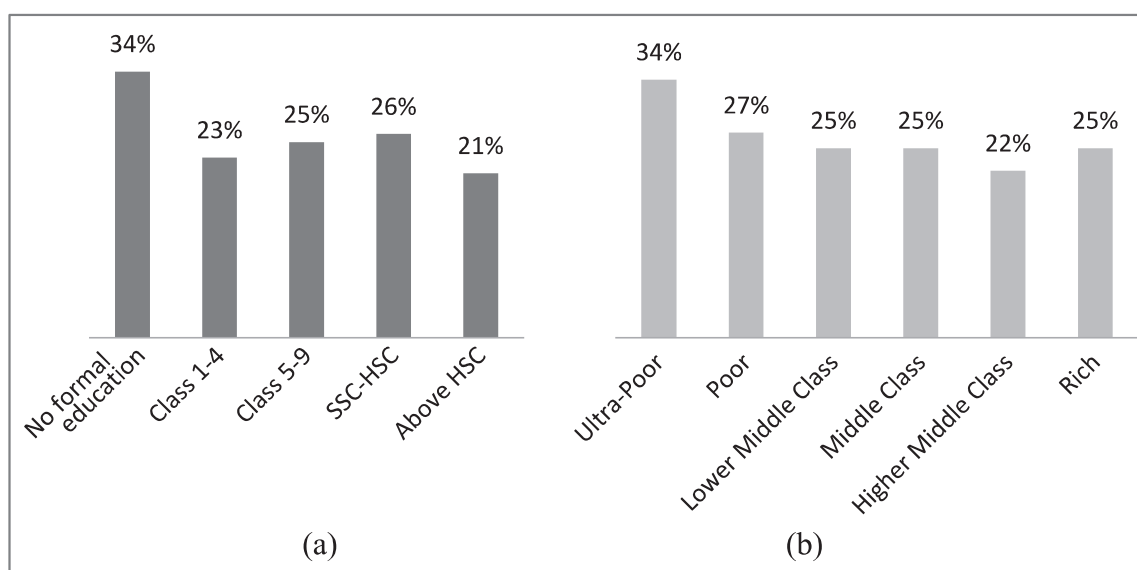


Figure 5: People's perception of vocational training which is suited for uneducated youth by (a) Education level and, (b) Socioeconomic status

Access to the Internet

Therefore, it would be wise to look into how well-versed on the internet the youth are. From Figure 6, 40% of young people, in general, have access to the internet, according to this research. Female youths use the internet less (24%), compared to 56% of young men. Again, youths from rural areas consume the internet much less (37%) than youths from urban

areas (50%). The same result has been found for educated or wealthier youths compared to uneducated/less educated or poorer counterparts (Figure 7).

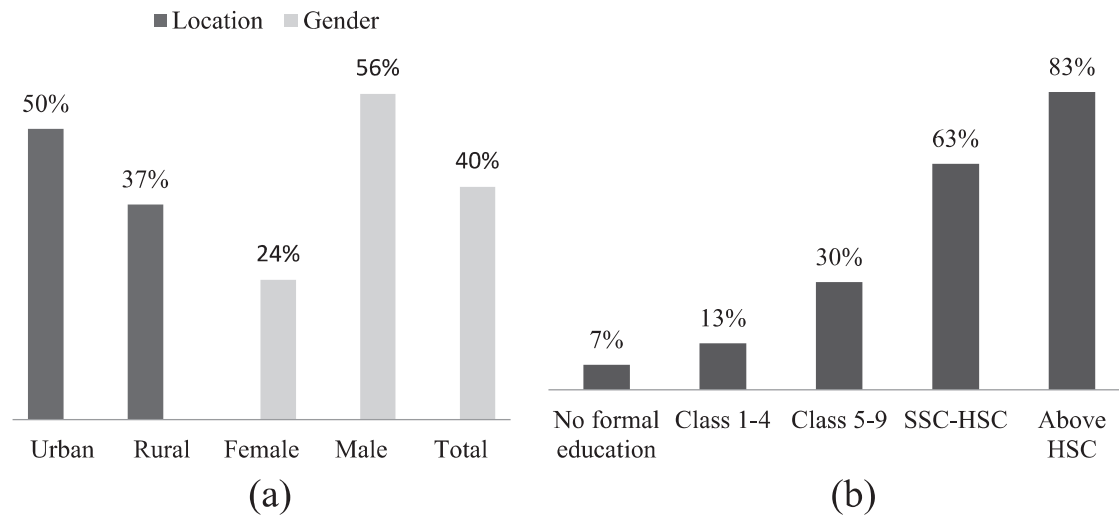


Figure 6: Internet access by: (a) Gender and Location (b) Education level

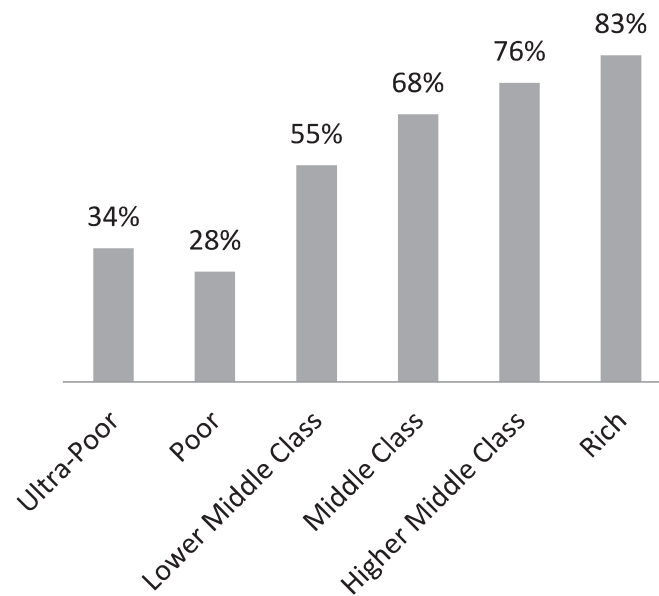


Figure 7: Internet access by Socioeconomic status

The Reason for Using the Internet

The youth were also questioned regarding why they use the internet. For male young people, entertainment, education, and information were the most frequent reasons for using the internet. For female young people, education, entertainment, and communication were the most frequent reasons.

Youth Perceptions of Their Readiness

To justify the preparedness level of the youth, a closed-ended question was asked to them; “how would they express their level of preparedness to achieve the goals of life they already had mentioned”. Very poor, poor, well, and very well was used to code the responses. 60 percent of young people, whether male or female, believe they are extremely capable or at least well-suited to accomplish their goals.

Youth Perception in Getting a Job

It is a common misconception that Bangladesh's educational system does not effectively prepare pupils for the workforce. So, the youths were asked, "Do you believe that your education will help you to acquire a job?"

Only 22% of young people with some education but who are not students responded positively overall. On the other hand, approximately 78 percent of young men and 83 percent of young women don't believe their education is of high enough quality or relevance.

Youth's Income-Generating Activities

During collecting data, one of the objectives of the study was to investigate how much young people were participating in the economy. The following table shows that a quarter of young people fall under the category of NEETs, which stands for not in employment, education, or training (vocational education).

Table 2: *Education and Income Earning Status of the Youth*

Education and Income Earning Status	Proportion of Youth
Students (including Vocational Training)	34%
Students (Earning)	5%
Non-student youth earning	36%
NEET (Neither students, nor earning, nor Vocational Training)	25%

Most Crucial Factors for Getting a Job

The youths (non-students and students with jobs) were asked to find out what factors are most crucial for landing a job. This question included multiple-choice options. More than a third of them noted technical

abilities, and the majority of them believed that educational background is vital (Figure 8).

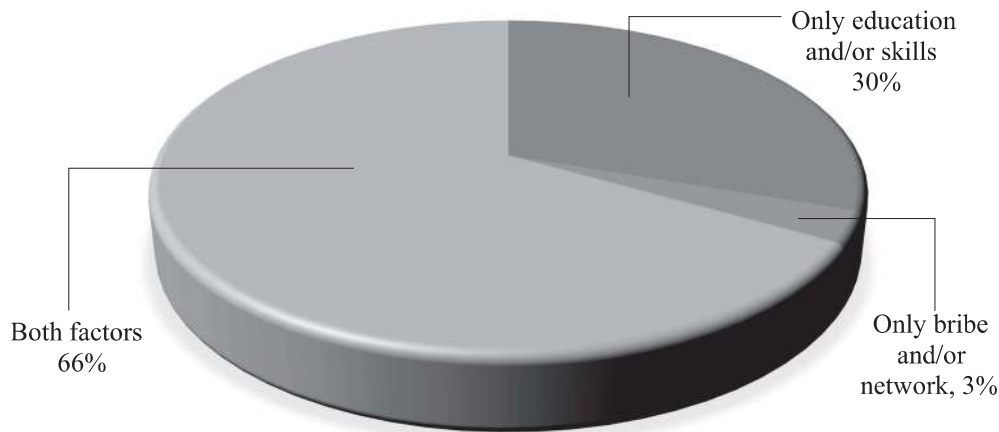


Figure 8: *Most important factors to secure a good job*

Further research reveals that only 30% of respondents believed that education and/or abilities were the only factors that mattered, whereas 2/3 of respondents said that they need a strong network or bribe for getting a job.

The majority of young people (59 percent to 68 percent), regardless of gender, location, educational attainment, or employment position, predicted that the employment situation will worsen in the next ten years when posed this question. According to the results broken down by the teenagers' educational attainment, those with greater levels of education were more inclined to believe that the employment situation will become more challenging.

Youth and Overseas Employment

One of the most significant factors in our economic growth and youth employment is overseas work. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), a total of 14,249,679 Bangladeshi workers are working as immigrants around the world till 2022, and USD 22070.87 Million foreign currencies were earned in the 2021-2022 fiscal year (BMET 2022). International Labour Organization (ILO) says that in search of jobs abroad, more than 400,000 Bangladeshi citizens leave the country each year (ILO 2022).

Hence the young people were being questioned about their interest in working abroad and their preferred locations. There is a clear gender difference in this instance. In contrast to the 31% of male teenagers who express interest in working abroad, only 7% of female youths do the same.

The youths were also questioned about which country they preferred most for immigration. Most of them from rural areas or middle-income families said that the Middle East is their first choice. Educated youths and youths from well-off families chose either USA or Canada or other European countries as their destination places.

Developmental Factors and Restrictions from The Perspective of Youth

The majority of young people who responded to the question "What aspects do you think are most important for the socio-economic growth of the country?" stated effective, high-quality, job-oriented education. The following crucial factors cited by the youth are tied to an effective state: security, political stability, and effective governance.

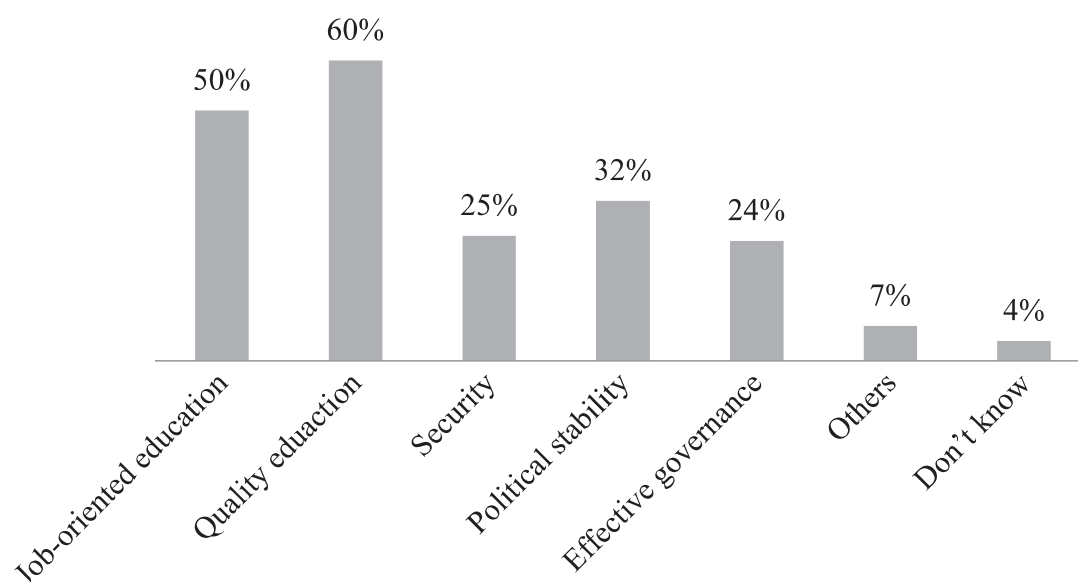


Figure 9: *Most important aspects of a country's development according to the youths*

The vast majority of young people who were asked what they saw as the main challenges to the nation's socio-economic development cited corruption. A quarter of the young people also identified issues like moral deterioration, which is connected to corruption, poor infrastructure, and economic disparity, as well as security concerns.

Political Future and Current Perceptions Among Young People

A question was asked to each young participant about how hopeful they are about Bangladesh's present and future political climate. In contrast to the current political climate, youth across all socioeconomic categories

are significantly more positive (by at least 14 percentage points) about the future.

Table 3: Youth and their optimism about politics

		Assessment of current political scenario as ...	
		Very good/good	Very bad/bad
Prediction of future political scenario to be...	Very good/good	(Pure Optimist) 47%	(Future Optimist) 18%
	Very bad/bad	(Future Pessimist) 4%	(Pure Pessimist) 31%

Young people who are Pure Optimists (47 percent) believe that both the present and future political climates should be good or excellent. A third of young people identify as Pure Pessimists, who believe that both the present and the future of politics are negative. Only 4% of people are Future Pessimists, which indicates that most people who are optimistic about the state of the country's politics are probably also optimistic about the future.

Participation of Youth in Politics

More Pure Optimists than any other category believe that young people should get involved in politics, and a larger proportion of Future Optimists agree. It's noteworthy to note that a third of Pure Pessimists agreed that young people should get involved in politics.

Table 4: Youth Involvement in Politics

Should youths take part in politics?	
Pure Optimists 52%	Future Optimists 42%
Pure Pessimists 35%	Future Pessimists 52%

Participation of Youth in National Planning

Since young people make up the majority and constitute the nation's future, it is important to listen to them and address their problems. So, it is necessary to know whether their thoughts about taking participation in national planning are reasonable or not. In this research, the majority, or roughly 85%, agreed that youth participation in national planning was vital, but less than 50% said that it was given the proper weight.

Youth's Confidence in Their Capacity to Impact Change

To know whether and how the youth think they can make changes, they were specifically asked about their involvement in: i) enhancing the education sector; ii) improving the job situation; iii) overcoming obstacles to the nation's progress; and iv) achieving the dreams of future Bangladesh.

The most significant finding from this inquiry is that 60 percent of young people don't know how they can work together to change the course of the nation. Youths who are purely optimistic are considerably more inclined to think that they can contribute in some way to Bangladesh's growth.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this research paper was to observe the youths of Bangladesh, as they are now possessing a large portion of the total population of this country. Hence, for the sake of the research, at first youth's aspirations and concerns as well as their ambitions and self-identities were observed, as these factors can influence their views, motives, and actions. After that, it was necessary to know about their education level including vocational education, English and computer abilities, and internet access as well as its. It was also necessary to identify their involvement in economic activities and interests in overseas job opportunities. Finally, their civic and political beliefs and engagement in politics or other social activities regarding national building and policy-making process were tried to find out.

Due to a social perspective, the first target of most young people is to establish themselves. In this case, securing a job, especially a government job is the main target of educated youths. The two most essential life objectives for the less educated and poorer youth are ensuring a good future for their children and protecting their assets and properties.

Involvement in wage-earning activities among male youngsters who are not enrolled in studying is over 90% at the HSC and lower educational levels, although it decreases significantly with higher education. When it comes to female youth, participation in wage-earning activities is least among SSC-HSC level, and more than twice as much among those with higher education. Ninety percent of young female persons are neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET).

The two most significant factors for the country's development, in the opinion of the youth, are high-quality and career-focused education, followed by political concerns like stability and governance. In addition, gender-based violence and drug addiction problems are the youth's two main concerns.

The majority of young people don't think they can take an active part in education, employment, or economic growth. Those who think they can do it are unsure of how they can exactly contribute.

According to our analysis, the Bangladeshi young are largely underutilized and are not yet prepared to take advantage of the prospects presented by the twenty-first century. This is especially true for young females and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The majority of young people believe that by educating people about the advantages of education, young people may improve the education sector by motivating individuals to pursue education. Another typical response was to band together to make sure that high-quality education is provided, and then it was suggested that young people educate underprivileged populations.

The youth believe that the two best ways for the youth to better their employment position are to be independent and to receive job-oriented education. Other recommendations included starting campaigns against various societal issues (such as corruption and the shame associated with vocational training) that make it difficult to get work, work hard, go to college, and engage in agriculture rather than wait for a job.

The youth believed that they might assist in overcoming the barriers to our nation's growth by raising awareness, actively pursuing essential and timely social reform, and building capacity, etc. of societal issues including corruption and moral decay. The comments listed below were provided to the restrictions they had previously specified, and they would make more sense in the proper setting.

The majority of respondents who were asked what role they might play in creating the Bangladesh they desired emphasized the importance of having self-motivation and performing good deeds. The youth can actively participate in creating the Bangladesh of their dreams by working hard and improving their skills, addressing social issues that are now impeding their efforts, joining political movements, and actively and carefully protecting the environment.

In terms of their political optimism, a significant polarization among young people is observed. The vast majority of young people either identify as "pure optimists," who think that both the present and the future political climates are good or very good or as "pure pessimists," who think the exact opposite. This indicates that our youth may not be able to take a critical and constructive approach to analysing the ongoing socio-political issues of the country. It may also be an indicator of a more divided society in the future, which we do not want.

Therefore, more studies on the political outlook of young people, what influences their thinking, and how that influences their actions, would offer important insights for creating a healthy citizenry.

CONCLUSION

Bangladesh wants to be a developed country within the year 2041. Again, the benefits from the demographic dividend will be shut down by 2041. Today's youth will be the aged person at that period and also will be considered as 'dependent people at that moment. At present time, the world is experiencing the so-called fourth industrial revolution, which is characterized by the innovative and unpredictable ways that technology will become profoundly ingrained in the economy, society, and way of life of people. This report emphasizes how important it will be for Bangladesh to build up today's young generation with standard education and to make them ready for the future. This education must be in line with the demands of the job market as well as the opportunities presented by the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). The job market is becoming more dynamic and interconnected. So, to maintain and sustain our today's excellent economic growth, our goal should be to support our youths with quality employment for higher productivity, higher earnings, and a higher level of social security rather than just to produce work. Finally, we will need to carefully consider how to redistribute wealth more fairly in a global economy where fewer jobs are expected to be created in the future and after the end of the demographic dividend, today's youth won't be considered a burden at that moment.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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